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## *The Transplanted*

During the first century and a quarter of its existence, the United States received between thirty-five million and forty million mostly European and British immigrants seeking land, economic opportunity, and political and religious freedom. The nineteenth century was by far the high-water mark of this incoming tide of humanity. During the second half of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, Wales came closest to experiencing a mass migration to the United States. Nevertheless, to use historian Alan Conway's memorable phrase, compared with the "big battalions from the continent of Europe and from England itself, the Welsh formed little more than a corporal's guard."<sup>1</sup> During this period a vast majority of the Welsh immigrants were coal miners and iron- and steelworkers whose historical significance rests on their strategic contributions to America's industrial development rather than their numbers.

### Welsh Immigration

A clear understanding of the Welsh experience in America requires an interpretive framework that accounts for the fragmented identities others attached to incoming migrant groups and the identity embraced by the

immigrants themselves. The term “immigrant” is packed with meanings constructed by natives and marks newcomers as not one of “us.” Unfortunately, there is no convenient term to replace it. Scholarship on immigration reflects the era during which it was written. During the early twentieth century, US scholarship was stamped by concerns over the potential for assimilating the great diversity of humanity entering the country during that period. Historians such as Carl Wittke were optimistic that the European nationals arriving from southern and eastern Europe would eventually be assimilated because of America’s ability to absorb different peoples and meld them into one. America was a “melting pot,” and immigration and assimilation were thought to have played a critical role in forging the American character.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the 1960s, revisionists abandoned this homogenizing paradigm and focused instead on race, ethnicity, and cultural pluralism. Even by the late 1930s, Marcus Lee Hansen was reminding scholars that, although British culture was dominant in the United States, it was only one of many cultures that had shaped the nation. Realizing that immigration and assimilation constituted a two-way street, scholars devised new conceptual approaches to explain the intercontinental mass movement of people. Richard A. Easterlin’s “push-pull” model explained immigration within the processes of economic modernization. Rapid industrialization in the United States created a great demand for labor while at the same time undermining the ability of other nations to sustain their own people. American scholars of this generation concentrated on particular ethnic cultures and communities, portraying immigrants as either “retainers” of their culture within ethnic enclaves or as “modernizers” who abandoned the old culture for the new for rational economic reasons.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, historians were preoccupied with conflict between immigrants and native-born Americans and how immigrants actively protected their own cultural identities rather than conform to mainstream American values.

John Bodnar’s *The Transplanted* (1985) synthesizes immigration and assimilation within the framework of capitalism and explores how Old World values were adapted, rather than abandoned, in the New World. He locates this dynamic within the family, community, and workplace, a personal world further influenced by class, kinship, and ethnicity. Bodnar might be described as a “soft pluralist” who regarded cultural differences as intrinsic assets, as opposed to the “hard pluralist” who is concerned with class rather than culture, as well as the issues of struggle and exploitation.<sup>4</sup> Bodnar’s

thesis is that immigrants were pragmatic about the culture they brought with them, retaining what was useful from the old culture and adopting what they found useful in the new.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1990s the drumbeat in immigration history has been for scholars to expand their approach beyond the United States and the nation-state in order to articulate the field within its global context; this is a “transnational” approach that studies movements and forces that cut across national boundaries. Historian Kevin Kenny asserts that two approaches to immigration history emerged from the effort to avoid the dead ends inherent in a singular focus on either the nation-state or cultural enclaves. The “transnational” approach looks for “reciprocal interactions . . . among globally scattered communities.” The “cross-national” approach, on the other hand, “examines specific similarities and differences in the experiences of similar migrants who have settled in different nations.” Kenny argues that neither perspective by itself will yield satisfactory results. Comparisons based on nationality do not “capture the fluid and interactive processes at the heart of migration history.” The transnational approach alone, however, does not account for the persistent power of nation-states to attract loyalty or for the sharp regional, cultural, and political differences that may fragment a single nationality, such as the Scots, Welsh, and English, not to mention the Irish, within Great Britain.<sup>6</sup>

This study examines continuity and change among Welsh immigrants within the framework of the Welsh homeland and the American hostland. The transatlantic transfer of Welsh culture and skills and how the migrants adapted them to American circumstances in order to succeed is the major theme in this study. It is therefore built upon the conceptual foundation of both the transnational and the cross-national perspectives, both being vital to understanding immigration and assimilation into American society. Unlike what occurred during the southern and eastern European mass migrations, Americans either welcomed migrants from Britain or did not feel a need to comment on their presence. In his popular book *The American Commonwealth* (1888), James Bryce claimed that the English, Welsh, and Scottish migrants were “absorbed into the general mass of native citizens” and tended to “lose their identity almost immediately” in the United States. Although they numbered in the millions, their political footprint was invisible because they had “either been indifferent to political struggles or have voted from the same motives as an average American.”<sup>7</sup>

Andrew Carnegie came a step closer to the truth in *Triumphant Democracy* (1886), asserting that the British held a privileged position in the United States because they played a leading role in building the country. Migrants from Britain, like the Welsh immigrant David Thomas, credited as the “father of the anthracite iron industry in America,” not only created the industries but, as industrial workers, they had performed much of the labor as well. Carnegie claimed that British immigrants held a monopoly on industrial invention and the skills needed to run those industries. In the nineteenth century almost half of the manufacturing workforce was from Britain, while Americans were primarily engaged in agriculture. Moreover, this near monopoly in manufacturing and the skilled trades was passed on to their children.<sup>8</sup>

In this era of aggressive racism, nativism, and Anglo-Saxonism, many (and probably most) Americans regarded southern and eastern Europeans, not to mention Asians, Africans, and even Black Americans, as too alien to be assimilable. On the other hand, British immigrants were seen as, and thought of themselves as, “valuable reinforcements” to the British stock that had established the United States. They occupied an ambiguous status between native and immigrant but were comfortable living among “cousins” though not necessarily feeling at home. Within Great Britain the “British” identity was constructed to meet the needs of empire by incorporating the distinct nationalities of the English, Welsh, and Scots, and it represented expansion, global power, imperialism, and, for some, the civilizing of “heathens” in remote places. However, British emigrants did not always share this identity in equal portions. The Scots and Welsh each maintained their own distinctive cultural and national identities in the United States in a way the English did not, even though Americans drew little distinction between them. The paucity of scholarship on the subject indicates that, at least in the literature, the British would seem to have been, in Charlotte Erickson’s apt phrase, nearly “invisible immigrants” and, to use another historian’s poignant phrase, “white on arrival.”<sup>9</sup>

