

# Captain Dan Jones and the Welch Indians

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The first group of Welsh converts to Mormonism arrived in the Salt Lake Valley on 26 October 1849 after a voyage of more than eight months. They had buried more than one-fifth of their number along the banks of the Mississippi and the Missouri after a savage bout with cholera. Heavy snows had delayed them, killing many of their animals.

Their leader was Dan Jones, converted in 1843 and baptized 19 January of that year in the Mississippi River. Jones was born 4 August 1810 in Halkin, Flintshire, Wales, son of Thomas and Ruth Roberts Jones. He took to the sea (Halkin is very near the coast) at age seventeen and immigrated to America about 1840. He operated a small steam vessel, *The Ripple*, on the Mississippi and later became part-owner of *Maid of Iowa*, a steamboat later purchased by Joseph Smith. In April of 1843 he took a boatload of English converts under the leadership of Parley P. Pratt up to Nauvoo where he met Joseph Smith for the first time. This was nearly three months after his baptism. In May 1843 he was called on a mission to Wales; his departure, however, was postponed — most likely because of his steamboat and later events which preceded the martyrdom.

Jones was the recipient of Joseph Smith's last prophecy — that he would live through the Carthage ordeal and return to Wales to serve the mission he had been called to. During his two missions in Wales, the first from 1845 to early 1849 and the second from 1852 to 1856, he had proselyted with phenomenal success and printed Church materials. In 1845 while he was assigned to North Wales he had only two or three baptisms, but during the next three years while he presided over the missionary effort in South Wales he and about twenty or thirty other missionaries added over 3,000 new converts to the

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Church. Jones experienced similar success during his second mission. During his first mission, Jones also published about sixteen pamphlets, a sixty-four-page hymnal, a 288-page book in support of Mormon doctrine and thirty issues of a Welsh Mormon periodical entitled *Prophet of the Jubilee* — all in Welsh and all proclaiming the restored gospel.

One week after his arrival in Salt Lake, the thirty-nine-year-old Jones wrote to his friends in Wales: "I was called [by Brigham Young] to prepare to go from 800 to 1,000 miles further to the southwest on a mission for God, and that at my own expense, across the tops of the snowy mountains through tribes of savage Indians along a road on which white man has never before set foot. . . . My fatigue is still vexing my health so that I am hardly better than when I started from Wales; yet God strengthens me miraculously day by day" (1849, 3). One would expect a hesitant reaction under such circumstances, yet Jones responded affirmatively — even enthusiastically.

On this journey southward, generally referred to as the Parley P. Pratt Southern Expedition, Jones carried another agenda in addition to settlement: "My mission is to search out that branch of the race of Gomer which are called the Madocians; their story is well-known, and I go with the intent of bringing them into the fold of the Good Shepherd" (1849, 3).

A legend dating from the sixteenth century identifies the inhabitants of Britain as descendants of Japheth through his son Gomer. The Madocians were thought to be a tribe of Indians descended from Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd, an adventurous twelfth-century Welsh prince (Deacon 1966, 82–96).

According to the legend, when Owain, King of Gwynedd (North Wales) died in 1170, a power struggle ensued among his sons. Madoc tired of the constant fighting, sailed west, discovered a new land, returned to Wales, and persuaded a number of settlers to return with him. Nothing further was heard from them, but it was believed that Madoc's land was America and their descendants formed a "tribe" called the Madocians.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth the legend gained wide acceptance, because it justified British claims to the new world. Early explorers claimed that some natives spoke a language that sounded like Welsh — evidence that they were the descendants of Madoc's group (Deacon 1966, 60).

Reverend Morgan Jones, a Puritan minister who left Wales for Virginia in 1660 when Charles II was restored to the throne, claimed to have been captured by a hostile tribe called the Tuscaroras in 1666. About to be slain, Jones began to pray in Welsh. An Indian of another tribe who happened to be present understood him, arranged for Jones's release, and took him back to his own tribe. Jones claimed to have lived with the second tribe, the Doegs, for four months, during which he preached to them in Welsh. Twenty years later Jones wrote his experience to a Dr. Thomas Lloyd of New York, who eventually sent it to Edward Llwyd, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. It first appeared in print in 1740 in *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, a history of Wales by Theophilus Evans (Deacon 1966, 110).

