

Tradition vs. Fact-Bangor Church

It is the experience of all who have attempted the collection of material for the history of a family, township, county or State, to be confronted with a variety of traditions, more or less plausible, which must be sifted, weighed, examined with facts, and either proved or disproved, before proceeding further in the work.

These traditions, when verbal, carried from generation to generation, one soon learns to treat with scant ceremony; and yet they have a value that needs consideration. It is rarely that there is not some foundation for them, but so distorted as to persons, places and time, as to make it a task to reach the truth. This is discouraging, but what is to be said when the traditions are written, and even printed, and given to the public, with all the assurance of proved fact?

Such has been my experience in an effort to collect something of the Welsh who settled Earl and Caernarvon, and founded Bangor Church. How better could a start be made than first to see the Bangor Church Records? Here was found a Vestry Book, the first entry made November 17, 1751, when the Rev. George Craig opened it with a traditional account of the settlement at Radnor, Chester county, their moving into Lancaster county in 1730, and founding of Bangor. Practically the same matter was used in opening the Church Book at St. John's Church, Compassville, and by the same reverend gentleman. It has gone into history, and should be corrected. It is as follows:

“By the Honorable William Penn, Esq., original proprietor of the Prov-

ince of Pennsylvania, his Charter to all persons who should be inclined to transport themselves from any part of Christendom into said Province, it is granted they shall enjoy the free exercise of the Christian Religion, under whatever denomination. Upon this so engaging a plan of Privileges, among others, several families of Welsh, known by the name of Ancient Britains, did transport themselves from Wales, in Old England, unto the Province aforesaid, and settled themselves at first in the Township of Radnor, in the County of Chester, in the Province aforesaid, where they erected a place of worship, where they had divine service, according to the doctrine and discipline of the Episcopal Church of England, of which Church they were all zealous members, and had for their minister the Rev. Mr. Robert Weyman, the Society's Missionary for the Propagating of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. After some years, many of them, finding their settlements too confined (from the vast numbers of incomers), they, Anno Domini 1730, removed some miles to the westward into a new county, called Lancaster, and settled in a Township called Caernarvon, from a shire of the same name in Wales, in Old England, and fixing here they (in imitation of all good Christians) found that no place would be agreeable to them without the Public Worship of God, therefore, Unanimously and Cordially Consented and agreed, according to their worldly circumstances, to build a Church of square logs, which they finished, and gave it the name of Bangor, from a Diocese of that name in Wales, in Old England."

A scant portion of this is fact. These people from Wales were not Episcopalians; they were Friends, well to do in the old country; had suffered for their religion at home. They came organized

in their meetings and settled in Radnor and other townships on a tract of 40,000 acres, surveyed and set apart for their exclusive use. This was in 1682-88. The persecution ceasing at home, and no more of their countrymen arriving, the land was not taken up, and their vision of the establishment of a Welsh Barony was frustrated by sales to other parties not of their faith or their language. They were dissatisfied. George Keith came among them preaching a doctrine different from that of Fox. Many followed him, becoming Keithian Quakers. Keith, after much controversy, deserted them. His followers became Keithian Baptists, Baptists, Seventh-Day Baptists, and many united themselves with the Established Church they had abhorred in the old country. Missionaries came among them, and, on the plantation of William Davis, a former Quaker, was built the first church of St. David. They were not crowded by the newcomers—the newcomers were Germans, and did not settle in Radnor. The movement west was a second effort of the Welsh to be alone. They did not move into Caernarvon township, Lancaster county, but into Conestoga township, Chester county, in the valley of the Conestoga. They were largely the children of the first settlers from Wales. This was in 1718 and 1719, and it is unaccountable that they should have permitted a statement of first settlement in 1730, when many of those who came before 1720 were living to contradict it. The county of Lancaster was established in 1729, and it was persons in this settlement who helped in that work.

