

*A History of Tallmadge Coal:
A Tale of Woodchucks, Welshmen,
and a Canal*



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Canal*

By

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*Dedicated to those members of the Davis, Roberts, and Thomas families who came from
Wales to Tallmadge to mine its coal and leave their mark.*

Of Mines and Miners

This effort was fueled by a desire to do two things. First, I hoped to gather together in one place as much information about the Tallmadge, Ohio coal industry as possible in an attempt to provide a detailed record of this part of Tallmadge's past. While research indicated much information was available, it also became obvious that a comprehensive study of the industry had apparently not yet been assembled. Prompted by questions regarding the locations of mines within the original township as well as the approach of the Tallmadge Bicentennial in 2007, I saw an opportunity to provide what I hope is a significant account of this portion of Tallmadge history.

My second motivation was purely personal: I wanted to find a way to honor the many Welshmen - some of whom were my ancestors - who had emigrated from Wales to Tallmadge to work in those mines. What I found was a whole community of Welshmen who not only labored in the mines but also built churches, held festivals, opened businesses, fought in wars, and generally embraced their new home.

It is my hope that this volume succeeds in both areas without becoming a personal chronicle so it can be of value both to those wishing to learn more about the Tallmadge coal mines as well as those whose interest might lie with the Welshmen of Tallmadge.

A special thank you is due the marvelous staff in the Special Collections Division of the Akron-Summit County Public Library. These wonderful folks bent over backwards to locate materials and provide access to them during the research process...then they went beyond the call of duty and offered suggestions for revisions to early drafts. Without Judy, Jo, Mike, and Mary, this little project would probably never have gotten off the ground. Likewise, a special note of gratitude is due Karen Wiper, Head Librarian at the Tallmadge Branch for her assistance in accessing the Lawrence Collection held at her facility.

A History of Tallmadge Coal

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Woodchucks and Others...

Shortly after the first settlers arrived in Town 2, Range 10 - that portion of the Connecticut Western Reserve destined to become Tallmadge, Ohio - coal was found in two areas of the township. First, Jotham Blakeslee reported finding coal around 1808 or 1809 near the surface on the farm of Col. Seth Meacham.¹ This farm was in the extreme southeast corner of the township in Tract 16; this discovery appears to have been the only one in that part of Tallmadge. Since Blakeslee was a blacksmith, the opportunity to have coal to fire his furnace was inviting. Reportedly, he was able to dig the coal with a mattock and carry it in a bag back to his shop. The bed was only about one foot thick, but it provided enough coal for Blakeslee to make several trips to refill his bag.

The major discovery of coal in the township, however, occurred in 1810 and is often credited to a woodchuck. Walking across the land owned by Justus Barnes, a resident was drawn to some shiny black stones laying on the surface. [Some sources identify the property owner as Elizur Wright.] Closer examination determined that these "stones" were actually shards of coal that had apparently been brought to the surface and cast aside by a burrowing woodchuck. The coal was found in a ravine north of the East-West center road in Tract 6; it lay in a rivulet without any cover, and so it, too, was easily accessible.² For the next several years, the "mining" operations in the township consisted mainly of blacksmiths and homeowners seeking out these sources and carrying off their coal for use at home or business. While this practice seemed to work fine for those gathering the coal, it appears that not all the land owners were as enthusiastic. At the semi-centennial celebration in 1857, Col. Whittlesey shared a story that suggests farmer Barnes was none too pleased about having his farm trampled by those seeking coal. According to Whittlesey's account, Jotham Blakeslee (the same fellow who had discovered coal earlier on Seth Meacham's farm) was driving a team across a field of new wheat in order to get to this coal. Mr. Barnes is said to have approached "with axe raised in a manner somewhat threatening" and made use of some expressions that could not have been considered friendly.³ Soon, this area west of the town center proved to be at the heart of a developing coal industry and the mining operations became much more sophisticated.

As simple as this discovery and the early scraping by hand of coal in the area were, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has identified this discovery as "the first account of surface mining of coal in Ohio".⁴ For approximately the next one hundred years, the coal industry in Tallmadge contributed not only to the needs of the township and its neighbors, but notably to commerce on the Great Lakes as well. As the closest source of coal available to the ships on the Great Lakes, Tallmadge was a leader in the changeover from wood to coal as the chief fuel for shipping concerns in the area.

¹ Barnes, Sydney C. [LC: Box 4, Folder 14, Page 9].

² Whittlesey, Col. [LC: Box 3, Folder 43, Page 205].

