

St. David's Society News

Volume 44/Issue 2/Summer/Haf 2026



Society changes ahead

A letter from Janice Barbee, out-going president

It has been my honor and pleasure to serve as the president of the St. David's Society of Minnesota for the past nine years. The Society has continued to celebrate St. David's Day every year and to hold the Holiday Tea and the Annual Meeting and Picnic.

During Covid, vice-president Ilene Alexander and I, with the help of board members, kept things going via Zoom with several speakers from Wales, and poetry readings and book discussions. We have had many pub gatherings, Welsh film showings, and have sponsored a few *Cyman-faoedd Canu*.

The Society has existed for 116 years and has gone through many changes along the way. I have suggested to the board, and the board has approved, some changes that we hope will keep the Society going for years to come. Some of these changes are to address our aging membership and some are to make the work of the Society less burdensome on our leadership.

New Leadership!

The big news is that two of our members have stepped forward to lead the Society for the next three years as co-presidents: Larry Moore and Steve Griffith! I'm sure we will be in good hands with some fresh leadership. Thank you, Larry and Steve!

Thanks to Our Volunteers

I want to highlight that the Society has always counted on people who volunteer for many kinds of roles. Currently, we have a dedicated group of people contributing regularly in myriad ways:

Board members:

- **Janice Barbee**, President & Secretary;
- **Pam Rose**, Treasurer & Membership Director;
- **Hywel Roberts**, (who has found us many Welsh guest speakers for our events);
- **David Richards**, (who has put together Holiday Tea programs, full of poetry and more readings);
- **Mary Mergenthal**, Newsletter Editor & and Sunshine Director (sending cards to members);
- **Ilene Alexander**, Well-Read Dragons Book Club organizer;
- **Laurel Bradshaw**, Organizer and teacher at Welsh language sessions;
- **David Evan Thomas**, Choosing music, enlisting performers, and accompanying singing.

We will be expanding this list.

MORE!

Ilene Alexander has agreed to organize regular pub gatherings.

I have agreed to step into a newly created role of Communications Director (sending out email updates and reminders to members, updating the website monthly, and supporting Mary Mergenthal to produce the newsletter with editing, printing, and/or mailing). This will take some of the duties away from the co-presidents to make that role less time-consuming.

Changes to Our Events

- St. David's Day Celebration: We hope to continue to hold this event at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church every year in the foreseeable future on a Saturday near March 1st. The meal will no longer be catered, it will be a potluck.
- Gymanfa Ganu: Mary Mergenthal and Kay Thomas will arrange one every year or two in the spring, with the financial support of the board.

Continued on p. 2

Upcoming Society Changes *continued from page 1*

- Holiday Tea: This will be held exclusively on Zoom and become the Holiday Party. Many members are finding it hard to attend in winter.
- Annual Meeting & Picnic: We will keep it as a potluck. This is a time for the financial report and slate of Board directors to be approved; for a summary of the year by the president (or co-presidents); and for people to get to know each other better.
- Pub gatherings: These will be arranged more frequently than in the past few years.

As you can see, the Society will still be hosting many events, and the board welcomes your ideas for other offerings. Please invite your relatives and anyone you know with Welsh connections or interests to attend and/or become members. And if you haven't paid your dues for this year, please send in your dues using the form on page 11.

We have 65 life-time members, 36 annual members, and one institutional membership for a total of 102 members. **We hope we can maintain and even grow the Society to continue to celebrate and cultivate all things Welsh.**

SAVE THE DATE:

Annual Meeting & Picnic Sunday, August 16, 2026

The Society's Annual Meeting and Picnic will be at a different Roseville Park: **OASIS PARK, 1700 Co. Rd. C2 W, FROM 12-2 P.M. TAKE FAIRVIEW AVE. NORTH FROM CO. RD. C OR LARPENTEUR AND TURN RIGHT ON MAPLE LANE. IN FEW BLOCKS YOU'LL SEE CO. RD. C2. TURN RIGHT, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE TURNING AGAINST THE ARROW. PARK IS JUST AHEAD.**

Please bring a dish to share.

