

Saints in Llandeilo'r Fan

by Kyle Williams

Ephesians 2:19 KJV

Some people might recognize only one saint in Llandeilo'r Fan – the Celtic St. Teilo, the namesake of the church, the village and the parish. But that's not what I'm writing about. I'm more interested in my ancestors, the Latter-day Saints. They were early members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons or LDS.

One Latter-day Saint in Llandeilo'r Fan was Samuel Daniel Williams. He was born in 1826, a son of Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones. Because his parents were my great-great-great grandparents, I'll take the liberty of calling him Uncle Samuel. One of Uncle Samuel's biographies includes this family legend:

He embraced the gospel when a young, single man. Aunt Margaret Passey wrote in a history that “when he was 14 he and a group of other boys heard about some missionaries coming to their town and they would hold a street meeting. These boys decided it would be fun to go and cause a disturbance by pounding on their hard high silk hats. As the meeting progressed, grandfather became interested in what they were saying and wanted to hear more so he moved away from the group and went to the front. He liked what they had to say and attended many of their meetings. He had one problem, this same group of boys used to lie in wait for him to get out of a meeting and then chase him home. But grandfather said if he could get a minute head start he could outrun them. Several years later he was baptized on November 10, 1848 by Johnathan J. Thomas.”

If this legend is true, Samuel Daniel Williams would have been the first of my Welsh relatives to become acquainted with the Latter-day Saints. However, my experience as a genealogist has taught me to take family legends with a grain of salt. This story is no exception. Uncle Samuel was age 14 in 1840-1841. The legend implies that Latter-day-Saint missionaries not only preached in the streets of Llandeilo'r Fan in 1840-1841, but held “many” meetings there.

Possible? Yes. Probable? No.

Some zealous Mormons may have preached in Wales without being formally called to the task, but the first official missionaries to Wales were Henry Royle, Frederick Cook, James Burnham and James Burgess. They went to Flintshire in October 1840 and established a branch at Overton. By April 1841 the Overton Branch included 170 Latter-day Saints. Overton, however, was in North Wales, far away from Llandeilo'r Fan.

In South Wales, James Palmer, Martin Littlewood, James Morgan and others preached in Skenfrith as early as November 1840. From Skenfrith they moved to Monmouth. In February 1841 James Palmer crossed the Black Mountains to Llanthony and Longtown.

For two years the missionaries labored in the border towns of South Wales. Llandeilo'r Fan, located on the west side of Brecknockshire, can hardly be characterized as a border town.

Early in 1843 William Henshaw preached in Pen-y-Darren, near Merthyr Tydfil. Before the end of the year, the Pen-y-Darren Branch grew to 50 Saints, and another branch was organized in nearby Rhymni. In March 1844 the Saints in the Merthyr Tydfil area numbered just over 100. In April 1844 William Henshaw presided over eight branches in the Merthyr Tydfil Conference: Beaufort, Tredegar, Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, Abersychan, Pen-y-Darren, Rhymni and Abergavenny.

It wasn't until 1844, the year Joseph Smith died in Illinois, that the LDS missionaries in South Wales began to expand outside Monmouth and Glamorgan counties. By November 1844, they were preaching as far away as Carmarthen. Considering the general pattern of the spread of Mormonism in Wales, I think it unlikely that the Latter-day Saints held meetings in Llandeilo'r Fan prior to 1844.

The late 1840's and early 1850's witnessed a great explosion of Latter-day Saint activity in Wales. Under the leadership of the legendary Captain Dan Jones, the membership expanded from about 500 at the end of 1845 (most of them in the Merthyr Tydfil area) to a peak of 5,244 in 1853. From that time the membership declined because many of the Latter-day Saints emigrated to America. I believe it was during the boom of the late 1840's that LDS missionaries first preached in Llandeilo'r Fan.

Specifically, I believe the first LDS missionary in Llandeilo'r Fan was Uncle Samuel's brother-in-law, John Evan Price. On May 29, 1841, John Evan Price married Ruth Williams, daughter of Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones. Uncle John and Aunt Ruth moved out of Llandeilo'r Fan in 1841 or 1842.

It was in Brynmawr that Uncle John had his first contact with the Latter-day Saints. Elders William Hughes of Merthyr Tydfil and Thomas Pugh of Cwmavon preached to him. When Uncle John moved to Cwmamman, Carmarthenshire, Elders John Griffiths and James Phillips taught him. John Griffiths baptized him on September 26, 1847 in Cwmamman. His wife, Aunt Ruth, was baptized on October 17, 1847. I believe they were the first of my Brecknockshire relatives to convert to the LDS Church.

