

The Silence of Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans

Alma 37:2

Lancaster, Pennsylvania: A letter arrives from Valley Forge, in which George Washington urgently pleads for support in the war against Great Britain.

Mannheim, Germany: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart writes a letter to his father, praising an aria by Johann Christian Bach.

Llandeilo'r Fan, Brecknockshire, Wales: Eliza Evans goes to St. Teilo's Church and marries Roderick Williams.

These events have one thing in common. Each occurred on Saturday, February 28, 1778.

The marriage of Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans was recorded in the Bishop's Transcripts of Llandeilo'r Fan. This is the earliest record I can confidently claim as part of the Williams family history.

Now, 230 years later, I am left with little information about my great-great-great-great grandparents Roderick and Eliza. To my knowledge, nobody has written anything about them, except a few simple facts:

- (1) Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans were married 28 Feb 1778 in Llandeilo'r Fan, Brecknockshire, Wales.
- (2) Their son William Williams was christened 21 Mar 1779 in Llandeilo'r Fan.
- (3) Their son Daniel Williams (my ancestor) was born 23 Aug 1783 in Llandeilo'r Fan.
- (4) They had a daughter Margaret who married either Rees Davis or Rees Walter.
- (5) They had three sons-in-law: Rees Davis, William Walter, and Rees Walter.
- (6) On 11 Jan 1805 Roderick Williams was buried in Llandeilo'r Fan.

In addition to the facts, a few theories entice me: One is that Roderick Williams was the son of William Prytherch who was christened 26 Aug 1750 in Llandeilo'r Fan. Another is that Roderick Williams was the son of Rowland and Mary Williams who was christened 26 Sep 1742 in Llanfihangel-Abergwesin, Brecknockshire, Wales. It has been suggested that Eliza was the daughter of Evan Edward christened 1748 in Llandeilo'r Fan, or the daughter of Evan William christened 1763 in Llandeilo'r Fan. Until recently I had thought that Elizabeth Williams who was buried 1 Jun 1804 in Llandeilo'r Fan was my ancestress. Now, I wonder if she survived Roderick and was the same Eliza Williams who married Rees Price on 20 Dec 1805 in Llandeilo'r Fan. Another interesting person is Elizabeth Williams who died at

Drain-duon (Black Thorn farm) in Llandeilo'r Fan at age 93 and was buried on 28 Aug 1832; was she Roderick's wife, his mother, his sister, or someone else? Were Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans previously married? Were the daughters from a prior marriage? These theories will be examined in a later chapter.

For now, let's see if we can figure out what kind of people Roderick and Eliza may have been. First, we know that they lived in the heartland of Wales, insulated from the hubbub of the coast and the boarder with England. A National Geographic article describes the heartland: "The center of Wales is almost unknown, except by old shepherds and farmers. It's a marvelous wilderness, lonely and wild and boggy, the secret of the Welsh soul if you like."

My ancestors spoke the Welsh language. Eighty-six years after Roderick died, the 1891 census was taken. There we discover that in Llandeilo'r Fan, 62% of the people spoke only Welsh, 2% spoke only English, and 36% spoke both languages. Since the 15th century, the Welsh language has been in decline. Therefore, it's probable that Roderick and Eliza spoke only Welsh. This deduction is supported by the autobiography of Mary Ann Williams Jenkins, a great-granddaughter of Roderick and Eliza. She wrote that nobody in her family, except her stepmother, spoke English when they left Wales in 1868. I estimate a 99% probability that Roderick and Eliza spoke Welsh, and a 1% probability that they spoke only English or some other language. I would give them a 30% probability of speaking both Welsh and English.

Roderick and Eliza lived in a rural farming area, where raising crops and livestock was a way of life. In the 1841 census of Llandeilo'r Fan, we see that 80% of the grown men were farmers or agricultural laborers. The others were weavers, carpenters, shoemakers, millers, coopers, blacksmiths, butchers, masons, ministers of the gospel, parish clerks, saddlers, stone cutters, tailors or tilers.

Although Roderick Williams died thirty-six years before the 1841 census, we can start with an 80% probability that he was a farmer. This probability is enhanced by the fact that Roderick's son Daniel was a farmer. The probability is diminished, however, by the fact that Roderick's son William was a cobbler. I estimate the probability as 80% that Roderick Williams was a farmer, 10% a cobbler, and 10% some other occupation.

