

**‘FREE SPEECH, FREE PRESS A BYTH FREE MEN’:
THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN WISCONSIN, 1850-1920**

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ABSTRACT

*In the second half of the nineteenth century, Welsh immigrants comprised a small but significant ethnic minority in the Midwestern state of Wisconsin. Economically successful, the Wisconsin Welsh were active participants in the political life of their adopted country, and like their counterparts elsewhere in the United States, overwhelmingly supported the Republican Party. Their identification of the Republicans with the abolition of slavery and victory in the Civil War made the Welsh a loyal constituency, but also one with particular concerns that reflected Calvinistic conceptions of morality. Furthermore, having internalized the view that their native language was unsuitable for public life, the Welsh cultivated a public image of themselves as exceptionally patriotic and eager to assimilate, defining themselves negatively against other immigrant groups. Drawing from correspondence, public records and the local English-language press, as well as reports in Welsh-language publications such as *Y Drych* and *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*, this paper traces the development of political identity among Welsh immigrants in Wisconsin. It concludes that, as much as economic and demographic changes, Welsh-American political attitudes diminished the status and already-limited role of their native language in the ethnic community.*

I. Introduction

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Midwestern state of Wisconsin was home to a significant Welsh-speaking population. In 1875, R. D. Thomas, the author of *Hanes Cymry America*, a handbook for prospective immigrants, estimated the number of Welsh in Wisconsin at 18, 260, close to his estimates for New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania respectively.² In the rural counties of Columbia, Iowa, Jefferson, Waukesha and Winnebago, clusters of Welsh-owned farms in the vicinity of Welsh-speaking churches formed ethnically-distinct Welsh settlements. The villages of Cambria (Columbia County) and Wales (Waukesha County) attest to heavier concentrations

¹ A native of Newport, Wales, resident in the United States, Robert Humphries graduated from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2012 with an MA in Celtic Studies. This paper draws upon research conducted for his dissertation: ‘Yn eu Hiaith eu Hunain/In Their Own Language: the settlement and assimilation of the Welsh in Iowa County, Wisconsin 1840-1920.’ Here, the geographic focus is expanded to consider the Welsh throughout the state. All primary source quotations retain original spelling and punctuation. All translations are the author’s.

² R. D. Thomas, *Hanes Cymry America* (Utica: T. J. Griffiths, 1872), Section C., 11.

of Welsh settlement. The urban centers of Milwaukee and Racine also had significant Welsh populations.³ Whether urban or rural, the Welsh tended to live closely together due to their language and religion, as one Oshkosh settler recalled:

Dichon fod prinder rhai yn gallu siarad Saesonaeg yn dylanwadu i'r un cyfeiriad iw nesu at eu gilydd i gael siarad, ac addoli yn yr iaith eu magwyd.⁴

Undoubtedly the lack of English speakers among them influenced their being close to each other in order to speak and worship in the language in which they had been raised.

While there is nothing inherently unusual about immigrants establishing distinctive ethnic enclaves within their new country, the Welsh are unique in the context of British emigration to the United States. Whereas the majority of English and Scottish immigrants assimilated effortlessly into their new country's English-speaking culture, the Welsh language increased the distance between the Welsh and the host culture, even if they were bilingual.

The number of Welsh in Wisconsin was dwarfed not only by the native-born American population, many of whom were 'Yankees' from New York and the New England states, but also by German and other European immigrants. Although like these immigrants the Welsh maintained their native language for a long time in Wisconsin, as Protestants from the British polity they shared more in common with native-born Americans than did Catholic Germans, for example, whose culture was seen as exotic and even threatening by Americans.⁵ Indeed, the Welsh enjoyed a positive reputation among Americans. As one publication noted, 'they have made up for their lack of numbers in their peculiar thrift and hardy virtues as good citizens and people of fine morality and social usefulness'.⁶ This perception was actively cultivated by the Welsh themselves, who were encouraged to conform to a high standard of morality and citizenship upon arrival in their new country. R. D. Thomas exhorted his fellow countrymen not only to become American citizens, but also to:

Byddwch yn ddeiliaid ufudd i'r Llywodraeth; yn gymydogion caredig a heddychol; yn grefyddwyr duwiol, haelionus, tangnefeddus a ffyddlon ...Ymroddwch i rod-di addysg da i'ch plant.⁷

Be obedient subjects of the Government; kind and peaceful neighbours; godly, generous, peaceful and faithful believers...Devote yourself to giving your children a good education.

³ P. G. Davies, *Welsh in Wisconsin* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2006), 7.

⁴ Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), Madison. WHS File 1909 December 8. Phillips, Laura J., Letters, 1909-1910. J. Edno Roberts to Howell D. Davies, 21 March, 1910.

⁵ For a discussion of anti-immigrant sentiment in the mid-nineteenth century, see J. Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 25-49.

⁶ J. E. Jones, ed. *A History of Columbia County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1914), 753-754. Perhaps the editor's Welsh name should be taken into account!

⁷ R. D. Thomas, *Hanes Cymry America*, Section C., 82-83.