While the immigrants who arrived in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were predominantly from the British Isles, it was the transportation revolution of the mid-nineteenth century that transformed emigration in British history. Steamships greatly reduced the perils of sea travel and made migration a much less irreversible decision, while in America railroads opened the interior to settlement and development. The

cost of transportation also fell, opening emigration to ordinary workers who sought to improve their lives by moving abroad. Industrialization in the United States attracted skilled British workers, who quickly took advantage of the new opportunities. Their privileged status was reflected in the immigrant experience of Welsh ironworkers, whose identity was anchored in their unique work culture, nineteenth-century Welsh nationalism, religion, politics, cultural practices, and labor-industrial relations. Their reception and social position, however, stood in stark contrast to the experience of the millions of southern and eastern Europeans who entered the US labor market at the lowest rung. The result was a stratified and segmented labor market rather than actual job competition.<sup>10</sup>

Welsh immigration to the United States was chronologically, geographically, and occupationally concentrated. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Welsh immigrants to the United States were primarily farmers seeking better land. By far the greatest influx, however, came in oscillating waves between the 1840s and 1900 with the migration of industrial workers.<sup>11</sup> The 1900 census recorded the presence of Welsh in every state of the Union, but they were concentrated in particular states. Out of a total 267,000 Welsh-born immigrants and their children in the United States (93,744 immigrants and 173,416 children of immigrants), 100,143 of them lived in Pennsylvania alone. Ohio was a distant second with 35,971. These two states also contained the two largest concentrations of Welsh in the coal and iron districts. More than 40,000 lived in adjacent Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, where Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, respectively, are the major towns. Of the 35,971 Welsh in Ohio, 24,312 lived in the coal and iron districts of northeastern Ohio and along the Ohio River.<sup>12</sup>

The British statistics on those immigrating to the United States between 1871 and 1920 showed 3.0 million English and Welsh together, 650,000 Scots, and 2.2 million Irish, a much larger number than the official count of the US census. The data discrepancy is a casualty of the differences in the American and British definitions of an “emigrant” and an “immigrant.” Until 1909 the United States counted only steerage passengers as immigrants, and a significant number of British had booked second- or even first-class passage to America. Until 1914, on the other hand, the British government classified all passengers as emigrants whether or not they intended to remain in America. Therefore, the American figures are too low while those of the British are too high. Also, the British did not differentiate between the

Welsh and the English, while in 1860 the US government became the first to recognize the Welsh as a distinct nationality. Further confounding the calculations, the British did not enumerate returnees until 1895, and the United States did not record those who returned to their native land until 1908. Because the migrants' motives were undocumented, there is no way to distinguish between immigrants and sojourners. Due to undercounting, the actual figures were undoubtedly higher. Nevertheless, it is clear that far more English, Scots, and Irish came to America than did Welsh, both numerically and as a percentage of their respective national populations. Between 1881 and 1931, Wales lost to the United States an average of fewer than 7 per 10,000 of population, whereas England lost 14, Scotland 25, and Ireland 89 per 10,000. As may be seen in table 1.1, the vast majority migrated between the Civil War and World War I. The number of Welsh-born immigrants in the United States was 29,868 in 1850 and peaked in 1890 at 100,079. On the other hand, that same year the English-born outnumbered the Welsh nine times over, the Scottish-born two and a half times, and the Irish-born by more than eighteen times.<sup>13</sup>

The historically interesting question is why the Welsh migration represented but a trickle relative to the emigration from other countries of the British Isles, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage. Why were the Welsh less likely to emigrate even though the conditions that stimulated emigration elsewhere in the British Isles also were present in Wales? The answer is found in the growth of the Welsh industrial economy and its articulation with the British and American economies. During the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, emigration from Britain and investment in the United States were positively correlated. When British capitalists invested in the US industrial expansion, economic activity at home stagnated and excess labor migrated to the United States. When British capitalists invested at home, the reverse occurred—emigration declined and internal migration to British urban-industrial centers accelerated. During the entire period between 1851 and 1911, Great Britain lost population through immigration, mostly to the United States, but departures fluctuated with each economic cycle and were reflected in the peak periods of 1851–1861, the 1880s, and 1901–1911.<sup>14</sup>

The South Wales coal and iron district had migration patterns that were the opposite of the English, Scottish, and American patterns. Emigration from Wales spiked in the 1860s and increased again in the 1880s, but the

Table 1. British-born population of the United States, 1850–1920

Year	Total population	Total foreign-born	English	Welsh	Scottish	Irish
1850	23,191,876	2,244,602	278,675	29,868	70,550	961,719
1860	31,443,321	4,136,175	431,692	45,763	108,518	1,611,304
1870	38,558,371	5,567,229	555,046	74,533	140,835	1,855,827
1880	50,155,783	6,679,943	664,160	83,302	170,136	1,854,571
1890	62,947,714	9,249,560	909,092	100,079	242,231	1,871,509
1900	75,994,575	10,341,276	840,513	93,586	233,524	1,615,459
1910	91,972,266	13,515,886	877,719	82,488	261,076	1,352,251
1920	105,710,620	13,920,692	813,853	67,066	254,570	1,037,234

Source: Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America*, 7, citing US Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, 1940, 2:43.

losses were more than offset by the population gains from in-migration as Wales absorbed population at a rate second only to the United States. Nearly the opposite occurred in England and Scotland. Wales's distinctive migration pattern is directly related to the growth of the South Wales coal, iron, and tinplate industries during the second half of the nineteenth century. Because of this rapid industrialization, the surplus rural population, as well as tens of thousands of British in-migrants, entered the local workforce. In effect, the South Wales coal, iron, and tinplate industries held back what might have been a flood of immigration to the growing economies of England and the United States. Industrial expansion in the coal and iron district of South Wales helped to stem the flow of migration by absorbing surplus rural laborers who could simply move to the nearest urban-industrial center rather than cross the Atlantic.<sup>15</sup> This migration pattern did not exist within other “Celtic Fringe” nations, particularly Ireland, where no similar expansion of industry provided the rural poor with industrial employment opportunities.

