

The Dunn County News, Menomonie, Wis.

Welshmen to mine Dunn County hospitality

A group of 68 Welshmen, making up the Rhos Male Voice Choir, will be Dunn County's guests for several days this summer and the local coordinators hope that the visit will establish ongoing relationships between the Welshmen's home county of Clwyd and this county.

The group comes from the village of Rhosllanerchrugog in northeast Wales and they work in such professions as mining, teaching, social services, and the trades. They say they want to get to know us and our work places and if possible, local persons of Welsh ancestry, said Jim Bjernerud, a Stout professor of Materials and Processes and one of the four Dunn Countians arranging the visit.

With them they will bring the music for which Wales, the country sharing England's island, is noted. According to an old saying, when two Welshmen get together, they form a chorus. Community singing has been the Welsh tradition for centuries and in some remote villages, an ancient form dating back to Middle Age monasteries — involving small group chanting — can still be heard.

Eisteddfod

Towns also had singing festivals, called eisteddfod (pronounced as STEETH vahl), a custom which was revived on a national level in the late 1800's in an effort to keep alive Welsh culture.

Today, the Welsh hold two world-renowned eisteddfods. The Royal National Eisteddfod, in August, rotates between cities and towns in northern and southern Wales and only the Welsh language is used during the event. And the International Music Eisteddfod is held in July at Llangollen, a town in Clwyd county.

The Rhos Male Voice Choir has a long history of first-prize success in these eisteddfods, which attract visitors from around the world.

Singing serves various functions for the Welsh, whose history Bjernerud said had some similarity to that of native Americans. "They've been overwhelmed by others, especially the English. They've been forced to conform and have been pushed back like our American Indian to rugged lands," he said.

Their choral singing has been an attempt to cling to what is theirs — in language and tradition — despite over 400 years of British domination.

"There's a Welsh nationalist group, called Cymru Ryddi or 'Free Wales,' that wants to separate from Great Britain but many realize that it's not realistic," Bjernerud commented.

Ed Sullivan Shaw.

For the past century and a half, sing-

ing has been an outlet for the otherwise drab existence of the miners of Wales' abundant coal, slate and limestone reserves. As literature for the Rhos choir put it:

"Out of the generations of coal miners, in Rhosllanerchrugog have emerged some of the finest voices and ablest composers (Wales) has ever produced. For miners, each re-emergence into the light was cause for thanksgiving. Light is a boon and a benediction. Shining through the day's grime is the joy of reunion with the light, the thanksgiving at the end of each shift."

The Rhos Male Voice Choir was formed in 1891 and "since then (it) has enjoyed continued success, singing grand opera and spiritual, hymn and drinking song, Richard Rodgers and Verdi, in Latin, Welsh, German, Italian and English, at venues ranging from tiny country chapels to the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Stuttgart Liederhalle in Germany and the Chicago Opera House in America," said another of the group's pamphlets.

The Rhos Choir toured the eastern United States in the late 1960's and appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Educators

A few years later, another contingent of Clwyd countians, this time a group of educators, came to the states and many stayed with area residents, Bjernerud said.

When the educators realized that Stout was very much like their North East Wales Institute of Higher Education, an informal exchange between the two schools was initiated.

In the 1980-'81 school year, Stout's chancellor, Dr. Robert S. Swanson, and NEWI's administrator, Dr. J.O. Phillips, formalized the ties between their respective institutions, which has already included faculty, student and cultural exchanges and cooperative international projects.

One such project, for example, was the sponsoring of two conferences on technical education in the developing countries, one at NEWI and one at Stout this past April. And faculty have jointly written a proposal for creating a technical school in Malaysia.

Bjernerud was the first faculty exchange. In the 1981-'82 school year he went to NEWI to teach in the School of Construction and Philip Boice came here to Stout's chemistry department.

In addition to their teaching responsibilities, the two men worked on developing joint international projects.

The exchange went beyond job location, extending to "houses, cars, even cats," as Bjernerud put it. He said he and his family "became a part of the Welsh community in all respects," ad-



The Rhos Male Voice Choir will appear at the Mabel Tainter July 27.

ding that they found it a tremendous experience that they wouldn't mind repeating for a longer period of time.

The cultural give-and-take started a year ago when an art exhibit called "One Square Mile of Wales," with photographs, drawings, paintings and ceramics from Clwyd county, was displayed here and also in Wales, Wisconsin, to celebrate its centennial.

The student exchange is getting off the ground, with 19 Stout students having spent last semester studying at NEWI.

And now Bjernerud and others on his committee are hoping to extend the ties to the schools' respective communities.

Life in the Midwest
Although the Welsh group will be housed in Stout dorms, "we're looking for those who can take them on excursions or in to work so that they can see American life in the Midwest," Bjernerud said, adding "They're very gregarious. They love to get together with people over beer or a cup of coffee and sing or talk."

In filling out an interest survey, some of the choir members had specific re-

quests. A social worker wanted to visit a residential and day care facility for the elderly and handicapped, a heavy goods vehicle driver said he'd like to visit a haulage industry and a builder, a local construction enterprise.

The social worker also had a beekeeping hobby; Bjernerud has lined him up to spend time with Oscar Carlson, Route 4, a Stout instructor who also keeps bees. Other hobbies, besides music, were gardening, sailing, sports, "odd jobbing in crafts and decor" (crafts in Wales refers to the skilled trades), sketching, motor racing spectator, pigeon fancier, winemaking, history of surveying, model trains and fishing. The fisherman expressed a desire to try Wisconsin streams but warned "I'm a novice."

July 27 has been set aside for the group to take part in Dunn County activities and it is hoped that area residents will host them on this day. For further information, call Bjernerud at 232-1102 or 235-9249.

The group will arrive in Minneapolis July 21, where they will stay with host families, appearing at Sommerfest and

on the Prairie Home Companion radio show, which is taped live, on Saturday, July 23.

Local Performances

On July 24, the choir will travel to Menomonie and stay until Thursday, July 28. Monday evening, they will sing with area barbershop quartets at the Stout Student Center. Tuesday they will offer a few selections at the Menomonie band concert at Wilson Park and Wednesday, they will sing in concert at the Mabel Tainter Theatre, with a "Meet the Choir" reception at intermission.

The following two weeks will be spent touring Wisconsin and Minnesota, with a stop back in Menomonie to sing at Stout's August 3 graduation ceremonies.

To purchase tickets for their 8 p.m. July 27 performance, contact Bjernerud at 232-1102 or 235-9249 or John Stevenson at 232-1896. Tickets can also be purchased at the Mabel Tainter Building the week of the concert or at the door. Cost is \$4.00 for adults and \$2.00 for children.