³ Whittlesey, Col. [LC: Box 3, Folder 43, Page 205].

⁴ Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources, GeoFacts No. 14.

The Growth of the Coal Industry

From its humble beginnings providing fuel for a blacksmith, one bagful at a time, the mining of coal in Tallmadge quickly grew into a major industry that has been estimated to have produced nearly 1,000,000 tons before the supply was exhausted.⁵ The exact number and location of the mines that sprung up in Tallmadge may never be known, but the following discussion attempts to identify and locate those mentioned by local historians and residents. [Refer to Appendix A, pp. 25-27]

Following the discovery of coal in Tract 6 in 1810, the prospect of serious coal mining in the area began to grow. In 1819 or 1820, Samuel Bronson and Samuel Newton purchased the property of Justus Barnes and drove an entry into the bluff of what came to be known as the Coal Bank or Coal Hill.⁶ Within the next seven years, Henry Newberry had opened a mine at the northwest six corners (now the junction of Howe Road, Brittain Road, Northwest Avenue, Bailey Road, and Tallmadge Road). At about the same time, Francis H. Wright opened a mine in Tract 10, south of the west center road at the eastern base of Coal Hill; this mine was located about one-quarter mile south of Newberry's. These men were followed by Cyrus Mendenhall, formerly of Cleveland, who opened a coal vein at the south end of the hill; this mine was apparently abandoned when it proved to be too thin to work profitably. Still another opening was made in the south end of the hill by a Mr. Woodruff who worked it until 1838.⁷

When the Ohio canal was opened to Akron in 1827, Newberry was apparently the first to decide to try this means to transport his coal to Cleveland where he believed it could be used as a substitute for wood as fuel for the steamboats on the Great Lakes. He hauled his coal by wagonload to Lock 16 on the Ohio Canal. It appears the abundance of wood at the time made this experiment mostly unsuccessful as it is said to have taken him three years to sell 300 tons. Canal receipts, however, show a steady increase in the acceptance of coal. In 1830, 178 tons of coal were shipped via the Canal from Tallmadge to Cleveland; in 1831, this figure climbed to 294 tons; and in 1833 the total was 431 tons.⁸

A major event in the history of coal in Tallmadge occurred in 1832 when Daniel Upson arrived in town and took an immediate interest in the mining activity. Records from the Summit County Recorder's Office indicate Upson personally purchased several pieces of property in Tracts 5, 6, and 10 between 1833 and 1839. In 1838 he secured from the Ohio State Legislature a charter for the Tallmadge Coal Company. This charter consolidated all the coal rights in Coal Hill with the exception of Newberry's. The original stock in the Tallmadge Coal Company was held by Upson, Francis H. Wright, and Charles Whittlesey.⁹ Later, the Tallmadge Coal Company was succeeded by Dr. Upson & Co., that firm by Upson & Sons, and finally by Upson Bros.¹⁰ Beginning in 1840, the Tallmadge Coal Company purchased or leased the mineral rights to an additional fifteen pieces of land, mostly in Tract 9, the southern end of Coal Hill. In

⁵ Barnes, Sydney C. [LC: Box 4, Folder 14, Page 10].

⁶ Bronson, Charles C., "Bronson Diaries", p. 60.

⁷ Whittlesey, Col. [LC: Box 3, Folder 43, Page 205].

⁸ Wright, Charles Handel [LC: Box 7, Folder 43, Page 1829].

⁹ Whittlesey, Col. [LC: Box 3, Folder 43, Page 206].

¹⁰ Barnes, Sydney C. [LC: Box 4, Folder 14, Page 10].

addition, Upson personally purchased or secured the mineral rights to another 22 pieces of land; most of this property was located in Tracts 6, 9, and 10. He eventually obtained control, both by purchase and by lease, of approximately 500 acres of the coal beds contained in Coal Hill.¹¹ In 1853, the coal company erected two long tenement houses about midway between West Avenue and Northwest Avenue on the west side of Thomas Road. These dwellings were built to provide housing for the Welsh miners and their families until they could purchase their own homes. F.E. Lawrence described these buildings in his book About Old Tallmadge: "One tenement had six apartments, the other had eight. Each apartment had two rooms on the first floor and two rooms on the second. In the middle of one tenement was a store. The unoccupied tenements were struck by lightning, August 1898, and burned to the ground."¹² It may be that in his effort to provide temporary housing for his Welsh workers, Upson may have unintentionally made these tenements unattractive to those he was trying to assist. Lawrence's description is a perfect fit for the cramped, generally hated quarters inhabited by many miners back home in Wales. Indeed, the 1860 census shows that the sixteen apartments were all unoccupied just seven years after having been built. Interestingly, it has been said that Dr. Upson, anxious for his men to establish themselves, often lent them money to pay for the homes they so desired.¹³

