



The First Welsh Emigration to Utah (1849)

BY T. H. LEWIS

■ The year 1849 is very important in the history of the Latter-day Saint Mission in Wales, for it witnessed the first emigration of Latter-day Saints from Wales to Salt Lake City. The mission's leader was Captain Dan Jones, who was with the Prophet Joseph Smith in his last days at Carthage. He has become recognized as the founder of the Welsh Mission, although he was not the first person to preach the faith in Wales. With his headquarters at Merthyr Tydfil (South Wales), this fiery pioneer conducted such a vigorous crusade that, in a few years, thousands of Welshmen joined the Church.

This article does not propose to deal with those early activities, details of which may be found in the interesting, but rare, LDS Welsh periodicals *Prophwyd Y Jubili* (The Prophet of the Jubilee) and *Udgor Seion* (Zion's Trumpet). It will suffice to say that in 1849 many Welsh Mormons were ready to accompany their leader to Salt Lake City. One of the last undertakings of Dan Jones before he left Wales was to attend the opening ceremony of the Saints' chapel at Llanelly, Carmarthenshire—a building which still stands.

Udgor Seion contains an interesting account of the departure of the Saints from Swansea (South Wales) to what was then frequently referred to as California. But it might be better to quote a Swansea newspaper (*The Cambrian*), February 16, 1849 as it can be regarded as giving a detached and objective description:

"Emigration to California

"On Tuesday last, Swansea was quite enlivened in consequence of the arrival of several waggons, loaded with luggage, attended by some scores of the 'bold peasantry' of Carmarthenshire and almost an equal number of the inhabitants of Merthyr and the surrounding districts, together with their families. The formidable party were nearly all 'Latter-day Saints' and came to this town for the purpose of proceeding to Liverpool in the *Troubadour* steamer, where a ship is in readiness to transport them next week to the glittering regions of California.

"This goodly company is under the command of a popular Saint, known as Captain Dan Jones, a hardy traveller. . . . He arrived in the town on Tuesday night and seems to enjoy the respect and confidence of his faithful band. He entered the town under the gaze of hundreds

of spectators, and in the evening he delivered his valedictory address at the Trades' Hall to a numerous audience, the majority of whom were led by curiosity to hear his doctrines, which are quite novel in this town.

"Amongst the group were many substantial farmers from the neighbourhoods of Brechfa and Llanybydder, Carmarthenshire; and although they were well-to-do, they disposed of their possessions to get to California, their New Jerusalem, as they deem it, where, their fanaticism teaches them to believe, they will escape from the general destruction and conflagration that is shortly to envelope this earth. . . . They seem animated only with the most devout feelings and aspirations, which seem to flow from no other source (judging from their conversation) than a sincere belief that the End of the World is at hand; and that their Great Captain of Salvation is soon to visit his *hobl yng ngwlad y Saint* (people in the country of the Saints). . . . Amongst the number who came here were several aged men varying from 70 to 90 years of age and 'whose hoary locks' made it very improbable they will live to see America. Yet so deluded are the poor and simple Saints that they believe that everyone amongst them, however infirm and old they may be, will as surely land in California safely, as they started from Wales. Their faith is most extraordinary.

"On Wednesday morning, after being addressed by their leader, all repaired on board in admirable order and with extraordinary resignation. Their departure was witnessed by hundreds of spectators, and whilst the steamer gaily passed down the river, the Saints commenced singing a favorite hymn. On entering the piers, however, they abruptly stopped singing and lustily responded to the cheering with which they were greeted by the inhabitants."

It is clear that these 1849'ers were serious and respectable folk. The steamer *Troubadour* took them to Liverpool whence they were to embark for New Orleans.

William Phillips, who had succeeded Captain Dan Jones as president of the Welsh Mission, gave a detailed account in *Udgorn Seion* of the happenings at Liverpool. There were 240 Welshmen (excluding children) on board the *Buena Vista*, and 65 Welshmen on the *Hartley*. All sorts of scurrilous stories had been broadcast about Dan Jones. Some had asserted that he would sell the emigrants as slaves, and others maintained that some wives had joined the emigrant group without the consent of their hus-

bands. Dan Jones was such an outspoken crusader that he aroused not only great enthusiasm among his adherents but also great enmity among others. For several days before leaving his home of Merthyr Tydfil, he was in great peril, and his house was attacked nightly for some weeks. For his own safety, Church members afforded him round-the-clock protection. He had to leave secretly because of possible attempts on his life. Some of the stories from South Wales had reached Liverpool, for in that town, the emigrants were visited by some Welsh nonconformist ministers who, however, were satisfied with the replies given to their queries.

All the Welsh emigrants were housed in one large six-storeyed building in Liverpool where they spent six days at a cost of one shilling and sixpence a day for each person. Due to the efforts of Captain Dan Jones, advantageous terms were secured for the voyage—namely, three pounds twelve shillings and sixpence (including food) for all over fourteen, and three pounds for the under-fourteens, as against the sum of five pounds (without food) which was charged in other ships.

A service was held on board the *Buena Vista* on Sunday, the 25th day of February, under the direction of Captain Dan Jones. A branch of the Church was effected aboard ship. Permission was given to use the ship captain's deck for the choristers and "orchestra" to render "The Saints' Farewell" for the last time.