The building has a parking lot, and is air-conditioned.

This is the time for our membership to approve the slate of directors of the board and learn how we have spent Society funds. We'll also have time to chat with each other and learn more about Wales.

Board member Hywel Roberts will give us an update on his documentary on the Welsh connections to King Arthur, and we may have a special guest, Rich Meredith, to answer any questions you have about Welsh genealogy. (If Rich is unable to attend, we will schedule another time.)

**We hope to
see you there!**

St. David's celebration, Feb. 28: Leek soup, Welsh harp music, Welsh singing



Photo by Mary Morris Mergenthal

A group of St. David's Day Society members sang I'r Awen [To the Muse] by John Thomas at our St. David's Day event, much to attendees' delight. Directed by David Evan Thomas, singers were Laurel Bradshaw, Sally Evans, Allison LaPointe, Janice Barbee, Catharine Morris, Don Barbee, Richard Rames, and Tony Evans. Cathy Victorsen accompanied the group on her harp. She also played eleven (!) Welsh Tunes for Harp while the group enjoyed lunch and visiting.

In addition to good food, lovely music, and friendly visiting, we enjoyed a fascinating ZOOM presentation from Wales by Sarah Woodbury: "None could go against the King of England: Crouchback and the History of Medieval Wales." Thanks to Hywel Roberts for making that contact.

NAFOW in Springfield, Mass., Sept. 2-6

Registration is open and hotel rooms are being booked for the 2026 North American Festival of Wales [*Gwyl Cymru Gogledd America*]. This year it's being hosted by the Welsh Society of Western New England. The event is headquartered at the Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel.

StDS member Laurel Bradshaw will be teaching Welsh folk dance again. There will also be seminars on Welsh topics, Welsh films, and, of course, lots of singing of Welsh hymns and folk songs.

Another StDS member, Kay Thomas, is on the Board of the Welsh North American Association, sponsor of this annual event. Her chief responsibility is planning and executing the annual Festival Gymanfa Ganu.

Go to www.nafow.org for more info. If you require printed info, please contact Welsh North American Association International Headquarters, Dr. Megan Williams, Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 1054, Trumansburg, NY, 14886.

Welsh Festival of Song

Sunday, September 27, 2026

1:30 p.m.

**First Presbyterian Church, Mankato
22 E. Hickory St.**

Director: Rev. Joseph Corbin

<https://mnwelshassociation.weebly.com>

- **The church is right downtown, easy to find from Hwy 169.**
- **Free parking ramp right next door.**
- **Church is accessible!**
- **Joe Corbin is from SE Wisconsin and is a popular Welsh conductor.**
- **Tea (or coffee) & Welsh cakes follow.**

**CONTACT MARY MORRIS MERGENTHAL
IF YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE A RIDE
OR ARE ABLE TO DRIVE OTHERS.**

**NO PROMISES, BUT WE'LL TRY!
(612) 670-8510 CALLS/TEXTS.
MARY.MERGENTHAL@GMAIL.COM**

DET is busy (as always)

Our resident Welsh-American composer, David Evan Thomas, (shown on left) had several performances of his music this spring.

On Easter Sunday, cellist Jeremy Capey performed "From the Land of Song" in Ashburton, England. On March 26, soprano Erika Lantz, sang his "Give Her the River," a setting of a children's book by the late Michael Dennis Browne, at Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior, Minn.

The Minnehaha Academy Band will perform/premiere David's arrangement of "Shall We Gather at the River" in May.



Photo by Kathy Criston.

StDS Archives at MNHS

By Ilene Alexander

The Minnesota Historical Society holds an archive of St. David's Society of Minnesota's business, history, and celebration materials in its Gale Family Library.

The archive index opens with this Historical Note: "The St. David's Society of Minnesota was organized by members of the Welsh Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis on June 19, 1911, as the Cambro-American Society. The name of the organization was changed to St. David's Society in 1920. Saint David is the patron saint of Wales." Judith Evans Warner and Ilene Dawn Alexander organized printed and photographic materials in 2014, delivering the donation to an archivist on June 25.