Although citizenship was not a prerequisite to suffrage in Wisconsin until 1908,⁸ the Welsh were eager to become naturalized citizens as Thomas encouraged. In the early twentieth century, it was noted that the Welsh were the most naturalized of any immigrant nationality, more eager to become citizens than other people from the British Isles.⁹ Undoubtedly many realized they were unlikely to return to Wales. It is also probable that many were less emotionally attached to the British crown than English or Scottish immigrants.¹⁰ Furthermore, rural Wales was already geographically and linguistically distant from the centers of economic and political power in Britain. Within Wales a small class of wealthy landowners held political power and suffrage was limited.¹¹ Without a political apparatus of their own, the Welsh in the United States may have found it easier to shift their loyalty from the crown to the constitution, a situation analogous to that of German immigrants, who until 1870 had no nation-state to command their allegiance. Like the Germans, many of the Welsh saw no conflict between American citizenship and maintaining their ethnic and linguistic identity.¹² As J. Glyn Davies, who visited Wisconsin in 1898 noted, 'Welsh nationalism did not weaken the sense of American citizenship one scrap'.¹³ Like other immigrant populations, the Welsh expressed what Jon Gjerde has called 'complementary identities' and 'layered allegiances' to both their ethnolinguistic heritage and their American citizenship.¹⁴

As participants in American democracy, the Welsh were described as 'cautious, conservative, true to their political convictions ...largely outside the machinery of politics' and 'not easily "worked" either for candidates or political ends'.¹⁵ Although their choice to emigrate had been largely economic, their widely-held political positions were deeply rooted in their religious tradition.

II. Chapel and Schoolhouse

In Wisconsin, Welsh-speaking churches and their attendant institutions, such as temperance organizations and Sunday schools, provided a focus for community life. The Calvinistic Methodists and Congregationalists were the main denominations, although there were also Baptists and a few representatives of smaller sects. R. D. Thomas counted 47 Calvinistic Methodist, 23 Congregationalist and 11 Baptist congregations in the state.¹⁶ Despite their

⁸ R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes: An Electoral History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 5.

⁹ R. T. Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America, 1790-1950* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953), 140.

¹⁰ P. G. Davies, *Welsh in Wisconsin*, 35.

¹¹ R. Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: A Social History of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 100-101.

¹² O. Øverland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 25-26.

¹³ J. G. Davies, 'Cambria, Wisconsin in 1898.' *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1957, 148.

¹⁴ J. Gjerde. *The Minds of the West*, 59-60.

¹⁵ *Waukesha Freeman*, 29 April, 1897.

¹⁶ R. D. Thomas, *Hanes Cymry America*, Section C., 20-21.

doctrinal differences, these denominations shared an underlying Calvinist theology, as well as the expectation of adherence to a rigid moral code of behavior that sought to separate the flock from a wicked world. The *Rheolau Dysgyblaethol* (Disciplinary Rules) of the Calvinistic Methodists commanded believers to avoid:

...gorwagedd y byd a'i arferion llygredig; megis ... dawnsiau, chwareuyddiaethau, gloddestfa, cyfeddach, diota, a'r cyffelyb.¹⁷

...the vanity of the world and its polluted customs, such as ... dances, plays, revelries, feasts, tipping and the like.

When the members of this denomination sought to raise their first church at Dodgeville in 1848, they deliberately purchased a plot of land that had been frequently used by a traveling circus even though it was more expensive, because it was 'y fan y mae y diafol wedi ddewis i ddangos ei bethau'¹⁸ (*the place the devil has chosen to display his wares*). As Anne Kelly Knowles has explained, this strict interpretation of Calvinism, expressed through the Welsh language, defined and preserved Welsh ethnic culture in the Wisconsin settlements.¹⁹

Until the early twentieth century, the Welsh language and Welsh Calvinism were inseparable, and in the churches, there was concern about passing on the language to the next generation. The Sunday school was 'prif noddfa yr iaith Gymreig yn America' (*the chief sanctuary of the Welsh language in America*), declared *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad*, the Welsh-language magazine of the Calvinistic Methodists, in 1859.²⁰ 'Cymysgedd iaith y plant' (*the mixture of the children's language*) was a threat to the Sunday School's continuing survival, because the Welsh 'collent eu crefydd pan gollent eu hiaith' (*lose their religion when they lose their language*), the article warned.²¹ Indeed, to one deeply religious Welsh woman who settled in southwestern Wisconsin, English was the 'devil's language' and she refused to speak it.²²

However, although Welsh served as the medium of worship and prayer, many Welsh speakers internalized the belief that their native language was to be confined to the religious and domestic spheres, and that English was the language of modernity and economic success.²³ In the United States the Welsh maintained this mindset and assimilated into English-

¹⁷ *Rheolau Dysgyblaethol, Cyfansoddiad a Chyffes Ffydd y Corff o Fethodistiaid Calфинаidd Cymreig* (Rome, New York: R. R. Meredith, 1857), 11.

¹⁸ *Crynodeb o Hanes yr Eglwysi Methodistiaid Calфинаidd Dosbarth Dodgeville, Wis., o'u Cychwyniad hyd yn Bresenol* (Utica: T. J. Griffiths, 1893), 7.