The *Buena Vista* left Liverpool on Monday, February 26. As the ship moved away, ". . . we were followed by our dear brethren — William Phillips (Merthyr), Abel Evans, Eliezer Edwards, and several other faithful Elders, together with David Jeremy, of Brechfa." They ". . . bought oranges and threw them into the ship as long as they were within reach."

By the time the ship was passing the Isle of Anglesey, everybody was seasick except Captain Dan Jones and Daniel Daniels. As the land of Wales was disappearing from view, Dan Jones ruminated on his sojourn there. "Why had I to flee before the scheduled time? . . . Religious persecution was the cause, and God is not the source of persecution. No religion which persecutes emanates from Him. . . ."

Cholera was prevalent at that time in New Orleans, as it was in many other places. These Welsh Saints had only one death from cholera there. Two others had died from other causes aboard ship.

Dan Jones engaged a special steamboat to convey his company from St. Louis to Council Bluffs, Iowa,

which was the usual starting-point for the long trek westward. A quantity of iron was bought at Council Bluffs to make wagons.

Before leaving Council Bluffs, Dan Jones arranged for some of the company to stay at that place for the time being, and for a Welsh branch of the Church to be organized with William Morgans (of Rhymney, South Wales) in charge. A Welsh newspaper was published there.

Soon, Dan Jones and his group were moving westward. In a letter to William Phillips, dated July 13, 1849, he mentioned that he was in "Omaha, the land of the Indians." There was no time to describe the scene fully as "the mosquitoes were biting." He was on the point of venturing "into the depths of the westerly regions, out of touch with civilisation, and into the midst of the red Indians in the forest lands." With him were one hundred wagons. The journey from Liverpool to Council Bluffs had cost each emigrant between six pounds and seven pounds. The letter concluded with a sad note: "Cholera has taken its toll of our group along the rivers, especially the accursed waters of the Missouri; but it was not so devastating as in the case of other people in the same area."

Another letter from Dan Jones, dated October 12 on the "Banks of the Green River" reached William Phillips in Merthyr Tydfil. The captain had already been over three months on the western trail. Only 464 miles remained of the journey. When Elder John Taylor of the Council of the Twelve addressed a conference at Merthyr Tydfil (South Wales) in 1850 he mentioned that on his eastward journey from Salt Lake City he had met "your dear Captain Jones" a few miles from the city, and that the Welshmen were quite comfortable and sang a Welsh hymn.

Among those who were in Captain Dan Jones' vanguard was Thomas Jeremy, who in a letter home mentioned that the party reached the "valley" on October 29.

Meanwhile, William Morgans and his contingent remained at Council Bluffs. The Welsh Branch there is what was known as "Cambria's camp." The gold rush to California was making a very busy place out of Council Bluffs. As William Morgans said in a letter to Wales: "Our town is like a seething cauldron these days, and as full as Merthyr Market on a Saturday."

In 1852, William Morgans and his company, which included some post-1849 emigrants, moved westward. With them were fifty wagons and ten carts. In a letter to Wales, William Morgans stated that he

was captain of the whole camp, Abel Evans was captain of the guards and William Beddoe (of Penydaren, Merthyr) the clerk of the camp. Among other officers named by him were Captain D. Evans (Llanelly, South Wales), John Rees (Merthyr Tydfil), H. Evans, the former president of the West Glamorgan Conference. One gathers from his letter that conditions on the western trek were less formidable than they had been in 1849: "The Saints are in good health; everyone has his canvas tent as white as snow. Much milk in our camp is being thrown away as casually as is the bathwater used by two or three Merthyr colliers. We have more milk than we can use."

When this group was within eighty miles of Salt Lake City, whom did they meet but Captain Dan Jones who was returning from Utah to Wales. When Mountain Creek was reached, some noise from a westerly direction was heard. That "noise" marked the coming of three of the early Welsh emigrants who had traveled between thirty and forty miles from the "valley" to meet the newcomers. Those three were Thomas Jones (Hirwaud, Glamorgan), Morgan Hugh (Pontyates, Carmarthenshire), and William Jones (son of Evan Jones, Aberdare, Glamorgan). With them was a load of fruit, including watermelons, potatoes, and onions. A little further on, the emigrants met another group of Welshmen who had likewise come to meet them; and in that group were John Parry (Newmarket, North Wales), Daniel Leigh, Owen Roberts, Thomas Jones, and Cadwaladr Owen.

This particular letter from William Morgans gave some further details of the journey across the plains. Hundreds of buffaloes were seen coming to drink at the Platte River. The Indians were "kindly folk" if approached in the right spirit. When William Morgans and his company happened to meet some hundreds of Sioux Indians, they were welcomed with the greeting, "How do? Mormon, good." The Indians spread their blankets on the ground and invited the Welshmen to sit down with them to smoke "the pipe of peace." When these Welshmen reached the "valley," they were surprised to find that the roads of Salt Lake City were 130 feet wide, and that there were trees between the carriage way and the pedestrian way. Alongside each road there was running water which could be turned on or off by the inhabitants. According to William Morgans the daily wage of an ordinary laborer was three shillings and threepence, and that of masons twelve shillings and sixpence. No wonder his comment was: "Isn't this a better place for workmen than Merthyr Tydfil is?"