The option of migrating to the South Wales coal and iron district explains why tens of thousands, rather than hundreds of thousands, of Welsh emigrated; it was a significant movement but not a diaspora. The influence of the Welsh migration in the United States, however, far surpasses the weight of its numerical measure. These largely skilled workers followed ethnic, family, and occupational networks in the coal and metal industries within their trades of expertise. According to the US Immigration

**Table 1.2.** Immigrants to the United States from the British Isles, 1875–1920

Country origin and time period	Immigrants to US with occupations	Percent skilled	Percent laborers	Total immigrants to the US	Annual rate of immigration per 10,000 mean population
WALES					
1875–1880	1,374	54.4	26.0	–	–
1881–1890	5,682	48.4	34.7	12,640	8
1891–1900	5,005	54.3	20.9	11,219	6
1901–1910	11,708	61.6	11.5	18,631	8
1911–1920	9,988	57.0	6.6	15,379	6
(Avg.)		(55.1)	(20.0)		
SCOTLAND					
1875–1880	19,471	51.8	13.6	–	–
1891–1900	28,006	53.6	12.2	60,046	14
1901–1910	86,976	62.2	22.1	133,338	29
1911–1920	100,824	52.2	5.2	164,131	34
(Avg.)		(52.6)	(15.3)		
ENGLAND					
1875–1880	92,602	39.8	31.9	–	–
1881–1890	319,118	34.7	42.5	644,680	25
1891–1900	128,107	52.4	16.0	224,350	8
1901–1910	237,227	62.3	12.4	387,005	12
1911–1920	271,181	52.5	13.0	419,526	12
(Avg.)		(48.3)	(23.2)		
IRELAND					
1875–1880	97,639	14.0	49.6	–	–
1881–1890	382,368	9.2	58.0	655,482	123
1891–1900	280,054	9.2	35.8	404,045	88
1901–1910	316,340	15.0	45.3	371,772	84
1911–1920	187,902	29.3	18.0	240,041	55
(Avg.)		(15.3)	(41.3)		

*Sources:* Compiled from B. Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth*, table 81, 269–72; B. Thomas, *Welsh Economy*, table 3, 11. *Notes:* Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent. Semiskilled workers were not represented in the breakout data; they were often learning one of the skilled trades associated with the iron-steel-tinplate industries. For Ireland, the percentage of immigrant “servants” (generally women) was higher than that of “common laborers” (generally men).



Commission of 1907–1910, only 15 percent of all immigrants working in industry had been industrial workers in their native countries, but a much larger proportion of the British resumed their previous trades when they arrived in America: 58 percent of the Welsh, 50 percent of the English, and 36 percent of the Scots. The percentage was even greater among the British iron-, steel-, and tinplate workers. Fully 72 percent of the Welsh resumed their previous occupations in the United States, while 48 percent of the English and 43 percent of Scots did so—a very high percentage compared with 21 percent of the Swedes and 17 percent of the Germans, two other nationalities with a significant presence in the US steel industry.<sup>16</sup>

Of the immigrant Welsh workers with identifiable occupations, 75 percent were concentrated in the coal mining and iron and steel industries. Census data do not identify actual occupation by ethnic group, thus precluding a precise number for Welsh in the metal industries. However, the census data demonstrate that two-thirds of the Welsh workers who entered the United States between 1881 and 1920 were “professional” and or “skilled” (table 1.2). The “semiskilled,” often in training for skilled occupations in the metal industries, were not included in the breakout tables.

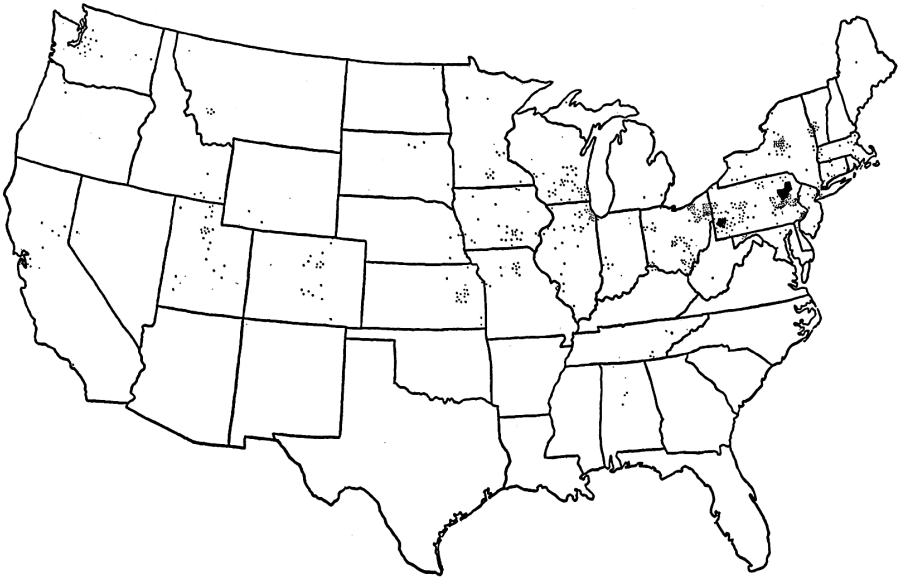
David Davies, editor of major daily newspapers in Cardiff and Swansea and a very knowledgeable observer of the South Wales metal industries, toured the Welsh mill communities in the United States in 1897–1898. He estimated that there were “7,000 Welshmen employed at American works.”<sup>17</sup> Davies certainly undercounted the total, however, for the semiskilled and laborers would have been nearly invisible to him. A closer estimate for the total number of Welsh-born workers in the US steel industry at the turn of the twentieth century would have easily reached more than 10,000 of the total 125,000 steelworkers in the country. Male Welsh immigrants were overwhelmingly married with children, so a conservative estimate of the Welsh-born steelworkers and their dependents would not have registered below 40,000. Nevertheless, even if the official count were doubled or tripled, the fact remains that the number of Welsh in the United States was small in comparison with other nationalities.

According to a leading expert on Welsh emigration, “The popular impression that Welsh workers flocked to the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century is a myth. In the decade 1881–1890, when the absorptive power of the United States was at a peak, the effect on Wales was hardly noticeable.” The annual rate per ten thousand British Isles immigrants with

identifiable occupations was only three for Wales, twelve for England, twenty for Scotland, and seventy-seven for Ireland.<sup>18</sup> Historian Rowland Tappan Berthoff's observation that the nineteenth-century British migration to the United States "ran not in a broad, undifferentiated stream but rather in many parallel channels" has particular poignancy for the Welsh. According to Berthoff, few of them were likely to cross the Atlantic unless they expected to find work in their chosen trade. The historical significance of the Welsh migration, therefore, lies not so much in its numbers as in the fact that they were skilled in crafts and management and "directly transfused the skills and experience of the premier industrial nation of the early nineteenth century into the veins of the rising giant of the twentieth."<sup>19</sup>