In 1848, a new coal bank located east of the Long Swamp and northwest of Howe Road was opened by William H. Harris. He was soon employing 50 men – most of them Welshmen he had encouraged to emigrate for the work available.¹⁴ Harris, too, increased his holdings both by purchase and lease. Land transaction records show that he concentrated his efforts in Tracts 2 and 6. Harris is known to have operated three mines in the area; in addition to the two which were served by his rail road and located east of his home in Tract 2, he also had an entry in the high ground of Tract 1 between Northwest Avenue and Howe Road at the northwest six corners.

By 1852, Upson and Harris were shipping 10 to 20 tons of coal daily. Just five years later, Upson was employing 65 men and shipping 135 tons a day. The Tallmadge Coal Company mines produced 23,000 tons in 1855 alone; from 1840 to 1857, 300,000 tons of coal had been removed from just sixty acres of the original field of 500. There were still 100 acres of coal unworked by 1857.¹⁵ This same year, Charles Whittlesey reported in the Summit Beacon that there were then twelve entries to the coal fields of Coal Hill, all located on the north, east, and south sides. There were no entries on the west side.¹⁶ Perhaps in response to the activity generated by the concerns of Upson and Harris, new mines continued to be opened. Amos Wright opened his west of the town center in about 1859, and William Thomas sunk a shaft on the farm of Joseph Richardson in Tract 5 around 1895.

Philip Thomas, another Welshman, began work in the coal bank of William Harris soon after he emigrated from Wales; later he moved on to Upson's Tallmadge Coal operation where he worked until 1865. By 1868, Philip Thomas and William

¹¹ "Tallmadge Semi-Centennial Commemoration", p. 189.

¹² Lawrence, Frank E. About Old Tallmadge, p. 2.

¹³ Lawrence, Frank E. About Old Tallmadge, p. 2.

¹⁴ Barnes, Sydney C. [LC: Box 4, Folder 14, Page 10].

¹⁵ "Tallmadge Semi-Centennial Commemoration", p. 189.

¹⁶ Whittlesey, Charles, The Summit Beacon, June 24, 1857, p. 3.

Owens obtained the lease to Upson's coal banks. Four years later, Thomas bought out his partner's interest, continuing to run the enterprise successfully until the vein was exhausted – at one time employing some forty men and producing about 15,000 tons annually. When Philip Thomas died in 1900, the mines passed on to his sons, who operated the business under the name Henry Thomas & Co. When Henry Thomas died in 1916, another of Philip's sons, Morgan, sued the remaining heirs for sole rights to the family's mining operations in Tallmadge. He was successful in this suit and in 1919 was issued a Sheriff's Deed granting him the sole rights to the coal and mining operations in Tracts 5, 6, and 10 of the township.¹⁷ He continued limited operations until his death in 1932.

One of the last mining operations in Tallmadge was undertaken by Steve Holic in 1932 on two parcels of land apparently owned by Frances E. Thomas in Tract 6, Lot 5 between Brittain Road on the west and Thomas Road on the east. Despite economic uncertainty brought by the Depression, almost immediately problems arose over the possibility of damage such a mining operation might cause. An article in the Akron Beacon Journal provides these details:

The Tallmadge township coal mining industry which started in 1840 and at various times assumed proportions of a major industry may be revived this winter with depression-hit family heads becoming miners.

And again the mine shafts may remain closed. Factors involved are being threshed out before Common Pleas Judge Carl C. Hoyt. Mrs. Catherine Steiner, owner of an 11-acre farm tract, seeks to prevent the mining. Steve Hollic, 1344 7th Ave., holder of a lease to coal strata under the land, would resume operations.