¹⁹ A. K. Knowles, 'Religious Identity as Ethnic Identity: The Welsh in Waukesha County' in R. C. Ostergren and T. R. Vale. *Wisconsin Land and Life*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 295-296.

²⁰ *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad*, February 1859, 49.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Mineral Point Historical Society (MPHS), 'Recollections of David B. Jones.' Unpublished manuscript by E. H. Bennett.

²³ I. G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: the Observers and the Observed*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 69.

speaking public life, to the disappointment of nationalists such as Michael D. Jones who had hoped that emigration might allow the Welsh language to flourish in the New World.²⁴ Although the Welsh continued to use their native language within their ethnic and religious communities, their political behavior pointed toward an acceptance of the eventual eclipse of Welsh by the English language.

A striking early example of the Welsh commitment to linguistic assimilation survives in a record book of the school board in the Welsh settlement at Pecos in Iowa County. The inaugural meeting of Mifflin School District No. 3 took place in 1851, a few years after the Welsh had begun to settle. Held at the 'Welsh Calvinistical Church' (sic), almost all of the officers and attendees were probably members of that congregation.²⁵ Some of the officers also served on the local town board, suggesting that the Pecos Welsh entrusted religious and secular governance to the same set of 'elders' and considered republican government as a logical extension of existing structures of self-regulation.²⁶

During the 1850s, the annual meeting minutes were often recorded in Welsh, although the practice ceased in the 1860s as settlers of different ethnic backgrounds arrived in the district. While it is no surprise that board approved the use of the standard McGuffey reading books to teach the community's children English, it is significant that so many of the settlers took such a serious interest in the school.²⁷ Relying on their religious institutions to maintain their native language, the Welsh saw public education in English as necessary to their children's success. Most significantly, the community's leaders employed the Welsh language out of convenience in a project of limited self-government that ultimately weakened the language over time.

Anne Kelly Knowles has pointed out that during the mid-nineteenth century there were few Welsh elected officials above the county level of American government.²⁸ As Welsh immigrants focused their attention on the localized concerns of school and town boards, the growing conflict over slavery in the 1850s drew them into partisan politics and nurtured allegiances rooted in their religious concerns.

III. Slavery, the Civil War and the Welsh

Unsurprisingly given Nonconformist disapproval of slavery, the Welsh in the United States were overwhelmingly in favour of its abolition. As Jerry Hunter has detailed, much of the credit for Welsh-American Abolitionism can be given to the Rev. Robert Everett, a Congregational Minister in New York State and publisher of *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd* as well

²⁴ R. O. Jones, 'The Welsh Language in Patagonia' in G. Jenkins, ed., *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 291.

²⁵ WHS Platteville, Iowa Small Series 1 School District No. 3, Town of Mifflin. District record, 1851-1867. Entry dated 29 September, 1851.

²⁶ Concluded from comparing the Mifflin School District record book with the *History of Iowa County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881), 818.

²⁷ WHS Mifflin school district record, 1 September, 1858.

²⁸ A. K. Knowles, *Welsh Settlement in Waukesha County, Wisconsin 1840-1873*. MS thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1989, 97.

as the translator of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into Welsh.²⁹ By the late 1850s, the initially pacifistic Everett had become convinced that war was justified in ending slavery, and many other Welsh immigrants adopted his militant stance.³⁰ Both *Y Cenhadwr* and *Y Drych* endorsed the Republican Party, and during the Civil War, *Y Drych* reinforced Welsh sentiment behind the northern war effort, President Lincoln and the Republicans.³¹

As Jerry Hunter has shown, the Welsh believed the Civil War a struggle to end slavery, unlike many northerners, immigrant or native-born, who were more concerned with crushing the rebellion and saving the union.³² In contrast to the Welsh, there was considerable resistance by some of Wisconsin's German and Irish residents to joining the Union Army or backing the war effort. The Democratic Party, which urged reconciliation with the south, drew support from these immigrants.³³

Nevertheless, both abolitionism and genuine concern for the human and political rights of African Americans had begun to influence Wisconsin's electoral politics in the 1840s, with the Free Soil and later the Republican Party earning support from Yankees and New Yorkers.³⁴ These settlers, steeped in the Protestant revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, shared with the Welsh an abhorrence of slavery and some even embraced radical antislavery views that supported equal rights for African Americans.³⁵ Even if on a national scale, the Welsh were in the minority who took such a position, in Wisconsin Americans of like mind were among their neighbors. Like them, the Welsh supported the Republicans. During the election campaign of 1860, the Welsh Republicans of Milwaukee, 'numbering a hundred' marched in a 'Grand Republican Demonstration' in that city.³⁶

An elegy written by a Welshman in Dodgeville for his son-in-law killed in the Civil War provides a powerful example of his political thinking as well as his emotional reaction to the war. In 1864, Dafydd Roach of Ridgeway in Iowa County was conscripted into the Union Army. Even though friends collected donations to hire a substitute, the 39 year-old father of six had refused them on principle, telling his wife '...teimlai mai ei ddyledswydd i'w Dduw a'i wlad oedd myned ei hunan'³⁷ (*he felt it was his duty to his God and his country to go himself*).

