
“I enjoy but little sunshine on my path”:
Reverend James Welsh
on Three Frontiers, 1790–1825

*Emil Pocock**

The trans-Appalachian West was an open and rapidly growing frontier region at the end of the eighteenth century. The lure of abundant and productive land, relatively easy river transportation, and a considerably diminished threat of Indian attacks helped to swell settlements on both sides of the Ohio River. Immigrants drawn from the older regions of the country by the economic promises and opportunities of the Ohio Valley brought with them familiar customs, habits, and beliefs, which they fully expected to transplant in their new communities. Religion was perhaps the most visible and important of cultural institutions, but the nearly unlimited opportunities to establish churches in the trans-Appalachian West were fraught with special problems. Foremost among these was the difficulties most Protestant denominations had in supplying clergy fast enough to keep up with the westering population. Partly in response to this problem, many churches developed innovative practices suited to frontier conditions, such as a circuit-riding clergy, missionary churches and ministers, establishment of frontier colleges to train ministers, and protracted outdoor camp meetings.

The camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening, which coincided with the flood of immigration after 1795, contributed powerfully to sustaining enthusiasm for religion on the frontier, but the revivals intensified other problems. The threat of schismatic splintering among religion-starved settlers who fell under the sway of independent-minded clergy and the interdemoninational competition for members stirred by the revival imperiled the order and integrity of established denominations. Presbyterians in particular

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were concerned by these problems because they insisted that only an educated and orthodox ministry be licensed to spread religion on the frontier. They held that a well-trained clergy was especially critical for maintaining congregations amidst the fluidity and uncertainties of newly settled regions, but such men were often hard to find. In this context, early Kentucky Presbyterians were perhaps fortunate to discover among their young settlers James Welsh, a Virginia-born pioneer who seemed to have all the qualifications the Presbyterian church required for propagating religion in the West.

Welsh was university trained, experienced as a revival preacher, and enthusiastic about bringing piety and Christian order to the often confused and gospel-hungry settlements. In spite of his enthusiasm, Welsh did not waver from the Calvinism that was Presbyterian orthodoxy. These qualities made him especially attractive, and the governing Transylvania Presbytery did not hesitate to recruit Welsh just as he was finishing his religious studies in early 1792. Like many other Presbyterian ministers determined to uphold Calvinist orthodoxy in the midst of the turmoil of the Second Great Awakening, Welsh faced difficult challenges. From outside the church, he strove to hold back the tide of irreligion, deism, and liberal fashions that accompanied Enlightenment thinking and political Republicanism. From within, Welsh shunned the emotional excesses of the camp meetings and opposed Arminian tendencies that grew out of popular revivalism, such as the possibility of personal and universal redemption, although he counted himself among the revivalist preachers. In addition, he fought against those later Presbyterians whose Arminian evangelism led them to benevolent reform, social and political activism, and an impatience with those who stood in their way of perfecting the world.

In spite of his preparation and qualifications, Welsh did not prevail in any of his important encounters with adversity and consequently failed to make good on the opportunities the frontier offered. He was hounded out of his prestigious post as a faculty member of Transylvania University before 1800, dismissed from his church at Dayton, Ohio, some years later, and suspended from the ministry while attending the needs of a struggling congregation at Vevay, Indiana, just a year before his tragic death in 1826. In place of welcome, praise, and a gradual rise in esteem and position, Welsh encountered hostility, condemnation, and disgrace. Although he had all the prerequisites a Presbyterian minister needed, Welsh did not thrive. Was it simply that he was unpopular and that his orthodoxy was out of fashion among the frontiersmen he was dedicated to serve?

It seems ironic that among the heroes of frontier revivalism, which included several preachers who began their careers as Pres-

byterians, were men who subverted the goals of established churches, overthrew tradition, and founded new denominations. These were the successes among the frontier clergy. Welsh of course could not take this route to immortality, but his inability and unwillingness to adjust to popular tastes in religion provide only part of an explanation of his failure. Welsh's life suggests that there may have been a greater irony in the Second Great Awakening: the frontier revivals likely served to constrain Welsh's opportunities rather than to enlarge them. The evangelical revival movement, with its implicit Arminian message and abandonment of strict Calvinist theology, swept over nearly all Protestant denominations during the antebellum years. Welsh simply could not abide by the calls to action the converted found implicit in the evangelical message of personal and universal redemption, whether untutored biblical literalism, physical and emotional devotions, or sober calls for organized social reform.

James Welsh was born in Virginia prior to the Revolution and may have been in Lexington, Kentucky, as early as 1781. Little else is known about his upbringing, although it is evident from his earliest years in Kentucky that he was well educated and committed as a young man to a religious calling. Sent out by the Synod of Virginia as a missionary during the fall and winter of 1790–1791, Welsh preached among outlying Kentucky settlements as a licentiate of the governing Transylvania Presbytery.¹ He then entered the Kentucky Academy (later Transylvania University) in November, 1791, as a divinity student and boarded with Colonel Robert Patterson, a Lexington pioneer settler, trustee, and civic leader. Welsh remained at the academy for at least two years and probably earned his medical degree while preparing himself for the ministry.²

Welsh was encouraged as a student to apply for membership in the Transylvania Presbytery, but a deep anxiety about his spiritual condition made him reluctant to take that step. "I am in tol-

¹ James Welsh's birthdate is unknown and his birthplace is disputed. One source suggests Pennsylvania, but Virginia, suggested by other authorities, is more consistent with his biography. A. W. Drury, *History of the City of Dayton and Montgomery County, Ohio* (Chicago, 1909), 245; Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky* (New York, 1847), 120; William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783–1840: Vol. II, The Presbyterians* (New York, 1936), 715; Charles R. Staples, *The History of Pioneer Lexington, 1779–1806* (Lexington, Ky., 1939), 20; James Welsh Memorandum Book, 1790–1791, Shane Collection (Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia).

² James Welsh, Journal, 1791, Shane Collection. A letter addressed to him as "Mr James Welsh, student in Divinity, near Lexington Canctuckey" during the summer of 1793 suggests that he was still at the Kentucky Academy. Joseph Patterson to James Welsh, July 25, 1793, Shane Collection. There is no direct evidence that he earned his medical degree at the academy or at the later Transylvania University, but he was commonly addressed as "Dr." and practiced medicine off and on for the rest of his life.



COLONEL ROBERT PATTERSON

Courtesy Montgomery County Historical Society,
Dayton, Ohio.

erable health of body but in great perturbation of mind," he wrote to the Reverend James Blythe in February, 1792. "I have some thoughts of joining Presbytery but know not what is duty . . . My own deadness, is my greatest difficulty," he added, complaining that he was sick of Lexington and ready to leave. A month later, he again confided in Blythe that a "variety of things at present seem to conspire to damp my spirits, and Render this vail of tears more gloomy . . . I enjoy but little sunshine on my path."³ In spite of his depression and evident spiritual uncertainties, Welsh remained in Lexington and was accepted as a full member of the presbytery within the month. Even so, his anxieties did not disappear.⁴

After completing his studies in 1793 and serving various congregations in Kentucky, Welsh married Nancy Smith in 1794. His marriage and subsequent decision to move to Washington, Pennsylvania (near Pittsburgh), his wife's hometown, temporarily raised his spirits. Welsh had high hopes that religion would flourish under his care, even though his new home was noted for impiety, yet he also admitted some ambivalence about leaving Kentucky and the friends he had made there. He confided in a letter to Patterson that he might return to Lexington if religion did not prosper in Pennsylvania and revealed further that he was again filled with many new cares and perplexities. A year later, his ambivalence gave way to greater anxieties, especially over losing contact with Patterson. "I am sometimes a little afraid that you have altogether forgotten me," Welsh wrote to his friend, and he complained that Patterson had not written once since he left Kentucky. Welsh trusted that Patterson was faring well "through the vicissitudes of this unfriendly world" and hoped to be at Patterson's house again by the spring of 1795.⁵

Religion may not have prospered in western Pennsylvania, but it is evident that Welsh grew desperately homesick for his friends and acquaintances in Kentucky. By May, 1795, he had returned to Lexington and accepted a joint call from the Georgetown and Lexington churches; he was ordained in February, 1796.⁶ It was not an auspicious time to return to Lexington, as a long-simmering dispute among the town's Presbyterians had just reached a shattering climax. Some years earlier, Lexington's popular revivalist min-

³ James Welsh to James Blyth, March 8, 1792, in Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, II, 716.