Uncle John's autobiography indicates that early in 1848 (February, March or April), he and his missionary companion started walking from Cwmamman with the objective of introducing the LDS gospel to their loved ones in Llandeilo'r Fan:

David Williams and myself commenced our way to Brecknockshire to testify the truth of the gospel to our relatives. After we crossed the Black Mountain we went to Pont-ar-llechau where brother Griffith Jones lived. There we hoped to rest and eat our lunch which we had with us. David Williams was whipped and dragged through the mud and mud thrown on him with Griffith Jones's wife, for our being Latter-day Saints. We went from there on Saturday night to my aunt's house. She was my father's sister and lived at Gellirhydd. We preached here Sunday at 3 p.m. and there were hundreds of people hearing us. At 6 p.m. we preached in Gellirhydd at the home of Thomas Davis. It was filled with people. On Monday we went to Llandeilo'r Fan to my father-in-law's house. We were there all day trying to

convince them the truth of Mormonism.

We preached Monday night in David P. Davis' house and there were a great many of the old Methodist brethren present listening attentively. On Tuesday morning we baptized my mother-in-law and her son Daniel. We had 35 miles to walk to this place. We gave and sold a great many books on our journey.

We returned from this place to Trecastle to see brother Jonathan J. Thomas and family. We went from this place over the country and mountains offering books in every home. We tried to visit every house we could see.

I conclude that in 1847 Uncle John Evan Price became the first of my Brecknockshire relatives to discover the Latter-day Saints. I further conclude that in 1848 my great-great-great grandmother Ruth Jones Williams and her son Daniel Williams, Jr., became the first LDS converts in Llandeilo'r Fan.

What shall I do, then, with the legend of Uncle Samuel? It's a wonderful story, and I don't want to discard it entirely. There are several possibilities for rescuing the story's integrity:

Maybe the street preachers were not Mormons, but from some other sect. In that case, the story relates Uncle Samuel's awakening to Christianity in general, not the LDS Church in particular.

Maybe Uncle Samuel spent some time outside of Llandeilo'r Fan, where the Latter-day Saints held regular meetings. It was common in Wales for children to leave their parents' home and work as servants elsewhere. Uncle Samuel, however, was in Llandeilo'r Fan when the 1841 census was taken.

Maybe Uncle Samuel was in his early twenties when he heckled the Mormon missionaries, but the story loses some charm when the pranksters should have outgrown such juvenile behavior.

Maybe Uncle Samuel was not the fourteen-year-old in the story, but the preacher who endured such treatment. According to the 1851 Census of Llandeilo'r Fan, Samuel Williams' occupation was "Laterday Saints Preacher."

Or maybe, just maybe, the story is entirely true. Not every movement of every missionary was recorded. It's possible that some LDS missionaries held "many" meetings in Llandeilo'r Fan as early as 1840-1841. But I have my doubts, and I think my skepticism is warranted. It seems more likely that the story has been passed to us in a slightly garbled manner.

This is not to accuse anyone of dishonesty. In our confusing world, many stories get distorted in all innocence and good intention. I wholeheartedly thank Cousin Margaret Passey for preserving the story.

*

In the shadow of Saint Teilo's Church, other Saints have walked. The first were John Evan Price and David Williams, his companion. John Evan Price had left Llandeilo'r Fan an ordinary Christian. He returned a Saint. The next Saints in Llandeilo'r Fan were Ruth Jones Williams and Daniel Williams, her son. From this humble beginning, the Latter-day Saints increased in Llandeilo'r Fan until they packed their bags and moved to America.

NOTES

Llandeilo'r Fan may be translated *The Place of Teilo's Church*.

Some sources say Samuel Daniel Williams was born April 10, 1826. Others say August 10, 1826. At present, I don't have enough information to judge which is correct.

The biography of Samuel Daniel Williams which contains the passage about the fourteen-year-old heckler was: "Compiled by Robert C. Stephens (Great-Grandson) with contributions from histories by Mary Ann Williams Jenkins (Daughter), Earl J. Thomas (Great-Grandson) and Margaret Caldwell Passey (Grand-Daughter). The book, *The Samaritans*, as found in the Family History Department of the LDS Church is another source of history concerning this family." See the entire biography at <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/1557>.

I borrowed heavily from Ronald D. Dennis for the information on Mormonism in Wales. He generously gave me his permission to do so. See:

"The Beginnings of Mormonism in North Wales" by Ronald D. Dennis
<http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/2389>

"The Welsh and the Gospel" by Ronald D. Dennis
<http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/2618>

The above passage from John Evan Price's autobiography is actually a combination of his diary and his autobiography, which I have freely edited and corrected. I know of three interdependent sources of information about John Evan Price. His biography is on pages 44-47 of *The Samaritans*, compiled and edited by Raymond R. Martin and Esther Jenkins Carpenter, published 1968 by Carr Printing Co., Bountiful, Utah. This biography is also on the Internet at <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/688>. In addition, John Evan Price's autobiography is at <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/974>. His diary is at: <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/209>. His photograph is at <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/1244>.