Thus far, Hollic is ahead, having been granted a temporary order restraining Mrs. Steiner from interfering. But before the order is effective he must post a \$1000 bond to insure against damage to Mrs. Steiner. Hollic has not been able to raise the bond. Final hearing on the merits of the case will be held Nov. 19 before Judge Hoyt.¹⁸

Further documents found in the Lawrence Collection at the Tallmadge Branch Library suggest that mining did at some point begin, even though the acrimony between the parties did not die out. In 1938, a letter from C.F. Schnee, Attorney at Law, to Mrs. Thomas indicated that Holic had completed mining on Mrs. Steiner's land but was now transporting coal from another site across the Steiner property – which Schnee states, "Under the mining deeds, he has no right to do that unless he pays Mrs. Steiner for the privilege."¹⁹ Mr. Schnee then goes on to suggest that Mrs. Thomas consider giving Mrs. Steiner a quit claim to the property; this same request was made again in 1940 by Schnee on behalf of Mrs. Steiner. All-in-all, this seems to suggest a rather "muddied" ending to the coal industry in Tallmadge.

¹⁷ Summit County Recorder's Office, Vol. 778, p. 7.

¹⁸ "May Resume Mining in Tallmadge Field", Akron Beacon Journal, November 29, 1932.

¹⁹ Coal lease, [LC: Box 14, Folder 20, Item A-16].

The Market for Tallmadge Coal

The apparent quality of Tallmadge coal contributed to making it an important commodity. The coal beds in Coal Hill were described as being from four to five feet in thickness; the quality of the coal was considered to be superior. Some years later in 1984, James S. Jackson wrote that, "The seam ran out long before the end of the century but the coal has been identified in later years as comparable to what is now known as Sharon No. 1, a fine quality coal of low-sulfur content, which by today's standards would be highly prized."²⁰

From the first discovery of coal in 1809 until about 1820, it was exclusively used in the homes and businesses of the area. In particular, blacksmiths from Akron and other surrounding areas would make regular trips into Tallmadge to gather coal for their furnaces. Before long, however, the value of coal as a replacement for timber as fuel began to catch hold, and soon a market for the coal that seemed to be in such plentiful supply began to grow.

One very early market for Tallmadge coal developed when Asaph Whittlesey and Samuel Norton joined forces with William Laird and Aaron Norton of Middlebury to build a forge for the manufacture of bar iron in 1817. The area surrounding this business came to be known as "Old Forge". Obtaining their iron ore from the southwestern part of the township, the businessmen began their manufacture of iron using coal from the "woodchuck" mine in Tallmadge.²¹

As mentioned earlier, Henry Newberry appears to have been the first local miner to attempt to sell his coal commercially in 1828. Karl Grismer's account in his local history volume Akron and Summit County provides more detail on Newberry's experience:

In the early fall of '28 Newberry hauled wagonload after wagonload down over the hill to Old Portage, filled a canal boat, and shipped it to Cleveland, confidently believing he could sell it to the owners of the four steamships then running on Lake Erie. But the ship owners scoffed. Their ships had been built to burn wood and they had no intention of installing new engines.

Newberry had a boatload of coal on his hands. Day after day he tramped around Cleveland, trying to find a buyer, carrying with him a bucketful to demonstrate its fine quality. Finally, one cold day in late October, he told his troubles to Philo Scovill, manager of the Franklin House at 25 Superior.

Scovill was sympathetic. 'Hand me that bucket,' he said; 'I'll try some in the barroom stove.' Taking a few chunks, he tossed them on the blazing fire. They burned beautifully. Scovill was delighted and bought twenty bushels.

Other men in the barroom decided they wanted some for their homes. Word of the fuel which gave wonderful heat spread through the neighborhood and Newberry soon sold his entire boatload. But his

²⁰ Jackson, James, "Behind the Front Page: A Newsman Looks at Akron", p. 35.

²¹ King, Mrs. H.O., The Searchlight, October 10, 1927, p. 1.

*experience had been so trying that he made no attempt thereafter to sell to the Cleveland market.*²²

Despite Newberry's experience, before long Tallmadge coal became attractive to the steamship operators and was the first to be extensively purchased for use by steamers on the Great Lakes, replacing wood as the chief fuel. In 1841, the Western Transportation Co. consumed 3,000 tons of Tallmadge coal on their steamboats "Vermillion" and "Wisconsin" alone.²³

In about 1844 or 1845, a group of Welshmen arrived from Pittsburgh with the intent of starting a blast furnace to manufacture pig iron. They located their furnace at Canal Lock 16; in anticipation of providing the business with coal, Daniel Upson had a branch of his tramway built to connect with it. At the expense of several thousand dollars, the furnace was erected and named the Cambrian Furnace – Cambria being the Latin name for Wales. Unfortunately, the initial promise if this endeavor faded after several failed attempts to maintain the "charge" necessary to produce marketable pig iron caused the business to close. Upson was left with an uncollectible debt of \$3000 for coal and other supplies.²⁴