⁴ Welsh to Blyth, February 23, 1792, in *ibid.*, 714-15. See also Joseph Patterson to Welsh, July 25, 1793, Shane Collection.

⁵ Welsh to Robert Patterson, May 6, 1794, February 25, 1795, Shane Collection; Welsh to Robert Patterson, April 7, 1794, Patterson Papers (Montgomery County Historical Society, Dayton, Ohio).

⁶ Minutes of the Transylvania Presbytery, October 7, 8, 1795, extracted in Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, II, 159-61.

Pennsylvania - Washington, Feb. 25. 1795

De Friends -

I know not by this time how it is, but I am sometimes a little afraid that you have altogether forgotten me - I have not since received a line from you since I left Kentucky, & have scarcely heard from you either as to your ^{own} ~~land~~ ^{land} or body. But however your interest may be passing through the various vicissitudes of this unfriendly world, I still feel comfortable in the hope that you are making your way good to that peaceful region where conflicts are no more known, where the wicked cease from troubling, & the weary are at rest - I would have hope, I say, that this is the case with you both, but at the same time, I cannot but say that my hope weakens, & languishes in some measure with regard to some of you. O be to it that you never rest until you have with some degree of Scripture

JAMES WELSH TO ROBERT PATTERSON, FEBRUARY 25, 1795

clearness, & upon principles that will stand
the final scrutiny, established your title
to the Days above — O Friends if we
are so happy as reach Heaven at last, we
will never regret an angelus for
having been at too much pains to
obtain it — Doubtless a moment's resed-
ence in the sweet unclouded vision
of Christ's boundless glories, will more
than repay a saint for ten thousand
times their conflicts while here on
earth — I have hitherto spent some
pleasing hours in a sweet sojourn
in your house, on these duties
I hope ere long, (God willing) to do
it again — I expect in May as early
as possible to be in Kentucky — Should
the Lord be pleased to let us there
O that it may be to see his Glorious Glor-
ings, & rich displays of grace arising
up in that country, & to share with
you those joys that result from man-
ifestations of divine love — Please to
give my kind love with many to
your dear little girls — I accept of latter
yourself — I am Dr. Springs affectionately
Mrs. Wm. H. Hattison; James Nelson —

ister, Adam Rankin, had refused to adopt Isaac Watts's modern hymnal, claiming that only the literal versions of the Psalms were fit to sing in church. In 1789, after Rankin began denying communion to those who dared disagree with him, a portion of the congregation brought charges against the revival minister before the Transylvania Presbytery. The case was not heard until 1792, but before the presbytery could formally expel the schismatic preacher, Rankin withdrew from its jurisdiction. Most of his Mt. Zion congregation followed their radical minister into the ultra-conservative Scottish Associate Reformed Church, leaving only a minority to proclaim itself the loyal First Presbyterian Church of Lexington. Patterson was among the leaders of the shattered remnant of one of Kentucky's largest Presbyterian congregations, and it was this church that Welsh was called to lead.⁷

In spite of the stormy conditions in Lexington, the first few years after Welsh's return were probably the high point of his life. He seems to have been well accepted by the congregation, although he was obliged to practice medicine to support his family between 1796 and 1799 because the congregation could not afford to pay him a full salary. Welsh became involved in civic affairs, including service as a trustee of the Kentucky Academy at the time it was transformed into Transylvania University in 1799. Within the year, he was appointed professor of languages at the university.⁸ Perhaps most significant for Welsh's years in his adopted home was the presence of Patterson, his friend and confidant since at least 1791. When the Lexington church split during the crisis over Rankin, Patterson was one of the stalwarts who had upheld orthodoxy and remained one of Lexington's most respected Presbyterian laymen. Patterson had undoubtedly used his influence to help Welsh secure his appointments to the Lexington church and to Transylvania University, as Patterson was a trustee of both. Indeed, Welsh came to rely on his older friend for emotional and other more tangible kinds of support. Their friendship developed into an intimate and life-long relationship upon which Welsh came to depend to an extreme degree.⁹

⁷ Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, 88-97; and George W. Ranck, *History of Lexington, Kentucky: Its Early Annals and Recent Progress* (Cincinnati, 1872), 108-10.

⁸ Ranck, *History of Lexington*, 110; Neils Henry Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828* (Lexington, Ky., 1965), 66-67; and Robert Peter, *Transylvania University: Its Origin, Rise, Decline, and Fall* (Louisville, Ky., 1896), 70, 82; and Welsh to Robert Patterson, October 30, 1799, Shane Collection.

⁹ Charlotte Reeve Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers: Being a Memoir with Personal Narrative and Letters of Two Pioneers, Col. Robert Patterson and Col. John Johnston* (Dayton, Ohio, 1902); Ranck, *History of Lexington*, 110. Welsh's relationship with Robert Patterson is revealed in Welsh to Robert Patterson, February 25, 1795, May 6, 1796, December 4, 1802, Shane Collection; Robert Patterson to Welsh, September 13, 1816, Patterson Papers.

This bit of sunshine that crossed Welsh's path in Lexington unfortunately did not last long. When he defended Presbyterian orthodoxy in the face of attacks both from liberal and revival camps soon after taking his university chair, he placed himself in the very center of doctrinal and political controversy. Liberals, who espoused Jeffersonian political beliefs and religious deism, had gained a strong place in Kentucky society, and in 1801 they demanded that Welsh resign his position at Transylvania. Liberal students charged that Welsh favored Presbyterian and Federalist scholars; that he was intolerant, emotional, and impatient with those whose views differed from his own; and that he was often inattentive to his duties. Welsh did have a tendency toward haughtiness, and his high-toned Federalism and Presbyterianism were clearly an unpopular combination in republican Kentucky. In spite of the charges and the public spectacle the controversy prompted, the orthodox majority on the university's board of trustees was eager to uphold Welsh and the forces of religious and political conservatism, even though they did not like him and found him to be difficult and intractable. An official inquiry cleared Welsh of any misconduct, but continuing student pressure, public humiliation, and popular feeling against him forced him to resign.¹⁰

Welsh remained the pastor of the Lexington church after his resignation from Transylvania and participated in the revivals that swept across Kentucky in 1801, although there were no indications that he was anything but orthodox in his theology.¹¹ Meanwhile, other Presbyterian revivalists were preaching a mixture of Arminianism and antinomianism that directly contradicted Calvinist doctrines of predestination and limited grace. This mixture presented a special dilemma for Welsh during 1802 and 1803 when the Synod of Kentucky heard complaints against certain New Light ministers. Richard McNemar and John Thompson had been charged with deviation from church doctrine, Arminianism, and preaching dangerous and pernicious ideas. The synod upheld the charges by a seventeen to six vote, concluding the ministers' views were "essentially different from Calvinism." Although Welsh voted with the minority, he did not lose the confidence of the presbytery; indeed, perhaps because of his sympathies he was named to a se-

¹⁰ Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky*, 68-73. Some years earlier, a correspondent had chided Welsh for being "quite above the World" and beseeched him to think of more ordinary men in his sermons. Andrew McClelland to Welsh, July 3, 1792, Shane Collection.