On arrival in the United States, the Welsh flocked to colonies of compatriots where they would be welcomed by relatives and friends, as at the Lonaconing ironworks in Maryland, where it was reported that the workers were "all uncles and cousins."<sup>20</sup> The 100,079 Welsh-born residents of the United States in 1890 were widely dispersed, as shown in map 2. The Reverend R. D. Thomas counted two hundred Welsh settlements in 1870, all of them small except for those contained within in urban-industrial centers, such as Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown. The industrial migrants were concentrated in the coal and iron centers of Pennsylvania and Ohio, where nearly one-half of all the Welsh lived, while the Welsh agricultural migrants were concentrated in Ohio and Wisconsin. Welsh migrants nearly always settled north of the Mason-Dixon line because the demand for industrial labor was strongest in the North. Four of every five Welsh immigrants lived in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, or Wisconsin in 1880. As late as 1900, after decades of American westward migration, two of every three Welsh still lived in these states, plus Minnesota.<sup>21</sup>

Welshmen and their families set out for the coal, iron, and steel districts of western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Johnstown, in Cambria County, Pennsylvania, grew under the stimulus of a major steel mill, and satellite coal mining communities provided the great quantities of coal consumed by the furnaces. The large Welsh colony of a thousand or more that had congregated around the mills and mines prompted one Welsh immigrant to call the Cambria Iron Company works the "Dowlais of America," referring to the largest ironworks in Wales.<sup>22</sup> By midcentury the iron and coal industries had also established an embryonic presence in Ohio, and



Map 2. Locations of Welsh-born persons living in the United States, 1890. Each dot represents one hundred persons. After R. Lewis, *Welsh Americans*, 49.

the number of industry enterprises expanded rapidly in that state during the Civil War and postwar years. In the northeastern Ohio triangle of the industrial cities of Youngstown, Cleveland, and Canton, thousands of Welsh iron- and steelworkers arrived between the 1850s and the 1890s. In many of these towns the Welsh occupied a prominent presence; a native of the Welsh “tinplate capital” of Llanelli reported that Youngstown was the “Welsh metropolis of America.”<sup>23</sup>

In many respects the story of William H. “Bill” Davey was typical of the Welsh steelworker who immigrated to America during the period when the tinplate industry was first established in the United States. Davey’s family had been engaged in steel and tinplate manufacture for generations, his father as a heater and his grandfather as an engineer in the same works. Davey was born in 1873 in Briton Ferry, Glamorganshire, South Wales. His father moved his large family to Pontypool to find work when the Briton Ferry works closed for lack of orders. Then, when Bill was fifteen, a shutdown in the mill finally prompted his father to move to the United States, where he had wanted to go for some time.<sup>24</sup>

His father's siblings had preceded him in making that move, so his was not a reckless act of desperation. At Demmler, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, the elder Davey took a position in 1888 as a roller in the U.S. Iron and Tinplate Manufacturing Company's blackplate mill, and his entire family soon joined him. Bill Davey became an opener on the hot mills and later a screwboy (one who assisted several skilled men at a time). At seventeen he became a heater for his father and at twenty went to work as a roller at the Falcon Tin Plate & Sheet Company in Niles, Ohio. From then on he followed the "tramping artisan" tradition so common among the skilled ironworkers and tinplaters of this period, moving on to Crescent Works in Cleveland, to Canal Dover, Cambridge, Youngstown, and then Martins Ferry, Ohio. His first position as manager was at McKeesport Tinplate Company, but from there he moved to become manager at McClure Tinplate, then Carnahan Tinplate in Canton, Ohio. Bill and two of his brothers constructed the Massillon Rolling Mill and then bought Carnahan, which they sold to Republic Steel in 1935. While becoming a manager and then owner was not typical for Welsh immigrants in the American industry, neither was it an unusual career trajectory.<sup>25</sup>

Bill Davey's reminiscences were published in Roy Rutherford's *Romancing in Tin Plate*, an excellent technical history of the industry.<sup>26</sup> Davey's reminiscence reveals the wide network of acquaintances that prevailed among the early Welsh tinplate communities in the United States. For example, one of the most important improvements in the tinning process was developed by Edmund Morewood in 1866, when he invented the patent rolling of tin plates as they left the tinning pot. Hand-dipping was replaced by the Morewood pot, which consisted of a pair of submerged revolving rollers in a pot of hot grease. The plates passed between the rollers, thus regulating the amount and evenness of the tin coating. Submerged rolls would eventually be utilized throughout the operation, thus eliminating hand labor except for the initial feeding.<sup>27</sup> "By a peculiar coincidence," Davey reminisced, "this family of Morewoods and my father and mother were playmates together as children in Briton Ferry, Wales. They were later employed by the same company and at the same works which was known as the Vernon Tin Plate Company."<sup>28</sup>

Davey knew and kept track of the Welsh workers who succeeded in the American tinplate industry. He noted, for example, that the Baltimore Tin Plate Company, located at Locust Point, in Baltimore, Maryland, was purchased by the American Tin-Plate Company trust, which almost immediately

closed its doors. Bosses at the works were Jimmie Michaels, William Thomas, John Jones, and John Taylor, all from Briton Ferry, Wales. Davey also recalled that the Stickney Iron Works, another tinplate plant erected in Baltimore, was superintended by John Embright, “whom I worked for as a boy.” Davey went on to mention other Welsh managers at numerous other mills. Substantial Welsh communities developed in the Indiana gas belt, in towns such as Elwood and Gas City, and Davey came to know the operators of these mills when he served as financial secretary of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tinplate Workers. The mills in Indiana produced a number of prominent men in the industry, many of them Welsh, Davey recalled. One was Charlie Hook, who chaired the board of the American Rolling Mill Company. Another was W. P. Lewis, a mill superintendent who later returned to Wales to manage the tinplate works at Cwmavon. Davey’s brother-in-law, John M. Jones, was superintendent of the works at Montpelier, Indiana, and later built the tinplate plant of the Bethlehem Steel Company at Sparrows Point, in Maryland. Davey also affirmed that Welsh immigrants generally followed the chain migration pattern, with friends and relatives providing new immigrants with a base of support, including occupational news and contacts. The home of Davey’s parents served as one of these way stations, Davey recollected, noting that “our home at McKeesport, Pa. seemed to be the rendezvous for all those who came from Wales looking for a job.”<sup>29</sup>

During this early period the separation between the skilled workforce and management was narrow, for skilled tinplate workers were responsible for the production and quality of the product. Among the Welsh immigrants, however, there was a distinction between those who were skilled and those who were not, and especially those who never would be. Their behaviors were apparent in how they related to management and personnel issues. As one of the elites, Davey reflected this attitude: “A lot of our friends from the other side came over here and got into disrepute, especially antagonistic toward the operator insofar as the union was concerned. Many of these meetings ended in brawls, and a lot of our Welsh tin workers got into bad grace because of some of these habits. In fact, one crowd went out to Gas City and in saloon parlors were known as the ‘Dirty Dozen.’” Davey observed that William C. Cronmeyer “became very much disgusted by these tactics and Welshmen seemed to be imbued with the idea that anybody who ventured into the tin plate business was an invader and resented it.” Cronmeyer decided he could find more amicable workers in Germany than

in Wales or England and, “in direct violation of the immigration laws at that time, brought back a large number of German workers.” Davey observed that they became very good workers and citizens, but “for a long while only those from Wales and England were efficient workers; others had been tried unsuccessfully.” The Welsh, of course, were outraged, and “while the Germans were not up to the standard of the Welsh worker, it did not take long for them to become efficient.”<sup>30</sup>

