



CENTRAL NEW BRUNSWICK WELSH SOCIETY SEPTEMBER 2025



Our **THANKSGIVING SERVICE** will be held Sunday, October 5th in the Welsh Chapel at 3:30 – 2900 Cardigan Road, Route 620. After the service we will gather for a beverage and sweets. So, bring your favourite cookies, cake or dessert and a friend!

Visit our display at the **FREDERICTON NORTH HERITAGE FAIR** on Saturday, October 18th at the Kinsman's Centre, located at 141 School Street in Devon, Fredericton North. We will be there from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

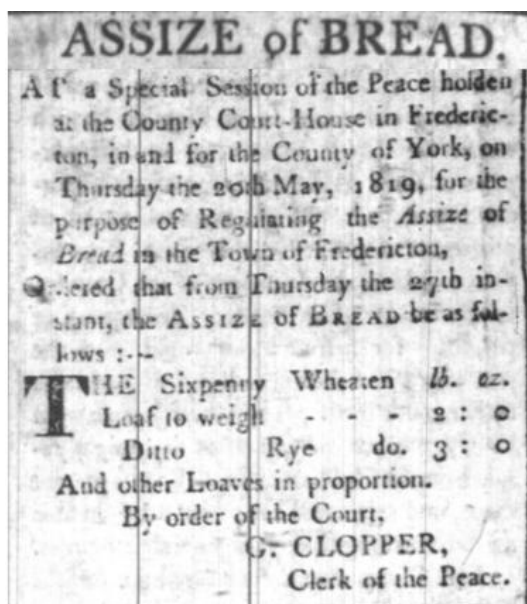
Hold the date: Our **CHRISTMAS DINNER** will be held on Saturday, December 6th at the Gibson Memorial United Church, 183 Gibson Street, Fredericton. More details to come in the next newsletter.

Image: M. J.



Did you know? Castell Aberteifi (English: Cardigan Castle) was once defended not just by stone walls and brave soldiers—but by one of history's most chaotic security systems: geese. Yes, while other castles boasted archers, boiling oil, and the occasional grumpy bloke with a mace, Cardigan had a squadron of furious, flapping feathered fiends. Sometime in the murky depths of the medieval past—historians are unclear, possibly due to uncontrollable laughter—a group of would-be raiders attempted a stealthy break-in. Under the cloak of night, they crept toward the castle... only to be ambushed by Honk Battalion Alpha. These were no ordinary birds. These were

Welsh geese—battle-hardened, sleep-deprived, and deeply suspicious of anything that moved. The moment the intruders stepped foot on castle grounds, all hell broke loose. Wings flapping like bagpipes in a wind tunnel, honks echoing off the battlements like war horns, and a frenzied storm of pecks to the shins. It was less a raid and more a poultry-based panic attack. Needless to say, the guards were swiftly alerted—probably by the noise, possibly by the sight of grown men fleeing from birds—and the invaders were captured. Defeated not by sword or flame, but by goose. The moral? Medieval Welsh defense wasn't just about brute force. Sometimes, it was about psychological warfare—and nothing shatters morale faster than being outwitted by an angry farm animal. So next time you visit Cardigan Castle, pay your respects to the real heroes. The knights were fine. But the geese? Legendary. (Disclaimer: The goose-guarding incident at Cardigan Castle is more legend and local lore than confirmed historical fact—but like many medieval stories, it's rooted in a plausible truth with a big side of humour 🤪). **Source:** *Facebook page Castles of Wales and the Wider World, article on May 7, 2025 by Ray Berriman*



THE STAFF OF LIFE

While the Welsh settlers were enduring the hardships of a trans-Atlantic voyage, the York County Justices of the Peace met to discuss the Assize of Bread. The Assize of Bread was a law first established in the 13th century. Its purpose was to regulate the price, weight and quality of bread being sold in Britain's cities, towns, villages and hamlets. Since bread was the foundation of the medieval diet, it was imperative that people could afford to buy it. So, the price of a loaf of bread remained the same but its size changed in response to the fluctuations in the price of grain. In May 1819 the weight of a sixpenny loaf of wheat bread declined from 2 pounds 12 ounces to 2 pounds while a loaf of rye bread declined from 4 pounds to 3 pounds. Bakers who violated the Assize of Bread were fined 10 shillings and their bread was confiscated and

given to the Fredericton alms house. The authority to establish the Assize of Bread was eventually transferred to county and municipal councils, existing in legislation well into the 1900s.