The first settlement in the Conestoga valley was made November 5, 1718, when Cadwallader Ellis had surveyed a tract of 500 acres, now east of Morgantown. This was followed Novem-

ber 6, 1718, by Thomas Morgan, 400 acres; Hugh Hughes, 630 acres; John Bowers, 100 acres; Anthony Yeidel, 340 acres (afterwards added to John Bowers'); Gabriel Davis, 450 acres, and in 1719, Thomas Edwards, at Spring Grove, 1,000 acres, and Jenkin Davis 1,000 acres at the mouth of the Muddy Creek; in 1720, George Hudson 312 acres; Nathan Evans, John Davis, Philip Davis, Edward Davis, William Davis, and many others, until, in 1735, the entire valley was surveyed, settled, and much of it patented. Great numbers of patents are dated between 1730 and 1740—none before those dates, but the account books of the Penns show interest charges in 1735 for sixteen years in the statement on issue of patent, in many cases the interest and quit rent to that date being greater than the principal. The date of the patent has misled as to date of settlement. In many instances a re-survey was made and inserted in the patent. The following is given as a sample of one of those accounts:

ACCOUNT OF GABRIEL DAVIES.

1735.	Dr.	1735.	Cr.
June 11. To		June 11. By	
450 acres		payment...	£44: 0:0
of land.....	£45: 0:0	Sept. 8. By	
Interest and		payment...	£49:12:0
quit rent,			<hr/>
to date.....	£48:12:0		
	<hr/>		
	£93:12:0		£93:12:0

This shows interest and quit rent from September 6, 1718, the date of survey by John Taylor.

Many similar statements might be given, but one is sufficient. Gabriel Davies had several other tracts, but this particular tract is east of the present village of Churchtown. This shows settlement in 1718; tradition said 1730.

Tradition says their first pastor was Rev. Griffiths Hughes. The inhabitants, in a petition to the Society of

London, in 1734, say "That we being well-affected to the Church of England, tho' destitute for several years of an orthodox minister until the coming of our dear countryman, Mr. Hughes." The Rev. Griffiths Hughes was then not the first. The petition was for Welsh books, and shows who among them at that time could speak and read Welsh. Not all of them, however, were born in Wales; in fact, most of them were the children of those who had settled in Radnor previous to 1688. The names are George Hudson, John Davis, Edward Davies, Evan Hughes, Edward Nicholas, Roger Parry, Morgan Morgans, John Evans, Jenkins David, John Bowen, Morgan John, Solomon Thomas, Gabriel Davies, Philip David, Hugh David, Nathan Evans, John Edwards, Bedam David, John David, Zaccheus David, William Willy, Edward Thomas, John Jones, Norris Richard. Of these, several lived in Earl and others in Robeson township, now in Berks county.

The Rev. Griffiths Hughes was sent, in 1732, by the Society at London as a missionary to St. David's and Perkiomen. He was an active, persevering minister, not content to work in the confined field allotted to him, but made monthly visits to Pequea, Caernarvon and the Tu'pehocken region. In a letter, dated Radnor, March 2, 1733, he says: "I found a great necessity of visiting a great many Welsh and English gentlemen that lived far back in the woods, where I found a great number of well-disposed persons, but entirely destitute of a minister. At their earnest request I have gone there several times since, and for a long time had no other place to preach but under the shade of a large tree—their houses being too small to contain the great numbers that resorted there." This fixes the date of the first church as some time in 1733. An

old draft, still in existence, locates it on the south side of the road, and nearly opposite the present church. In another letter the Rev. Hughes says he officiates at Bangor the first Tuesday of every month, in Welsh and English. The great hardships experienced in going on this long journey, suffering for the common necessities of life, and at times forced to sleep under a tree, had its effect on his health, and on the advice of a physician he retired to Barbadoes. The Rev. Hughes had surveyed 405 acres along the Cacoosing creek, January 16, 1733—the finest farming land in Berks county, and near the present village of Sinking Springs. This he suffered to lapse when he retired from the country.