²⁹ The most comprehensive study of Everett and his work is J. Hunter, *I Ddeffro Ysbryd y Wlad: Robert Everett a'i Ymgyrch yn Erbyn Caethwasanaeth Americanaidd* (Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2007). See also, J. Hunter, *Sons of Arthur, Children of Lincoln: Welsh Writing from the American Civil War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 49-91.

³⁰ J. Hunter, *I Ddeffro Ysbryd y Wlad*, 188-205.

³¹ A. Jones and B. Jones, *Welsh Reflections: Y Drych and America 1851-2001* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2001), 17-24.

³² J. Hunter, *Sons of Arthur*, 182-188.

³³ R. N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. II: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 312-319.

³⁴ M. J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent State University Press: Kent, Ohio, 1998), 49.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 161.

³⁶ *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 25 October, 1860.

³⁷ *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*, July, 1865, 217-218.

In February, 1865, Roach fell at the battle of Hatcher's Run in Virginia and was buried on the battlefield.³⁸ Later that year, an elegy titled 'Galareb' (*Mourning*), penned by his father-in-law, Robert C. Owens, appeared in *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*. One stanza in particular articulates Roach's ideological commitment to abolitionism and the war effort:

Nid oedd ynddo duedd bradwr,
Gwir wladgarwr ydoedd ef;
Fe ddadleuai dros iawnderau
Du a gwyn o dan y nef;
Gelyn perffaith i gaethiwed,
Free press, free speech a byth free men,
Oedd ei enwog arwyddeiriau,
Er cael saethau llawer sen.³⁹

*There was in him no treacherous tendency,
He was a true patriot;
He argued for the rights
Of black and white under heaven;
A perfect enemy to slavery,
Free press, free speech and forever free men,
Were his famous mottos,
Despite the arrows of rebuke.*

The elegy not only draws a line between the virtuous Roach and the treacherous Confederacy but also gives voice to a sincere belief in racial equality, that of the poet himself as well as his slain son-in-law's. Significantly, the words 'free press, free speech' and 'free men' echo the slogan of the Republicans' first presidential candidate, John C. Frémont, whose 1856 campaign adopted the refrain 'Free press, free speech, free Kansas, free men and Frémont'.⁴⁰ The only English words in the poem declare Roach's (and Owens's) loyalty to both the Republican Party and an English-speaking political culture.

In the aftermath of the war, the Wisconsin Welsh remained concerned about the wellbeing of emancipated blacks. In an 1866 poem titled 'Cofier y Negro' (*Remember the Negro*), E. D. Davies of Rosendale reminded readers of *Y Cenhadwr* that freed slaves continued to suffer and had few means of economic support. 'Y Negro t'lawd' (*the poor negro*) was 'heb noddod, ty na thanwydd' (*without refuge, a house or firewood*), wrote Davies.⁴¹ Furthermore, Davies felt strongly that African Americans who had served in the war deserved assistance, and was appalled by President Andrew Johnson's failure to address their difficulties. Davies asked pointedly:

³⁸ *ibid.*, 218.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 210.

⁴⁰ R. N. Current, *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. II.*, 232.

⁴¹ *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*, May 1866, 144-145.

A raid i'n brawd, os du y mae,
Mewn bythol wae breswylio?;
A raid ei roi yn fwyd i gwn,
Heb ynom gwyn tuag ato?⁴²

*Must our brother, if he is black,
Live in eternal misery?
Must we make him cannon fodder,
Without being fair towards him?*

Significantly, Davies added a note to the editor, explaining that he wrote the poem 'ar gais amryw gyfeillion yn yr ardal hon...' (*at the behest of friends in this district*), to raise awareness that 'nad ydyw sefyllfa y Negro druan nemawr yn well na phan ydoedd yn rhywm mewn dygn gaethiwed, ac mewn llawer o fanau y mae yn llawer gwaeth arno'.⁴³ (...*the situation of the poor Negro is scarcely better than it was under slavery, and in many places it is much worse for him*). His comments imply that sympathy for African Americans was widely and genuinely felt among the Welsh in Wisconsin.

In the Welsh Settlement at Pecatonica in Iowa County in 1865, funds were gathered at a prayer meeting to help emancipated blacks.⁴⁴ It has also been claimed that the Pecatonica Welsh assisted fugitive slaves fleeing via the so-called Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses.⁴⁵ However, the most powerful testament to the community's commitment to Emancipation is that a freed slave, James D. Williams, lived there from the end of the war until his death in 1903. Although the circumstances of his manumission are unclear, Williams migrated north from Virginia after the war in the company of a Welsh soldier whose last name he took.⁴⁶ Williams was well liked and remembered as 'a good Christian man'.⁴⁷ Indeed, Williams joined a Calvinistic Methodist congregation where he learned to sing Welsh hymns, and joked about being 'the only Welsh negro in history'.⁴⁸ His gravestone proudly declares him 'made free by President Lincoln's proclamation' and his obituary pointed out that 'although "Jim," as he was known by his friends, was one of the colored race, he was very highly esteemed by his acquaintances'.⁴⁹ Admittedly, the relationship between the freed slave and his Welsh hosts appears tinged with paternalism, and more troublingly, he was

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Y Cyfaill o'r Hen Wlad*, February 1865, 43.

