

# The Abandonment of Mary Williams Davis

by Kyle Williams

*I Corinthians 7:12-14*

While researching my family history, I discovered the tragedy of Mary Williams, a daughter of my great-great-great-grandparents, Daniel Williams and Ruth Jones. Her story is embedded in the biography of her husband:

## DAVID PRICE DAVIS

David Price Davis was born October 11, 1825 in Tyryrabad Parish, Breconshire, Wales. He was baptized in Tir Abbot Church, Breconshire, South Wales. He was one of six children born to David Davis and Catherine Price. He was of average size and had dark brown hair and blue eyes.

His first wife was Mary Williams, sister to Samuel D. Williams. They lived in Breconshire, Wales. They had two children, the eldest of whom was Daniel W. Davis. David Price Davis's occupation in Wales was that of a school teacher and station master. There is very little information about his wife Mary, who refused to join the Latter-day Saint Church and come to America with him. He, therefore, left her and came alone. She died October 20, 1888 in Brecknock, Wales.

He sailed from Liverpool, England, 17 April 1855, on the ship *Chimborazo*, arriving in New York. In those days it took from five to six weeks for a ship to make the crossing. From New York he crossed the plains with some of the pioneers and came to Salt Lake City, Utah. While in Salt Lake City, he worked at odd jobs and at the depot.

His second wife was Alice Stuart of Salt Lake City. They had one son David Joseph Davis. They were divorced because of a difference of religion.

He was married to Hannah Treharne for a short time, and they had one son David Davis.

He then married Elizabeth Griffith. She had also emigrated from Wales and had crossed the plains with her parents and other pioneers. She was sixteen years younger than her husband. They were married in the Endowment House. They lived in Salt Lake City a short time before moving to Samaria, Idaho in Malad Valley. Their first home was a two-room log cabin. They had seven children: twins, Lucy and Maggie (Maggie died at birth). They were followed by three boys: Edward Henry, Owen Thomas, and William Price. Then came another girl, Elizabeth. Their last child was a son, David Griffith (the Griffith after his mother).

Their log cabin was by the cold springs near Sam Thorpe's place. When David G. was one year old they moved to Gwenford, Idaho near the old grist mill. The house was a two-room lumber cabin bought from John Jensen of Brigham City, Utah. They carried water from the spring in buckets. Later they bought a barrel, made a sleigh for it and hauled

the water that way.

David Price Davis filed on a homestead of 160 acres in Pleasant View, five miles from Gwenford. He was a pioneer of Malad Valley. He was the first school teacher in Samaria, Idaho. He was also Justice of the Peace in Malad and had the privilege of marrying many people. He was active in community and church affairs. He had great faith in the Gospel and the gift of healing, and was often called to administer to the sick. He wrote the blessings given by Patriarch John Stephen Morris. He was quick-spoken but considered a good public speaker.

He was a widower for fifteen years before his death at the age of seventy-nine. He died 12 November 1904 and is buried in the Samaria Cemetery.

--Della Davis Orem

This bittersweet story moves me. From Aunt Mary's perspective, it's the story of religion at its worst. When she was abandoned, she couldn't seek comfort from her parents. They, too, had joined the Latter-day Saints and emigrated from Wales to America. Most of her siblings followed suit. It appears that Aunt Mary had to support herself as a dressmaker. At age 68 she seems to have died alone, a pauper in a workhouse. I hope she found some happiness in her situation.

Of course, we don't know the entire story. Religion may not have been the only issue that drove David Price Davis from his family. Life is usually more complicated than that. Was Aunt Mary an intolerant nag? Was Uncle David an arrogant jerk? Did they verbally abuse one another? Was she a bad wife? Was he a bad father? Time and distance have drawn a veil over such matters, and it's just as well. Little good can come of rehearsing the sordid details. What we know is that David Price Davis had four wives. Religious differences tore apart his first two families, and possibly his third.

I don't lay blame or pass judgment on Uncle David or Aunt Mary. In fact, I empathize with them. My family, too, broke up for religious differences and other sordid details. I've experienced the heartache and remorse they must have felt. Was their experience like mine? Did they come to regret their hasty separation? Did they learn that family is more important than having to be right all the time? Did they wish they had been more loving, more tolerant, more longsuffering? Did they weep over the pain they had inflicted on one another and on their innocent children? Did they have trouble forgiving themselves? Did they yearn to reconcile with their loved ones, but could not because they had lost contact?

