

My Trip to Utah and Idaho

Matthew 5:4

I recently took a two week¹ trip to the Rocky Mountains. I had three purposes: to attend my Aunt Lauri's funeral in Ammon, Idaho; to visit my family; and to research the Williams genealogy at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. It was a bittersweet time of mourning for the dead, fellowship with the living, and puzzling over the hidden mysteries of ancient records.

Notes to my Family

Thank you, Dirk and Jeannie,² for allowing me to stay with you for two weeks. You're the perfect hosts. Jeannie, I am impressed how smart and talented you are, and what great sons you have. Dirk, you are kindhearted to the core. Even when we disagree about politics, I see the gentle generosity of your soul.

Dad and Jan,³ I enjoyed spending some time with you. You're really good sports about opening your home to such a gang of relatives. I'm proud to be a son of Duane Williams. Jan, your sense of humor is eternally endearing. I've never heard anyone so talented at the keyboard of a player piano. Thanks, also, for the photos and your kind letter.

Thank you, Kynne and Doyle,⁴ for chauffeuring me around Idaho Falls, and for sharing your musical talents. Kynne, I wish you were as healthy physically as you are mentally. You always lift my spirits, even when any normal person in your condition would grumble and complain. (By the way, Kynne, Cary Caputo⁵ sends her love.)

Uncle Ronald and Aunt Sharlene,⁶ your stories are always entertaining. I'm amazed at your beautiful stones. I treasure your kind note and generous gift. Also, I'm impressed with the urn you made. What a fitting tribute to your sister.

Aunt Lauri,⁷ I miss you. Being such an avid genealogist, I imagine you're interviewing ancestors and completing the pedigree charts, laughing at the difficulties we mortals have with our incomplete records. Now that Uncle Jim⁸ enjoys your company, he's probably not playing so many practical jokes on the angels. All the more for Drek⁹ to do. And Mom.¹⁰

Jonnalyhn,¹¹ I was thrilled to see you again. You're an excellent speaker and singer. Let's plan a trip to Wales. Erik,¹² it was good to meet you.

¹ June 17 to July 1, 2009.

² Dirk L Williams, my brother, and Jeannie Udy Williams, his wife.

³ Duane Howard Williams, my father, and Janice Grover Williams, his wife.

⁴ Kynne Marie Williams, my sister, and Doyle Wood, her friend.

⁵ Cary Caputo is a friend of mine in Tennessee. When Kynne visited Tennessee, Cary took an instant liking to her. Who wouldn't?

⁶ Ronald David Williams, my father's brother, and Sharlene Robbins Williams, his wife.

⁷ Laurene Williams Hall, my father's sister, died on May 25, 2009.

⁸ James Lee Hall, Aunt Lauri's husband, died years ago.

⁹ Drek R Williams, my brother, died 8 Oct 2003.

¹⁰ Dianne Elizabeth Teasley Williams, my mother, died 11 May 1989.

¹¹ Jonnalyhn Hall, daughter of Aunt Lauri and Uncle Jim.

¹² Jonnalyhn's friend, Erik Trill.

Jeremy,¹³ your skill in photography astounds me. What a terrific book you created! But, Jeremy and Heather, of all your many talents, what impresses me most are your family skills. You must be very proud of Taylor, Spencer, Allison and Robyn. I wanted to visit your home while I was in Utah, but when Sunday rolled around, I found that I really needed the rest. I'll be glad to help you organize your mother's genealogical records, if we can figure out how to collaborate at a distance.

Jason,¹⁴ you have some remarkable stories to tell. I'll never forget the sinking of the kayak. It was good to get reacquainted with you. I get the feeling that you love life and you're full of joy and peace. Jason and Kelly, you also have an impressive family. You can be very proud of Garion and ... oh, my. I knew I should have written all the names down. Please send a family group sheet. You, too, Jeremy.