What you can find there: You'll find the following highlights—alongside a substantial collection of board-related materials (minutes, financial records, articles of incorporation and bylaws, membership directories)—in the physical archive:

- Historical records of St. David's Society of Minnesota that list original dues-paying members of the Cambro-American Society, which became the St. David's Society.
- St. David's Day programs spanning 1911–2014, including materials from the 100th Anniversary Celebration in 2011.
- Photographs spanning the 1970s–1990s, including two albums, several individual photos, and a small set of digitized images.
- Drafts and final editions of the Society written and *Welsh History in Minnesota*, first published in 1985, and updated in 2006.
- Documents from Annual Meetings of the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Associations' 1978, 1987, and 1999 gatherings in Minnesota. This stash includes planning documents; event programs, publicity, menus, and ephemera distributed to attendees.

- Some early history of the Welsh in Minneapolis/Saint Paul, as found in *Y Drych*, between 1870–1950. These two volumes include translations of select materials from Welsh language newspaper in the United States.

- Minneapolis Welsh Presbyterian Church, 1881–2008. One volume. Documents include photographs, news coverage, list of original members, 50th anniversary programs and correspondence of the church building located near the intersection of 15th Avenue South and Lake Street.

- Brass rubbings of the church cornerstone, bearing the inscriptions *Ewch i mewn i'w byrth ef â diolch* [Enter into His gates with thanksgiving]. Psalm 100:4, and "WELSH CHURCH 1881–1910."

- Architectural drawings, circa 1910. Eight drawings.

- Cross-sections, elevations, and floor plans; W. J. Williams, architect.

- Plans for the pipe organ installation, 1921. Four drawings.

- Welsh Presbyterian Church, undated and 1931–1999.

Viewing materials in the archive: To actually view the collected Society documents and photographs, you will need to visit the Gale Library in person, or consult with library staff about making copies of specific materials. The Gale is open for appointments and walk-in visits Thursday, Friday, and Saturday each week, unless the day is a holiday. To learn more check: <https://www.mnhs.org/library/about/hours>. In visiting the archive you'll sign in, store all belongings in a secure locker, taking only paper, pencil, and a device that you can use for making notes or taking photographs.

To get a fuller view of what's included in the archive, you can follow through on the direct link to the St. David's Collection Finding Aid: <https://storage.googleapis.com/mnhs-finding-aids-public/library/findaids/01228.html>.

Attend Summer School online: Welsh Migration to the U.S. and Elsewhere in the 19th Century



COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines the profound changes that occurred in *Cymru* [Wales] in the 19th century, including the early industrial revolution and a period of intense migration into and from *Cymru*. As the state democratized, *Cymru* saw a period of national revival in the context of other national revivals across Europe and in the British Isles.

The *Cymry* [Welsh] engaged with the British Empire and the world in several ways, including emigration to the United States. Once in America, the *Cymry* contributed to the emergence of modern America. This course will introduce students to these topics and key sources (texts, articles and other historical evidence).

Students may take optional, online assignments that will allow them to connect material associated with community history or family history. The intent is to provide students with a supportive and safe environment to learn a bit more about history and to encourage those who want to return to education.

The first class is Sat., June 6, 2026, and will run for eight weeks (except for Sat., July 4). The class will meet every Saturday at 2 p.m. CT for one hour. Optional office time will be available after each class for those who are interested.

The link for the class is
<https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/2124684970>.

COURSE PREPARATION

No preparation is required. However, students are encouraged to bring their personal or community stories of migration to the class, so that we can compare those stories to evidence.

For students who want to learn more and engage with the optional exercises, there are some core texts and sources recommended. It is not required to read them in advance, though students are likely to enjoy them.

For syllabus details, to register, and for office hours, please contact instructor Lawrence Huw Webber, M.A.. He is a Welsh native who now lives in Colorado. He is on the Board of the Great Plains Welsh Heritage Project. Direct questions about the course and registration to:
lawrence.webber001@umb.edu

There is no fee for the course, but a donation of \$99 to the Great Plains Welsh Heritage Centre is suggested.