In 1789, when war broke out between Great Britain and Spain, the British once again used the Madoc legend as evidence of a prior claim (Deacon

1966). Two years later, Dr. John Williams, a minister living in London, wrote the first book “proving” that Madoc was the true discoverer of America. The fervor to locate Madoc’s descendants became so great among London’s Welshmen that they financed an expedition for a young man by the name of John Evans. Although Evans’s six-year search was unsuccessful, the dream of finding Welsh Indians did not die (Deacon 1966, 137–50).

Captain Dan Jones, so titled even in religious settings because of his sailing experience, became one of the most ardent supporters of the Madoc legend. During his boyhood in Wales, the search for the Welsh Indians was a widely discussed topic among Welsh patriots. In 1851 he confessed, “The greatest desire of my soul for more than twenty years has been to get the Madocians out into the light and to give them a knowledge of their forefathers” (1851, 258). His main source of information appears to be a mixture of Williams’s 1791 book, Robert Southey’s 6,000-line narrative poem, *Madoc* (1805), and what he calls contemporary “eyewitness accounts” that cannot be identified. On 3 December 1845 when he had been in Wales as a missionary just under a year, Jones wrote a letter to Brigham Young, in English, containing the following bits of information:

1. “[There was] a colony who left Wales in A.D. 1261.” 1170, the year Madoc’s father died, is the date most commonly used. Perhaps Jones was relying on his memory.

2. “[They] sailed in ten ships under the command of the celebrated Welsh Chief Madoc ab Owen Gwynedn . . . [and] landed in America.”

3. “The tombstone of the Chief with his name and year corresponding is now to be seen near Charleston, S.C.”<sup>1</sup>

4. “That they, about 40 years ago, inhabited Illinois is also proved beyond a doubt, and the hunters and trappers of late years report having seen a tribe near the head waters of the Missouri River, speaking the Welsh language fluently.” (That any of Madoc’s descendants should speak fluent Welsh after more than six centuries would constitute even a greater miracle than his arrival in America in the first place.)

5. “They are purely Welsh in their marriage and funeral ceremonies, otherwise resembling other Indians.”<sup>2</sup>

6. “About a year ago two Indians traveling through Wisconsin spoke Welsh to some Welshmen there, and stated that they lived a great distance in the western wilds, but refused to give any particulars.” (Enumeration mine.)

As a convert of nearly three years to Mormonism, Jones enthusiastically sketched for Young the possibilities of using Madocian converts to proselyte in Wales: “What a help that would be to enhance the work among the other tribes; if I could but have some of them (Pagans) to preach the Gospel to these zealous religionists of their Fatherland, that would be something new under the Sun; and the whole nation would flock to hear such.”

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<sup>1</sup> Deacon does not mention this tombstone.

<sup>2</sup> Deacon points out some similarities in marriage and funeral ceremonies among the Mandan Indians. See Ch. 16.

His enthusiasm had not waned four years later. On 13 July 1849, as Jones was beginning to lead his Welsh Saints across the plains, he wrote to John Davis, his successor in the Mormon print shop in Wales: "Do your best to sell my books which I left and send the rest of the money with some faithful brother who will lead the next company to come here. Doubtless, they will be very useful by then to support my family, so that I can devote my time to serve the Saints, and perhaps to look for the Welch Indians" (p. 181). After an exhausting ten-week journey, Jones returned to Salt Lake City without having spoken Welsh to a single Indian. He had spent over \$300 of his own money, suffered several days of snow blindness, and been on the verge of starvation. "No amount of money," Jones reported to his compatriots back in Wales, "would tempt me to go through that again" (Jones to Davis 1851, 256).

Still, he reported encouragingly to Davis two months after his return:

I returned here from the south in February, after traveling about 1,000 miles, and being within less than 100 miles from the abode of the Madocians as I was told afterwards by Indians who had been in their midst. I could not have gone further, as our horses and our supplies were depleted and the rainy weather was flooding the country. . . . We intend to fulfill the purpose of this adventure yet, perhaps this year; in any event, we shall not give up until I get hold of the Madocians.