The story of Aunt Mary and Uncle David is poignant and tragic, but it also demonstrates that life goes on. We can learn from our mistakes. Uncle David's fourth marriage was long and apparently successful. He administered to the sick, spoke publicly, and helped people in other ways. We can't always go back and bless the people we have wronged in the past. What we can do is love our neighbors here and now, in the present. We can forgive others, forgive ourselves, and learn to live joyfully.

\* NOTES \*

I found the biography of David Price Davis by Della Davis Orem on page 15 of *The Samaritans*, compiled and edited by Raymond R. Martin and Esther Jenkins Carpenter, published 1968 by Carr Printing Co., Bountiful, Utah. It is also on the Internet at <http://www.welshmormonhistory.org/index.php?/resources/view/608>.

Mary Williams was the sixth of eight children born to Daniel Williams, a farmer, and his wife, Ruth Jones. Mary was christened on January 28, 1820 in Llandeilo'r Fan parish, Brecknockshire, Wales. At that time, her family lived at Nantygwrddi, a farm adjoining Bryn-melyn. (Bishop's Transcripts of Llandeilo'r Fan Parish, LDS film 104471, item 4)

The Ancestral File and Pedigree Resource File at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) reports the Christening of Mary Williams as 28 Jan 1819 (3 times) and 29 Jan 1820 (13 times). I have carefully examined the Bishop's Transcripts, and I am confident that the correct date is 28 Jan 1820. The day may look like the 29<sup>th</sup> at first glance, but careful comparison with other 8's and 9's leads me to the confident conclusion that the 28<sup>th</sup> is the correct day. The year on the transcripts is erroneously recorded as 1819. Examining the records in context, however, reveals that the correct year was 1820.

In the 1841 Census of Llandeilo'r Fan, Mary Williams is enumerated with her father's family at Bryn-melyn farm. (LDS film 464300)

The 1851 Census of Llandeilo'r Fan shows David Davies, laborer, age 25, at Ty-newidd. His wife was Mary Davies, age 31. Their son was John Davies, age 1. If Della Davis Orem's sketch is correct, it appears that the "eldest" son, Daniel W. Davis, died young. Another possibility is that John was the oldest, and Daniel was born between 1851 and 1855. (LDS film 104249)

Those closest to Mary Williams Davis who joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and emigrated from Wales to America were:

Father	Daniel Williams	5 Feb 1853	<i>Jersey</i>
Mother	Ruth Jones Williams	5 Feb 1853	<i>Jersey</i>
Brother	John Jones Williams	28 Feb 1853	<i>International</i>
Husband	David Price Davis	17 Apr 1855	<i>Chimborazo</i>
Brother	Daniel Williams	18 Feb 1856	<i>Caravan</i>
Sister	Ruth Williams Price	7 Jun 1865	<i>Bridgewater</i>
Brother	William Williams	(30 May 1866?)	<i>(Arkwright?)</i>
Brother	Samuel Daniel Williams	4 Jun 1868	<i>John Bright</i>

The fourth family of David Price Davis is enumerated in the 1880 Census of Samaria, Oneida County, Idaho. (LDS film 1254173)

The 1881 Census of Brecknock St. David, Brecon, Wales shows a Mary Davies, widow, age 59, born in Llandeilo'r Fan. She had been a dressmaker, but in 1881 she was one of 103 paupers locked up in the Brecknock Union Workhouse. (LDS film 1342313) Could this be our Mary? One way to investigate is to search the 1861 and 1871 Census records and the appropriate death or burial records. To read more about the Brecknock Union Workhouse, go to <http://history.powys.org.uk/school1/brecon/poor1.shtml>.

The county where Llandeilo'r Fan parish is located is sometimes called Brecon or Breconshire, and sometimes Brecknock or Brecknockshire. The proper form is Brecknockshire. Brecon is a city in Brecknockshire, southeast of Llandeilo'r Fan parish.

Tir Abbot is also called Tirabad or Llandulas. Tyryrabad is another variation. It is immediately north of Llandeilo'r Fan parish.

Thanks to Della Davis Orem for recording the biography of David Price Davis. Thanks to Ronald D. Dennis for maintaining his valuable website on Welsh Mormon History. Thanks to Celia Morgan for generously sharing information.

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