¹¹ "Extract of a Letter, from Colonel Robert Patterson, of Lexington (Ken.) to Rev. Doctor John King, of Pennsylvania [Sept. 25, 1801]," *New York Missionary Magazine and Repository of Religious Intelligence for the Year 1802*, III (1802), 121. Welsh did not dissent from presbytery reassertions of Calvinist doctrine; see, for example, Miami Presbytery Minutes, April 3, 1811 (Presbyterian Historical Society).

lect committee of four to effect reconciliation. This effort failed as one member of the reconciliation committee joined the dissidents, and five ministers in all withdrew from the presbytery. McNemar, Thompson, and fellow revivalists Robert Marshall, John Dunlevy, and Barton Stone then organized the independent Presbytery of Springfield (Ohio), later known as the Christian Church.¹² Although Welsh had some sympathy for the revivalists, his inclinations did not extend to abandoning orthodox doctrine or to joining the schismatic revivalists. His actions rather may have been a reflection of the more personal concerns he had about the summary treatment of unpopular men, for he too had been the object of similar attacks.

A year after the New Light ministers broke from the Kentucky Synod, Welsh moved to Dayton, Ohio, a frontier village on the Miami River fifty miles north of Cincinnati. He arrived just as the revival movement was sweeping up the Presbyterian churches in the region and putting the whole Miami Valley in religious turmoil. Although the small Dayton church, founded only six years previously, was one of the few Presbyterian congregations in the Miami River Valley to resist the New Light stampede, there was considerable revivalist sentiment in the area.¹³ Welsh's move to the Ohio frontier may have been especially welcome because he had the formal training and experience the Presbyterian church was desperately seeking to stem the tide of unrestrained revivalism. Even so, Welsh probably did not leave Kentucky with the intention of bringing orthodoxy to the Ohio frontier, nor is there any indication he left because of any problems he had in Kentucky. Despite his rough treatment in Lexington and the dilemma in which the revivals had placed him, he had apparently been in good standing with his church.

The key to Welsh's move to Dayton probably lay with Patterson. His friend and patron had purchased one thousand acres of land just south of town and moved his entire household to his new farm in 1804. In fact, the fifty-year-old Patterson had been planning a move to Ohio for several years. He already had interest in a woolen mill his son operated in a neighboring county and may have been restless in the fast-growing area around Lexington. In addition, Patterson had long opposed slavery, although he continued to own slaves himself, and was frustrated over the stalled an-

¹² Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, II, 94-97; Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, 192-98; Catharine C. Cleveland, *The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago, 1916), 136-37; Staples, *History of Pioneer Lexington*, 271; J. P. MacLean, "The Kentucky Revival and Its Influence on the Miami Valley," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, XII (1903), 253-63.

¹³ MacLean, "Kentucky Revival," 259.

tislavery campaign in Kentucky.¹⁴ The move to Dayton provided Patterson with a fresh start on a new frontier, and his illustrious past led him to expect a leading role in building his new community. He joined Dayton's small Presbyterian church and may have suggested to Welsh its possibilities, as Dayton did not have a permanent minister. The move augured well for Welsh, for once again he had the support and patronage of his influential friend, and he too could make a clean break with the past.

Neither man realized the promise that they believed this frontier town could offer. Patterson never got the opportunity to exert the influence his previous standing in Kentucky might have led him to expect, and Welsh was never fully accepted by the Dayton Presbyterians. Patterson's troubles began soon after moving to Dayton when he was twice brought into county court for holding slaves on his farm. His accusers were several prominent Presbyterians of mid-Atlantic origins, most notably town proprietor Daniel Cooper of New Jersey and his allies. Although their motives were not entirely clear, a simple intolerance for slavery would have been reason enough. It is likely that personal animosity between Patterson and Cooper, the area's two largest landowners and natural competitors for prestige and office, was also a significant factor. Patterson was found innocent of holding slaves in one case but guilty in the second; his reputation was irreparably damaged as a consequence.¹⁵

Patterson remained bitter about his treatment at the hands of Dayton's leading men for the rest of his life. He took no role in Dayton's public affairs and removed himself from the Dayton Presbyterian church, vowing never again to have any association with the men who had accused him. He was also unsuccessful in seeking state-level political office, as his enemies used his alleged sympathies for slavery as an objection to his nomination or election.¹⁶ As

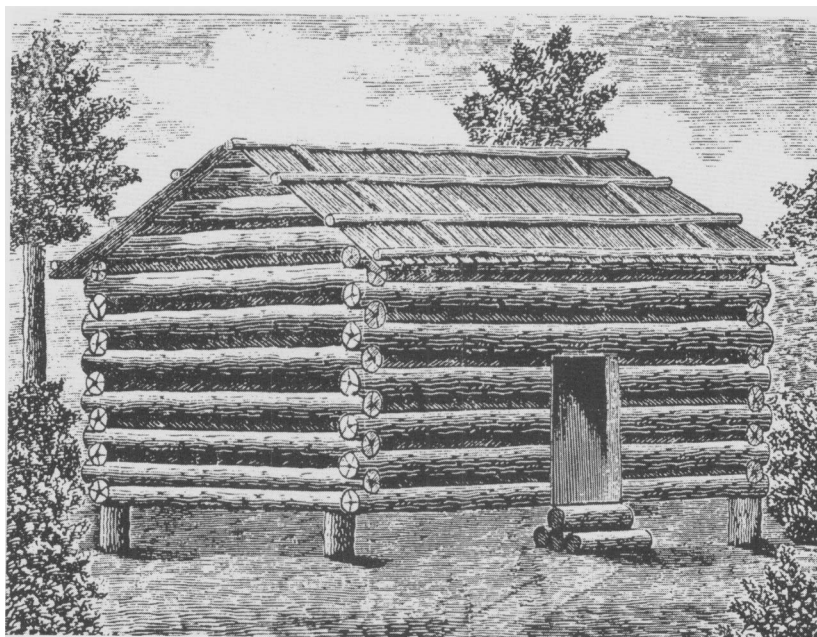
¹⁴ There may have been an additional reason Robert Patterson chose to move to Dayton in 1804. He sold much of his Kentucky holdings and his interests in Cincinnati when he was forced to forfeit a \$6,000 security bond posted to enable a friend to take a position as revenue collector. With the funds left over, he bought cheaper land just outside of Dayton. Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers*, 266-71; Joan Wells Coward, *Kentucky in the New Republic: The Process of Constitution Making* (Lexington, Ky., 1979), 118-19.

¹⁵ Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers*, 284, 312-14. Two separate cases with the same name were brought concurrently before the county court in 1805 and settled that year. See *Ohio v. Patterson* (1805), Montgomery County, Ohio, Clerk of Courts, Common Pleas Civil Law Record, 1803-1833 (Department of Archives and Special Collections, Wright State University Library, Dayton).