Nathan,¹⁵ I enjoyed getting to know you better. I admire the way you bless those who persecute you.

Ben and Monica,¹⁶ thank you for having dinner with me. Monica, I was enchanted to meet you, with your sparkling personality. Ben, I'm still amazed at what you and your friends can do with bicycles. I've been bragging on you and showing the DVD. Your Tennessee fan club sends you a respectful salute.

Topher,¹⁷ I enjoy reading your weekly reports. You don't have many weeks left on your mission. Make them meaningful.

Stefanie,¹⁸ best wishes on your upcoming wedding to John White. I'm sorry we couldn't get together on this trip.

Jeanne & Scott Phillips,¹⁹ thank you for treating me to such a nice dinner in Salt Lake City. I was really honored and excited to meet you. Thank you for showing me the photos of your family. Let's keep in touch!

Arlo Williams,²⁰ it was good to meet you, too. Thank you, Arlo, for sharing your genealogical information and family photos with me. Thanks for the delicious honey, too. I appreciate your spiritual stature and your friendliness. You are always welcome to my home.

That goes for everyone. You are always welcome to visit me in Tennessee. To those I didn't see or hear from this last month, I send you my love.

Monument for Daniel and Ruth?

Jeanne Phillips made an interesting suggestion. We were discussing where various ancestors are buried, and I told her about Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones. Twenty-three years ago I visited Brigham City Cemetery.²¹ Daniel and Ruth were buried there, but they

¹³ Jeremy Lee Hall, son of Aunt Lauri and Uncle Jim. His wife is Heather Ann Skeehan Hall.

¹⁴ Jason Lyle Hall, son of Aunt Lauri and Uncle Jim. His wife is Kelly Rae Joyce Hall.

¹⁵ Nathaniel Dallin Williams, son of my brother Dirk L Williams.

¹⁶ Benjamin David Williams, son of my brother Dirk L Williams. His friend is Monica Medina.

¹⁷ Christopher Derek Williams, son of my brother Dirk L Williams. He is serving a mission in Germany and Austria.

¹⁸ Stefanie Denise Williams, daughter of my brother Dirk L Williams, is to be married to John White on 3 Sep 2009.

¹⁹ Jeanne Williams Phillips, wife of Scott Phillips, is a fourth cousin. She is a descendant of Roderick Williams, son of Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones.

²⁰ Arlo Lee Williams is a fourth cousin living in Arizona, a descendant of Roderick Williams, son of Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones. Arlo motorbiked to Tennessee, a few days before my trip.

²¹ 26 May 1986.

had no tombstone. Jeanne suggested that we erect a monument in their honor. It sounds like a good idea to me. If we get contributions from enough people, it wouldn't cost anyone much.

Who volunteers to head up this project? You might start by visiting Brigham City to make sure it hasn't already been done. Then you might attend the John Jones Williams Annual Reunion in Malad, Idaho, on or near August 12.²² Surely you will get some support there. Who volunteers? Dirk? Duane? Jason? Jeanne? Ronald? Who?

Before this trip to the library I didn't know exactly when Daniel Williams had died. According to the conflicting information at my disposal, I concluded that he had died in December of either 1870 or 1871.²³ At the library, I discovered a document entitled "Records of Death in Samaria Settlements," which includes this entry:²⁴

Decr. 18. 1870 Daniel Williams. bro Williams held the office
Highpriest. was born August __ 1782
Emigrated to these Valleys in 1853. Was native of
Breconshire Wales

The various entries on the page are not in chronological order. Therefore, I doubt that the entry for Daniel Williams was recorded immediately after his death. The document is part of the Record of Members of the Samaria Ward of the LDS Church, which was organized on 31 Oct 1880. This record of Daniel's death, therefore, seems to have been recorded about ten years after the fact. Nevertheless, it is probably as close to a contemporary record as we can get, and I suggest that the date be accepted as accurate.