In 1851, an article reprinted in The Summit Beacon from the Cleveland Herald praised Tallmadge coal for producing a coke of excellent quality used in the manufacture of iron throughout Northern Ohio. The article went on to say, "Large quantities of this coal are also consumed in the generation of steam, for which it seems well adapted, and it has proved one of the most valuable varieties, used by our Gas Company for the production of gas."²⁵

Prior to the Civil War, the presence of large coal deposits in the area meant very little to local manufacturers as most operations were powered by water, especially those close to the Cascade Mill Race. However, the end of the war saw the potential of steam power become more and more attractive. Karl Grismer wrote of this age: "Akron was fortunate indeed in having abundant coal nearby. From mines within miles of town the steam age manufacturers were able to buy the coal they needed as cheaply as they could anywhere in the country, usually at tippie prices with no transportation charges. That was one of the reasons they located here. Had they been forced to pay a stiff price for coal, they quite probably would have established their plants elsewhere."²⁶ What he seems to be suggesting is that much of the growth of Akron as an industrial manufacturing town can be attributed to the local coal operations in Tallmadge and other nearby areas.

Two additional factors played important roles in the growth of the coal industry in Tallmadge: the completion of both the Ohio Canal through Akron in 1827 and the Pennsylvania & Ohio Canal in 1841 and the construction of Atlantic and Great Western Railroad lines through Tallmadge in 1864-1865. The connection by canal from Akron to Cleveland enhanced the ability of Tallmadge coal operators to efficiently supply fuel to steamers on the Great Lakes as well as Canadian gasworks in Toronto and Kingston. The Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal enabled Tallmadge coal operators to ship their coal from Akron to Beaver, Pennsylvania, on the Ohio River, thus opening up a still larger

²² Grismer, Karl, Akron and Summit County, p. 181.

²³ "Tallmadge Coal", The Summit Beacon, June 10, 1857 [LC: Box 12, Folder 36, Page 51-1]

²⁴ Lane, Samuel, Fifty Years & Over of Akron and Summit County, p. 1050-1051.

²⁵ "Tallmadge Coal", The Summit Beacon, June 11, 1851, p.1.

²⁶ Grismer, Karl, Akron and Summit County, p. 182-183.

market.²⁷ The coming of the railroad to Tallmadge permitted operators to ship their coal via rail to Akron as well as to Kent, Ravenna, and other points east.²⁸ Within about twenty years, however, such shipments were abandoned due to the exhaustion of many of the larger veins of mineral in the Tallmadge mine fields.

Locally, the business of coal remained brisk. In 1894, William Davis successfully bid to furnish coal for the Tallmadge Township Hall at \$2.50 per ton, delivered. Some 30 years later in 1923, Morgan Thomas entered into an agreement with the Summit County Commissioners to supply "1000 tons run of mine coal delivered to the County Home" for \$5.75 per ton.²⁹

The Welsh Workforce

Had it not been for the discovery of coal in Tallmadge and the resultant need for men to work those mines, it is unlikely that the Welsh community that became a viable part of the township would have grown to the size that it did. Even though many of the Welshmen who came to Tallmadge were, by most accounts, actually shoemakers, butchers, tailors, farmers, and blacksmiths, they were drawn to mine work because it was the only thing available at the time that would pay them in cash money. Many families came into the area, worked the mines in order to save a nest egg, and then moved on only to be replaced by others seeking to do the same. A brief anecdote from Frank Lawrence's collection of Tallmadge memorabilia goes a long way to demonstrate the lot of the local coal digger: "Thomas Rhymes and Tom's father Henry worked in the coal mines on Thomas Road. They would go into the mine before daylight and it would be dark when they came out – so they would not see daylight."³⁰ It's little wonder that so many of the local mine workers stayed in the mines only until they had amassed a small "nest egg" and then moved on.

A review of the United States census records for Tallmadge for the years 1850, 1860, and 1870 indicates that the vast majority of those who gave "miner" or "coal digger" as their occupation had been born in the United Kingdom. In 1850, there were 39 individuals claiming this occupation: 33 were said to have been born in England, 5 in Ireland, and 1 in Scotland. In 1860, only 16 individuals gave this occupation: 12 were born in Wales, 1 in Ireland, and 3 in Ohio. By 1870, there were 39 individuals claiming this occupation: 26 from Wales, 2 from England, one each from Ireland and Scotland, and 5 from Ohio.

