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News

The Welsh in America and the world

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By Marylynne Pitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



The red dragon is the symbol of Wales.

It's said that the Welsh excel in occupations that involve talking -- acting, preaching, teaching, politics, singing, reciting poetry and storytelling.

There was no end of talking before 56 men signed the Declaration of Independence; of those, at least six were Welsh or had Welsh ancestry, including Thomas Jefferson.

At least two U.S. presidents, Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, claimed Welsh ancestry.

Among this year's presidential contenders, Democratic New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton can claim Welsh ancestry because her father hailed from a long line of Welsh Methodists.

Moviegoers who have seen "Goldfinger" recognize the distinctive voice of Dame Shirley Bassey, who sang the title song for two other James Bond movies, "Diamonds Are Forever" and "Moonraker." Queen Elizabeth II honored her with the title of dame in 1999.

Baby Boomers can imitate the live, kinetic performances of Welshman Tom Jones, whose smash hits include "It's Not Unusual" and "The Green, Green Grass of Home."

Among well-known Welsh actors are silent screen comedian Harold Lloyd and later Treat Williams, comedian Bob Hope, Richard Burton, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Christian Bale, Jonathan Pryce and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright was born of a Welsh mother, and Taliesin, the name he gave to homes in Wisconsin and Arizona, means shining brow and also refers to one of the oldest Welsh poets.

Wright put the Welsh bardic sign, which is a three-pronged Celtic symbol, in most of his buildings. The words in the symbol mean "The Truth Against the World."

In the world of literature, Dafydd Ap Gwilym was the Welsh answer to Shakespeare. The best-known modern Welsh poet is probably Dylan Thomas, and the most popular myth from Wales is the legend of King Arthur. The Welsh, who are independent thinkers, have succeeded in science, too. Clive Granger and Robert Engle won the 2003 Nobel Prize for Economics, and Sir Martin Evans, the discoverer of stem cells, received the Nobel Prize for his work in mammalian genetics.

The Welsh were pleased in 2005 when Sir Howard Stringer became chairman and CEO of Sony Corp. of Japan. He's the first non-Japanese executive to head the corporation.

And the most notorious Welshman of all was Bartholomew Roberts, better known as Black Bart, who plundered more than 470 ships off the coast of the Americas and Africa between 1719 and 1722, besting even Captain Kidd and Blackbeard in the search for treasure.

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