

HISTORY OF THE CHAIRING OF THE BARD AT WELSH FESTIVAL

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If you had been living in Malad Valley in the late 1800s, you would be well acquainted with Malad Valley's version of the Welsh *eisteddfod*. Held in Wales since the 1100s with the modern version beginning in the late 1700s, the *eisteddfod* is the largest and most prestigious poetry and choral competition in the world. With over 6000 competitors in poetry, prose, and song and 150,000 visitors, the *eisteddfod* is held for eight days during the first of August with one year in northern Wales and the next year in southern Wales. Because of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the *eisteddfod* was cancelled for the first time since 1914 during World War I. This year it will be held in Tregaren, a town of 1200 in northern Wales.

The finale event of the Welsh *eisteddfod* is the Chairing of the Bard, always held on Friday afternoon. Although other prizes are given for prose and song, the Bard's Chair is the top prize for poetry. A unique chair is designed and built for the occasion, and the winning Bard takes the chair home with him or her. The winning poem must be written in Welsh and in the strict Welsh poetic style.

At the ceremony, only the winner's *nom de plume* (pseudonym) is announced so nobody knows who the winner is. In the huge tent where thousands of people wait in anticipation, the Archdruid, who presides over the ceremony, announces the winner's *nom de plume* three times as spotlights pan the crowd, waiting for the winner to stand and be escorted to the stage by groups of druids and young girls dressed in flowing costumes and carrying flowers.

Welsh pioneers brought those traditions with them, and Malad Valley hosted its own *eisteddfod* – one year in Malad and the next in St. John or Samaria – from the 1880s until World War I. Participants, spectators, and judges came from as far away as Salt Lake City to be part of the Malad Valley *eisteddfod*. Besides choral, small ensemble, and solo singing and original poetry and prose readings, dancing was part of the Malad *eisteddfod*. An early article in the *Idaho Enterprise* stated that the 75 cent prize had to be split between two boys as the judges could not decide who was the better step dancer.

In 2005 a committee decided it was time to celebrate the Welsh heritage of Malad Valley. Although not a traditional *eisteddfod*, the Malad Valley Welsh Festival does host some events reminiscent of the Welsh festival.

This year's Festival will be presided over by Cory Webster, the "2019 Bard of the Malad Valley Welsh Festival." He will sit in the special Bard's Chair after being led into the Festival during the opening ceremony by the Knight of the Festival (Malad's version of an Archdruid.) The chair was donated to the Festival by Bob Crowther, refinished by Lance Tripp and Shawn and Roxanne Albretsen. The late Shannon Evanson designed the decorative Welsh dragon for the seat of the chair. Unlike the Bard's Chair in Wales, the Malad's Bard's Chair remains in Malad on display in Malad City Hall along with the plaques listing the winning Bards and the winners of the Patsy Price Scott Poetry Prize, which was introduced last year during the only event – the Adult Poetry Competition.

The winners of the Youth Poetry Competition will receive cash prizes and coupons with the top winner in each grade category receiving a crown. Judging of the 500+ youth poems that were submitted by Malad students has begun. Winners will be announced at the Youth Poetry Reading on Friday, June 24.

This is the first year for the Adult Fiction (Prose) Competition. Short stories (no more than 2000 words) must have a Welsh or Western pioneer theme, setting, or main character. (See guidelines at www.welshfestival.com or contact Lucie Thomas Washburn, the Chair of the Adult Fiction Competition.) All authors must submit their stories using pseudonyms. The deadline for submissions is June 1. The winning short story author will be announced at the finale event on the afternoon of Saturday, June 25.

It is not too late to enter the Adult Poetry Competition as the deadline is June 1. (See guidelines at www.welshfestival.com or contact Mary Alice Telford, the Chair of the Adult Poetry Competition.) The poems must be written in English and follow this year's theme of "Trails and Trials." (In the past, we have received poems written in Chinese, Pakistani, and some unidentifiable languages.) The poets must submit their poems using pseudonyms so that the judges will not know the authors. The winning Bard and the winner of the Patsy Price Scott Poetry Prize will be announced at the finale event on the afternoon of Saturday, June 25, after all poets have had the opportunity to read their original poems.