

Livingston-Watson reunion celebrates 90 years



The Livingston-Watson Family Association celebrated their 90th reunion, with a 2-day celebration on August 2nd and 3rd in Livingston. Family members traveled from California, Oregon, Washington State, New York, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin for this annual tradition.

Nearly all ancestors who arrived in America came from The Vale of Avoca, Ireland where the terrain and beauty match that of Wisconsin. Copper mining drew them from areas around the British Isles to The Vale of Avoca. Later due to difficult political conditions and the potato famine in Ireland, the Livingstons and Watsons emigrated to America, Canada and Australia. Many settled in the southwest corner of Wisconsin where they were engaged in lead mining, later turning to farming. The area became known as one of the largest lead producing areas of the country.

The Livingstons and Watsons figured prominently in the area. The village of Livingston was named after Hugh Livingston, who was born in Ireland in 1819 and emigrated to Wisconsin in 1848.

Festivities began Friday at 1 pm at Livingston United Methodist Church with Hannah Hill Rudstam's presentation of family history, how the families came to settle in Ireland and later Wisconsin, and their stories of leaving their beloved home in Ireland.

Crow Branch was the settling place of many ancestors who were engaged in lead mining. The Crow

Branch area, about 2.5 miles southwest of Livingston, was a community of cabins and mining sites called the "Crow Branch 40." Today the area has little that could be recognized as a community, but Frank Livingston, a family historian, recorded that under the brush and grass one can still find red clay thrown into mounds by miners as they dug and tunneled veins of lead.

A driving tour of historical locations included Crow Branch, Hill-Watson family farm where they raised their 11 children, Livingston Park (the original reunion location), 7-Ft Bridge, and the Rock Church Cemetery. Many family members are buried at Rock Church Cemetery. People enjoyed finding the grave stones of their families, including Thomas Watson Sr., the Teacher, whose stone is marked "Died at Sea." The day concluded with an enjoyable dinner at Tower Junction, Montfort, where cousins exchanged family stories and memories.

Saturday began with a 10:30 Memorial Service at the beautiful Rock Church, built in 1851. Rock Church and Rock Church Cemetery, located approximately 2 miles west of the Village of Livingston, hold great historic significance and are focal points for the reunion. The Rock Church Cemetery contains some of the area's earliest graves and is one of the best kept cemeteries in the area.

The Saturday service included the singing of hymns, accompanied on the pump organ by Kay Moen of Livingston. Pastor Greg Marsh of

the Livingston Free Methodist Church gave an encouraging and uplifting sermon on the importance of families. Randy Warne provided special music, and memorials for family members who have died in the past year were presented.

After ceremonies at Rock Church, everyone gathered at the Livingston United Methodist Church to enjoy a potluck dinner. An afternoon program featured James Hibbard of UW-Platteville who gave a very interesting presentation of researching records and piecing together the history of a person, photo, or area.

A Livingston-Watson website was created in the past year thanks to the efforts of Lance Hill, who gave a brief introduction to the site (<http://livingstonwatson.org>). Family members are welcome to share research, documents, pictures, stories and ideas. The information shared at this year's reunion will be available on-line in the near future.

The event concluded with awards for the youngest, oldest, greatest distance traveled, and longest attendance record. This year's winners were: Alana Roskopf of Sussex, WI, age 4; Charles Bregman of Dubuque, Iowa, age 90; Lance, Joan, Grant, and Grace Hill from Sunnyvale, California 2,100 miles; and Roger Thiede of Dubuque, Iowa for 25 reunions attended.

The Livingston-Watson Family Association meets the first Saturday of August each year. All family members are invited to save the date and join us in 2014.