By the time of this reminiscence, the exact date of which is not clear, Bill Davey sounded very much like an American, declaring that “the tin plate market was already here and all we had to do was take it away from the Welshman.”<sup>31</sup>

The notion that the Welsh were much less likely to emigrate than the English or Scots does not fit comfortably into the popular perception of the Welsh, as historian Gwyn Williams has observed. Welsh American émigrés occupied a special place in Welsh life because they were literally and figuratively family. The farmers, colliers, and steelworkers who missed their family and friends subscribed to local and trade newspapers and wrote letters, and, after transatlantic transportation improved, many returned home to visit. Industrial modernization had fractured their families, but locations where they settled, such as Scranton, Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and other, smaller mill towns, became virtually household names in Wales. The idea that relatively few Welsh emigrants went to the United States contradicts received wisdom in Wales because there are few families, and hardly any extended families, that do not include an American branch.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the small size of the Welsh migration and the inadequate statistical data constraining historians of the Welsh American experience, the written record left by Welsh Americans themselves is scant and sometimes misleading. These writings often exaggerated the number of Welsh in the United States, as well as the extent of their contribution to the country. Among the more colorful of the claims repeated again and again in print was that a Welsh royal named Prince Madoc had sailed west from Wales and “discovered America” in the twelfth century. Some were convinced that the Mandan Indians, Native Americans of the northern Great Plains who supposedly spoke Welsh, were descendants of Madoc. Unfounded myths, along with the boasting of the “most eminent” Welsh Americans, did little to bolster meager historical documentation and obscured the real experience.<sup>33</sup> Such filiopietistic writing appeared at the height of the Welsh

migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in popular Welsh American periodicals like *Y Drych*, *The Druid*, and *The Cambrian*. “The ever constant overwhelming praise of the Welsh” was “nauseating,” the Welsh American William Howells declared to *The Druid* in 1909. The editor dismissed Howells’s objection, suggesting that he medicate his indigestion.<sup>34</sup> These periodicals presented the Welsh as positive reinforcements to the American Anglo-Saxon nation, unlike the southern and central European immigrants, and they extolled the Welsh as the most religious, dependable, thrifty, and abstemious of people.

Moreover, the Welsh migration to the United States was overwhelmingly composed of working people who left no caches of manuscript records or personal papers. Therefore, despite their inherent biases, periodicals are one of the most important sources for studying Welsh America. Even though they must be used with caution, the ethnic newspapers and magazines served an important function in the transition from the Old World to the New. The editors might have been motivated by ethnic pride, but the published biographical profiles of prominent individuals in many cases provide the only historical record of their lives. Most significant for the social historian are the letters and articles submitted by otherwise ordinary Welsh immigrants living in scattered and otherwise disconnected communities. From these sources can be gleaned local community news, as well as the state of local industry, conditions, and employment. The letters and articles helped to maintain the ethnic networks that facilitated and, to a degree, determined the direction of Welsh migration and settlement in America. Moreover, the periodicals gave Welsh Americans a more powerful collective voice than their actual numbers would have suggested.

### Forces Energizing Preindustrial Migration

Americans and the Welsh may think of the industrial migration of the mid- to late nineteenth century as the historical tissue connecting the two places, but the links actually stretch back to the origins of the United States. Although an indeterminate number of Welsh traveled to the American colonies, they were few in number and they went as individuals.<sup>35</sup> The earliest immigrants were people with some means and a broader political and religious consciousness than is generally ascribed to poor rural migrants. Several prominent nonconformist members of the clergy with a wide following



in Wales, as well as a deep understanding of American affairs, embraced the American Revolutionary War and took the lead in defending it from opponents in Britain. In his *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776), the dissenter Richard Price anticipated Thomas Paine's application of the "rights of man" to the American Revolution, and David Williams, another Welsh dissenter who knew Benjamin Franklin, also advanced an intellectual defense of the Americans in *Letters on Political Liberty* (1782). Both argued for the God-given right to national self-determination, and Williams went a step further by advocating universal manhood suffrage, the ballot, payment of MPs, annual parliaments, and smaller constituencies—all reforms that presaged the Chartist manifesto. The identification of America with radical democratic ideals had a strong appeal in Wales, particularly when expressed by these highly respected religious leaders. While these revolutionary ideas did not stimulate emigration, they did place the United States in the mix of legitimate alternatives for Welsh settlement.<sup>36</sup>

Welsh emigration in the long nineteenth century was divided into two phases, the first an agricultural migration from 1815 to the 1840s and then an industrial migration between 1850 and 1920. The Welsh agricultural migration was generated by major social and economic changes on the land similar to those stimulating the mass migrations in Europe following the Napoleonic wars. For most of the nineteenth century, according to historian Alan Conway, Wales was two nations. The rural areas were occupied by a "Welsh-speaking, non-conformist, politically Liberal Welsh peasantry and an English-speaking, Anglican, politically Tory land-owner class." In the industrial districts "the same linguistic, ethnic, religious, and political differences divided the foundry men from the ironmasters." This division was more or less true for the colliers who were employed in the mines belonging to the iron companies. In the heavily capitalized segments of the iron and coal district of South Wales, the Royal Commission on the State of Education in Wales emphasized this division in 1847: "In the works the Welsh workman never finds his way into the office. He never becomes either clerk or agent. . . . Equally in his new, as in his old, home, his language keeps him under the hatches, being one in which he can neither acquire nor communicate the necessary information. It is a language of old-fashioned agriculture, of theology and of simple rustic life, while the entire world about him is English."<sup>37</sup>

Wales was therefore unprepared for the great population explosion that began in the early nineteenth century and had doubled the number



of inhabitants of Wales by midcentury. The dramatic increase in the price for corn during the wars with France between 1793 and 1815 precipitated the enclosure movement and led to the enclosure of the uplands formerly regarded as suitable only for the poor. Welsh farmers removed from the moorland grew into an “army of landless farm laborers” forced to migrate to the burgeoning South Wales coal and iron district or to immigrate to the United States, where cheap land was available.<sup>38</sup>