⁴⁵ M. Knebel, *In the Shadows of the Mines: The Village of Rewey, Wisconsin, 1880-1980 and Southern Part of the Town of Mifflin* (Rewey Historical Committee, 1980), 40.

⁴⁶ Iowa County Historical Society (ICHHS). R. Davies, 'The Welsh Element in Iowa County.' Unpublished manuscript reminiscences gathered in 1945, recompiled in 1976.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ P. G. Davies, *Welsh in Wisconsin*, 40-41.

⁴⁹ *Dodgeville Chronicle*, 14 August 1903.

remembered as 'Nigger Jim' by second-generation residents.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Williams's decision to put down roots with the Welsh, rather than join a community of freed slaves nearby proves that he felt comfortable at Pecatonica.⁵¹ Putting their religious convictions to work, the Welsh at Pecatonica exemplified an unusually progressive response to the racial inequality that permeated American society.

IV. Welsh Republicanism

With the war that ended slavery fresh in their minds, the Welsh of Wisconsin continued to support the party of Lincoln. The legacy of the assassinated president, namely emancipation and the restoration of the Union, contributed to the Republican Party's esteem among the Welsh. It has also been suggested that the Welsh translation of Republican, 'Gwerinol' with its root in the Welsh word 'Gwerin' meaning 'the folk' or 'the people', possessed an emotional appeal to Welsh speakers.⁵² A decade after the war, R. D. Thomas summarized the reasons for Welsh support for the Republicans, hinting at this popular appeal:

Mae y dinaswyr Cymreig, bron yn ddieithriad, wedi pleidleisio dros egwyddorion ryddgarol Plaid y Gwerinwyr ...am fod eu saflawr (platform) hwy yn sylfaenedig ar wirionedd a chyfiawnder; a bod eu gweithredoedd gwleidyddol hwy, bron yn ddieithriad, wedi bod yn anrhydedd i'n llywodraeth ac yn llesol i'r bobl yn gyffredinol.⁵³

The Welsh citizens, almost without exception, have voted for the freedom-loving principles of the Republican Party ... because the foundation of their platform is truth and justice; and their political activities have almost always been honourable to our government and universally beneficial to the people.

Nevertheless, the Welsh liked to appear independent and principled in politics. In 1897, the *Waukesha Freeman* reported that although the majority of the Welsh were Republicans, there were 'enough Democrats among them to keep up the interest and the argument'. Furthermore, 'we hear very little about the Welsh candidate, or the Welsh vote, and Welshmen feel insulted by any such scheme to entrap them', the *Freeman* continued.⁵⁴ However, this claim belies the existence of some ethnic solidarity among the Welsh.

As early as 1860 the Welsh voters of Racine were accused of 'selling out other candidates for the sake of securing office for their own countrymen'.⁵⁵ 'Nationality is stronger with the Welsh than political principle,' claimed an election handbill posted at the city's polls

⁵⁰ ICHS, 'Welsh Element'. Also, H. Gibbon, 'A History of my Community' in WHS Platteville SC 79 Rural Sociology Class Papers, 1944-1954.

⁵¹ This was Pleasant Ridge in Grant County. See Z. Cooper, *Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 21-29.

⁵² R. Lewis, *Welsh Americans: A History of Assimilation in the Coalfields* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 97.

⁵³ R. D. Thomas, *Hanes Cymry America*, Section C., 68.

⁵⁴ *Waukesha Freeman*, 29 April, 1897.

⁵⁵ *Racine Daily Journal*, 9 November, 1860.

by a rival of the Welsh candidate for district attorney.⁵⁶ This charge was refuted by a Welsh Democrat who had lost his countrymen's votes to his Republican opponent.⁵⁷

Welsh voters do appear to have valued Welsh-speaking candidates. One correspondent to *Y Drych* felt compelled to remind readers that Llywelyn Breese, soon to be elected Wisconsin's Secretary of State, was

...nid yn yn unig yn Gymro trwyadl, ond yn llenor Cymreig o fri hefyd, gan nad beth a ddywedai gelynyon politicaidd...am dano yn ddiweddar.⁵⁸

...not only a Welshman through and through, but a distinguished man of letters in Welsh as well, unlike what has been said about him by his political enemies recently.

The Welsh also supported each others' participation in electoral politics. In an 1873 letter, Breese encouraged a Welsh friend to accompany him to the state Republican convention and asked about another Welshman's electoral prospects.⁵⁹

Yet the small size of the Welsh constituency undoubtedly limited their influence and led to discontent with the Republican leadership. When Samuel W. Reese, the former mayor of Dodgeville in Iowa County, failed to gain support from fellow Republicans for a nomination to the state ticket in 1894 he complained bitterly to fellow Welshman William A. Jones that the party took the Welsh vote for granted and suggested that the Welsh deserved more recognition for their support. 'It seems that the republican [sic] party think that they have the Welsh vote solid and the more they are kicked the better that they like it,' he wrote.⁶⁰ The following year a delegation of Welshmen visited Governor Upham and lobbied for the appointment of 'David Williams of Cambria as warden of the state penitentiary and of George Roberts of Milwaukee as deputy oil inspector of the Milwaukee district'. The delegation impressed on the governor that 'all or nearly all of the Welshmen of the state were Republicans and deserved some recognition in the way of offices'.⁶¹