The date of Daniel's birth is wrong on the Record of Members. More trustworthy records indicate that he was born 23 Aug 1783. However, the birth occurred almost a hundred years before this document was recorded. An inaccuracy regarding the birth does not seriously call into question the accuracy of the death date.

Oldest Pioneers

While at the library, I struck up a conversation with Gordon, a professional genealogist. I knew him when I did genealogy for a living some fifteen years ago. I mentioned that Daniel and Ruth Williams were among the oldest pioneers to cross the plains. He directed me to an interesting article in the *Genealogical Journal*:²⁵ "Pioneers to Utah over Seventy Years Old, 1847-1869" by Elaine C. Nichols. According to the author's research, 80,000 people immigrated to Utah between 24 Jul 1847, when the first company arrived, and 10 May 1869, when the first transcontinental railroad came into the territory. She identified 106 men and women who arrived after their seventieth birthday. Among the distinguished few, eight were Welsh:

²² A possible contact person is Emma L. Goodman (wife of John Goodman) at 415 N. 400 W., Malad, ID 83252. I have saved three invitations to the John Jones Williams Annual Reunion. However this information is getting stale. The latest invitation I have is for 1991. The reunion takes place on or near August 12, the birthday of John Jones Williams.

²³ The Early Church Information Card Index (FHL 820,136) shows Jan 1870. The TIB (FHL 1,262,039) shows Dec 1870. Various family group records and pedigree charts show Dec 1870; 1871; 18 Dec 1871. The Sexton's Record of Brigham City Cemetery shows 1872.

²⁴ FHL film #7,603.

²⁵ *Genealogical Journal*, Volume 18, Number 2. Published in 1990.

Thomas Axton, age 80, born in Wales.
Hugh Davis, age 72, born in Amlwch, Isle of Anglesea, North Wales.
Hannah Morgan Evans, age 71, born in Rumney, Monmouth, Wales.
Susanna Thomas Jones, age 72, born in Glamorgan, Wales.
Ann Thomas, age 77, born in Glamorgan, Wales.
William White, age 70-75, born in Haverfordwest or Prendergast, Pembroke, Wales.
Daniel Williams, age 70, born in Llandeilo'r-fân, Brecon, Wales.
Ruth Jones Williams, age 73, born in Tirabad, Brecon, Wales.

John Jones Williams

At the library I discovered a little more about my great-great-grandfather John Jones Williams. In the 1851 census he was an unmarried blacksmith, native of Breconshire, age 27, lodging in the household of Thomas Howells, Bridge Street, Pontnewynydd, Trevethin Parish, Monmouthshire, Wales.²⁶

On Sunday, 15 Feb 1852 John Williams, a 28-year-old bachelor, blacksmith of Pontypool, son of Daniel Williams, married Jane Merrifield, an 18-year-old spinster of Pontypool, daughter of Uriah Merrifield. They were married at the church in the parish of Trevethin, Monmouthshire. John signed the Marriage register with his name, and Jane signed by mark. James Denning²⁷ was one of the witnesses.²⁸

Roderick Powell, Chief Constable

Roderick Williams alias Powell was not an insignificant person. His marriage bond reveals that he was a yeoman.²⁹ The Bishop's Transcripts of Llandeilo'r-fân show that he served as Church Warden in 1760-1762.³⁰ At the library, I discovered that he was appointed Chief Constable in 1775. Every year, the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace held a court for Breconshire in the Town of Brecon. The Justices of the Peace appointed twelve Chief Constables, two for each Hundred. On 25 Apr 1775, the Court appointed Roderick Powell of Llandeilo'r-fân one of the two Chief Constables for the Hundred of Merthyr Cynog.³¹

Who was Roderick's Father?

Hoping to find a christening record for Roderick Williams alias Powell, I searched the Bishop's Transcripts of every parish surrounding Llandeilo'r-fân, and then expanded my search to other nearby parishes.³² I kept in mind that Roderick's father was likely to be named either Howell Williams or William Powell.