Corn prices collapsed with the end of war, and economic depression ensued. By 1817 Wales had entered a period of famine. The normally conservative Welsh peasants became radicalized, and their grievances exploded in the Rebecca Riots following passage of the Highways Act of 1835, which initiated a turnpike system in Wales, maintained by tolls collected at gates erected every few miles. The tolls laid an excessive financial burden on the already strapped farmers, and they were quick to demonstrate their distress. The first riot erupted in 1839 in western Wales and spread to South Wales during the early 1840s. Like the better-known rural violence of the Whiteboys, Ribbonmen, and Molly Maguires in Ireland, Welshmen disguised in women’s clothes and with their faces blackened set about destroying the tollgates and driving off the keepers and constables who attempted to protect them.<sup>39</sup>

The agrarian unrest had major implications, as the Welsh became much more politically conscious. The nonconformist ministers emerged from the smoke of cultural warfare as the uncontested leaders of the people in the struggle against the Anglican, English-speaking, Tory landowners who still controlled society. The rising tide of Welsh nationalism broke in full force over the Treachery of the Blue Books, an inquiry conducted for Parliament by the Royal Commission on the State of Education in Wales and resulting in a report released in 1847. The three commissioners were English Anglicans ignorant of the Welsh language and culture, and they managed to insult patriotic Welsh with their arrogant conclusions that the language, culture, and institutions of Wales were inferior. The report was received in Wales with bitter indignation, and it galvanized the Welsh behind the nonconformist ministers who launched a counterattack against English imperialism.<sup>40</sup>

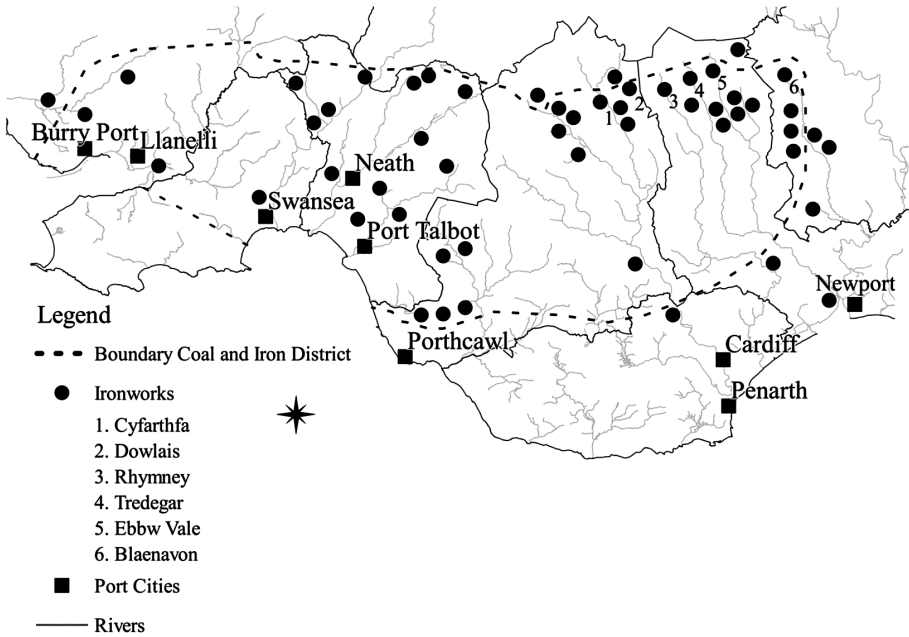
The Treachery of the Blue Books shifted the balance of power in the political struggle for the hearts and minds of the Welsh-speaking population in favor of the nonconformist ministers, who rose up in unison to denounce the Blue Books, and they brought the issue of disestablishment of the Anglican Church as the official state church to the forefront of Welsh politics.<sup>41</sup>

In this context, one can readily understand why the idea of establishing a new Welsh nation abroad, one that would preserve the language and culture of Wales, gained urgency during the nineteenth century. Nonconformist ministers, such as Morgan John Rhys, Benjamin Chidlaw, Samuel Roberts, and Michael D. Jones, played a prominent role in this movement that led thousands of Welsh to establish new colonies in the United States and, in Jones's case, in Argentina's Patagonia region.<sup>42</sup>

Undoubtedly these promotional activities stimulated interest in and general awareness of emigration among the rural Welsh population. The vast majority of those who left for America went for pragmatic rather than idealistic reasons. Even though the vast majority did not seek an exclusive Welsh existence, the pre-1840s agrarian migrants tended to join family and friends in the Welsh agricultural communities of Pennsylvania, New York, and eastern Ohio, where they continued their familiar practices with little interference. Welsh settlers followed the American western agricultural migration into the fertile flatlands of the Midwest. Large concentrations of Welsh settled in Wisconsin, and others moved on to Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. Compared with other immigrant groups, however, their numbers were small, and the farther west the Welsh migrated, the more dispersed they became. It is also clear that they emigrated individually or in family groups, relying on family to assist them in settling the new land. However, one section of the United States that Welsh farmers avoided was the South, because they found slavery repugnant, cheap land was scarce, and there was little demand for their labor in a region dependent on oppressed Black workers. The 1860 census reported that fewer than 500 of the 45,500 foreign-born Welsh lived below the Mason-Dixon line.<sup>43</sup> Occupying a unique place in the history of Welsh emigration in the mid-nineteenth century was the large number of Mormon converts who settled in Utah. The Mormon scholar Douglas Davies claims that in 1887 the Welsh population reached nearly 17,000, or about 15 percent of the population in Utah, while another authority finds this figure too low, estimating that the Welsh population was closer to 25,000.<sup>44</sup>

### Industrial Migration within Wales

As the rural economy rebounded in the 1850s and 1860s, emigration from rural Wales to the United States faded. Prosperity did not last long, however, for in the late 1870s the Welsh countryside was plunged into a severe



Map 3. Ironworks in South Wales, 1860. Cartography by Caroline Welter, Regional Research Institute, West Virginia University, Morgantown.

depression that lasted for the next two decades. Once again poverty forced people to migrate, but this time many went to the rapidly expanding South Wales coal and iron district.<sup>45</sup>

In the nineteenth century Welsh industry was defined regionally. Slate mines and quarries dominated the northwestern county of Gwynedd; Cardiganshire was noted for its woolens manufactured in small shops and homes throughout the western counties. Copper was smelted in the lower Swansea Valley, and to the west in Llanelli and adjacent towns the Welsh tinplate industry dominated British production to the point of monopoly. But it was the ironworks, born out of the demands of the almost continuous wars with France from 1757 to 1815, that emerged as the dominant industry in Wales during the first half of the nineteenth century. Eight great ironworks, as well as numerous smaller ones, sprang up to cast guns and munitions. At the center of the iron industry stood Merthyr Tydfil, the “Iron Capital of the World,” encircled by the giant Cyfarthfa, Dowlais, Penydarren, and Plymouth works.<sup>46</sup>