¹⁶ Andrew McCalla to Robert Patterson, July 5, 1806, Welsh to Robert Patterson, —5, 1808, and David Reid to Robert Patterson, October 3, 1808, Patterson Papers. Patterson lost to Daniel Cooper in the 1808 election for the Ohio Senate and was defeated in the elections of 1810 and 1812 for a seat in the Ohio House of Representatives. Montgomery County, Election Abstracts, 1803-1826 (Department of Archives and Special Collections, Wright State University Library). Patterson's name does not appear in any records of the Presbyterian church.



DANIEL COOPER



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, DAYTON, OHIO, 1800–1805

Courtesy Montgomery County Historical Society,
Dayton, Ohio.

humiliating a defeat as this was for Patterson, it was an even greater blow to Welsh, who depended on Patterson's stature and influence. Welsh's second marriage in 1811 to Margaret Patterson Venable, a widowed Patterson daughter, only strengthened his ties to the family. In other situations, this would have been a fortuitous union, but Welsh's loyalty to the Pattersons made him an easy target for Cooper and other leading men of Dayton. Once Patterson had been alienated from the community, Welsh's position was exposed.

The Dayton men who turned on Patterson and then Welsh were prominent merchants, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and professionals, primarily from New Jersey, but they counted among their numbers men from several states.¹⁷ They were unified by their ambition not only to make Dayton a prosperous commercial center but also by their vision of the central role the church might play in ordering the community. Their view of religion's social role had been influenced by the currents of Presbyterian and Congregational evangelicalism that were just gathering in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic states. Northern evangelicalism suggested a modified version of the Calvinist doctrine of election, which allowed for greater individual initiative in seeking personal salvation and encouraged social reform activities. These evangelical reformers scorned the southern-style revivals for their undisciplined emotionalism, yet they were no more comfortable with the doctrinal orthodoxy that Welsh and other conservative revivalists offered. Many of the Jersey men and their allies may not have cared to defend the particularities of election, humankind's inability to save itself, and special redemption, but they placed more emphasis on one's ability to effect a spiritual change within and to reform society at large. In this emphasis they probably differed with Welsh because they sought to use the church as a base for wide-ranging social reforms predicated on the assumption that organized people could do much to change the social and moral condition of the world.¹⁸

¹⁷ The leading members of the Jerseyite connection included Cooper (a New Jersey surveyor and proprietor of Dayton); Horatio G. Phillips (successful Dayton merchant, recruited by Cooper from New Jersey); Joseph Pierce (merchant from Rhode Island); James Steele (Pierce's partner and brother-in-law, a merchant from Kentucky); Isaac Burnet (newspaper editor, from New Jersey); William King (ferry keeper, raised in Pennsylvania and lived in Kentucky). All were trustees of the Presbyterian church.

¹⁸ The religious and social ideas of those identified as "evangelical reformers" are inferred from their behavior, as none left explicit reference to their thinking. They all opposed Welsh as minister and were instrumental in calling two northern men to succeed him, Backus Wilbur (a Princeton graduate from New Jersey, called in 1817) and Ahab Jenks (a Connecticut Congregationalist, called in 1819). By the early 1820s, these reformers and their wives were the most prominent founders and leaders of a miniature benevolent empire in Dayton, which included an academy

Welsh's personality and latent sectional animosities also contributed to the minister's problems. He had already proven that he was a difficult and irascible person, and his behavior in Dayton did not indicate that he had changed. In addition, many of his Jerseyite detractors may not have cared for his southern revival background or for his most ardent supporters, the poor Kentucky farmers in the neighborhood. In spite of mutual animosities, the Dayton church could not entirely do without Welsh. There was a shortage of trained Presbyterian ministers throughout the West, and Welsh was in particular demand by other Miami Valley churches. So long as Welsh lived in Dayton, the governing presbytery could not ignore him when the Dayton church requested the services of a minister.¹⁹ The Jerseyite reformers could not get rid of Welsh either, so they made life for him as difficult as possible. The congregation never offered him a regular call nor was any attempt made to raise a subscription for his salary. Instead, the church called him on a year-by-year basis, often for less than full-time service. Welsh was forced to supplement meager contributions from members by offering his services as a physician and as the proprietor of an apothecary's shop.²⁰

Welsh fought back as best he could. He had support from a number of Kentucky farmers who lived in the surrounding country and a few friends within town, although these men were clearly a minority of the congregation. Welsh also had at least three allies among the five elders who constituted the church's ruling session: John Miller, Hezekiah Robinson, and John McKaig.²¹ The session had primary responsibility for calling a minister, enforcing discipline, and accepting new members; Welsh exerted considerable power as its moderator and manipulated it for his own interests. He probably contrived to prevent the election of additional elders,

(1808), Sunday school (1817), female Bible society (1817), county Bible society (1822), and mission society (1822). These men also held prominent political offices, including town trustee and representatives to the Ohio legislature. In contrast, Welsh and his allies were notably absent from all of these activities. Wallace N. Jamison, *Religion in New Jersey: A Brief History* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), 34-43; Charles C. Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelicals, 1826-1860* (New York, 1954); and Lois W. Banner, "Presbyterian Voluntarism in the Early Republic," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, L (Fall, 1972), 187-205. Contrast Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, La., 1980), 91-129, 159-85.

¹⁹ Welsh supplied eight other churches between 1808 and 1817 in addition to serving Dayton. Miami Presbytery Minutes, 1808-1817.

²⁰ Miami Presbytery Minutes, October 8, 1808, April 3, 1811, April 12, 1812, March 23, 1813; Dayton *Repertory*, March 1, December 7, 1809; Dayton *Ohio Centinel*, February 6, 1812.

²¹ John Miller was a hatter from Kentucky; Hezekiah Robinson was a miller, probably from Kentucky; and John McKaig was a farmer. As for the other two elders, James Hanna (weaver from Ireland) remained neutral for a number of years before actively opposing Welsh, and William King (ferry keeper from Kentucky) opposed him from the start.

for example, as no elections to augment the session were held after 1806. The effect was to leave the session essentially friendly to Welsh and in a position to frustrate his critics. The session was also remiss in its duties, perhaps deliberately so. It did not keep minutes of its meetings, as required, and rarely forwarded congregational reports to the presbytery. Deliberate or not, the session's laxities worked to frustrate Welsh's detractors. There could be no accurate accounting of members without session records, which might have made it easier for Welsh to disguise the extent of division among the congregation. Similarly, the presbytery may have found it difficult to take action against Welsh without specific complaints by the elders, although it did cite Dayton for its failure to send annual reports.²²

Welsh rarely attended presbytery meetings anyway and would not have been on hand to answer any questions concerning irregularities in the Dayton church had they been posed. Nevertheless, the presbytery was suspicious as early as 1808 when it wrote to Welsh inquiring why he had not attended presbytery meetings for two years. It hoped that his absences were not intentional, but offered him a reasonable chance to explain. Ill-health was his reply, as it would be on several other occasions, and apparently this was a satisfactory response.²³ Welsh may also have been too exhausted to make every semi-annual presbytery meeting. In addition to preaching in Dayton an average of two Sundays a month, he was also called upon to supply churches in a fifty-mile radius, necessitating journeys of one or two days for each visit. He also made rounds as a physician and attempted to keep his drugstore in Dayton. Chronic ill health and strenuous demands of his work undoubtedly took their toll, yet Welsh would have had good reason to avoid the presbytery whenever possible even without these convenient excuses.