Two things should be noted about the census records just described. First, in 1850, it would seem that no one in the township had been born in Wales; the truth appears to be, however, that the census takers simply gave England as the birthplace for everyone from that part of the world. Secondly, many of those who worked in the mines were also farmers, blacksmiths, etc. and gave those occupations to the census taker. One should not assume that in 1860, for example, there were really only 16 men working the highly productive mines of Tallmadge. The purpose of including the census information

²⁷ Wright, Charles Handel [LC: Box 7, Folder 43, Page 1829, 1829-1].

²⁸ King, Mrs. H.O., *The Searchlight*, October 10, 1927, p. 1.

²⁹ Coal lease, [LC: Box 14, Folder 18, Item A-9A]

³⁰ Collection of Frank E. Lawrence, [LC: Box 5, Folder 28, p. 950]

is to show that all the mine owners depended heavily on the immigrant work force to operate their mines. The magnitude of the Welsh presence in Tallmadge is seen in this comment by Frank E. Lawrence in About Old Tallmadge: "Coal mining in Tallmadge was at its peak from 1860 to 1870. That was the period when the Welsh settlement was at its height, with about 15% of the population of Tallmadge of Welsh descent and totaling about 20% of Tallmadge families."³¹

The notes of Frank E. Lawrence indicate that the first Welshman to come to Tallmadge may have been Thomas Williams who purchased seventy acres of land in Tract 6 on the south side of Howe Road from Newberry in 1810. This property was later purchased by Anson Upson. When Newberry erected a saw mill in 1823, Williams worked for him. In 1825 a good vein of coal was discovered on Newberry's land north of Howe Road in what is now Cuyahoga Falls. Williams took over the operation of this mine for Newberry.³²

Some ten years later, when Daniel Upson gained control of much of the area west of the town center that came to be known as the Coal Banks, one of his first concerns was to hire a competent, experienced man to operate his mines. The story is that he sought the advice of a Welshman, Richard Hughes, who worked for him on his farm. Hughes recommended his brother-in-law, Thomas Ellis, who was then engaged in operating a mine in Pennsylvania. Dr. Upson made an attractive offer to Ellis to come to Tallmadge and oversee the operations of the newly formed Tallmadge Coal Company. Ellis accepted and soon brought his family to the township and settled them into a large log house Upson had built for him.

By the early 1840's another Welshman, William Harris, had arrived in Tallmadge and quickly started operations of his own in a coal bank in Tract 2, east of Long Swamp and northeast of Howe Road. He soon had three mines in operation and employed 50 men. Harris is noted especially for his efforts to not only recruit Welshmen to the community but also to assist them in establishing themselves once they arrived. Many of the men he recruited came directly from Wales; when they arrived, he frequently supplied furnished living quarters for them until they had earned enough to go out on their own. The efforts of Harris undoubtedly drew many additional families from Wales into this area.

By 1845, the Welsh community was large enough that they had established their own settlement about one and one-fourth miles west of the town center and near to the Coal Banks. While many of the Welsh did speak English, there were those who conversed only in Welsh and so naturally felt comfortable having those who could understand them as their neighbors. Because their religious life was so precious to these settlers, they immediately sought a church home upon arrival. Many of the earliest Welshmen united with the Congregational Church at the town center, where the Rev. Carlos Smith welcomed them in a manner that quickly earned their regard and esteem. Weekly cottage prayer meetings held in the Welsh homes were often attended by other members of the congregation.

Despite this acceptance on the part of the Congregational Church, many of the Welsh longed for a church of their own where services could be conducted in their native language. This was particularly true of those for whom English was an insurmountable

³¹ Lawrence, Frank E., About Old Tallmadge, p. 4.

³² Lawrence, Frank E., "Our Goodly Heritage", January 15, 1975.

challenge. The first effort in this direction was accomplished by holding Sunday School in the little shoe shop of William Thomas. Mrs. Thomas would sweep and dust the shop on Saturday night, and on Sunday, the youth of the neighborhood gathered there. Finally, in about 1860, they erected a church building located on the little hill above the northwest six corners where the Chapel Hill Church and Christian School are now located. The land for this structure had been donated by Henry Newberry as long as it was used for church purposes. When he died, those who inherited the property continued to honor this agreement.