St. David's Foundation news

Should you wish to celebrate your Welsh heritage with a financial gift, or remember or honor another Welsh person, send a check to the **St. David's Society Foundation** treasurer: Ron Adams, 3600 Wooddale Ave. S, #213, St. Louis Park, MN 55416.

The Foundation uses its money to fund projects of Society members. A recent example was support from the Foundation for Hywel Roberts' recent film project in Wales. Members have received funding for academic efforts or pursuits in Wales.

Please ask about other possibilities.

Applications for funding are available from:

Foundation President, Dr. Kay Thomas,
kayanthomas168@gmail.com

or

Treasurer, Ron Adams,
cymraeg@imaginarytowers.com



Photo by Ilene Alexander.

Home of the Ladies of Llangollen, with the Medieval castle Dinas Brân in background.

Well-Read Dragons schedule for June and August

By Ilene Alexander

The two books remaining in the '25-'26 Well-Read Dragons line-up are going to take readers through a mix of centuries:

June 6 – We'll discuss **Doris Grumbach's** *The Ladies*, a 1984 novel that retells the life two upper class Irish women—Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby—built in Llangollen, North Wales, from 1778 to 1829. Their journey began as an elopement to escape family-planned marriages.

Quirky. Adventurous. Life partners, whether as romantic friends or lovers. Each an independent woman with economic benefits in being part of aristocratic families who accepted, in the end, their life decisions.

A 2023 letter writer in *The Guardian* called *The Ladies*, “Extraordinary individuals who turned a dull turnpike town into a beacon of fashionably, [they] were superstar celebrities of their time.” That status is confirmed by visitors to their neo-classical Georgian and Gothic revival cottage with its intricately carved oak paneling including Lord Byron and Caroline Lamb, Queen Charlotte, Charles Darwin, Anne Lister, Percy Shelley, the Duke of Wellington, and William Wordsworth.

Less than this celebrity, as a Goodreads recommender notes, Grumbach's narrative is “acutely sensitive to the quiet hum of everyday living and the small acquired habits that bond lovers over long periods. It is especially touching

to watch the women age as the pages turn, affecting a kind of time-lapse realism that doesn't diminish the Ladies' passion or love for each other."

The Plas Newydd page within the *Cadw* site for historical places provides brief, helpful context about the women and their home.

August 1 – The contemporary anthology *Welsh [Plural]: Essays on the Future of Wales*—edited by **Darren Chetty, Grug Muse, Hanan Issa, and Iestyn Tyne**—offers a reading experience focused on Wales now, a diverse and contemporary country with the daily experiences of joy and searching for justice that comes with cultural richness and plurality. The essays explore questions the editors returned to in planning the collection: "We found ourselves returning to questions of what we mean by Welshness, Welsh identities and Welsh culture. What do these phrases mean to a Cardiffian, or a West Walian; those living in Wales, the Welsh diaspora, those newly arrived in Wales; those with ties across the border, across the sea? What do they mean to the Muslim, agnostic, lapsed Catholic, just-there-for-the-singing Nonconformist, the Welsh speaker, Welsh learner, non-Welsh speaker?"

Several reviewers called *Welsh [Plural]* a rewarding read, in part because the collection offers 19 wonderfully varied selections: essays, experimental pieces, sociological works, memoir, and poetry, letting readers engage in a "choose-your-own adventure" among works by writers from all types and backgrounds, some known and some new to readers of Welsh literature.

- We have two copies of each book to circulate among readers. Just get in touch with Ilene (ilene.dawn@gmail.com) to set up a handoff.

- Added bonus each month—Hear short selections of Bob Minish's memoir-in-progress as the opener for our June discussion, and in August close the session by selecting the six books for 2026–2027.