The congregation's board of trustees also remained in the hands of Kentuckians friendly to Welsh. Elections for this governing body were not called for six years after 1807, although the usual procedure provided for annual terms of office.²⁴ Trustees met

²² Miami Presbytery Minutes, October 6, 1808, October 1, 1811, September 12, 1812, September 27, 1814. Daniel Cooper charged Welsh with cheating in church elections and other dishonorable dealings, and the church records indicate considerable irregularities. Jerry Fox Vincent, *A Cabin Grows: The History of a Church, 1799-1946* (Dayton, Ohio, 1949), 7.

²³ Welsh was absent from over 60 percent of all presbytery meetings between 1808 and 1822. Discussion of Welsh's absences are found in Washington Presbytery Minutes, October 4, 1809, in "Minutes of Washington (Ohio) Presbytery, 1808-1811," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, XXVII (December, 1949), 229-34; Miami Presbytery Minutes, April 3, 1811, April 12, 1812, April 15, 1814, October 5, 1819.

²⁴ The trustees between 1807 and 1813 were David Reid (from Kentucky), John Ewing (Kentucky), John Miller (Kentucky), James Miller (Kentucky), Cooper (New Jersey), Hanna (Ireland), and McKaig (former residence unknown). Book of Minutes of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, 1804-1828, Records of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton (Presbyterian Historical Society).

separately from the minister, and they had primary responsibility for the church's physical property and finances. Control of the congregation's finances provided one opportunity for Welsh's enemies to gain control of the church and perhaps oust him, for although they were not a majority on the board, they were by far the wealthiest men in town. They had already made Welsh uncomfortable by denying him a salary; they could also use their wealth to insinuate themselves into positions of power. Thus when the trustees proposed building a meetinghouse (the congregation met in the county courthouse after selling their log cabin in 1804), a door was opened for Welsh's eventual downfall. The trustees began in 1807 by applying to the county for deeds to four donation lots offered by proprietor Cooper. The prospect of owning real estate and a building in turn prompted the board to seek incorporation for the church. The special act of incorporation was introduced into the Ohio legislature by Cooper, who was also a state senator, and finally passed its required third reading in 1812. It granted the church the right to raise subscriptions, buy and sell property, and other privileges, although the trustees had engaged in some of these practices already. It also required new elections to the board, which provided an opportunity Welsh's reform-minded opponents exploited.²⁵

The 1812 election for trustees resulted in a rough balance between the Welsh and reform factions, as did the balloting the following year. The mixed board proceeded slowly, doing little more than clearing a new graveyard and buying a more favorable building lot. The 1814 election brought some of the long-smoldering conflict into the open, as questions were raised concerning who had the right to vote. Because there were no records of members and the charter was silent on the matter, the board declared that those persons who believed themselves to be baptized, who resided within ten miles of Dayton, and who contributed to the congregation were eligible to vote. As the session kept no baptismal records either, residence and contribution to the church were the operating criteria, which favored the evangelical reform faction led by Cooper. The trustees drew up a list of twenty-eight men who were declared voting members, and a majority of them were men known to oppose Welsh. Seventeen of these men actually voted, and, not surprisingly, four of the five trustees they chose (Cooper, Horatio G. Phillips, Mathew Patton, and James Steele) were among the leading reformers and most prominent residents. The formal exchange of offices took place under unusual circumstances and amid deep mistrust and evident ill will. The outgoing and incoming

²⁵ *Ibid.*, May 9, 1807, December 3, 1811, and April 6, 1812. An Act Incorporating the First Presbyterian Congregation in the Town of Dayton, 10 Ohio Acts (1812), 85-88.

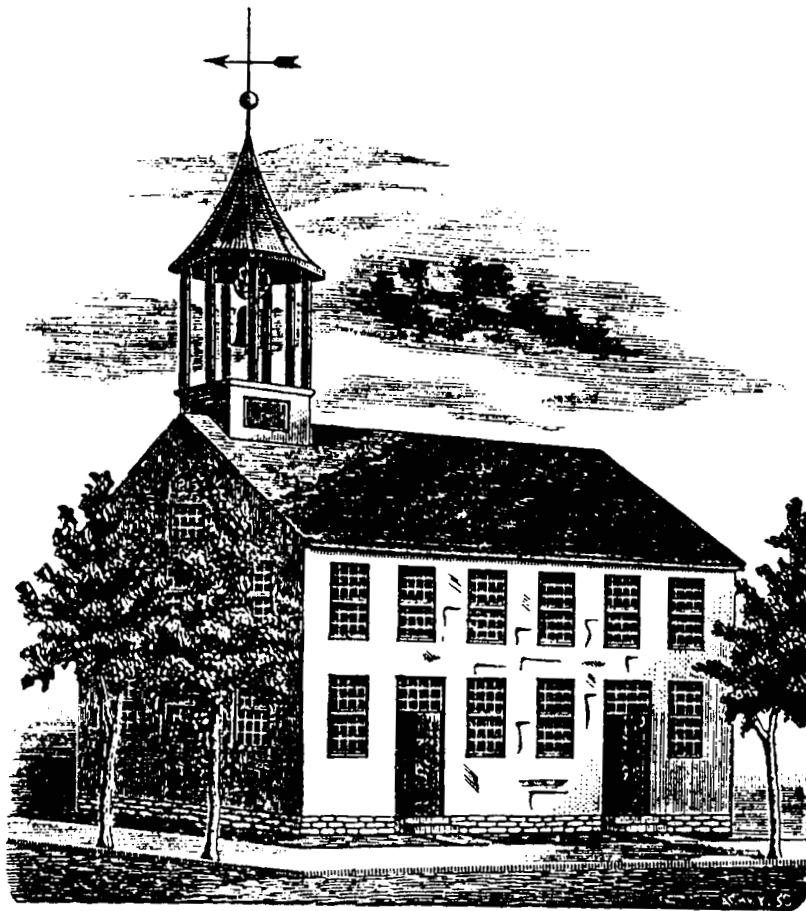
members of the board met in the law offices of John Folkerth, a fellow Presbyterian and justice of the peace. Under his supervision, the records and financial papers of the church were transferred to the new trustees.²⁶

The new trustees immediately embarked on a plan to build a brick meetinghouse near the center of town, which required an additional \$250 to purchase a more desirable lot from proprietor Cooper. Building costs already exceeded several thousand dollars, but some of the wealthiest and most prominent reformers were not entirely satisfied. They wanted a clear mandate for an even larger meetinghouse than planned, including the addition of a second story and steeple, since the leading reformers were willing to pay for it. In preparation for the next annual trustee elections, they contrived to tighten requirements for voting a second time as a means of securing the election of men who would support their grand plan. The trustees obliged by declaring prior to the 1815 poll that none but residents of the town and neighborhood who had contributed to the building of the meetinghouse or to the support of the minister and who were willing to come under the government of the church were eligible to vote. These new qualifications demanded a more specific financial commitment to the church and excluded most of Welsh's few remaining supporters. Just twelve men voted in 1815 and elected a board dominated by the ambitious reformers.²⁷

Confrontation with the minister burst into the open when the new trustees led the effort to get rid of Welsh. The *Dayton Ohio Republican* announced in May that the presbytery had assigned several ministers to preach to the Dayton church in place of Welsh, a fabricated report as insulting to Welsh as it was offensive to the presbytery. In its September, 1815, meeting, the presbytery appointed a committee to investigate the source of the "scandalous and abusive" article and further ruled that a request for supply from the Dayton church, no doubt the work of the determined re-

²⁶ Book of Minutes, May 29, June 12, June 19, September 28, 1813, and April 12, 1814. Henry L. Brown, "Early History of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton," in *A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio, from 1845 to 1880*, ed. Clarke McDermont (Dayton, Ohio, 1880), 13. List of male members [1813], Miscellaneous Papers, 1814–1918, Records of the First Presbyterian Church. Election held for trustees and other officers of the First Presbyterian Congregation of Dayton, April 5, 1814, *ibid.* James Hanna, the fifth trustee elected in 1814, soon joined those attempting to oust Welsh.

