

BACKGROUND

The Establishment of Cardigan, New Brunswick

On April 9, 1819, a large crowd gathered on the shores of the Teifi River near Cardigan to see the brig *Albion* lift anchor for Saint John, New Brunswick. The brig was loaded with slate and 180 passengers, families from the surrounding countryside who were looking for a better life in British America. The *Albion* arrived in Saint John harbour on June 11, 1819. Once declared healthy and disease-free, the Welsh immigrants came ashore and immediately held a church service to give thanks for their safe crossing. By mid-July many families had moved upriver to the capital city of Fredericton and had petitioned the Legislative Assembly for land located about 25 km outside the city. They named the new community 'Cardigan Settlement'.

The arrival of 150 destitute Welsh immigrants made quite an impact on the small city of Fredericton. Many did not speak English, and none had the knowledge needed to prepare the wilderness for habitation. Thus, an Emigrant Society was formed to supply food, shelter, tools and someone to teach the Welsh how to clear land and build cabins.

The difficulties faced by the settlers was well-documented in the local newspaper, the *Royal Gazette*. In August 1819 they were described as 'very destitute' and 'straggling through the streets or crowded into Barns'. In September, the Emigrant Society was asking for more support from the good citizens of Fredericton because 'it is evident without further assistance they must nearly perish with cold and hunger the ensuing winter'. Citizens were reminded that no matter how willing anyone would be to help these families, it would be difficult to find them housing in the coming winter because few 'would like to admit families whose habits are so different from their own, into their houses.'

By November it was clear that the settlers, despite their best efforts, would have to be housed in Fredericton. The Emigrant Society visited the 'various habitations' of the Welsh, finding most of them in dire straits. William Richards, his wife and four children were 'lying in a most miserable situation' which shortly led to the death of William's fourteen-year old child. A few days later John George was found dead in the woods, having died of 'fatigue and the inclemency of the weather'. Nine families wintered miserably in the Cardigan settlement, the others lived in sheds and barns in town. All were sick, cold and hungry.

At the advent of spring, the hard work resumed. By the end of 1820, the Welsh families were established in Cardigan. Some of the original families moved on to New York and Kansas. But most stayed and over the next 2 or 3 years, were joined by another 20 Welsh families who settled in the adjoining hamlets. By the 1830's Cardigan was a thriving farming community.

Over the past 200 years, the descendants of the original Welsh families prospered and spread across the country, although some still live in Cardigan. They left the farms to become doctors, engineers, soldiers, airline pilots, nurses, teachers, entrepreneurs, accountants, pharmacists, professional athletes, RCMP officers and university professors. Their keen sense of community, so much a part of their Welsh culture, led them to serve their fellow citizens at City Hall, in the Legislative Assembly, in hospitals, schools, government offices and civic organizations.

Cardigan today looks very different. Like most rural communities, the post-WW2 industrialization saw the end of small family farms and indeed, much of the land cleared so painstakingly by the original settlers has reverted to forest. The Welsh Chapel and graveyard has been declared an historic site, maintained by the great, great, great grandchildren of the original settlers. Services are held in the Chapel in June to commemorate the arrival of the *Albion* and in October to give thanks for the perseverance of our ancestors.

The story of the establishment of the Cardigan Settlement has been well documented in a book by Peter Thomas, titled *Strangers From a Secret Land*, in public records, newspaper accounts and the private letters and family bibles of Welsh settlers.

PRESS RELEASE



*Central New Brunswick Welsh Society/
New Brunswick Welsh Heritage Trust*

Fredericton, NB: Celebrating 200 Years of Welsh Heritage

On June 11, 1819, 180 Welsh men, women and children arrived in Saint John, New Brunswick in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Most of these emigrants moved upriver to Fredericton where they were given land located 25 km northwest of the city. Overcoming many challenges, the Welsh settlers established the small settlement of Cardigan. They were joined by 20 more Welsh families over the next few years, most of whom settled near the Cardigan settlement. The next generation moved to other communities along the Saint John River, and many moved to Fredericton to establish prosperous businesses. Today some of the descendants of these Welsh settlers remain in Cardigan, but most are spread across the continent. Cardigan is the oldest enduring Welsh community in Canada. The Welsh Chapel and cemetery is a designated historic site.