A few months later Jones was called by Brigham Young to settle in Manti so he would be in a more advantageous position to continue his search for the Madocians (Jones to Phillips, Sept. 1850). While in Manti, Jones heard several other encouraging reports of "a nation of white people" to the south. Visitors had been welcomed into their midst by women dressed in petticoats and white pettigowns, their heads adorned with flowers. The only tangible evidence, however, was some wool blankets shown to him by Indians who had received them in trade from "white people" (Indians) who lived a ten-day journey to the south. These blankets, said Jones, were "similar to the home spun of Wales" (Jones to Phillips, March 1851).

He continued to collect reports.

I heard from some of the mountain men and the Indians several accounts of the existence of a nation of white and civilized people who settled in the south. Their accounts agreed with respect to the locality, etc., and some assured us that it was Welsh which they spoke. . . . Pres. B. Young told me that he had been totally satisfied by a man of good character since he has been here, that such a nation had settled on the banks of the Colorado. This man said that he had visited them . . . [and] understood just enough of the Welsh language to know that it was Welsh that they spoke. . . . Perhaps the accounts which I heard are incorrect to some extent; I could not expect less, but I repeat, I cannot believe that they are all baseless imaginings (Jones to Davis 1851, 256-57).

The president of the American Antiquarian Society, Josiah Priest, reported the finding a few years previous of several bodies buried with war-like clothing resembling the Roman dress, on one of which was the emblem of the mermaid playing the harp (Jones to Davis 1851, 257). No doubt, the harp established the Welsh connection.

In 1851, just a year after Jones settled in Manti and before he had an opportunity to launch another search for the Welch Indians, Brigham Young

counseled him to prepare for a second mission to Wales, but switched the instructions in the spring, to a fall search for the Madocians. Young told Jones that he had recently heard "quite a number of interesting stories about them" (Jones 1856). Apparently, the stories were not sufficiently interesting, for Young changed his mind for a third time. Even before the fall of 1852 arrived, Jones was on his way back to Wales.

During the next three years Jones's determination to find the Madocians continued unabated. Just before he returned to Utah, he issued an appeal for help through the *Udgorn Seion*, the Mormon Welsh periodical:

Despite how much others doubt the story that Madawg ab Owen Gwynedd discovered America before Columbus, we obtained satisfactory proofs of the fact in our searches across the continent for the "Welsh Indians" during the past twenty years, and since we have decided to re-initiate at the end of this month [March 1856] a search with no turning back, if they are living on land, we beseech those who may have a more correct or more extensive story than that given by "Powell" or the "Triads"<sup>3</sup> about the departure of Madawg from this country or by his successors on the other side of the sea, to assist us in our venture; not their money, we do not ask that, rather for accounts which will help us to accomplish the objective which has cost us several hundred already.

Jones then extended his appeal even to those who had opposed him for years:

If the editors of the *Amserau*, the *Gwron*, the *Cymro* or any other man who holds dear his pedigree see fit to put this request before the eyes of their readers, perhaps they will attract some to bring out their treasures from their old libraries to the light of the sun, and they will have the pleasure from that before long to read that the debate has been broken, the subject proven that the Madocians have come to the light also. Please choose whatever means you judge best to notify us; otherwise, direct responses to the Editor of *Udgorn Seion*, Swansea (1856, 95-96).

There are no extant records of how much assistance he received from any of his fellow Welshmen. He left Wales in April of 1856 and wrote several letters back to his friend, Daniel Daniels, his successor as mission president and the editor of *Udgorn Seion*. None of these letters contains any reference to the Madocians. The periodical continued until early 1862, but only scattered issues are available beyond 1857.

Jones wrote several times to Brigham Young between 1857 and 1861, but his letters make no mention of the Welsh Indians. Because of financial difficulties, domestic complications, and ill health, which led to his death in 1862 at age fifty-one, it appears unlikely that he made any further expeditions.

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<sup>3</sup> "Powell" is Dr. David Powell, author of *The historie of Cambria, now called Wales* (1584). It was the first publication to contain any detailed information concerning Prince Madoc and was actually a reworking of an earlier publication, no longer extant, by Humphrey Llwyd. The Triads are ancient three-line poetic sayings in Welsh.

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