²⁷ Edwin A. Parrott, "Historical Sketch of the Church, and Its Pastor," in *Centenary Souvenir, Commemorative of the Completion of a Century by the First Presbyterian Church of Dayton, Ohio* (Dayton, Ohio, 1900), 36. Book of Minutes, May 5, 1814, April 4, 1815. An election held for Trustees and other officers of the first Presbyterian Congregation of Dayton, April 4, 1815, Miscellaneous Papers, 1814–1918. The trustees elected in 1815 were Williams, King, Patton, Burnet, and Hanna.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Built 1817; taken down 1839.

CORNER SECOND AND LUDLOW STREETS, DAYTON, OHIO.

The second Church built by this Congregation.

Courtesy Emil Pocock.

formers, was out of order, presumably because it did not come from the elders and because the congregation still had the services of Welsh. It resolved to meet in Dayton the following spring to "enquire into and redress the evils existing in said church."²⁸

The presbytery was not pleased with what it found in Dayton when it met there in April, 1816. It concluded that a second request for supply from Dayton was disorderly, in spite of the difficulties over Welsh, because it found no genuine cause for complaint against him; the presbytery also admonished the trustees for not providing Welsh with adequate salary. When it realized that the church was hopelessly divided, it advised the congregation to lay aside contention and be satisfied with ministers the presbytery could supply "until God in his providence shall send them a pastor to whom the affections of the people may generally be united." As a compromise, the presbytery proposed that Welsh serve part time, provided the church compensate him. It also dropped its investigation into the source of the scandalous newspaper article and directed the elders to be more attentive to the congregation. Two months later, the presbytery directed the Dayton session to hold new elections for elders under supervision of a presbytery member and to open a session book.²⁹

Confident of the eventual outcome of the crisis, the reformers went ahead with plans to replace Welsh. In June, they circulated a subscription for the support of one Reverend Moses Allen for a year, which was signed by all sitting trustees. Seventy-eight men subscribed \$656, with Cooper, Phillips, Steele, and Joseph Pierce the major contributors. Despite Allen's evident support from a large portion of the congregation, once again the presbytery refused Dayton's request for services of a minister other than Welsh. Instead, it suggested that elders James Miller and John H. Williams conduct a poll of the congregation to determine if Welsh should be retained. In the meantime, it allowed Welsh to serve the church at his discretion.³⁰

The presbytery gave him the benefit of every doubt, but Welsh became despondent as it became clear he would not last much longer. His support was weakening even among the elders, and he probably knew the poll of the congregation would show little enthusiasm for keeping him. He complained to Patterson that he was "nearly broken down" and accused his old friend of abandoning him and his daughter to suffer "*anything & everything*, that may

²⁸ Dayton *Ohio Republican*, May 4, 1814. The paper was coedited by Burnet, one of the chief proponents of an enlarged building. Miami Presbytery Minutes, September 19, 1815.

²⁹ Miami Presbytery Minutes, April 5, 1814, April 2, June 25, 1816.

³⁰ Subscription to support Moses Allen for one year, June 28, 1816, Miscellaneous Papers, 1814-1918; Miami Presbytery Minutes, September 17, 1816.

befall us, before . . . your enemies." The five sitting elders were confirmed in their offices as a result of the special election mandated by the presbytery, and the new session met without Welsh. Reverend Peter Monfort, "moderator by invitation," opened a session book in May, 1817, and began the business of bringing the congregation to order.³¹

Not long afterward, eighty-two men signed a subscription for the support of Reverend Backus Wilbur, a licentiate from New Jersey, for a five-month period. Welsh's friends responded a few days later on March 25 with a petition signed by forty-four persons sent to the Miami Presbytery requesting that Welsh be allowed to preach two Sundays a month in Dayton. They accompanied it with a subscription for \$166 toward his salary. The list of forty-four petitioners and the meagerness of the subscription revealed the shallowness of Welsh's support. Only ten signers had any previous or subsequent association with the Dayton congregation. Former trustees Williams, Robinson, and Andrew Hood were among the petitioners, while none of the reform trustees cared to retain Welsh. Among prominent non-members was Patterson, who came out of his self-imposed exile to aid his friend.³² This petition drive was no effort to retain Welsh in the pulpit; rather the Kentucky revivalists realized that support for their minister had collapsed utterly and that he would be forced out. Their effort was instead aimed at establishing a Second Presbyterian Church. Welsh himself moderated the meeting that elected trustees for the proposed second church; among those named were Hood and Robinson, two of Welsh's most loyal allies among the old trustees and elders, and Henry L. Brown, another Patterson son-in-law, but a man who also had no previous association with the Dayton church.³³

The crisis over Welsh broke during 1817. The presbytery that assembled in April considered the petition to retain Welsh in a second church and the reformers' request for the services of Wilbur. Hanna, Dayton's lay representative to the presbytery, reiterated the reformers' complaints about Welsh. In its decision, the presbytery gave the Dayton congregation permission to hire Wil-

³¹ Elders John Miller, Hanna, King, and McKaig pledged to Allen's subscription. Welsh to Robert Patterson, September 13, 1816, Patterson Papers; Session Book of the Presbyterian Church, Dayton, 1817-1839, May 24, 1817, Records of the First Presbyterian Church.

³² Again, reformers Phillips, Steele, Pierce, and King were among the major subscribers. Subscription to support Backus Wilbur for five months, March 20, 1817, Miscellaneous Papers, 1814-1918; Petition to the Miami Presbytery, March 25, 1817, *ibid.*; Miami Presbytery Minutes, April 1, 1817.

³³ Dayton *Ohio Watchman*, November 20, 1817; anonymous letter, *ibid.*, December 4, 1817; Brown, "Early History of the First Presbyterian Church," 10. Henry L. Brown was secretary to Colonel Robert Patterson in 1793 and remained close to the Pattersons after both men moved to the Dayton area. Brown married Katherine Patterson. Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers*, 288-89, 290.

bur temporarily, pending a full investigation, and held that the two private petitions for Welsh's services were disorderly, although it left other charges for the next meeting.³⁴ Meanwhile Welsh charged Hanna with "slanderosly and unjustly accusing him of falsehood and dishonorable conduct" in the presbytery as Williams, Robinson, and Hood also brought charges against Hanna. The presbytery, in turn, called upon Dayton to furnish proof that a majority of the congregation opposed Welsh and disallowed another private petition for Welsh's services.³⁵ During the summer, the presbytery dropped its investigation as the pending complaints were quietly settled, and it accepted evidence presented by the Dayton elders that a majority of the congregation opposed Welsh. Although it allowed the congregation to call Wilbur and excluded Welsh from serving in Dayton, he remained in good standing with the presbytery.³⁶

Welsh was assigned to supply other churches in the Miami Presbytery for several years after that fateful conclusion to his ordeal, but he resumed his lax attendance at presbytery meetings.³⁷ Welsh remained in Dayton only another year, all the while struggling to make his living with means at hand. He continued his medical practice, operated his drugstore, and platted a speculative tract called North Dayton, which failed to attract the mechanics Welsh hoped would buy his lots. Late in 1818, he decided to leave Dayton and move on to Vevay, a struggling village in adjacent southwestern Indiana where he had preached from time to time. He sold his house, town lots, household goods, and cow, and petitioned the county court for permission to vacate his unsuccessful North Dayton plat.³⁸ By early 1819, he was living in Vevay.

