

Gloria Jean Thomas
Malad, Idaho
March 17, 2007

Welsh Nicknames

Customs: Nicknaming

Informant:

Gloria Jean Thomas is a resident of Malad, Idaho. She grew up here and her ancestors were some of the first Welshman to settle the valley. Boyd Thomas, her father, is of Welsh ancestry and was born and raised in Malad. She is currently the president of the Malad Valley Welsh Society. She is a professor at Idaho State University and has done extensive research on Welsh folklore.

Context: I was in Malad, Idaho, my hometown, visiting for the weekend. Malad was founded in 1865 by Welsh immigrants and currently has the largest per capita concentration of people of Welsh ancestry outside Wales itself (hence, a perfect location to collect Welsh American folklore). One Saturday afternoon, Jean came over to my house in Malad to talk to my mom about some church business. I had been wanting to talk to her about some Welsh folklore, since I knew she has studied it and grew up here in Malad, so I just asked her about it. She immediately started telling all kinds of Malad Welsh folklore. She was sitting relaxed in our recliner and just seemed so eager to share all the information she could. I asked her about some specific items, but a lot of the information she volunteered that I had not known about. Because of her knowledge and study of Welsh culture, she often described the scholarly reasoning behind many of the items she shared. This was one in particular that I asked her about because I was interested in it.

She gave me the background information as well as the actual custom of nicknaming. She said that the Welsh had the patronymic system of naming, where it was just the father's first name coming down. *Ap* [pronounced *op*] means *of*, so if the patronymic system was still purely in place, she said her father would be Boyd ap David ap Frederick ap William. You had to be able to tie yourselves back to your ancestors at least 7 generations. To have any kind of standing in the community, you had to know your genealogy. So when the English forced the Welsh to take surnames, they just picked them. They usually picked the first name of an ancestor—a father, grandfather, great-grandfather—who was revered or important in the village. That's why you end up like it is in Malad with four lines of Thomas's not even related, because 4 groups of people just picked the surname Thomas. So because of this you end up with all these Thomas Joneses and Jonah Thomas's and Evan Evans's and James Joneses and Jones James's. So in Wales, because they had all these Thomas's and Davids and Williams's, they took all these new biblical names and traditional Welsh names and to differentiate between all the Davids and Williams's and Thomas's, it was David the Carpenter, Bill the Butcher, David the Drunk, Tall David, and Short David. They needed something to differentiate. That is how she explained the naming.

Text: You know, one time when my grandfather was alive, there were 5 James Joneses. So, they all had a nickname. So it was always James B. [collector note: James B. is my great

grandfather James Bywater Jones], my grandfather was Jim Miller because he worked at the mill, even though he was James L. Jones, but there were three James L.'s. There was Billy Snipe [collector note: Billy Snipe was my great-great grandfather William Evan Jones] because there were a lot Bill Joneses and he was Billy Snipe for some reason I'm not sure of. There was also Black Monte, Red Monte, Tailor Monte, Old Monte. I mean, that just fits right along with it.

They say that there was one stake conference [collector note: conference held by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints semi-annually in Malad for members of the stake in Malad] where they asked if James Jones would come up to speak and 30 guys stood up. And they said, "No, no, James William Jones." 10 sat down. Anyway, in the old days in Malad the names were really a lot more than they are now. My other grandfather David Thomas—there were all kinds of Dave Thomas's—was called Liquor Store Dave because he ran the liquor store. And then he started working at the mill so then he was David Jones because the Joneses owned the mill.

Texture: This was told in a light-hearted tone. Jean was relaxed and talked about these things as if she were very familiar with them. She often stopped mid-sentence and went back to finish a thought that hadn't been completed, then went back to what she was saying before. She also tells it as one who is very much a part of this culture—it is just who she is. She smiled often and joked about things such as "David the Drunk."

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