

These old mountains that hark back to the beginning of time could tell many strange tales. One among them would be the tale of the Welsh man who started the charming little settlement of English people which is known as "Bowman's Bluff". Many travelers passing through the country wonder at the fine old homes set in the midst of the hills.

It was two years after our great struggle that a Welshman by the name of Evans came into this part of the world on horseback. He was a widower and came to America to get away from familiar scenes. This wilderness in its virgin beauty appealed to him, and the graceful French Broad River flowing through the narrow valley with the high peaks of the mountains in their blue haze crowding around, held him fascinated. He stayed and built a home after the architectural plans of houses in the old country. The house stands on the bluff overlooking a sharp turn in the river which affords it a duplex view of a beautiful valley. The bluff rises some five or six hundred feet and from it are visible many noted peaks in the Blue Ridge. The house itself is well worth describing. Made of cement, it stands high on its little bluff. The sunken porch, the iron pillars holding up the roof, the narrow windows that give hardly anything but air to the dark interior, all speak of the old world. Over the front door in colored glass is this Welsh motto—"Hib Inw Heb Idim Idnw A liaon." The place was named "Brinaven" meaning Mountain-Overlooking-River. Mr. Evans went back to England shortly after he built the house, and later brought out his second wife but they only stayed a few years when he sold the place and went back for good. The old house is standing almost unchanged. Mrs. Mallett who owns the place has added a modern kitchen but the rounded front and the huge front door remain as they were.

There is no record as to how Mr. George Holmes came to Western North Carolina, but we are sure that once getting here he could not resist the place and he either stayed or came back very shortly after his first visit. His fine old place called "The Bluff" is on the bank of the river a quarter of a mile downstream from "Brinaven." Mr. Holmes was an Englishman whose home had been near Birmingham, England. He bought several thousand acres and built a charming English house on what was known as "Bowman's Bluff." This bluff rises nearly a thousand feet from the river and the whirling pool below is said to have no bottom. It was here the beautiful Polly Bowman leaped to her death because of a hopeless love affair. The vista from the Holmes house is even more extended than that from "Brinaven." Mt. Pisgah and The Rat appear to the right, lesser peaks crowd in the foreground. It was a noble estate, entered by the long drive bordered with great all pines in profusion. The south of the house was a tangle of garden with numerous overgrown arbors covered with rioting vines. In the spring great flocks of wild ducks settled on the river and Mr. Holmes held shooting matches where there was great rivalry between the young members of the colony. Out of the waters of the French Broad came delicious trout and other mountain fish and under the brow of the bluff Mrs. Holmes had a small house where she could set for hours with her line angling for the dusky inhabitants of the stream. The house has been changed by the present owner, Mr. Smythe of Greenville, but the tall pines still stand grotesquely against the sky line and the wind still sighs through there to the running accompaniment of the river below

To Mr. Evans and Mr. Holmes belong the credit of having been the first to start the colony, for it was not until 1863 that the third member arrived, Mr. Frank Valentine whose ancestral home in England

adjoined the Holmes' place there. The little colony set in the wilderness and the surrounding mountains looked wild and cold to Mrs. Valentine, whose girlhood home had been in Australia. Mr. Valentine bought the place adjoining "The Bluff", and his house was set down in the valley and lacked the extended view of the Holmes' house. But there is a sense of cosy hominess about the low English house with the great mountains frowning over it. Mr. Valentine was a very fine musician and brought out with him a small organ over which he spent many happy hours. So wonderfully could he play that people in passing the home would never believe that he did not have a pipe organ. Following the Valentines came many other people—Mr. Joudweine who was a famous singer and who spent long hours with Mr. Valentine. Another Welsh family called Thomas joined the colony. Their home was further back in the mountains and the winding drive gives glimpses of many beautiful vistas and hints of the wonderful view from the house. The Westons, old friends of the Valentines, spent many months with them, although their home was at Fletcher.

To a small log cabin set snug in the foot hills came Mr. Stone from England and with him came Mr. Henry Twyford, who had been sent out by his father to learn farming. Mr. Stone added room and room to the cabin until it rambled all over the landscape, but the farming adventure proved futile. Mr. Stone was too fond of his ease to get out and farm. He was only here a few months but Mr. Twyford stayed and bought a place on the river next to "Brinaven". There he built a house for his stepmother who came out with a couple of sisters, but the country life proved too strenuous for Mrs. Twyford and she soon went back leaving Mr. Twyford here. The house is falling to ruin, but the creaking timbers whisper of times gone by.

Here in the list we find the name of Mr. Wainwright, an Episcopal clergyman, who came here seeing the health he had lost in the Hawaiian Islands. He began religious services first in the houses of the parishioners, later Mr. Valentine gave a church site and the community built a little church on a high hill in the center of the settlement. Back of the altar is a beautiful stained glass window portraying a biblical scene, which it is said was stolen from a church in Wales.

Several young sons of clergymen, who had been living wild lives in "Merrie England" were sent out here in the hope that the quiet life might correct them. The two Cowan boys and a young man named Bentson kept the neighborhood community aroused, but the life was too quiet for them and they finally returned to England, much to the relief of the other members of the settlement.

The social life with that one interruption ran very smoothly and happily. Parties, dances and church affairs kept life from being dull. As the mountains abounded in wild game many famous hunts were held, and the men supplied the tables with meat the year round. The Valentines were the first to leave. They moved into Asheville and from there came to Hendersonville. The Joudweines, Wainwrights, Thomases and Evans soon followed going back to England. The Scotts and Addenbrocks went over the mountains to Knoxville, Tennessee. Of the "Old Timers" only Mr. Eade and Mr. Finwick, a brother of Mrs. Stone, live in the neighborhood. Today the settlement is only a shadow of the past, a grim reminder of time. The houses, most of them empty, especially in winter look down upon the valley and river with their sightless eyes mourning for the lost grandeur.