What was the religion of Roderick and Eliza? Many of the Welsh were not religious at all. Of those who were, the Anglican Church was the official religion, but the Anglicans were outnumbered by Nonconformist Protestants. In the 1700's a Methodist revival swept through Wales, leaving the majority claiming adherence to Calvinistic Methodism.

I suspect that Roderick and Eliza converted to Calvinistic Methodism between 1779 and 1783. Their first child, William, was christened in the Anglican Church in 1779. Their son Daniel, born in 1783, was not. The Roderick Williams family and the Rees Price family seem to have intermarried more than once. A biography of John Evan Price, grandson of Rees Price, says that he was born March 3, 1817 in Llandeilo'r Fan, and he was a Methodist for the first twenty years of his life.

It seems likely, then, that Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans Williams were Welsh-speaking farmers who converted to Calvinistic Methodism.

I hope, as I continue to examine the records of Llandeilo'r Fan, that my ancestors will come into sharper focus, and this chapter will have to be rewritten. Until then, we have only a vague idea of who Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans were.

Roderick and Eliza were human beings. They had strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, successes and failures. But they apparently left no record. Their silence can instruct us: If we want to be remembered as more than a name or a statistic, we need to write something. It doesn't have to be a perfect journal or a blockbuster autobiography. Just write. Something. Anything. Future generations will be grateful for it.

Sharon, Vermont: In the year that Roderick Williams died, a child was born to Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith. The child was Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Mormon prophet was to have a profound influence on the descendants of Roderick Williams and Elizabeth Evans.

NOTES

One researcher has misread the Bishop's Transcripts and spread the word that Roderick Williams and Eliza Evans were married on 28 Feb 1772. Having carefully examined the record on LDS Film 104471, I am confident that the correct date is 28 Feb 1778.

Researchers have given different dates for the birth of Daniel Williams. I got my information from Daniel Williams himself. In 1861 he reported that he was born 23 Aug 1783 in Brecknock County, South Wales, son of Roderick and Elizabeth Williams. (Endowment House records, #658, Book D, Page 36; LDS film 1,262,039.)

The only record of the daughters and sons-in-law of Roderick and Eliza is found in the Logan Temple records, Baptisms for the Dead, #15836 (LDS film 177,843). On 13 April 1886 John Jones Williams reported that he was:

Nephew of	William Williams
Cousin of	Roderick Williams
Brother of	Reese Williams
Brother of	Daniel Williams
Grandson [sic] of	William Williams
G-Grandson [sic] of	Roderick Williams
Nephew of	Reese Davis
Nephew of	William Walter
Nephew of	Reese Walter
Grandson of	William Jones
Nephew of	Thomas Jones
Nephew of	Daniel Jones
Nephew of	William Jones
Nephew of	Thomas Rowland
Relative of	David Rowland
Nephew of	William Davis
Relative of	Edward Davis
Relative of	William Jones
Relative of	David Griffith

This information is not completely reliable. John Jones Williams was not a grandson of William Williams. He was a grandson (not a great-grandson) of Roderick Williams. On the same day, 13 Apr 1886, Elvira Ann Williams Harrison reported that she was:

Gt. Gd. Dau of	Mrs. Elizabeth Williams
Grandniece of	Margaret Williams
2 nd G-Granddaughter	2 nd G-Grandmother Williams
Grandniece-in-law of	Mrs. Ann Williams

2nd Cousin of Mary Williams
2nd Cousin of Elizabeth Williams
Grandniece-in-law of Mrs. William Walter
Grandniece-in-law of Mrs. Mary Jones
Grandniece of Ann Jones
Grandniece-in-law of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowlance
Relative of Ruth Rowlance
Grandniece of Dinah Davis

I found general information on the religions of Wales in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and in *Prophet of the Jubilee*, translated and edited by Ronald D. Dennis (1997, Provo; Brigham young University).

The quote about the center of Wales is attributed to Wynford Vaughan-Thomas in “Wales: the Lyric Land” by Bryan Hodgson, National Geographic, Vol. 164, No. 1, July 1983, page 41.

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