²⁶ FHL film #104,188. It is in District 2k, page 17. Secondary page number is 221 ½.

²⁷ James Denning married Sarah Merrifield, a sister of Jane Merrifield. James and Sarah were the parents of Elizabeth Merrifield Denning. Elizabeth married Azariah Franklin Williams, son of John Jones Williams.

²⁸ FHL film #2,408,879. The other witness was Joseph Wayman.

²⁹ National Library of Wales, Brecon B 39/109.

³⁰ Family History Library, film #104,471.

³¹ Quarter Sessions, Breconshire, Book of Orders 1762-1787, pages 265, 267. Family History Library, film #1,655,117.

³² The Breconshire parishes I searched were Aberysgir, Devynog, Llanfihangel Nant Bran, Llangammarch, Llanwrtyd, Llywel, Merthyr Cynog and Ystradgynlais. The parishes I searched in Carmarthenshire were

Bishop's Transcripts are not completely reliable. Some children were never christened. Some christenings were never recorded. Some christenings were recorded incorrectly, or in poor penmanship, or on a broken-off edge of the parchment, or in ink that has faded. Some microfilms are not well focused. Some christenings were recorded, but that year's transcript has been lost. The parish of Tirabad has lost all of its Bishop's Transcripts, and Trallong has lost all the pertinent years for this inquiry. These records, then, may be full of holes, but they're among the best records we have for eighteenth century Wales.

I did not find a definite reference to Roderick's birth. I have, however, formed a hypothesis based on clues found in the Bishop's Transcripts of Llangammarch Parish, which adjoins the northeast border of Llandeilo'r-fân. More than one man named William Powell lived in Llangammarch:³³

- Elizabeth, wife of William Powel, was buried 10 Feb 1713/4.
- Maud, wife of William Powel, was buried 7 Jul 1725.
- Margaret, wife of William Powell, was buried Jan 1729/30.
- **Rees & Catherine, children of William Powell, were christened 29 Mar 1732.**
- **Catherine, daughter of William Powell, was buried 22 May 1732.**
- Margaret, wife of Rees William Powell,³⁴ was buried 13 Sep 1738.

The William Powell who interests me the most is the one whose children, Rees and Catherine, were christened on March 29, 1732. This William Powell disappears from the Bishop's Transcripts of Llangammarch after the burial of his infant daughter Catherine on May 22, 1732. Where did he go? I find it interesting that the Bishop's Transcripts of Llandeilo'r-fân seem to take up where Llangammarch leaves off:³⁵

- Howell, son of William Powell, was christened 4 Jun 1733.³⁶
- Elinor, daughter of William Howell, was christened 9 Nov 1734.
- Morgan, son of William Powell, was christened 9 Apr 1737.
- William Powell was buried 22 Aug 1742.³⁷
- William Powell married Rachel Jones 5 Jan 1749/50.³⁸
- John, son of William Powell, was christened 26 Jun 1752.
- William Powell was buried 14 Dec 1753.³⁹

Cilycwm, Llandeusant, Llandingad, Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, Llangadog and Myddfai. I searched Trallong for Elizabeth Evans. Tirabad (a.k.a. Llandulas) has no Bishop's Transcripts.

³³ Family History Library, film #104,476.

³⁴ According to Welsh naming patterns, Rees William Powell was a son of William Powell.

³⁵ Family History Library, film #104,471.

³⁶ There is an earlier reference to a William Powell in Llandeilo'r-fân. Margaret, daughter of William Powell, was christened 19 Jul 1720. However, there were 13 years between Margaret and Howell. It seems likely, therefore, that their fathers were two different William Powells.

³⁷ This may or may not be the father of Howell, Elinor and Morgan.

³⁸ This may or may not be a second marriage of the father of Howell, Elinor and Morgan.

