

## **A Brief background of the Welsh organizations in Utica**

The present St. David's Society of Utica, Inc. is the only Welsh oriented organization in the area which has evolved from several earlier organizations.

One of the first local organizations was the CYMREIGYDDION<sup>1</sup> SOCIETY Whose membership was made up of Welsh men many of whom were immigrants from Wales. The Society held meetings and social activities in the St. David's Hall located on South Street between Steuben Street and Park Avenue. The building had been a Methodist Episcopal church and when the church merged with Central Church the building and the adjacent house was sold in 1919 to the CYMREIGYDDION SOCIETY. For many years the Hall was a popular social center until 1940 when the title of the property was transferred, by mutual consent, to Hamilton College to satisfy a mortgage of \$7,193 on which the Society was no longer able to meet the payments.

The Annual Utica Eisteddfod<sup>2</sup> was sponsored by the CYMREIGYDDION SOCIETY Which went on for one hundred and three years. The last one was held in 1959. From 1941, the newly formed St. David's Society of Utica, Inc. sponsored the Eisteddfod. In the early years, the. Utica Eisteddfod was held on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day at the Utica Armory, a large drill hall on Steuben Park. The building was torn down several years ago and the Historical Apartments are presently on the site. In its flourishing years, the program of competitive performance drew participants and an audience from throughout the Northeast section of United States and from Canada. There were so many entries in each category, i.e, solos in each voice range and public speaking, that preliminaries were held so that just the three best performers appeared on the stage to be judged in the program. The entrants would not know whether they would be "staged" until the competition was announced. The adjudicators were among the best known in the performing arts in the country and Wales one of whom was Dr. Daniel R. Protheroe.

The peak performances of the weekend were the appearances of ladies, male, and mixed choruses which came from Rochester, Albany, Wilkes Barre, Scranton, Canada in addition to our local choruses. The coveted \$1000 prize made the traveling worth the journey.

There was also a competition for an enlarged pencil sketch drawn from a photograph of a renowned Welshman. One year it was a picture of The Hon. James Davis, Governor of Pennsylvania.

With the Change in economics and the diversions in entertainment preference of society, the interest in Eisteddfodau diminished. The event was moved to the old Utica Free Academy auditorium and subsequently to the Thomas R. Proctor High School auditorium. The time for holding it was also moved to May when the weather was more suitable. There were many stories of frost-bite suffered by people when walking home to Corn Hill in the sub-zero temperatures after midnight on New Year's Eve When it was held in the Armory.

When the ST. DAVID'S SOCIETY was organized it took over the sponsorship of the Eisteddfod which was its foremost activity. With the involvement of United States in World War II, the competitive items on the program changed to include the high school age youth which aroused interest from several of the high school choirs and individual performers. As a result of this type of programming, unique to the Welsh, the New York State Music Teachers Association took up the idea of competitive performance and the interest in the Eisteddfod waned.

Ellis Roberts was president of the Society when the one hundredth anniversary was held. Ellsworth Jones was president for the 101st and Dick Hughes for the 102nd which was the last.

Then there was the UTICA WELSH AMERICAN DAY COMMITTEE which had its beginnings as the British-American Day started by Edward G. Williams. The special event was sponsored by a British

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<sup>1</sup> CYMREIGYDDION----come-re-guth-Yun

<sup>2</sup> EISTEDDFOD-----eye-steth-vod

war veterans organization. The program was a Gymanfa Ganu and was held in the summer in the Firemen's Hall in Chadwicks, the Utica Country Day School auditorium and the Norwich Corners Church. It was supported by contributions from local businessmen and individual patrons. The Gymanfa Ganu grew in popularity which developed into the UTICA WELSH AMERICAN DAY COMMITTEE as the sponsoring organization.

The personnel for this committee was made up of delegate members from the Gwenfron and Goronwy Lodges of the Order of True Ivorites, the St. David's Society and members-at-large. The purpose of this committee was to sponsor a Welsh American weekend of events, i.e. a Noson Lawen and two sessions of the Gymanfa Ganu on Sunday. This has continued to be held the third weekend in September now under the sponsorship of the present St. David's Society of Utica, Inc. It was the UTICA WELSH AMERICAN DAY COMMITTEE that sponsored the 1962 National Gymanfa Ganu held in Utica. The "National" had not been held in a city as small as Utica and there was some anxiety on the part of the National committee about its success. Utica did not have the "posh" hotels of the larger cities but what it lacked in glamour was made up for by its hospitality and a most successful performance and financing.

As the years passed the UTICA WELSH AMERICAN DAY COMMITTEE entered into dialogue with the St. David's Society and the Ivorites lodges to be released of sponsorship and reorganize under the name of The St. David's Society of Utica as an independent organization. The treasury of the Committee was divided between the two lodges and a third kept in the new organization. The treasury of the former St. David's Society was activated and became a part of the newly organized society which now included male and female members.

A system of membership dues was initiated in order to know of people who were interested in the programs of the SOCIETY and provide a roster of possible officers. The SOCIETY elects an Executive Board which handles the programming and business of the SOCIETY.

THE ST. DAVID'S SOCIETY continues to sponsor a Welsh-American Weekend with a Noson Lawen and Gymanfa Ganu. It took over from the Ivorites Lodge, the sponsorship of the St. David's Day Banquet. An Annual Dinner Meeting is held in January for the entire membership and a Christmas Party is held for the membership in December.

It sponsors the COB DEWI SANT under the direction of Robert A. Jones. This choir performs in concerts throughout central New York in churches and for special groups. In cooperation with the village of Remsen, the SOCIETY has a booth at the Festival of the Arts to familiarize the public with the Welsh in Oneida County.

The SOCIETY has set aside a TRUST FUND to offer scholarships for advanced studies and to support local events of Welsh culture. From this fund, a substantial donation was made toward the preservation of the STONE CHURCH in Remsen.

(And so it goes!)

Irene E. Jones  
March 1989