Cwmamman, Carmarthenshire, is not found on every modern map. Searching for it, I found this note on the Internet at <http://www.breconbeacons.org/content/geopark/community-pages/cwmamman/?searchterm=Ammanford>: "Cwmamman / The south-western corner of the Geopark / The main settlements within the community lie along the Amman and comprise Glanamman and Garnant together with Twynmynydd. Much of the rest of the settlement within Cwmamman is dispersed."

Black Mountain, crossed by John Evan Price, is in Carmarthenshire between Cwmamman and Pont-ar-llechau. It is not to be confused with the Black Mountains, which are in eastern Brecknockshire.

There is some confusion of place names in the autobiography and diary of John Evan Price. The confusion may arise from Uncle John's creative spelling, his poor handwriting, or the transcriber's limited knowledge of obscure Welsh place names. I have corrected the place names to the best of

my ability. Feel free to check my conclusions, and please let me know what you discover. The originals are lost, but we have two different transcriptions in the form of his autobiography and his diary (references above). The most difficult task was figuring out what was meant by Gillynth / Gellyrith / Gillingwearth / Gilligwecrith. I believe these are all the same place: Gellirhydd, a farm in Llanfair-ar-y-bryn parish, Carmarthenshire. According to John Evan Price, it was the home of David Thomas in 1848, and also the home of a sister of Uncle John's father, Evan Price. According to information on familysearch.com, the daughters of Evan and Esther Price were: Elinor Price Morgan (1785), wife of David Morgan; Eliza Price Pugh (born 1786), wife of Roger Pugh; Ann Price (1789); Catherine Price Powell (1789), wife of Rowland Powell; Elinor Price (1795); and Esther Price Price (1801-1822), wife of Thomas Price. I suggest that the first step in verifying the place is to check the 1841 and 1851 census records to see if any of these people lived at Gellirhydd farm.

The 1841 and 1851 censuses of Llandeilo'r Fan show several people named David Davies. Those who were old enough to own a house in 1848 were:

David Davies	1841: age 70, Pant-mawr	1851: age 81, Mynydd-bach
David Davies		1851: age 37, Tir-bach
David Davies	1841: age 20, Pentre-bach	
David Davies	1841: age 15, Gelli-gaeth	
David Davies	[Gelli-gaeth / Brunant]	1851: age 25, Ty-newydd
David Davies	1841: age 14, Brunant	
David Davies	1841: age 10, Crofte	

I favor Tir-bach as the place where John Evan Price preached to "the old Methodist brethren." In 1857, Babell Methodist chapel was built beside Tir-bach. It seems perfectly consistent, then, for a Methodist congregation to meet at the Tir-bach house before the chapel was built.

The places mentioned in this article are:

<u>Place</u>	<u>OS Grid</u>	<u>County</u>
Aberdare	300400,202500	Glamorgan
Abergavenny	329700,214400	Monmouth
Abersychan	326500,203500	Monmouth
Beaufort	317200,211500	Brecknock/Monmouth
Brynmawr	319200,211600	Brecknock
Carmarthen	241300,220000	Carmarthen
Cwmamman	267500,213500	Carmarthen
Cwmavon	327200,206200	Monmouth
Gellirhydd	282500,236200	Carmarthen
Llandeilo'r Fan	289600,234700	Brecknock
Llanthony	328800,227800	Monmouth/Hereford
Longtown	332200,228900	Monmouth/Hereford
Merthyr Tydfil	305500,206500	Glamorgan
Monmouth	350900,213600	Monmouth
Overton	337400,341900	Flintshire
Pont-ar-llechau	272900,224400	Carmarthen
Pen-y-Darren	305300,207400	Glamorgan
Rhymni	311200,208000	Monmouth
Skenfrith	345600,220300	Monmouth

Trecastle	288000,229200	Brecknock
Tredegar	314200,209200	Monmouth

The 1841 Census of Llandeilo'r Fan shows the following on neighboring farms:

Hirllwyn	John Price	20 Agricultural Lab.	[John Evan Price]
	Ruth Price	25	[Ruth Williams Price]
Brimmelin	Daniel Williams	55 Farmer	[My g-g-g-grandfather]
	Ruth Williams	60	[My g-g-g-grandmother]
	Mary Williams	20	[Mary Williams Davis]
	Samuel Williams	15	[Samuel Daniel Williams]
	Roderick Williams	35	[Firstborn child of Daniel & Ruth]
	Ann Williams	30	[Ann Price, Roderick's wife]
	John Williams	17	[My g-g-grandfather]

The 1851 Census of Llandeilo'r Fan shows the following:

Brimmelin	Daniel Williams	head	68 Farmer of 94 acres
	Ruth Williams	wife	71 Farmer's wife
	Samuel Williams	son	24 Laterday Saints Preacher [sic]
	John Williams	g-son	9 Errand boy [son of Daniel Williams, Jr.]
	Esther Price	g-daur	8 Errand girl [daughter of John Evan Price]

Thanks to Ronald D. Dennis and Celia Morgan for their fine work and cooperation. I stand on the shoulders of giants.

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