Welsh faced the prospect of establishing himself on his third frontier with uncharacteristic optimism. "Business is not yet, very lively, but the country is filling fast & that business will yearly encrease I have no doubt," he wrote to his brother-in-law Francis Patterson. Welsh was preoccupied with the move, and in the absence of a regular call to a settled church, he became more concerned about financial matters in his new home. He built a house

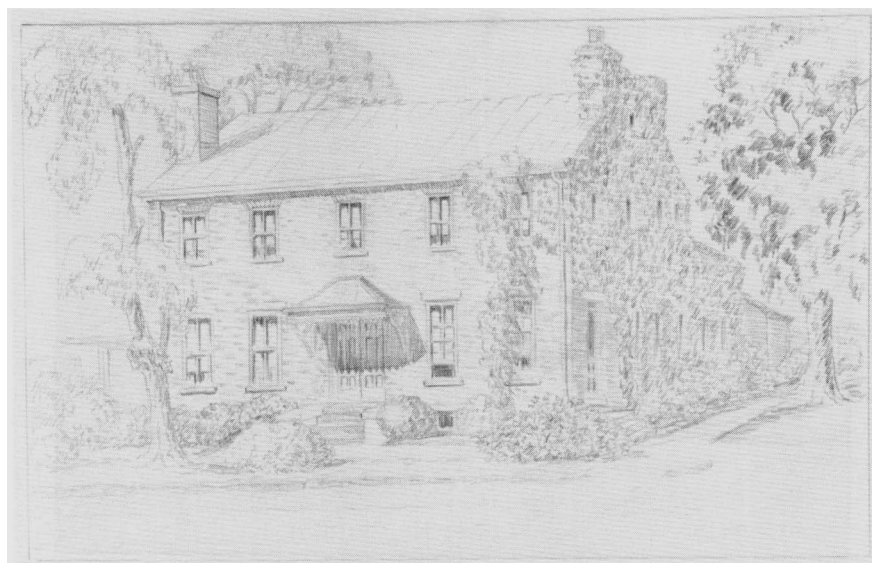
³⁴ Miami Presbytery Minutes, April 1, 1817.

³⁵ Session Book of the Presbyterian Church, Dayton, 1817-1839, May 24, 1817, June 5, 1817, Records of the First Presbyterian Church.

³⁶ Session Book, August 13, 1817; Miami Presbytery Minutes, September 2, 1817. William Gray to Miami Presbytery, September 4, 1817 (Presbyterian Historical Society).

³⁷ Welsh attended just two of twenty presbytery meetings between October 28, 1817 (the first meeting after his dismissal from Dayton), and April 9, 1822 (when his church at Vevay, Indiana, came under the jurisdiction of the new Presbytery of Cincinnati). Miami Presbytery Minutes, 1817-1822. Extended illness was his likely excuse, as the presbytery accepted his reasons as satisfactory. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1819.

³⁸ Dayton *Ohio Watchman*, March 11, 1816, April 23, May 7, 1818; Welsh to Francis Patterson, February 15, 1819, Patterson Papers.



HOME OF REVEREND JAMES WELSH, VEVAY, INDIANA

TWENTIETH-CENTURY SKETCH BY WILL VAWTER

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.
Neg. no. C4663.

and probably a new drugstore, in part with lumber he obtained from Robert Patterson, and discussed business prospects with the Pattersons.³⁹ Perhaps because of his new involvements, he often failed to supply the few congregations the presbytery assigned him and more than once was called upon to provide sufficient reason.⁴⁰

In spite of this relapse to old habits, Welsh was offered an opportunity to redeem himself in 1822 when he was assigned to the new Presbytery of Cincinnati, created from the older Miami Presbytery. The new presbytery treated Welsh with some deference and respect: he was appointed moderator of the presbytery, was sent as the presbytery's representative to the annual General Assembly, and was assigned to a number of other responsible tasks. He also accepted a call from the congregation at Vevay for his ministerial services in the same year, although its supplication did not mention a regular salary.⁴¹ Unfortunately, Welsh was unable to

³⁹ Welsh to Francis Patterson, February 15, 1819, Welsh to Robert Patterson, July 25, 1819, Patterson Papers.

⁴⁰ Miami Presbytery Minutes, October 5, 1819, April 18, 1829.

⁴¹ Cincinnati Presbytery, Minutes, April 10, 11, October 15, 16, 17, 1822, April 8, 1823, Presbyterian Historical Society.

follow up on this new opportunity. Not in good health and without a regular income, he was naturally under great pressure to provide for his family. His medical practice, drugstore, and other business ventures suffered under the depressed economic conditions following the banking panic of 1819. Increasingly, he turned his attentions to his faltering businesses and to the immediate needs of his family at the expense of his ministerial duties.⁴²

Welsh was thus under a great deal of strain after 1822. In addition to his evident ill health and poor financial condition, he was advancing in years and had few options left. He must have also been bitterly disappointed by his failure as a minister and the wretched condition in which he found himself near the end of his life. Welsh was desperate and turned to alcohol to relieve his pains. The presbytery could perhaps excuse his absences and failures to perform ministerial duties for reasons of health or overwork, but when word reached its ears that Welsh had taken to excessive drinking, it could no longer remain impassive. On April 18, 1825, the Cincinnati Presbytery opened a formal investigation into Welsh's conduct at Vevay.⁴³

Welsh tried to delay the three-man investigating committee appointed to go to Vevay and make inquiries, claiming that however innocent he might be, damage to his character would result from the public nature of the investigation. Nevertheless, the committee would not alter its charge and went ahead with its inquiries. Its report to the presbytery in July cited three specific chargeable sins under the discipline of the church: intemperate use of wine and strong spirits, unfair dealings in the transaction of temporal business, and neglect of church interests. Welsh was ordered to appear at Vevay to answer the charges before a special meeting of the presbytery.⁴⁴

The presbytery opened the trial on Wednesday, August 10, 1825, expecting it to last only two or three days, but a series of tragic delays stretched it out to more than a week, thoroughly exasperating the presbytery and driving Welsh to distraction. On the first day of the trial, Welsh requested a delay on account of the severe illness (probably typhoid) that had struck his family. One day was granted, but on Thursday, the trial resumed with Welsh's innocent plea and the calling of the first witnesses. On Friday, the trial was interrupted by a local physician, who reported that

⁴² Welsh was absent from eight of eleven presbytery meetings between 1822 and 1825, but the presbytery usually accepted Welsh's explanations for his absences. His reasons were not recorded, but Welsh had cited ill health in the past; and it is likely this may have been his stated excuse again. Cincinnati Presbytery, Minutes, April 9, 1822, to July 5, 1825.

⁴³ Cincinnati Presbytery, Minutes, April 18, 1825.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, July 5, 6, 1825.