Whatever their level of discontent with the Republicans, many of the Welsh remained loyal to the party throughout this period. Even in the face of financial panic and depression, Wisconsin was relatively prosperous during the postwar decades, and electoral politics were defined by social concerns such as temperance, rather than economic issues. During downturns short-lived third parties, such as the Greenback and Reform parties emerged and then dissolved as the economy recovered.⁶² In 1877, Thomas Lloyd Jones of Iowa County, who usually favored the Republicans, expressed interest in the Greenbacks, who advocated currency inflation as a cure for indebtedness. In the 1880s, he joined the Patrons of Husbandry, commonly known as the Grange, which pressed for government regulation of grain-elevator

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 November, 1860.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 November, 1860.

⁵⁸ *Y Drych* 28 July, 1870.

⁵⁹ WHS Madison, File 1873 July 29, Letter from Llywelyn Breese, Portage to "Friend Jones".

⁶⁰ MPHS, W. A. Jones papers, S. W. Reese to W. A. Jones 30 July, 1894.

⁶¹ *Racine Journal*, 30 January, 1895.

⁶² R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*, 32-62.

operators and railroad companies. Political 'Grangerism' dissipated as economic conditions improved, and the organization became an educational society for farmers.⁶³

If any faction threatened the Republican hold on the Welsh vote, it may have been the Prohibition Party. Although the Republicans ostensibly favored temperance, the party leadership was careful not to push the issue too far.⁶⁴ For those who took a harder line against the evils of the saloon, *Y Drydedd Blaid* (The Third Party) as it was referred to in the Welsh-American press, provided a political voice for their moralistic concerns. In a poem titled '*Y Gwaharddwyr*' (The Prohibitionists) published in *Y Drych* during the presidential election year of 1888, J. J. Jones of Columbus warned that those who voted Republican risked damnation by sacrificing religious principles for political expediency:

'Rwy'n gofyn dros fy Meistr
Un waith cyn mynd i'm bedd,
O! deuwch oll, Werinwyr,
Cyn teimlo min ei gledd;
Mae'n hogi ar eich cyfer
Mor wired ag rwy'n fyw,
Cewch deimlo min ei gleddyf,
Un miniog yw cledd Duw.

Na siwch eich cydwybod,
I gysgu rhag y cyst
I'ch eto boen a gofid,
Un enbyd yw fel tyst;
O! rhoddwch eich tocynau
Dros faner Dirwest lan.
Cewch wel'd na fydd yn ofid
Pan elo'r byd ar dan.⁶⁵

*I am asking on behalf of my Master
Once more before I go to my grave,
Oh! Come all, Republicans,
Before you feel the edge of his sword;
It is being sharpened for you
As truly as I am alive,*

⁶³ WHS Madison, M2003-119 Jones, Thomas Lloyd. Diaries, 1856-1893; Lloyd Jones attended a Greenback meeting in Dodgeville 17 September 1877 and attended Grange meetings, 17 September 1879, 11 January 1882, 1 February 1882. He is also mentioned as a Grange member in the *Dodgeville Chronicle*, December 3, 1880; on the Greenback party platform, see R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*, pp. 43-45. On the Grange, see R. C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. III: Urbanization and Industrialization, 1873-1893*, 96-100.

⁶⁴ R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*, 50.

⁶⁵ *Y Drych*, 13 September 1888.

*You shall feel the edge of his sword,
The sword of God is a sharp one.*

*Do not lull your conscience
To sleep through this trouble
To you also will come pain and suffering,
Awful for the witness;
Oh! Cast your ballots
For the pure banner of Temperance.
You'll see there is no sorrow
When the world is in flames.*

Welsh Republicans responded that the Prohibition vote threatened to deliver power to the Democrats. That same year, one correspondent to *Y Drych*, 'Hen Lanc o Cambria', cautioned voters to stay loyal to the Republicans and admonished potential Prohibitionists and Democrats:

*Mae'r frwydr ofnadwy'n agoshau,
Dewch Gymry oll heb lwfrhau;
Os am Lywodraeth gyfiawn gre,
I Harrison a Morton rhown hwre,
A pheidiwch bod yn rhyw chwit chwat
Gwaharddol, nac yn Ddemocrat;
I'r blaid Werinol rhown hwre,
Nes cryno'r creigiau yn eu lle.⁶⁶*

*The terrible battle approaches,
Come all Welshmen without losing heart;
If you're for a strong and just government,
Let us cheer Harrison and Morton,
And don't be some fickle
Prohibitionist, or a Democrat;
We'll cheer the Republican party,
Until the rocks tremble.*

In an earlier letter, 'Hen Lanc' also described the Democratic party as '...y blaid nad yw yn proffesu dim gwell na *free whisky, free trade a free secession*'⁶⁷ (...the party that professes nothing better than free whisky, free trade and free secession), inverting the famous Republican slogan of the 1850s. Despite the party's measured approach to temperance, Republican rhetoric conflated the saloon with the treacherous South and the Democratic

⁶⁶ *Y Drych*, 29 September 1888.