In Ellis' and Evans' History of Lancaster County, page 688, there is another tradition, as follows: "By will of Thomas Morgan, Esq., a Welshman, of Morgantown, December 6, 1740, donated 93 acres, lying around this log church, which they had named Bangor, to its use and service. This property was let out on ground rents, for the purpose, according to the terms of the will, of 'supporting the preaching of the Gospel,' the leases running to the period of ninety-nine years. On this property houses were erected, the church thus becoming the nucleus of the village. It was intended to have named the village Bangor, after Bangor in Wales, but in this way it came to be called 'the church town,' and so Churchtown."

Thomas Morgan gave nothing to Bangor—in fact, I do not think he was a member there, or, if he was, then, at the making of his will, in modern language, a disgruntled member. He gave nothing to the public. His children were members—became such by marriage to members of the English Church. Thomas Morgan was an in-

dependent factor, alone among the other Welsh, and desired to have his descendants remain the same. More of this, however, later on. It is in order now to show how the Bangor property was acquired:

1733. First log church built on vacant land.

At that date this vacant spot, on the summit of the ridge, on which afterwards was located the King's Highway leading from Lancaster to Coventry Iron Works, was bounded north by property of John Davis and Philip Davis, east by property of George Hudson, south by property of John Jenkins, and west by that of Jacob Light; supposed to be about 100 acres.

1737-'38—January 4. Report of viewers on King's Highway received and confirmed by the Council. This left log church on the south side of the road—the graveyard to the north.

1738—May 24. Warrant issued to Gabriel Davies for 10 acres of land "for a church thereon to be erected."

Gabriel Davies also held by warrant a tract to the west of the Jenkins tract. The following memoranda may refer to either:

"1742—September 22. I have agreed with Gabriel Davies that I take a patent for ye whole tract which was formerly in ye possession of John Jenkins, and do oblige myself, my heirs, executors and administrators firmly by these presents in the penal sum of three hundred pounds to make him a title to his share or part of ye tract, he paying what is due to ye proportion for it, before the first day of May, as witness my hand ye day and year above written. WILLIAM BRANSON."

1742—December 28. Patent issued to William Branson for 400 acres under warrant issued to John Jenkins, January 10, 1733. The warrant and survey

to John Jenkins had been forfeited for some reason not stated, and William Branson procured a new warrant and had a re-survey made.

On this property was built Windsor Forges.

1754—September 7. At a meeting of the vestry of Bangor, held this day, a subscription started as follows: "We, the subscribers, members of the Church at Bangor, do hereby promise for ourselves, our heirs, executors and administrators, to pay or cause to be paid to John Davies and Lynford Lardner, the present Church Wardens, or to the Church Wardens for the time being, on or before the 16th day of November, 1755, the several sums annexed to our names, which sums are to be applied towards building a new church, and to such other purposes as the said Wardens and Vestry shall hereafter agree upon." Total subscriptions, £421:13:0. The new church was then built of stone and located about one hundred feet to the east of the present building.

1755—February 21. Patent to Lynford Lardner and John Davies reads as follows: "Whereas, by warrant, dated May 24, 1738, there was surveyed by Gabriel Davies, a tract of land in Caernarvon township, Lancaster county, and Province of Pennsylvania, etc., containing 62 acres, 127 perches, for a church thereon then intended to be and since erected, and called Bangor Church, for the use of the Congregation of Protestants of the Established Church of England in that Township and neighborhood, as by the said warrant and survey returned and remaining in our Surveyor's Office.