Mrs. Martha P. Bierce provides a personal sketch of the church in an article she wrote for the Tallmadge Sesqui-Centennial which was then published in the book, A History of Tallmadge, Ohio. According to her description, the church *“was a small frame building with a seating capacity of 75 to 100. Perhaps its only claim to beauty was the unusual fan light [window] centered over the double front door. There were nice pews with green cushions, a chandelier for coal-oil lamps, and a coal burning stove. Upon the wall hung an antique clock which seemed to move its hands slowly for the tots who early were taught respect for the House of God and who must sit straight and still during the hour of worship.”*



This photo shows the Welsh church after it had been abandoned. It sat facing East on Brittain Rd.; Howe Rd. run along the right hand side of the photo. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Akron-Summit County Public Library.

Eventually, according to Mrs. Bierce, the family of Philip Thomas presented the congregation with a small organ *“to accompany those fine Welsh voices as they sang their songs of praise.”*³³

On at least one occasion, this small congregation hosted the yearly association meeting, which brought Welsh ministers from all parts of the state. Three meetings a day

³³ Bierce, Mrs. Martha P., A History of Tallmadge, Ohio, p. 28.

were held with two sermons at each. It was reported that the visiting ministers presented fiery and powerful messages that left those in attendance weak with guilt as well as soothing, uplifting messages that reminded those in attendance that all was not lost. Mrs. Bierce tells of the final chapter in the church's story with these words:

Finally, there came a day when all of the church founders were gone. Their descendants having become thoroughly Americanized, gradually drifted away from the old church and from the mother tongue.

For many years the old landmark stood abandoned, clinging helplessly to its foothold on the hill.

The land reverted to the farm of which it was originally a part. Grading for a paved road made the position of the building precarious and it was thought best to tear it down.³⁴

Just as it is today, music was an important part of Welsh life. In addition to the sweet songs of Welsh hymns on Sundays, the Welsh community in Tallmadge also contributed when the first Eisteddfod, or singing competition, was held in Youngstown. One story, as recounted in the Cuyahoga Falls Reporter on July 7, 1905, goes like this:

Thomas Thomas the tailor (so called because there was another Thomas Thomas in town who was not a tailor) had moved to Youngstown and opened a small clothing store after earning the capital to do so by working in the mines at Tallmadge. Although he was a fine singer, he was also a very old man at the time of this event. A prize had been offered for the best bass solo sung at sight. Of course the music was low, but the last note was D below. There were a number of competitors: self-confident young men, fine looking, well dressed, and didn't they sing well? But that last low note beat them; not one of them could reach it, but sang it an octave higher and left the stage chagrined at their failure, while the audience laughed and cheered. Finally, an old gentleman advanced to the stage, very plainly dressed but dignified and easy [of] manner. He began to sing, and the great hall was so still you could have heard a pin drop. His rich, deep, languid tone charmed the whole house. When he came to that last low note, the people were almost breathless with suspense. Would he reach the low note and win the prize, or would he fail as the others had? But apparently without effort he struck the note and held it, sustained and clear, while a great burst of applause greeted him from the delighted audience. The old man was Thomas Thomas the tailor, who earned his first dollar in America working in the Tallmadge coal mine.

Along with practice of their faith, patriotism and a willingness to serve and defend their newly adopted country were not lost on these Welshmen. However, as is true with most stories involving the Welsh, there is a tale even here with an element of humor to it. As the War of the Rebellion became more and more imminent, an artillery company under the command of Captain Sidney Barnes was formed at the northwest six corners. This company was comprised mainly of Welshmen who lived near the coal mines there. The company had secured an old cannon and faithfully drilled with it in Barnes' pasture field. Eventually, powder was secured, and the men prepared to learn how to fire the

³⁴ Bierce, Mrs. Martha P., in A History of Tallmadge, Ohio, p. 28.

cannon. Details are sketchy, but it seems the cannon exploded the first time it was fired, and the whole company narrowly escaped death. As it was, a number of the men were wounded by flying pieces of metal.³⁵

Despite this less than stellar start to their military training, when war was declared, the young Welshmen of Tallmadge volunteered and served. Several of them were part of Company C, 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry and were captured and marched to Andersonville Prison in Georgia. Upon release, some of their numbers were tragically killed in the explosion of the Sultana, one of these being Edward Ellis, son of Thomas Ellis, the first foreman hired by Daniel Upson.