⁶⁷ *Y Drych*, 2 August 1888.

Party.⁶⁸ One Welshman in Iowa County claimed that a local Democrat who imbibed at local taverns while campaigning was 'evidently in sympathy with Southern habits, and believes in Kentucky treats'.⁶⁹

V. Ethnic Politics and the Bennett Law

Paul Kleppner and Richard Jensen have shown that in the second half of the nineteenth century partisan affiliation in the Midwest was determined by religion and ethnicity, rather than economic status. Protestant 'pietists' who favored a moralistic reform agenda supported the Republicans, while the libertarian Democrats attracted 'liturgical' Catholics and Lutherans, many of them immigrants. Wisconsin's large German population regarded the anti-alcohol movement as an attack on their culture, increasing their support for the Democrats. Indeed, since the 1850s the Republicans had also relied on the support of nativists and anti-Catholic voters, the so-called 'Know Nothings' who believed in a Catholic conspiracy to take over the United States.⁷⁰

These ethnic divisions were not precise, and the Republicans, for example, were able to draw upon the support of many German Protestants.⁷¹ Indeed, it was a Catholic Republican, Assemblyman Michael Bennett, whose 1889 school reform bill exacerbated the state's ethno-political divisions. The so-called Bennett Law required all schools in Wisconsin, including Catholic and Lutheran parochial schools, to teach key subjects in English. The reaction of many of the state's immigrants in the 1890 election shattered the coalition of native-born and immigrant voters that had long made Wisconsin a Republican-governed state. The mass disapproval of the law by immigrants gave the governorship and legislature to the Democrats who promptly repealed it.⁷² A Republican majority eventually returned, but for several years ethnicity and religious affiliation continued to play a greater role than usual in state politics.⁷³

As protestant 'pietists', the Welsh were staunch supporters of the Bennett Law. At their annual synod in 1890, the Calvinistic Methodists passed a resolution supporting the law since it 'seeks to secure the rights of children to a fair education in the English language, and thereby make them fit citizens in a free government.'⁷⁴ Similarly, Wisconsin's Welsh Congregationalists resolved the law proved 'conclusively the loyalty of the Welsh people to the laws and institutions of their adopted country'. It was a 'wise and necessary enactment' since although the Welsh:

⁶⁸ R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*, 50.

⁶⁹ *Dodgeville Chronicle*, 15 October 1880.

⁷⁰ R. Jensen, *The winning of the Midwest: social and political conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 58-88 and P. Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: a Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 36-91.

⁷¹ R. E. Wyman, 'Wisconsin Ethnic Groups and the Election of 1890' *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Summer 1968, 269-293.

⁷² R. B. Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*, 50.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 69-70.

⁷⁴ *Waukesha Journal*, 28 June 1890.

... cling very tenaciously to the use of their native language in the home circle and in their religious assemblies they wholly disapprove of the violent denunciations of compulsory teaching of English in the public schools, by sectarian bigots and political agitators ...⁷⁵

For these Welsh Americans, their cultural identity was now subservient to an English-speaking civic identity. Implicit in statements of Welsh support for the Bennett Law is a condemnation of other immigrants who attempted to perpetuate their native language in public life. Significantly the Welsh Congregationalists published this resolution in *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd* in English. However, the *cymanfa* continued with a remarkable declaration of Welsh-American exceptionalism:

Nothing fires a Welshman's heart more quickly or calls from him a more determined opposition than the encroachments of Rome. They have sworn eternal enmity to its oppression. They desire to see their adopted country as free from its abominations as their beloved Cambria beyond the sea is. It would have done good to our weak-kneed native American politicians to listen to the scathing castigation administered by these sturdy descendants of the Penrys and Walter Caradocs and other eminent Welsh reformers to that class of office seekers, who would sacrifice their birthright, honor, and religion to the minions of Rome for political preference and power.⁷⁶

The Bennett Law controversy not only justified Welsh sectarian prejudices, it also allowed the Welsh to define themselves as better defenders of their adopted country than many native-born Americans, especially since some Republican legislators had qualms about supporting the law.⁷⁷

VI. Nativism, Nationalism, and the Decline of the Welsh Language in Wisconsin.

Anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment would remain a potent force among the Welsh into the early twentieth century. In 1894, Samuel Reese wrote to William A. Jones, who was soon to be a candidate for the state assembly, that there was 'quite a sentiment against Catholics for office at present' in reference to a rival Republican candidate. 'I don't believe in secret societies in politics', he continued, arguing that 'any person who thinks he owes allegiance to a higher power' than the United States was 'not fit for office'. Reese pledged to 'fight on that line openly' to help secure Jones's nomination.⁷⁸

Two decades later, anti-Catholic feeling could still be aroused. In 1914, Rev. Griffith Griffiths of Pecatonica reported that *The Menace*, an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant magazine was widely read there. He went on with a florid description of the publication's contents:

⁷⁵ *Y Cenhadwr Americanaidd*, July 1890, 222.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ R. Jensen, *Winning of the Midwest*, 145.

⁷⁸ MPHS. W. A. Jones papers. S. W. Reese to W. A. Jones, 6 September 1894.