"And, whereas, the said congregation and the said Gabriel Davies, who is a member thereof, are now desirous and have humbly besought us to grant our patent of confirmation for the said tract of land unto Lynford Lardner

and John Davies (the present Church Wardens of the said Church), and their heirs, for the use aforesaid, and the said Gabriel Davies, having accordingly by his deed poll, bearing date the 14th day of January last past, transferred and conveyed all his right and interest and title of, in and to the said tract of land under the said warrant and survey unto the said Lynford Lardner and John Davies, and their heirs for the use aforesaid, as by the same deed poll now produced appears; Now know ye that we favoring this request and for and in consideration of the sum of nineteen pounds, fourteen shillings and eight pence, lawful money of Pennsylvania, to our use paid by the said Lynford Lardner and John Davies, do grant," etc. Quit rent one-half penny sterling per acre, or value thereof in coin current according as the exchange shall then be between our said Province and the City of London.

1759—October 8. Nathan Evans, Sr., having paid £29:2:0 for the Glebe Land which lies around the church, clearing it out of the office, the patent being for the use of the minister officiating in the Church of Bangor, and it having been noticed the tract was patented to Lynford Lardner and John Davies (Church Wardens), and their heirs, for the use, etc., Lynford Lardner and John Davies this day conveyed the same to Nathan Evans, his heirs and assigns, in trust, for the uses, intents and purposes aforesaid.

1759—October 10. Nathan Evans, Sr., and Susannah, his wife, by indenture of this date, granted and conveyed the tract of land, with the church thereon erected and built, unto James Turbet and Nathan Evans, Jr., (then), Church Wardens of said church, and their successors in the office of Wardenship, hereafter chosen

by the said minister and congregation, or a majority of them, from time to time, in trust for the sole and only benefit and behoof of the Minister and Congregation for the time being of Protestants of the Established Church of England, using and frequenting the said church then erected, and at any time hereafter to be erected on the said tract of land, and for such other uses and intents and purposes as the majority of such Minister and Congregation of Protestants of the English Established Church for the time being, and their successors of that persuasion using and frequenting the said church erected or to be erected from time to time, order, limit, direct and appoint, agreeably to the Act of General Assembly of said State, in that behalf made and provided.

The ground along the great road was now plotted and sold, leaving a ground rent to be paid annually. Other portions of the ground were leased in larger tracts. In these deeds the location is Caernarvon township, sometimes Church-town. At no time is Bangor mentioned except as applying to the church.

The following note needs no explanation:

1761—October 31. "This is to acquaint the Wardens and Vestry of Bangor Church that I am credibly informed that some of them are for applying the moneys arising from the lots purchased in Church-Town towards finishing the Church, But I do hereby assure them that that was not my design when I paid for that land, but, on the Contrary, my Intent was that the Profits arising from that land should be towards the support of the Minister, be it more or less, for the money I paid for that Land was my own, And as I never expect it I think it is but reasonable that the Profits

thereof should be applied the way I intended it.

“I am yours to serve,
“NATHAN EVANS.”

“THOMAS BARTON,
“JAMES TURBET,
“JAMES ALLEN.”

This then makes it clear that the land on which Bangor Church is located did not come from Thomas Morgan.

But Thomas Morgan did give ground for a church, so there was a foundation for the tradition. His will being recorded at Philadelphia, it is not strange that so little of its contents are known.

Thomas Morgan resided on his plantation of 710 acres. His house, built on the centre of it, was half a mile south of the present village of Morgantown, on the banks of the Conestoga. He directed George Hudson to prepare his will, which he did in a clear, round hand, with ink as bright now as on the day it was written. It covers seven pages of foolscap paper. A few blanks were left to be filled at signing. Ten hundred and twenty-five acres were devised to his four sons and a granddaughter. All the land is accurately described by courses and distances. To son John he gives 200 acres, to son Francis 173 acres, to son William 154 acres, to son Jacob 212 acres, to granddaughter, Elizabeth Morgan, 37 acres. Also, to sons John and Jacob a mill property of twelve acres; to son Francis another tract of 31 acres, and to son William 93 acres. All these are “to them and the heirs of their bodies lawfully begotten or to be begotten forever.” He provides for his wife, Elizabeth.