One Welsh family in particular established deep roots in the Tallmadge area after being drawn to the region by coal. John Thomas arrived from Monmouthshire, Wales about 1849. He was accompanied by his wife, Rachel; daughter, Elizabeth; sons Llewellyn and William; and grandchildren John J., William, and Mary Ann Davis. The 1850 census shows him at age 55 working as a "coal digger" along with sons Llewellyn and William, probably at the coal bank of William Harris. Shortly afterward, son Philip and his family arrived from Wales. This family became the backbone of coal mining operations in Tallmadge for the next 75 years. While John Thomas' son, Philip, was carving out his place in the history of coal in Tallmadge as was described earlier, Thomas' grandson, William Davis, was working to make a name for himself as well. He also began as a coal digger and over the years was able to purchase land and mining rights which he successfully operated. Frank E. Lawrence in his About Old Tallmadge suggests that Davis may have been the first coal dealer in Tallmadge. Davis also went on to be elected to several terms as Tallmadge Township Trustee. His sister, Mary Ann Davis, married Thomas Roberts, a Welshman who had immigrated from Carmarthenshire, Wales, with at least two of his brothers. Thomas Roberts worked as a coal digger and farmer while he and Mary Ann raised a family of six children. According to Samuel Lane, he eventually went into the business of coal dealer with one of his sons.³⁶

It becomes abundantly clear that much of the success of the Tallmadge coal industry can be credited to the contributions of the Welsh immigrants who came to work its mines; however, their most lasting impact may stem from the cultural heritage they brought to their new home. Perhaps the contributions of the Welsh immigrants were best summed up by Charles Handel Wright, former editor of the Akron [Beacon] Journal and Tallmadge son. In a piece entitled "History of the Coal Industry in Tallmadge, Ohio", apparently written about 1922 and just two years before his death, Wright said:

Perhaps the biggest and best thing which resulted from the original mining on Coal Hill by the woodchuck was the bringing to Tallmadge a number of hardy experienced Welshmen directly from the mines of the Old Country. A writer of one of the papers of the Archeological and Historical Society of Ohio, in describing the establishing of a Congregational Church in 1803 in the first Welsh settlement in Ohio at Paddy's Run, twenty-two miles northeast of Cincinnati says: 'The first thing a Frenchman does in a new country is to

³⁵ Jones, Anna C. Evans, [LC: Box 14, Folder 16, Pages 139-141]

³⁶ Lane, Samuel, Fifty Years & Over of Akron and Summit County, p. 1059.

build a trading post; an Englishman builds a block house, but a Welshman builds a church.'

True to their National characteristics, the Welsh miners, soon after their settlement in Tallmadge established their church at the Northwest Six Corners, and for many years services were held regularly in it, the Welsh language being used. As the older generation passed on and as coal deposits became exhausted, there ceased to exist a strictly Welsh settlement in Tallmadge. But the little church, deserted, vacant, alone, still stands as a document to the sterling worth and integrity of the founders.

Some of our best citizenry, not alone in Tallmadge, but throughout a wide circle in Northern Ohio, has come from the Welsh miners who brought forth for human use the stored up wealth of Coal Hill. The names of Thomas, Phillips, Evans, Morgan, Williams, Davis, Lewis, Jones, James, Guffites [sic], and Jenkins typify true Americans.³⁷

As Wright suggested, most of these men moved on to become farmers and businessmen once they had earned sufficient money to leave the mines. Still, their imprint was left on the community that had offered them an opportunity to earn the means to establish their families with dignity in a new land.

A Trip into a Tallmadge Coal Mine

In July 1849, the editor of The Summit Beacon, John Teesdale, accepted an invitation to tour a mine owned by Daniel Upson, founder of the Tallmadge Coal Company. The resulting article which appeared in the paper on July 25, 1849, provides a unique glimpse into the mines and mining process in Tallmadge. What follows is a complete transcript of this article.

D. Upson & Co.'s Coal Mines

Accepting a polite invitation from our highly esteemed friend, Dr. D. Upson, we paid a visit to his Coal Mines, in Tallmadge, one day last week. A ride of 4 miles, in company with two pleasant companions, was disposed of in a very short time, and we were gratified at finding the enterprising proprietor and his gentlemanly sons, who are associated with him, on hand.

We may here premise that the Tallmadge Mines are nearer Cleveland than any other that have yet been opened or discovered. They are 4 miles from this place by canal, and 41 from Cleveland. The point at which they have been opened faces a valley or basin of considerable width and length. This basin is now mostly under cultivation, but was once partly covered with water dammed in by the Beavers, the remains of whose works may yet be seen. The entrance to the mines is at the base of a range of hills or undulating ground, whose elevation at the point of

³⁷ Wright, Charles Handel [LC: Box 7, Folder 43, Page 1829, 1829-2].