³⁹ The death of a parent sometimes encourages a child to marry. Daniel Williams, for example, got married four months after the death of his father, Roderick. It's interesting that Roderick Williams alias Powell got married one year after the death of this William Powell. Interesting, but not compelling.

Is this the same person? Did William Powell move from Llangammarch to the neighboring parish of Llandeilo'r-fân between 22 May 1732 and 4 Jun 1733? Quite possibly, I think, though it's unlikely that we'll find more definite evidence. Another question is whether Roderick was the son of this William Powell. Again, definite evidence will be hard to find, but it seems to be a distinct possibility. Llangammarch is missing the 1731 Bishop's Transcripts. Maybe Roderick was christened at the beginning of 1731.

How compelling is this hypothesis? I don't recommend adding William Powell to the pedigree chart without indicating the uncertainty of the relationship. In my estimation, the various hypotheses can be assigned these probabilities:

- Christened 26 Sep 1742 Llanfihangel Abergwesyn 01%
- Son of William Prytherch, christened 26 Aug 1750 Llandeilo'r-fân 02%
- Son of William Williams (suggested by Baptisms for the Dead) 02%
- Son of William Powell or Howell Williams 90%
 - a. Of Llandeilo'r-fân and Llangammarch 45%
 - b. Of Llandeilo'r-fân but not Llangammarch 35%
 - c. Neither of Llandeilo'r-fân nor Llangammarch 08%
 - d. Of Llangammarch but not Llandeilo'r-fân 02%
- Other 5%

So, I'm 80% sure that William Powell of Llandeilo'r-fân was the father of Roderick Williams alias Powell.⁴⁰ This is subject to change, depending on the discovery of other information, or further deliberation.

Where was Roderick in 1754-1760?

I had hoped to find christening records for children of Roderick Williams alias Powell between 1754 and 1760 in a parish close to Llandeilo'r-fân. A Roderick Powell of Cray, Llywel Parish, caught my attention, but he had a daughter christened as early as 1749.⁴¹ He most likely was not, therefore, the same person who married Elinor Jeffreys in 1753.

It seems likely that Roderick Powell and Elinor Jeffreys remained in Llandeilo'r-fân. If they had children between 1754 and 1760, they don't seem to have been christened.

Elizabeth Evans

I had hoped to find definite evidence of Elizabeth Evans with children named Rees Davies, William Walter and Rees Walter. Such evidence stubbornly refuses to materialize.

I did find all three names in the parish of Llanwrtyd, but they lived too early to be sons of Elizabeth Evans. Is it possible that these three were "uncles" from a prior generation? Is it possible that they were brothers, uncles, or cousins of Roderick Williams? There were various Rodericks in Llanwrtyd parish, too, including people named Roderick Walter and Roderick Williams. There were people named Daniel, including a son of

⁴⁰ I don't know how certain we have to be in order to do temple work. I do know that people have erroneously had Roderick Williams sealed to William Prytherch. A sealing to William Powell would be more accurate, although not absolutely certain.

⁴¹ Family History Library, film #104,486.

Roderick Prees christened 20 Nov 1722.⁴² These names make me wonder how my ancestors were connected to Llanwrtyd parish, which lies immediately to the west of Llangammarch, and north of Llandeilo'r-fân, with only the tiny parish of Tirabad in between. There may very well be a connection.

Another possibility emerged from the records of Llangammarch parish:⁴³

Roger Davies & Elizabeth Williams married 3 Feb 1771.

Anne dau Roger Davies was baptized 7 Dec 1772.

Rees son of Roger Davies bapt 21 Jan 1776.

Roger Davies does not appear again in the records of Llangammarch parish. Was Elizabeth Evans who married Roderick Williams the widow of Roger Davies? Maybe. Maybe not. It's a little discouraging that she was Elizabeth *Williams* (not *Walter* or *Evans*) before her marriage to Roger Davies. I'll keep my eyes open for more information, but I'm not holding my breath.