By midcentury, the advantages of location at the upper rim of the South Wales coalfield dimmed as the ores played out and technological changes forced the iron industry to move down the valleys to the coast. The South Wales coal industry became the engine of the Welsh economy during the last half of the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> The industrial transformation of Wales in the nineteenth century is documented statistically by the growth in population, from about half a million in 1800, 80 percent of whom depended on agriculture, to more than 2.5 million in 1914, 80 percent of whom lived in urban areas and were employed in nonagricultural pursuits. By 1850 the number of industrial workers had already passed that of farmers, and, by 1910, 388,000 people had abandoned the Welsh countryside, primarily for the South Wales iron and coal industries. Most of the workforce was Welsh at midcentury, but during the last half of the nineteenth century Wales became an importer of labor. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the population of Glamorgan County had surpassed one million, and fully one-third had been born outside the country.<sup>48</sup>

Prior to industrial expansion in the nineteenth century, Wales was overwhelmingly pastoral, and the workforce that gathered in the new coal and iron towns lacked a tradition of class cohesion.<sup>49</sup> During the crisis years of depression and the First Reform Bill, 1829–1831, the working class in Wales began to take shape as a national force. The rising class consciousness peaked with the Merthyr Tydfil Rising of May 1831, when the workers took over the city for four days; authorities regained control only after three pitched battles with military troops. Eight years after the Merthyr Rising, Chartism, the first attempt to build an independent political party representing the interests of the working classes, took root in the Welsh valleys.<sup>50</sup> The Chartists took their name from their charter, first published in 1838, demanding universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, the secret ballot, abolition of property qualifications for members of Parliament, payment to MPs, and equal electoral districts. When soldiers fired on the Chartists' ill-fated march on Newport in 1839, the result was twenty-two deaths and three leaders transported to the Australian penal colony. Yet, in spite of these losses, the workers of the coal and iron district had established another milestone on the road to solidarity.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the labor unrest, militant trade unionism (with which Welsh coal miners and iron- and steelworkers became synonymous in the twentieth century) was slow to find organization. For most of the nineteenth century,

Welsh miners and foundry workers were not ideological radicals; in fact, they were preoccupied with wages even to the exclusion of hours of labor, safety, and working conditions.<sup>52</sup> It was this preoccupation with wages that shaped their attitudes toward unionism. When unions promised to have wages raised, workers joined; when they failed to keep that promise, workers lost interest. Consequently, no permanent industry-wide labor organizations were established in Wales until the 1890s. Many reasons have been offered for the difficulties confronting the early unions, but the idea that workers and employers shared a common interest in keeping the works operating weakened the development of unions. In the 1870s the automatic wage regulator, the sliding scale, and the regulatory committee were mechanisms established to deal with grievances, and these undoubtedly weakened the perceived need for strong labor unions. Also, the nonconformist religious denominations, which had particularly strong representation among the mine and mill workers, opposed the unions. The strike weapon was therefore the only instrument left to the miners, and for most of the century it was used in generally unsuccessful attempts to prevent a cut in wages, rather than to seek wage advances.<sup>53</sup> The ironworkers embraced the sliding scale because it brought an end to the turmoil in the South Wales coalfield and removed the wage rate from the arbitrary actions of the employers. It also undermined the need for a strong labor union.<sup>54</sup> The commitment of Welsh ironworkers to the sliding scale and the arbitration of grievances was therefore deeply rooted in their experience in Wales.

The great influx of people seeking employment in the burgeoning South Wales coal and iron district came primarily from rural Wales; most were displaced agricultural laborers who brought with them their own traditions and religious practices. In the years prior to the 1850s, Protestant Nonconformism, as represented by the Unitarians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Calvinistic Methodists, and Independents, characterized the religion of the Welsh. Many Welsh rejected the Church of England as an imposition and symbol of their subordinate position to England. Also, they found comfort in the simplicity of the denominational structure of Nonconformism, in which control rested with the local congregations. Therefore, 87 percent of them attended nonconformist chapels while only 9 percent of Welsh churchgoers attended the Church of England.<sup>55</sup>

Nonconformism attracted many talented Welsh ministers. Its antie-establishment stance carried within it the roots of Welsh nationalism, but what made Nonconformism the religion of Wales were the nonreligious

institutions created and then transported to America. Dissenting chapels became educational centers for working-class children and adults (whom British institutions ignored) by operating tuition-free day schools and Sunday schools. Moreover, unlike the Anglican churches, which were strictly devotional spaces, the nonconformist chapels also served as community centers, providing educational activities such as lectures, eisteddfodau, concerts, and readings, as well as serving as meeting places.<sup>56</sup> The dissenting denominations emphasized the “centrality of individual responsibility and worth, and claimed that individual evils were responsible for the social iniquities of the period,” not the capitalists, not the economic system, not the complicity of government. The emphasis was on personal respectability rather than social change. Therefore, with the exception of the free-thinking Unitarians, the nonconformist denominations were either lukewarm or hostile to the social revolts of the day, such as the Rebecca Riots, the Merthyr Tydfil Rising of 1831, and the Chartist movement.<sup>57</sup>

The growing importance of Disestablishment, or the movement for religious freedom and independence for the nonconformist denominations from the official state church, offered another point of convergence for labor and dissenter radicalism. With greater representation in Parliament, reformers could support the repeal of laws that prevented freedom of religious expression.<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding the stirrings of conscience among some individual clerics, official Nonconformism in Wales took no stand on social or political issues unless they directly affected the denominations, so nonconformist ministers seemed indifferent to the social problems that affected the tens of thousands of their adherents. The struggle between labor and capital intensified as the nineteenth century waned, but most nonconformist leaders seemed blind to social injustice. One worker complained that, “instead of giving men justice,” the ministers attempted to make workers “more sober, humble, and contrite in heart.” The chapels were good for “Psalm singing, tea meetings, and pious sentiments,” he continued, but “their influence is always on the side of the oppressors, the capitalists.” The split in Wales between the radical dissenters and traditional nonconformist ministers resurfaced in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

### Bound for America

It is against the backdrop of poor living and working conditions, the unpredictability of employment and wages, and the growing power of

Nonconformism that the emigration from the Welsh coal and iron district must be understood. Ethnically, these families were very cohesively Welsh, culturally not far distant from rural Wales, and bound together by a common language. Many industrial workers were still capable of returning to the land, but increasingly most mine and mill workers were the children of migrants who had known only industrial life. Therefore, when economic difficulties mounted, the lure of a rapidly industrializing America, where skilled labor was in demand and an abundance of cheap land was still available, proved irresistible for many. After decades of nonconformist ministers' letter writing, newspaper exchanges, and lectures on the advantages offered by the United States, the Welsh were fully apprised of political and economic developments there.

