

Genesis of My First Trip to Wales

I had known since a child that the Hughes family who homesteaded in Colorado in 1898 were from Wales. Great Grandfather Richard Hughes who settled in Iowa, was from a long line of Welsh Calvinist Methodist Ministers from South Wales, while his wife Sarah Reese whom he met and married in Llandebie, Carmarthenshire in 1847 came to America in 1870 with him and their 9 children. My Grandfather Eben was the youngest at 2. When Eben grew to manhood in the 1890s he 'went west' from Iowa where most of the rest of the Hughes clan around Cotter, Iowa continued to live and grow up.

Eben met Ellen Jones who had grown up in Anglesey, North Wales, and had come to America in 1890 with an aunt. He met her in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Eben and Ellen married, traveled together to Denver, lived there for several more years, where they had three children Leila, Edward, and Walter. And Eben, having started in the printing business in Nebraska, migrated to learn how to live off the land, raise cattle, in Colorado. In 1898 they homesteaded the Hughes Commanche Creek Ranch east of Kiowa, on Comanche Creek, Colorado. They had two more children while on that ranch - my father David Ralph being one, Mary the youngest, the other Their parents spoke Welsh as well as English at home.

So I was aware of the family 'Welsh Connection' from an early age, and got to listen to my Grandmother Ellen Hughes in her later life tell bits of facts relating to Wales as I grew up. Such as the fact that we are related to Charles Evans Hughes, the Supreme Court Justice who ran for President, whose family also came from Wales. And we may be related through her to the Tudor royal family (Henry VI, VII, and VIII, also from roots in Anglesey.

Other than my Uncle Walter Hughes, who, in his 70s, and ill then, visited Wales in the 1970s with his wife Flora, I knew of no other family members who went back to the visit the 'Old Country'. They manage to visited relatives of his mother Ellen in north Wales. He was given a painting of his mother, when she was young, . Gary Hughes, Walter's son - from Virginia - has the original, we have a color framed digital copy.

But I was also greatly intrigued when I too was 72, after I had studied a book in Welsh and English which came down to me. It was written on the occasion of my great grandfather Reverend Richard Hughes's 50th wedding anniversary with Sarah Reese Hughes, in Iowa in 1900, honoring him as a noted Minister but also detailing his life and that of the entire line of Hughes ministers back to Dafydd ap Hugh (David, Son of Hugh), born in 1588, and his and Sarah's life in Southern Wales where all that Hughes line lived and ministered all their lives.

That book, in Welsh and English was passed down to me in the 1970's. As best I and my daughter Rebecca could figure out - (and she has been the persistent family lineage researcher - I am actually David Hughes the XIth, my son David being the XII, and my grandson David being the XIII.) That family name, has been passed down also in accordance with Welsh naming traditions.

Rebecca, who was living in the Seattle area for a time, had the opportunity to attend a meeting of all those - most of them driving down from Vancouver, Canada, with ancestors in England and Wales - who wanted to trace their Welsh lineage. Put on by a Researcher for the Mormon Church, who had also authored a book about the non-conformist clerics of England. In it she found not only the name of Reverend Richard Hughes, but the specific churches in Southern Wales he served in - by name, location and dates. Together with the commemorative book about Richard and wife, we had loads of specific family information with which we might be able to make a short visit to Wales and have a chance finding the towns, and the churches - some very old - that my great grandfather preached in, and where he and Sarah brought 9 children into the world. Including the church where his great grandfather was (along with other Welsh speaking ministers) were expelled from the Church of England on St Bartholomew's Day, 1666, for refusing to preach from the Book of Common Prayer,

which was in English rather than Welsh!

It was clear that I was descended from pretty independent minded Welshmen who never, even after England defeated and dominated them since the 12th Century, lost their Welsh identity, Celtic traits, or values. And 20% of the population of Wales still speaks Welsh. There are many programs in Wales which promote the learning of that Celtic language.

So I suggested to Rebecca, who could travel with me around Christmas, 1998, that we fly to Wales over New Years, and see what we can find. I doubted we could encounter any living family members. But we had lots of information to go by to seek out the towns, churches, and maybe even cultural clues to how and where our ancestors lived. She was more than game. But as things evolved on a later trip, we did indeed find two relatives.

Besides, I wanted to hear a bunch of drunken Welshmen sing, on New Years Eve, in Wales - fully aware of what wonderful singers the Welsh were. (As well as writers, poets, story tellers, whose traits have come down to me.

The Help From Computer Newsgroups

It was then that a global computer network, hitherto almost only used by computer engineers seeking

to share technical knowledge with others in large companies over UUCP linked computers in what were called 'News Groups.' came to our aid.

'News Groups' had started to develop scores of topical areas beyond engineering subjects which was how newsgroups got started, such as "soc.culture.welsh" and 'soc.culture.irish" (distinct discussions between those who could connect up about the Welsh and Wales as well as the Irish) which was bound to have readers and posters from INSIDE that small country of Wales. A free form discussion forum where the comments appeared on Unix systems - largely corporate, government, but also university systems - distributed around the world. And by individuals who had personal computers with modems.

I logged in, posting messages asking for sources of good in-country travel maps, and the modern name of old Welsh placenames which I found in both the 1900 book and the non-conformist book.

To my delight I got lots of responses, and advice on how best to travel in Wales, and even an invitation by one woman who would be glad to meet us at the Cardiff, Airport and get us to our first lodging in Cardiff. From knowing not one person in Wales, to many - via text messaging.

I was able to order a number of maps, including

government ones which went back a century or more, with old as well as modern, welsh spellings.

So we booked TWA flights from Colorado to Paris, and then a smaller plane flight from Charles De Gaulle airport into Cardiff, Wales. For December 27th to return January 5th, 1998. (I avoided flying into Heathrow Airport, England for two reasons - first that the time to get to and from Wales from London would be lost time from Wales. And secondly I did not care for the English or England.)

In the next "Trips to Wales (2)" you can reach by clicking on 'next' you will go to short summary of the highlights of the 9 days we spent in Wales, but ALSO access to a 12 part 24,000 word PDF file that I wrote both while I was in Wales every evening on my portable computer, and finished it up when I returned.

What happened as a consequence of sharing that with people who lived in Wales after we returned will surprise you.