To make clear that he intended an entail, he adds:

“Item: I do further explain it to be my will and mind that each and every of my four sons and granddaughter

aforesaid, and their heirs, shall neither sell nor mortgage their said tracts of land, nor any part thereof, forever, and that they and every of them do let the said tracts of land and every part thereof fall to their descendants clear of all arrearages of quit rents, by discharging the same annually and every year."

Then follows:

"Item: I give and devise unto my four sons, John, Francis, William and Jacob Morgan, the quantity of one acre of land lying on the hill that's on the left side of the Cart Way that leads from my land's end to Conestoga Creek, the which acre of land I give unto my four sons aforesaid for a burying place, to have and to hold the said acre of land unto my four sons aforesaid for the use aforesaid, and to their heirs of their bodies lawfully begotten and to be begotten forever."

"Item: I give and devise unto my four sons, aforesaid, John Morgan, Francis Morgan, William Morgan and Jacob Morgan, all that messuage, plantation and tract of land, situate on Conestoga Creek (land described), containing 154 acres, the said messuage, plantation and 154 acres of land, I give and devise unto my aforesaid four sons in trust, and it's my will that my said four sons and their heirs apply the rents, issues and profits thereof forever towards building a Church or House of Worship and maintainance of a Gospel Ministry therein, the which Church or House of Worship I order to be built on that acre of land I have already given for a burying place, and that they do not destroy, nor suffer to be destroyed, the timber belonging to the said tract of land, to have and to hold the said messuage, plantation and 154 acres of land and appurtenances thereunto belonging unto my four sons aforesaid, for the use of afore-

said and to the heirs of their bodies lawfully begotten and to be begotten forever."

"Will signed December 6, 1740.

"THOMAS MORGAN.

"Witnessed by

"JOHN BLACKALL,

"GABRIEL DAVIES,

"GEORGE HUDSON."

John Blackall was the Society's Missionary. When this will was presented to the Register General at Philadelphia, March 25, 1741, there was a codicil of the same date with the will, with same witnesses, written on the last page, as follows:

"Whereas, In and by my last will and testament, written on this sheet of paper, I have given and devised unto my son, William, the tract of land containing 93 acres and a tract containing 154 acres I have given towards building a Church and Maintaining a Gospel Ministry, as is therein mentioned, I do hereby order and declare that my will is that the tract containing 93 acres be towards building a Church and maintaining a Gospel Ministry, as aforesaid, and the other containing 154 acres I give unto my son, William, and his heirs, instead of the tract of 93 acres, and in the same manner as that was devised.

"THOMAS MORGAN.

"Same witnesses."

The blanks in the will, all the signatures and the codicil, having been written with a different ink, have faded to such an extent that with the aid of a powerful glass only portions can be read. Enough, however, is revealed to throw doubt as to its being with the consent of Thomas Morgan. George Hudson and Gabriel Davies, in their oath on proving the will, "declare they saw and heard Thomas Morgan, the testator above named, sign, seal, pub-

lish and declare the same will to be his last will and testament." They do not make oath as to the codicil. I believe it was understood at the time that the codicil was not the will of Thomas Morgan. There was no one to question it. The property was evenly distributed—the church and burying-ground was to be for those children exclusively, and so made their own division. The 154 acres given in the will for the church is one of the best plantations in the Conestoga Valley—the 93 acres probably the worst. It has never been farmed—is rocky, swampy and used only as a pasture for young cattle.

As will be noticed all the property was entailed. As early as May 1, 1769, proceedings were instituted "for docking, barring and cutting off all estate, tail and remainders thereupon expectant and depending," and eventually all the acres of Thomas Morgan passed into other hands.

As for the ninety-three acres, nothing is known of it until sometime before August, 1765, Jacob Morgan called the attention of the Vestry of Bangor to the provisions of his father's will, and he, it seems, was authorized to build a chapel on the one-acre lot—he, as well as his brothers, Francis and William, then being members of Bangor.