The Civil War caused great apprehension in Wales and dampened the emigration spirit until it became clear that the Union would prevail. The Welsh clergy and the press spoke in a unified voice against slavery, and public opinion in Wales was strongly supportive of the Union during the Civil War, which they viewed as a struggle to end the evil of slavery. Prior to the war, nearly all Welsh immigrants had settled in the northern states, at least in part because of their abhorrence of slavery. Almost without exception, therefore, those who fought in the war enlisted in the Union ranks. Prior to 1863, President Lincoln occasionally was chastised in the Welsh press for not emancipating the slaves.<sup>60</sup> Even with the disruptions in transportation, however, a number of Welsh workers, most of them skilled ironworkers and colliers, embarked for the United States during the war years. American workers were being drafted into the military, so newly arrived British replacements readily found work at high wages. The *Merthyr Telegraph* editorialized on the reasons for the emigration of industrial workers, noting first low wages, followed by a glut of labor in the mines and mills, and the almost constant strife between workers and operators over low wages and poor living and working conditions. Consequently, even with the attendant risks, the potential for prosperity in the United States was preferable to the certain misery of remaining at home.<sup>61</sup> The outflow strengthened as the war proceeded, and its conclusion in 1865 triggered a surge of Welsh migrants heading for the United States.

By the end of the 1860s, however, there was a growing concern in the South Wales coal and iron district over a perceived mass migration. It was not in Merthyr's interest to export its best workers, city newspapers pointed



out, for local industry would be deprived of their services, while, at the same time, they would be in the United States helping to advance the industrial interests of Merthyr's competitors. The *Merthyr Telegraph* editorialized in 1869 that, with the "excessive course of depletion" from the coal and iron district, "we lose our best workmen and our competitors gain their services; and while we suffer they are advantaged."<sup>62</sup> The *Merthyr Express* complained in 1868 under the headline "Emigration: Its Advantages and Disadvantages" that people were still keen to go abroad, and "our best men have been scattered to the four corners of the earth."<sup>63</sup> By the end of the decade, the emigration "contagion" had been resurrected as a criticism of the owners of industry for neglecting their civic responsibilities by not paying their skilled workers a proper wage or giving them the respect they deserved.<sup>64</sup> Historian William D. Jones suggests that Merthyr Tydfil is best understood as a "transnational" city. The press played an influential role in constructing an international Merthyr and nurturing an awareness of a wider world with the town at its nerve center. The city's newspapers carried news of former residents, printed letters from them, and reprinted extracts from overseas newspapers sent to them by emigrants.<sup>65</sup>

By 1868 South Wales had many emigration societies, particularly in the coal and iron towns at the heads of the Taff, Cynon, Rhondda, and Rhymney Valleys, where there was serious economic distress and a significant number of people were leaving, mostly for the United States.<sup>66</sup> Two societies were launched in Merthyr in 1868: the Merthyr Tydfil Emigration Society and the Cambrian Emigration Society, both organized by workers themselves and both hoping to relieve the labor surplus.<sup>67</sup> The historical significance of both organizations, as well as others like them, is in the evidence that many industrial workers in South Wales, as in Britain generally, considered emigration to be a legitimate alternative during times of economic stress. The emigration societies provided assistance to members who emigrated, but the greatest majority of those who migrated to the States did so with their own funds and relied on their own networks of family and friends to make the passage.<sup>68</sup> In 1869, *The Times* of London observed that it was disheartening to witness the "large number" of skilled working men "constantly leaving the coal and iron district of South Wales from Merthyr, Aberdare, Pontypool, and other centres of population." Each week 100 to 120 were departing, and "the passage money of a large number of them has been paid by relatives and friends who left their native home years ago, and



who have since so far prospered as to be able to render this assistance to their connexions. As usual a large majority of the emigrants are leaving for the United States.”<sup>69</sup>

The emergence of emigrant steamship lines as a mature business transformed traveling conditions and significantly lowered the barriers to crossing the Atlantic. Steamships first plied the Atlantic in the 1840s, but they carried only a few cabin passengers who could afford the trip. In 1856, 96 percent of all British passengers entering the United States through New York City arrived by sailing vessels, mostly American packets. The rapid shift to steam had important repercussions on the emigration business. By 1865 nearly three-quarters, and in 1867 more than 90 percent, of British passengers bound for North America arrived by steamship. By the end of the decade travel by sail was a thing of the past.<sup>70</sup>

Large-scale migration to the United States would not have been possible without the shift to steam because crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a sailing ship was a monumental psychological barrier for most people. Passage from Liverpool to New York took about five weeks by sail, and foul weather could easily lengthen the voyage to fourteen weeks. Steamships reduced the length of the voyage to two weeks or less, were more reliable, and provided a far less traumatic experience than sailing vessels. They made the world smaller so that crossing the Atlantic seemed less irreversible; if one were disappointed with America or wanted to visit family, returning was not unreasonable or impractical. Travel by steamship also made seasonal migration possible for workers who could sojourn to the States when work was scarce in Britain and return home when the economy recovered.<sup>71</sup>

Reporting on the departure of emigrants from Beaufort, at the head of the Ebbw Fawr valley in Monmouthshire, a Merthyr newspaper account observed that “the difficulty of getting to America is of little moment or consideration,” for the journey to America “is now looked upon as a mere excursion.”<sup>72</sup> Typically, married men would precede their wives to the States and, once they had earned sufficient money, would send steamship passes so their families could join them. In October 1869, the *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* correspondent in Aberdare reported that scores of wives were leaving the train station to join their husbands in America.<sup>73</sup> Even under the best of circumstances, departures were dramatic, disruptive events for families and communities. Farewell and departure rituals, sometimes with concerts, poetry reading, and speeches, provided the emigrants a proper send-off, but

they also testify to the impact of emigration on the family and community. Large crowds often escorted emigrants to the train station amid exhibitions of great joy and sorrow. A newspaper reported in 1869 that hundreds of Ab-erdare residents paraded in the streets, cheering and waving handkerchiefs in a farewell to a party of emigrants.<sup>74</sup>

Emigration triggered social repercussions in Wales and America on a very personal level. Families were the principal links in the networks that supported the chain migration and forged transnational identities among families in both Wales and the United States. It created distinctive ethnic occupational communities in the United States that, as long as memory and communication lasted, made America an extension of “home.”