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International Eisteddfod Day, September 5, 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago.

To the celebration of this ancient custom the Welsh came in great numbers, bringing their own language and national costumes, their love of poetry and song, and their ancient rites. Tradition teaches that the annual Welsh Eisteddfod (sitting or session) is a survival from days before the Christian era, when the Druids took the idea of competitive congresses from the Olympian games of Greece. On the annexation of Wales to England these bardic gatherings received the sanction of Edward I, and this ancient practice, kept alive religiously, has created among the Welsh a love of poetry and song. The picturesque custom was reproduced faithfully at the International Eisteddfod at the Exposition, where authority to conduct the performance was granted to the Cymrodorion Society of Chicago, the Archdruid of Wales delegating his chief bard, or Hwfa Mon, to the work. The Eisteddfod was conducted through four days.

The proceedings were opened at noon September 5 with a *gorsedd* [1] meeting in the plaza before the Government Building. From this *gorsedd*, or throne, the beginning of the session is announced "in the face of the sun, the eye of light," and upon it the formal ceremony of honoring the winners in the competition is performed. This throne was a large unhewn stone, and around it were placed twelve smaller ones, a bard standing by each and guarding the mystic circle, into which no one was permitted to enter. The rock on which stood the chief bard bore an ancient inscription meaning "To the Light of God." All the bards wore long, white flowing robes and head covering trimmed with oak leaves. The ritual, which was all in Welsh, consisted of an invocation by the chief bard and a responsive service between him and the other bards, in which the Welsh in the surrounding throng took part. At the close of these ceremonies a procession was formed to Festival Hall, where the work of the Eisteddfod was entered upon.

A most comprehensive program had been laid out, including concerts on each evening, and afternoon contests in poetry, solo and choral singing, and harp playing, for which prizes to the amount of \$30,000 were given. Fifteen choral societies, four of which came from Great Britain, took part in the competition, and several famous Welsh poets and musicians assisted. Among the latter were Ben Davies, the Queen's tenor; Mrs. Mary Davies, a fine soprano; D. Gordon Thomas, and John Thomas, harpist to the Queen, from London. The principal interest of the first day centered in the male-chorus competition, in which nine organizations, numbering the best singers in Wales and the United States, contested for two prizes of \$1,000 and \$500 each, the first one being awarded to the Rhondda Valley Glee Club of Wales.

On the second day the Welsh opera of Prince Llewellyn was given by a chorus of 1,000 voices, accompanied by twenty harps from the Chicago Harp School and the Max Bendix Exposition Orchestra under the direction of the composer, John Thomas. On the third day occurred the interesting ceremony of "chaining the bard" with Druidical rites—an honor bestowed upon the first-prize winner in the highest



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grade of poetry. The fourth day began with a repetition of the *gorsedd* meeting on the Government plaza, when those who had successfully passed examination for admittance to the bardic circle were initiated. The grand feature of the competition was the contest on the last day between four choirs of 250 voices each for a first prize of \$5,000 and a second one of \$1,000. The competing societies were the Cymrodorion Choral Society, of Scranton, Pa., the Scranton Choral Union, the Western Reserve Choral Union, of Cleveland, Ohio, and the great Salt Lake City Tabernacle Choir. To the Scranton Choral Union was awarded the first prize, and to the Mormon choir the second.

[1] A ***gorsedd*** [plural *gorseddau*] is a community or coming together of modern-day bards. When the term is used without qualification, it usually refers to the national Gorsedd of Wales, namely *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, meaning "The Gorsedd of Bards of the Island of Britain". However, other gorseddau exist, such as the Cornish Gorsedh Kernow and the Breton Goursez Vreizh. Gorseddau exist to promote literary scholarship and the creation of poetry and music.