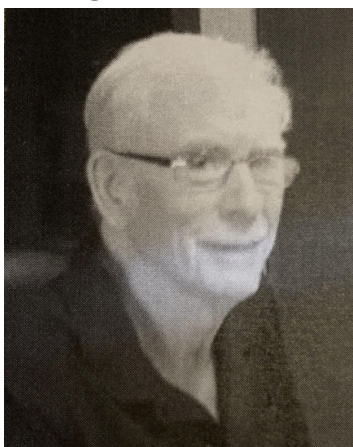
Meeting time and place—We meet from 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. on book discussion days, using a dedicated Zoom room at <https://bit.ly/4fkXGPh>. The discussions are lightly facilitated, with each participant noting a couple of questions and/or passages they want to offer as springboards for talking together. Contact Ilene (ilene.dawn@gmail.com) if you want to be on the mailing list for Well-Read Dragons updates and reminders.

IN MEMORIAM

Bill Christianson

Bill (William) Christianson, 92, died Feb. 5, 2026. He was born on Dec. 22, 1933. His life was defined by devotion to his family and his work.

Bill graduated from Drummond (Wis.) High



School and the University of Wisconsin, Superior. He served his country in the 82nd Airborne. He enjoyed a long career in banking and accounting, owning his own accounting and income tax service in St. Paul.

Bill and Lola shared a deep love of travel. They especially enjoyed their time in Florida and many summer days spent at their family cabin in northern Wisconsin.

Bill is survived by his wife Lola; three daughters Debra Alexander, Kathleen (Jim) Helseth and Susan LaFreniere; a sister Lois Christianson; foster son Ed Sandstrom; four grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Blessed be his memory.

If Flowers Could Sing

If flowers could sing
they would sound like a Welsh choir
in St. David's Cathedral,
the notes floating up and around
transept, apse and sanctuary,
stopping the radiant saints
in their tracks.

A hymn in four parts:
Daisies and Daffodils (soprano)
Bluebells and Primrose (alto)
Spindrift and Thrift (tenor)
Foxglove and Yarrow (bass)
And for this service,
Heather, dressed in lavender, will
play the organ.

Listening, the blue sky
becomes a rainbow,
the rocks, rock,
the mica sparkles
and the green hills roll.

by Shannon King



Here's Shannon King among much larger plants than those described in her poem. She's in the Clyne Botanical Gardens in Swansea.



Photo by Ilene Alexander.

The hills around Llangurig, Powys, reputed to be the village at highest elevation in Wales with its 1,000 foot elevation.



Hywel Roberts films in Wales

During the first week of March, StDS Board member Hywel Roberts, of Winona, was in his home country of Wales. He was filming a three-part documentary on the history of the Brenin [King] Arthur that has survived across the ages.

The documentary will show that King Arthur is solidly rooted in Welsh, not English, tradition. The first documentation of Arthur was by Taliesin, a sixth-century Welsh poet and historian of the time. He was followed by Aneurin making a reference to Arthur in his poem *Gododdin*. Aneurin was followed by the Welsh monk Nennius in the ninth century.

Arthur was possibly a Roman-British leader defending Britain against Anglo Saxon invaders. This would have made him a Celtic (Brythonic) figure in the 5th–6th century. (The documentary will not enter the debate about whether or not the Arthur of legend actually existed.)

In March, cinematographer Blake Darst, editor Daniel Munson, and director and producer Hywel Roberts interviewed and filmed Prof. Raluca Radulescu at Bangor University's Center for Arthurian Studies. She was recently awarded a prestigious three million euro grant to explore manuscripts related to King Arthur.

This significant award, the first and largest in Wales and the only Arts and Humanities grant of this type awarded in the U.K. last year, places Bangor University at the forefront of Arthurian studies.

The project will unite scholars from six European countries—Wales, Iceland, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—a unique consortium dedicated to exploring Arthurian traditions from Medieval manuscripts to modern multimedia interpretations.

The Minnesota-based crew also filmed Scott Lloyd. He works for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. He has served on the committee of the British Branch of the International Arthurian Society and is the author of *The Arthurian Place Names in Wales*. [Mr. Lloyd visited us a few years ago and talked to the society.]

