



Jim McDonald

THE WELSH FAMILY IN 1996: Members of the Welsh family gathered yesterday in Pomona. The family began in 1897 with the marriage of Thomas H. Welsh and Bridget Manion.



File photo

THE WELSH FAMILY IN 1916: Front row from left, Lucy Welsh Humphry, Adalaide Welsh Leahy, Lillian Welsh Ossman, Peggy Margaret Welsh Morrison, Rosalie Welsh Willett and Kathy Welsh Rabatin. Back row from left, Thomas Manion Welsh, Bridget Manion Welsh, Vincent Thomas Welsh, Mary Welsh Bogasky and Thomas Blaise Welsh.

Reunion helps Welsh family renew their roots

By C.J. Miller

For the Rockland Journal-News

POMONA — "A happy family is but an earlier heaven."—Anonymous

Stony Point resident Karen Welsh Harris sat at a shaded picnic table, her face flushed with heat and happiness as she flipped through the pages of the program for the Welsh family reunion yesterday.

"I don't know who wrote that," she said of the quote, which took up an entire page of the booklet. "But it seemed to fit us."

Close to 250 members of her extended family attended the gathering, which was held at the North Field of Krucker's Restaurant off Route 202. Harris, who works as an accountant at Rockland Community College, said it took 10 months of planning and hard work by a three-member committee to bring the family together.

"We have over 307 relatives, living and dead, on that family tree," she said, pointing to a computer-generated chart covering almost an entire wall of

the field house. "Everyone on that chart is a descendant of the original Welsh clan."

The family, which traces its roots back to Ireland, began in 1897 with the marriage of life-long Haverstraw residents Thomas H. Welsh and Bridget Manion.

"Thomas' brother, Larry, and his wife were killed in the Haverstraw landslide of 1906," Harris, 54, said. "Our family has been in Rockland County for a long time."

The Welshes raised nine children. More than half of the family, which now numbers 42 grandchildren, 116 great-grandchildren and 97 great-great-grandchildren, still live in North Rockland.

Each family member wore a name tag, and many donned T-shirts bearing an old photograph of the original clan, with each descendant's name listed in red ink.

"We had these printed last week, and since then, two new babies were born," laughed Harris. "They didn't make the

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shirt.”

Harris' first cousin and fellow committee member, Michael P. Willet, 51, explained how the idea for the reunion came about.

“We went to one too many wakes, and we decided to get together for a joyous occasion,” he said. “We wanted our children and our children's children to know their roots, and to meet relatives they'd never seen.”

Family members traveled from as far as Oregon, Hawaii, and Pittsburgh to attend the reunion. Chicago resident Beata Welsh, 46, and her son 14-year-old Michael were impressed by the turnout.

“There's a wonderful feeling of connection to history and the world here,” Beata said. “There are so many of us. It's overwhelming.”

Between reminiscing and group photographs, entertainment was provided by a sing-along, a roving face-painting clown and an awards presentation.

“We're giving Anilda Rabatin McSharar the Round-Up award, for getting the largest family together and having 100-percent attendance,” Harris said. Awards for the oldest and youngest family members went to 87-year-old George Leahy and five-day-old Gabrielle Cotto Ramos.

George J. Leahy, whose daughter, Jennifer, was married the night before, was overcome with emotion.

“If Thomas and Bridget could be here to see how well this family has turned out, they'd be so proud.

“This day is to honor our ancestors, to appreciate the present, and to celebrate the future.”