Welsh's daughter-in-law Hester lay dying. Welsh requested an indefinite delay, but the presbytery granted only a two-hour suspension for him to attend to his family. Welsh, obviously agitated by the presbytery's refusal to accommodate him in this crisis, initially refused to return, but after assurances that he would be given leave to rush home in case of any emergency, Welsh relented and the trial resumed.⁴⁵

Preoccupied by his family's crisis and the imminent death of Hester, Welsh repeatedly sought time to attend to his family, but the presbytery stubbornly insisted on proceeding through Saturday. After Hester's death on Sunday, the presbytery allowed Welsh only a two-hour break on Monday for the funeral. When testimony concluded on Wednesday of the second week, Welsh was in no condition to mount a defense, but again, the presbytery rejected pleas for a further delay. Welsh finally walked out of the trial and refused to return. Even this did not stop the presbytery's relentless quest for a judgment. It deemed Welsh's conduct contumacious and decided unanimously that the evidence substantiated all charges.⁴⁶

The presbytery concluded that the sin of drunkenness had been supported by several witnesses on two specific occasions. Welsh's defenders focused on this charge, as it must have been considered the most serious of the three, and cited the minster's advanced age and his chronic afflictions as explanations for his erratic behavior. "Welsh's physical inability, the inactivity of his eyes, the clumsiness of his tongue, as well as the irregularity of his bodily motions," one anonymous defender wrote, "may all be accounted for upon his complicated diseases which would be too tedious to explain." Welsh's physician offered his diagnosis of chronic hydrothorax, which, he said, had worsened in recent weeks. Welsh was thus compelled to take laxatives and other "drastic medicines," resulting in anorexia, dyspepsy, and loss of appetite. The smell of whiskey on Welsh's breath, these defenders suggested, was nothing more than the result of small amounts he took to relieve his pain.⁴⁷

The presbytery was not impressed with this defense and was no less harsh in its judgment of the other two charges. Although

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, August 10, 11, 12, 1825. The identity of the daughter-in-law is uncertain. Welsh's wife Margaret bore a daughter Maria Eliza in 1807 by her first husband, Dr. Samuel Venable, but Maria Eliza Venable married in 1826 and lived until 1880. Welsh's daughter Hester is mentioned in a manuscript history of the Vevay church, but she is not included in any of the Welsh or Patterson genealogies. Julie LeClerc Knox, *History of the Presbyterian Church at Vevay, Indiana* [1960] (Hanover College Library, Hanover, Indiana); Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers*, 422-23.

⁴⁶ Cincinnati Presbytery, Minutes, August 13, 15, 16, 17, 1825.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, August 17, 1825; *An Exposition, Relating to Some of the Proceedings of the Ohio Presbytery, in Trial of the Rev. James Welsh, at Vevay, in August, 1825* (Vevay, Ind., 1825), 3-4, 7.

unfair dealings had not gone so far as fraud, the testimony nevertheless showed "a course of conduct which is destitute of that openness, fairness, and disinterestedness which the precepts of the gospel require." Finally, it judged the evidence that Welsh neglected his duty as overwhelming. Perturbed by Welsh's demeanor during the trial and noting the "gloomy aspect" that hung over the whole affair, the presbytery showed no sympathy for Welsh's plight or recognition of his double distress. The presbytery's only compassion was in inflicting the penalty of suspension, instead of outright deposition, in hopes of later reconciliation.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Welsh could no longer be reconciled to the vicious vicissitudes of an unfriendly world, as he once characterized life. Despondent over the loss of his daughter-in-law, humiliated by the trial, ill, and nearly bankrupt, Welsh committed suicide little more than a year afterward.⁴⁹

Welsh's ordeal and tragic failure on the frontier did not stem from lack of preparation, opportunities, or influential friends. Welsh had a university degree and pursued professional careers in ministry and medicine, both of which were in high demand on the frontier. Offices were always open to him, and even after several disastrous experiences churches never failed to call for his services. The presbyteries, too, continued to place him in positions of trust and responsibility despite misgivings they may have had about his reliability. In addition to all the support he could reasonably expect from the Presbyterian church, Welsh also relied on friend and patron Robert Patterson, who helped him obtain positions in both Lexington and Dayton, provided advice and counsel, and sustained his friend as best he could through Welsh's life. Welsh seemed to have all that a man needed to succeed and prosper on the frontier—and more.

Welsh's difficulties stemmed from several factors: his personality and personal problems, the downfall of his patron, the grimness of frontier conflict, and the political implications of the Great Awakening. Welsh was undeniably a difficult person. He was cantankerous, intolerant, and unreliable at the very least, and his haughtiness invited harsh treatment from men who had little patience with him or his ideas. Welsh's rejections made him all the more resentful and depressed, while his feelings of unworthiness cast a gloomy spell over his entire career. His chronic ill health, overwork, and harassed life also took a heavy toll. Welsh finally turned to drink and ultimate despair when living became too de-

⁴⁸ Cincinnati Presbytery, Minutes, August 17, 1825.

⁴⁹ Conover supplies November 10, 1826, as the date of Welsh's death, but mentions nothing of the cause. Conover, *Concerning the Forefathers*, 318-19. See also Lucien V. Rule to Samuel Wilson, January 15, 1936, Unclassified Manuscripts (Presbyterian Historical Society).

pressing and burdensome. Welsh's temperament made it likely that he would have had difficulty wherever he lived, but the frontier may have magnified his problems.

Patterson's influence and connections undoubtedly helped Welsh gain his university post and pulpits. Even in half-formed frontier society, family and friendship ties counted for a great deal. Welsh made the right connections, and they worked to his advantage early in his career; but his relationship to Patterson went beyond the usual ties of patronage and friendship. Welsh also relied on his father-in-law for emotional support, and this dependency made Welsh dangerously vulnerable. When Patterson lost his status and influence in Dayton and withdrew from church and society, Welsh suffered a doubly devastating loss. He could no longer depend on Patterson's stature to help build the Dayton church, and Patterson's downfall also left Welsh with little protection from his friend's powerful enemies. Welsh's fortunes were too closely identified with his patron's, and when Patterson fell, Welsh was unable to loosen the bonds that tied them together.

Frontier society was also harsh and unforgiving, perhaps even cruel at times. It was certainly no egalitarian meritocracy, where talent, experience, and hard work would guarantee reward. A man's politics, religion, origins, and connections played as much a role in his ultimate success as how hard he worked, and Welsh was certainly aware of these factors. Indeed, as a minister and natural leader, he was inescapably drawn into the very center of political conflict. In each place that Welsh sought to make home, religious issues had distinct social and political implications; in each place there were ambitious men with their own agendas, little social hierarchies in the making, and keen competition for office and leadership. This was true in Lexington, where the popular majority held distinctly liberal religious and political views quite opposed to those held by Welsh, and in Dayton, where a Jerseyite clique gained virtual control over the church and all facets of social and political life. Both groups excluded Welsh and men like him who stood in their way.

Although Welsh lacked the skills and flexibility needed to thrive amidst the conflict that was rife on the frontier, the Great Awakening itself exacerbated both the nature of that conflict and Welsh's troubles. The Calvinist orthodoxy of the Presbyterian church and the bleak social and political precepts of a Calvinist world view were under attack by awakened evangelicals. The preaching of the Great Awakening placed greater emphasis on spiritual rebirth, the ability to affect one's own salvation, and the possibilities of perfecting this world. The social and political implications of these and other liberating evangelical notions provided some with new opportunities on the frontier, but they also raised havoc in a society that had no firm foundations. Good men and

women disagreed about how best to carry out the evangelical prescriptions for social salvation and fought over leadership of frontier communities, but Welsh and others who held on to a dying orthodoxy had little to offer this new social order. Welsh may have failed his mission on the frontier, but the social and political turmoil that followed closely in the wake of the Great Awakening provided the special context that made his success nearly impossible.