On August 10th and 11th, 2019 a celebration will be held to honour these early settlers and to share our Welsh heritage. On Saturday, August 10th, activities will be held at the Welsh Chapel, 2900 Route 620 (Royal Road), beginning at 1:00 p.m., with Opening Ceremonies to commence at 1:30 p.m. There will be opportunities to explore your genealogy, to learn a little of the Welsh language and to make Welsh cakes, along with music, crafts and refreshments. On Sunday, August 11th a special church service will be held at 10:30 at the Brunswick Street Baptist Church, the first church with which most of the early settlers were affiliated.

Everyone is welcome to join us, admission is free. Bring a lawn chair so you can sit and chat with other visitors! More information at www.nbwelsh.ca or on Facebook at Central New Brunswick Welsh Society.

We gratefully acknowledge the promotional assistance provided by the City of Fredericton and the financial assistance provided by the Province of New Brunswick.

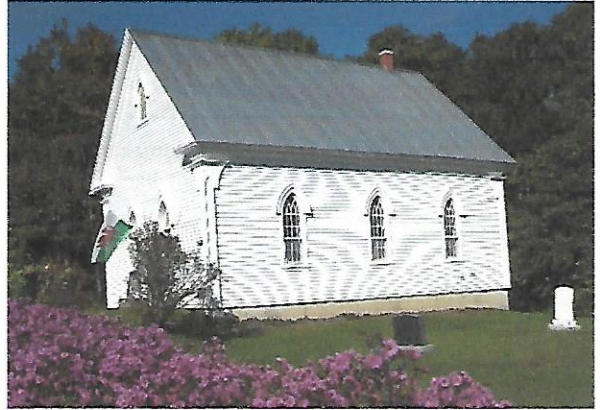


Fredericton

BACKGROUNDER

The Welsh Chapel: A Canadian Historic Place

The Welsh Chapel, located in Cardigan, New Brunswick, is a designated Provincial Historic Site and can be found on the Canadian Register of Historic Places. The community of Cardigan was established by immigrants from Wales who arrived in 1819 with the hope of making a better life for themselves and their families. Most of the settlers were members of the non-conformist churches – Methodist, Congregationalist and Baptist. It was the Baptist congregation that built the Welsh Chapel.



In the early years of the settlement, the Baptist families worshipped in their homes or traveled to Fredericton to attend services. In 1825 a formal church was established in the community, serving 45 souls, with services conducted in Welsh. The church and graveyard were situated on a one-acre lot transferred from David Lewis to the Baptist Society in 1831. This early building was eventually moved to the nearby community of Woodlands to serve as a farm building. It was replaced by the current chapel circa 1856 which served Baptist families in the area for many decades.

In the late 1980's a group of interested families with roots in the Cardigan area began investigating the possibility of preserving and restoring the chapel and graveyard. At the same time efforts were underway to establish a Welsh Society in the Fredericton area. The aims of the two groups overlapped, resulting in the establishment of the Central New Brunswick Welsh Society, and the creation of the New Brunswick Welsh Heritage Trust, to be managed by the Society.

Discussion with the United Baptist Convention, which owned the Chapel and graveyard, culminated in a transfer of ownership of the property to the Welsh Heritage Trust in June 1989. During the next few years extensive work was carried-out, including the addition of a heated basement, painting of the interior and exterior of the chapel, improvement of the grounds and restoration of the gravestones. In October 1997 a plaque designating the Chapel and graveyard as a provincial historic site was unveiled by the local MLAs of the day, one of whom was a descendent of the original Cardigan settlers.

Many improvements have subsequently been made to the Chapel and graveyard. Two ecumenical church services are held there annually, one on the Sunday closest to the June 11th arrival date of the Welsh settlers, and the second on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Donations made to the NB Welsh Heritage Trust are used to maintain the Welsh Chapel and the cemetery. The New Brunswick Welsh Heritage Trust is a registered charity and thus issues tax receipts for all donations of \$10 or more.

Other special events are held at the Chapel from time to time, including a number of weddings and baptisms. The graveyard continues to attract visitors from across the continent, many of whom are descendants of the original families.