...y dynoethir dirgeloedd y Babaeth ac y tynir y llen megys oddi ar lygredd ac aflendid Sodomaidd arweinwyr yr eglwys Babaid, yn nghyd a'u cyfrwysdra dichelddrwyg i gael y Pab, nid yn unig yn gynrychiolydd Crist, ac yn frenin nefoedd, daear ac uffern, ond mewn modd arbenig yn frenin ac yn ben ar yr Unol Daleithiau.⁷⁹

... the mysteries of Catholicism are exposed and the curtain is raised from the Sodomitical corruption and filth of the leaders of the Catholic church, as well as their cunning and evil scheme to make the Pope, not only the representative of Christ, and the king of heaven, earth and hell, but in a particular fashion ruler of the United States.

As Justin Nordstrom has explained, the eruption of anti-Catholicism in the early twentieth century Midwest was a conservative Protestant reaction to rapid urbanization and demographic change.⁸⁰ However, the significance may have been deeper for Welsh-speaking Americans. By declaring Pecatonica a community of *Menace* readers, Griffiths argued that Welsh Americans had assimilated the dominant Protestant and Anglo-Saxon identity of the United States better than other immigrants. These statements must also be understood in the context of what Orm Øverland has called a 'filopietistic' narrative. European immigrants in this period sought to justify their presence in the United States by asserting their ethnic group's historic and cultural ties to their new country, however tenuous. Furthermore, many immigrant groups claimed an exclusive relationship with their new country, leading to a competitive nationalism between them.⁸¹ The period between 1890 and the First World War also saw the emergence of a xenophobic nationalism in the United States in response to rising immigration from eastern and southern Europe. Pressure increased on immigrants to become culturally and linguistically 'Americanized,' with the English language serving as a symbol of national identity.⁸² Although the Welsh were not the targets of nativist sentiment, it certainly influenced the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant rhetoric of some Welsh community leaders during this period.

In contrasting their patriotism with the alleged disloyalty of other immigrants, Welsh leaders in Wisconsin cultivated a public image of their community as more deserving of American citizenship. Even though they remained proud of their Welsh birth or ancestry, adhered to Welsh Calvinism and used the Welsh language among themselves, through their assimilationist polemics, often published ironically in Welsh, they asserted themselves as Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

In rural Wisconsin, the Bennett Law controversy appears to have increased tension between the Welsh and some of their neighbors. In 1892 the Rev. R. H. Evans of Cambria complained that many originally Welsh farms were now in German hands:

⁷⁹ Y Drych, 19 March 1914.

⁸⁰ J. Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 72-29.

⁸¹ O. Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*, 29.

⁸² A. Pavlenko, 'We have room for but one language here': Language and national identity in the US at the turn of the 20th century.' *Multilingua* 21 (2002), 174-178.

Os oes Cymry yn rhyw le am ffarm dda, gallant ei chael yn ardaloedd Cymreig Wisconsin. Gwna hyn gadw yr Ellmyniaid allan, a chadw yr achos crefyddol yn fyw.⁸³

If there are Welsh people looking for a good farm, they can find one in the Welsh districts of Wisconsin. This will keep the Germans out, and the religious cause alive.

On the other hand, the same community was home to a German cobbler who ‘spoke Welsh perfectly’ along with his daughters.⁸⁴ Adam Schliesmann may be exceptional, but evidently there was plenty of inter-ethnic accommodation even in predominantly Welsh Cambria, despite the prejudices of community leaders. Ultimately, demographic change and the rise of American nationalism may have contributed to the weakening of a distinct linguistic and cultural identity among the Welsh. In 1898, J. Glyn Davies found the Cambria Welsh largely unconcerned about the declining use of the old language among the younger generation:

No concerted effort ...seems to have been made to keep it up in the house, or to have it taught in the school. As for those who used it daily, it would last their time, and that was enough.⁸⁵

Most significantly, as Bill Jones has pointed out, Americans of Welsh birth or parentage no longer saw the language as essential to Welsh identity as it became increasingly irrelevant to their daily lives.⁸⁶ In Wisconsin, many Welsh-speaking individuals used the language well into the twentieth century, as attested by contributions to *Y Drych* that continue into the 1930s, but they no longer comprised a sustainable linguistic community.

The response of Welsh-born Americans to the partisan politics of their adopted country is a topic that merits continued and deeper investigation. Although it is impossible to know the mind of every Welsh Wisconsinite, their submissions to the Welsh-American press do give us a sense of the dominant views in that state’s immigrant community. Through their support of the Republican party and embrace of American nationalism, Welsh-American leaders in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Wisconsin cultivated a public image of morality and patriotism that conformed to the dominant political and religious culture of the state. Perhaps most significantly for the Welsh, Americanization entailed asserting themselves as English-speaking citizens, both reflecting and reinforcing existing attitudes to their native tongue.

⁸³ *Y Drych*, 11 February 1892.

⁸⁴ J. G. Davies, ‘Cambria, Wisconsin’, 156.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 148-149.

⁸⁶ W. D. Jones, ‘The Welsh Language and Welsh Identity in a Pennsylvanian Community’ in G. H. Jenkins, ed., *Language and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), 281.