The crew also filmed anthropologist and writer Sara Woodbury at locations in Caernarfon, Nefyn on the Llyn Peninsula, Castell Emrys, and the National Library of Wales. [Woodbury was our presenter, via zoom, for our recent St. David's Day celebration.] The film crew will return to Wales in May to continue filming in Aberystwyth and Swansea University.

After his return in March, Hywel said: "The filming in Wales went very well with historians and academics alike very excited that at last someone is taking this on! We return to Wales at the end of May to film in Aberystwyth and Swansea."

Hywel plans to show the documentary first in Wales, then the U.S., and around the world. It will be a three-part series, the first two parts in English and the third, in Welsh with English sub-titles. He hopes to have the documentary finished to present at NAFOW in Cleveland in 2027.

If you are interested in helping fund this project, please send a check to King Arthur Documentary LLC, 22 West Wabasha St., Winona, MN 55987. If you do, you will be credited for your support at the end of the film. Questions? Contact hywelroberts@gmail.com



Photo by Ilene Alexander.

Dinas Brân (see remotely on p. 6). Note the ever-present Welsh sheep that joined Ilene on her walk.

THE MAKER

by R.S. Thomas

So he said then: I will make the poem,
I will make it now. He took pencil,
The mind's cartridge, and blank paper,
And drilled his thoughts to the slow beat

Of the blood's drum; and there it formed
On the white surface and went marching
Onward through time, while the spent cities
And dry hearts smoked in its wake.

Thomas was a vicar, noted for being out-spoken, and lived near Criccieth, North Wales.

Though he spoke Welsh as a child, he wrote poetry only in English.

He was nominated for a Pulitzer prize in Literature. He died in 2000, at age 87.

This issue's tidbit from

Llyfr Bach Cymru — The Little Book of Wales by Roger Thomas

All Things Being Equal =

The equal sign in mathematics was invented by Robert Recorde of Tenby, Wales, a brilliant 16th-century academic. *Ed. note: See modern-day Tenby on our cover photo.*

Membership Application/Membership Renewal Form St. David's Society of Minnesota

www.stdavidsofmn.org www.facebook.com/stdavidsofmn

PLEASE PRINT YOUR INFORMATION

Name (for Partner/Family* memberships, please include all names): _____

Address (including city, state & zip): _____

Phone Number(s) for Directory: _____

E-mail Address(es): _____

_____ I do not use or seldom use email. Please send newsletters by post.

Individual and Partner/Family Membership Categories and Rates

___ Individual Annual (July 1- June 30) \$25/year

___ Partner/Family * Annual (July 1- June 30) \$40/year

___ Individual Lifetime (*one-time payment*) \$225

___ Partner/Family* Lifetime (*one-time payment*) \$300

* Partner/Family Rate covers 2 adults and may include children under 18 years of age, under the same roof.

Organization Membership Categories and Rates

___ Affiliated Organization (July 1- June 30) \$50/year

___ Supporting Organization (July 1- June 30) \$75/year

___ Sustaining Organization (July 1 - June 30) \$100/year

Please make checks payable to: ST. DAVID'S SOCIETY OF MN

Send membership status questions to: pamresearch@hotmail.com

Mail this form and check to: Pam Rose, Treasurer

8514-13th Ave S.

Bloomington, MN 55425

IN PREPARATION FOR A NEW MEMBER DIRECTORY, OUR TREASURER, PAM ROSE,
IS CONTACTING PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT UP-TO-DATE WITH THEIR DUES.
PLEASE REACH OUT TO HER IF YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION HAS CHANGED
AND/OR IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PAY YOUR ANNUAL DUES.

St. David's Society of Minnesota
Janice Barbee, president
3425 Wisconsin Ave. N.
Crystal, MN 55427

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Photo by Bill Jones

Tenby North Beach, in Pembrokeshire, in southwest Wales.

*** Apologies, readers:
The cutline for the Winter issue's beach was cut off. It was Aberystwyth Beach, further north, in Ceredigion.*