Diminishing Returns

Discovering the ancestors of Roderick Williams will not be easy. The easy research has already been done. Progressing back in time will take more and more effort for fewer and fewer results. And the few results will be less and less certain. It's not like hitting a brick wall; it's more like wading into a gradually deepening swamp. It's not black and white; the shades of gray gradually fade from practical certainty to educated guesswork.

Difficult, maybe. Impossible? Perish the word! Winning the lottery is not impossible, and neither is extending the pedigree chart. The only question is whether it's worth the effort. There is still a great deal of work to do. For those with a passion for such work (you can't do it effectively without being a little quixotic), here are some suggestions:

- Expand the search of Bishop's Transcripts to other parishes in Breconshire. This may be our best bet for a jackpot.
- Get better records. Search originals in Wales rather than microfilms in the USA.
- Improve the indexes. The IGI,⁴⁴ for example, is useful for starters, but it is unreliable at this level of inquiry. It contains many, many errors and omissions.⁴⁵ By improving the efficiency of genealogical research in general, we improve the chances of a breakthrough on our specific project.
- Abstract entire parishes. Catalog every person and place in the records of a parish. I have started catalogs for Llandeilo'r-fân, but there is still much work to do in Llandeilo'r-fân, as well as in neighboring parishes. Some people are daunted by the unfamiliar place names, the strange handwriting, and the Welsh language. I am no smarter than anyone else, and I have become familiar with the place names

⁴² Family History Library, film #104,485.

⁴³ Family History Library, film #104,476.

⁴⁴ International Genealogical Index, available at familysearch.org.

⁴⁵ As an experiment, I tried to locate IGI listings for the christenings and marriages (the IGI does not list burials) in the 1778 Bishop's Transcripts of Llandeilo'r-fân. Out of 6 baptisms, 3 are not in the IGI at all; the other 3 are listed at least once under the wrong year; only 1 listing has the correct year, but it assumes the patronymic name and doesn't list the surname. For the four marriages there are 23 entries; 14 of them have the wrong year; 1 has the wrong day of the month; only 8 out of 23 entries are correct. I conclude that searching the IGI is no substitute for searching the original records.

- and handwriting. It only takes a willingness to jump in and start doing it. Some records are in Welsh, but a little familiarity with a Welsh-English dictionary helps.
- Index, abstract or transcribe all Breconshire Records. This is a huge task, but every journey starts with a single step. I suggest that probate and court records are good places to start. I skimmed through some of these records in Salt Lake City, but they require systematic indexing, abstraction or transcription, not just skimming. By skimming I found some interesting information, but I probably missed some, too.
 - Become familiar with the National Library of Wales (NLW) in Aberystwyth.⁴⁶ The catalogue is not easy to use. On my trip to Wales, I learned to use it to some degree. However, it remains something of a mystery to me. There is a wealth of information waiting to be mined at the NLW, as soon as the code is cracked.
 - Publish what we know. The Internet is ideal for this. There are also various genealogical journals that publish articles and queries. I hope to publish a book, too. Published records tend to attract others with the same interests, maybe others who can bring more information to the table. I would love to find someone who knows the whereabouts of John Evan Price's original diary, for example, or find cousins with more complete genealogies.

Goodbye, Aunt Lauri

You can stop laughing now, Aunt Lauri. While you've got it all figured out back to Adam, I'm still mucking around in the dark, trying to make sense of the eighth generation. It must be very funny, watching me spin my wheels. How about a little less mirth at my expense? How about a little assistance? Doesn't heaven have a post office? Couldn't you just send me a package of information?

Please?

Seriously, Aunt Lauri, I miss you. Send my greetings to Uncle Jim. Also to Mom and Drek. And Grandma, and Grandpa, and everyone else. I'll see you soon enough.

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⁴⁶ See the website for the National Library of Wales at llgc.org.uk.