1765—August 8. In a letter of this date by Rev. Thomas Barton to the Society at London, we have:

"I beg leave at present to acquaint the Society, that on Sunday last (August 4, 1765), I opened a New Church in the County of Berks, about five miles from the Church of Caernarvon, and 26 miles from this place (Lancaster). It is a small stone Edifice decently finished, and has been built in Compliance with the last will and testament of one, Thomas Morgan, a

very Pious, worthy Man, who ordered his Executors to build a Church upon a Lot of ground pointed out by his will; and to apply the Issues and Profits of ninety acres of Land, bequeathed by him for this use, towards the Building, until paid for (which will be in about twenty years). And when that is done, the Issues and Profits are directed to be paid to the Minister forever. Tho' there did not appear at first any immediate Necessity for a Church so near that of Caernarvon, yet I am now convinced it may be very useful. There are in the Neighborhood of it, a great Number of Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, etc., who have no stated Houses of Worship, or settled Preachers of their own, and thought it too far to ride to Caernarvon, who propose to attend here as often as there shall be Divine service. This being the case, and as it falls at present within my mission, the venerable Society may be well assured that I shall give it all the attendance in my power, tho' it will add greatly to my Duty and Fatigue, as I shall be obliged to attend it on Week Days, the other Churches not being willing to be deprived of any Sundays." He afterwards preached there, on the Sundays allotted to Bangor, in the evening.

1766—November 10. "Jacob Morgan, having laid his accounts before the vestry for building a new Church, agreeably to his father's will, and it appearing that there remains the sum of £43:4:10 unpaid by him of the expenses he has been at for said building, and the said Jacob Morgan being willing to run the risk of receiving £23 of the above sum from the upper part of the Congregation, and the lower part of the congregation having engaged to pay £20, the said Jacob Morgan now agrees to pay the Minister of

this Mission £5 due last June as rent for the Glebe bequeathed by his father for the use of the Gospel Minister of said Mission. And said Jacob Morgan further agrees that said rent of £5 per annum arising from said Glebe shall yearly and every year as the same becomes due be paid from this time forever to the Minister officiating in Bangor and the new Church aforesaid."

Later a school was established in the church building on the one-acre lot. Morgantown was laid out about 1770. During the Revolutionary War all the *Episcopalian Churches* were closed.

1786—March 6. The act for removing the Protestant Episcopal Chapel of St. Thomas, in Caernarvon township, Berks county, and for incorporating the congregation thereof passed. This Act, authorizing the removal from the one-acre lot on the hill south of Morgantown to lot No. 32 in the town, was altogether in the interest of the school, and to secure the income of the 93 acres. The congregation in their petition, after giving all the facts in regard to the will of Thomas Morgan, say: "That agreeably to the intent of the said testator a building was erected on the said one-acre lot, and was called St. Thomas' Chapel, wherein public worship was performed and a Gospel Ministry maintained, and also a public school kept therein, but that the said house is too small to contain the congregation, and is so situated that the roads leading thereto are rough and difficult, and in the winter season very dangerous, and frequently impassable, especially when the water rises high in the Conestoga Creek, and that it would be more convenient to the members of the said congregation, and the youth instructed at said school, if the materials of said church were re-

moved and a church and school house built at a place called 'Morgan's Town,' in the Township of Caernarvon aforesaid."

A building for a church and school was now erected on Lot No. 32, in Morgantown, but in doing so a debt was contracted, suit was entered, and the lot and church thereon sold by the Sheriff, May 12, 1791. It was bought by James May, who assigned his deed to Jacob Morgan. Provision in the will of Jacob Morgan was made for the recovery of the property by the congregation.

By special Acts of the Legislature, permission was given to sell the one-acre lot and the 93 acres, and the money derived from the sale invested for the benefit of the ministers officiating at St. Thomas'.

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