Wheat bread was considered to be the bread of the gentry so the Cardigan settlers would have opted for the rye loaf. The rye loaf had the added advantage of being much larger, stretching their limited financial resources a bit farther. A sixpence was half a shilling. To put this in context, a carpenter would earn about 3 shillings a day, a labourer less.

The Welsh settlers were accustomed to relying on bread as a mainstay in their daily meals, although they typically ate an oat bread rather than a barley or rye bread. This oat bread was more commonly known as oat cakes (not to be confused with Welsh cakes which are made with sugar, currants and spices). Oat cakes were a flat bread eaten at almost every meal. They were made with fine oatmeal, bacon fat, boiling water, and salt, then kneaded and cooked on a baking stone.

Making good, thin oat cakes took skill, with the secret laying in mixing and kneading the dough sufficiently to ensure that the oatmeal stuck together well enough to prevent cracking when forming the oatcakes. After dusting the table with oatmeal, the dough was rolled with both hands to make a long thick roll which was then divided into equal parts and rolled into round balls. The balls were flattened in pairs, one for each hand, by pressing and turning the balls until they were the size of a large saucer. The oatcakes were placed one on top of the other with a layer of oatmeal between to make a pile of twelve. The pile was then flattened further with the palm of the hand and as they grew in size, the arm from the wrist to the elbow, until they were the size of a dinner plate (a rolling pin was never used). The oatcakes were carefully separated and the oatmeal brushed off with a clean feather. They were baked one at a time on a flat bake stone or griddle. A small, thin wooden shovel was used to turn the oatcakes during baking. The final and very important step was to let the oatcakes dry in front of the fire. They needed to be dried thoroughly on a drying rack so they didn't mold after they were stored on top of the oatmeal chest or in muslin parcels hung from hooks in the kitchen ceiling.

Of course, the Welsh settlers were unable to make their customary oat cakes. Not only did they have no homes in which to bake, oats were in short supply. Just another shortcoming in a long list of shortcomings in this new world.



OATS AND MORE OATS

The primary crops in southwest Wales in the early 19th century were oats, rye, barley and potatoes. Oats, in particular, were the largest crop since they would grow in the poorer soils of Wales. So, it is no surprise that that oats were the dominant food source for Welsh farmers, finding their way into bread, cakes, milk dishes, broths and stews.

The oats were harvested by hand, threshed and sent to a nearby mill to be dried, hulled and ground. The oatmeal had to be kept absolutely dry to ensure it didn't mold, so most families stored their oatmeal in an oat chest. The oat chest was usually kept on the upper floor of a house where it was warm and dry. The oatmeal was packed tightly in the chest, often being stamped down by a person wearing clean white stockings. The intent was to pack the oatmeal tightly to drive out the air and keep it fresh and free from mites.

Given the importance of oats in the Welsh diet, it is curious that the Welsh settlers did not plant much of an oat crop during their first summer in Cardigan. In March 1820 the House of Assembly approved a sum of £150 to "purchase provisions for the immediate relief of the Welch Emigrant Settlers in the County of York, and seed for the ensuing season'. The 1820 summer survey of the Cardigan settlement reported ten families planting crops on 27.5 cleared acres. Only Daniel Davis and David Lewis planted oats, planting 1.25 bushels between them. The largest grain crop planted was wheat (7.25 bushels), followed by Indian corn (6.5 bushels). And the largest crop of all was 64 bushels of potatoes, indicating exactly what these families would be relying on for food during the upcoming winter months.

Perhaps the English gentry responsible for buying and distributing the seed did not know of the Welsh preference for oats, assuming that they would want to plant wheat like English farmers. More likely, however, was the fact that oats were seen as an undesirable crop since no middle- or upper-class English household would consume oatmeal, considering it to be a food for peasants. The Welsh settlers, however, had no qualms about eating oat-based food and once they were purchasing their own seeds, reverted to their old ways. Soon there was a substantial oat crop which needed milling. There was no oat mill near the settlement, just the grist mill at Estey's Bridge which generally ground wheat and rye.

Enter 24-year-old William Morgan, an enterprising young man who had initially settled in the Welsh community near Shelburne, Nova Scotia in 1818. In late 1821 he arrived in Fredericton and in January was located on a lot on the western side of the road leading to Cardigan, just above today's McFarlane Road. In January 1824 he petitioned for his land and requested an additional 90-100 acres of vacant gore land on the opposite side of the stream upon which he intended to 'erect a grist and hulling mill, there being none in the neighbourhood'. The following month he petitioned the General Assembly for financial assistance for the establishment of a grist mill on his land. He said that, at the desire of the inhabitants of Cardigan, he intended to erect a grist and hulling mill and that he had experience in erecting such mills. He said that the mill would be of great service to the inhabitants as their 'mode of agriculture and living in the mother country made oatmeal their chief and desirable food (bread kind).' He said that because of the plentiful crop of oats raised in Cardigan, the inhabitants would be able to live off their own crops rather than needing imported flour or corn if they had a suitable mill. He also said that the mill would benefit others living in the area as well and would induce others to move there.

William was granted his original lot of land and given £50 towards the erection of his mill. His mill operation must have been lucrative because by 1828 the 30 families surveyed in the settlement reported

that 2045 bushels of oats had been harvested the previous year. The next largest grain crop harvested was wheat at 402 bushels, followed by buckwheat at 317 bushels. A small amount of rye (81 bushels) and barley (74 bushels) were harvested as well.

As it turned out, the Cardigan farmers were on the leading edge of progress. By the mid-1820s a general failure of the wheat crop led to a renewed interest in oats, a crop which was not only thriving but also selling at a higher price than wheat. There was a concerted effort by legislators and prominent community leaders to encourage the consumption of oatmeal in all households. Hampering their efforts was the fact that there were only seven oat mills in the entire province in 1828, leading the legislature to grant funds for the erection of oat mills in many communities.

Presumably William Morgan's oat mill was one of those seven. And although he said in his petition that he was erecting the mill at the desire of the inhabitants of Cardigan, there is some doubt that the Cardigan farmers were happy with his milling. In early 1831 a petition from William John for funding to erect a grist and oat mill in Cardigan was read in the legislature. The petition was referred to the Committee of Supply for consideration but it appears that the funding request was rejected.

It is unclear as to how long the mill operated after William Morgan received his grant in 1834. The 1840 Census reported that there were only three oat mills in Douglas parish, one of which was surely near the Cardigan settlement which was steadily increasing their production of oats. Indeed, by 1860 the Cardigan/Tay Mills/Tay Creek farms had produced 5,650 bushels of oats!!



Welsh Surnames

Welsh families began adopting consistent surnames in the 1400s but it wasn't until the early 1800s that the old system of patronymic naming finally disappeared. Patronymic naming is when the children are identified by the name of their father. In Wales sons were identified as 'ap' or 'ab', meaning 'son of', and daughters by 'ferch' (pronounced vairch with the 'ch' sounding like the 'ch' in loch) meaning 'daughter of'. Anne, the daughter of John, would have been Anne ferch John. John's son, William, would have been William ap John. William's son, David, would have been David ap William, and so on. The anglicization of Welsh names led to the creation of new Welsh surnames such as Bowen, which was ab Owen, that is son of Owen; or Pugh, which was ap Hugh, that is son of Hugh. The patronymic naming system is what makes tracing our Welsh genealogy so difficult.



Got some time on your hands? We could use some help at the upcoming Fredericton North Heritage Fair. No experience needed, just a willingness to talk to visitors at our booth. If you can help, contact Janet at bwheal@nb.sympatico.ca or (506) 474-0812.