

**HISTORY AND GENEALOGY  
OF THE THOMAS J. AND  
HENRIETTA (HOWELLS)  
POWELL FAMILIES**

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**W. D. SHIRK**

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# HISTORY AND GENEALOGY

OF THE

Thomas J. and Henrietta (Howells)  
Powell Families

—  
Washington  
D. C.  
By W. D. SHIRK



FAIRFIELD, IOWA  
LEDGER PRINTING HOUSE  
1918

## Preface

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Nearly six years ago, in September, 1912, my wife and I attended the annual reunion of the descendants of the Thomas J. and Henrietta (Howells) Powell family, held at Converse, Ind. At this reunion it was suggested that a family history be started, and kept by the association. It being known that I had in my possession numerous century old letters written by the Powell ancestors, and I being one of the older descendants and having a wide acquaintance in the family, I was called on for a speech but having no talent in that line, I declined, promising that I would have a paper to read by the next reunion. After due consideration, however, I took it on myself to compile a complete genealogy and history of the family, asking or receiving no compensation, other than the consciousness of having tried to do something for the benefit of the coming generations. Having no children of my own, I desired in some way to help the children of those who have been more fortunate than myself, in handing down to them the noble examples of Christian charity, parental affection, temperance, industry, unselfishness and strict honesty of our foreparents; a most noble inheritance, which cannot fail to be an inspiration toward higher ideals and better living. I make no pretensions to literary ability, but in my own way, I have made a great endeavor to gather every available fact and arrange them in as intelligible form as I could. I heartily thank those who so kindly assisted me in my work and gave me so many words of encouragement and commendation, which at times I surely needed in my great effort to get in touch with the nearly eight hundred descendants in twenty-five different states; and to get a correct genealogy and an authentic history.

To the numerous descendants of the Powell Family and its branches, I am pleased to dedicate this book; and if, as I am sincerely trusting, their lives have been made better, because of it, then my highest hopes will have been realized.

Most affectionately, your cousin,

W. D. SHIRK.

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## History and Genealogy of Thomas J. and Henrietta (Howells) Powell

The head of the house of Powells, W. D. Howells informs me, was David Powell, who as he remembers the talk about him, was a man of considerable state and substance, and he thinks he resided in South Wales.

David's brother, William, was the father of Thomas Joseph Powell, the history of whom, with his wife, Henrietta (Howells) Powell, and their descendants, it is the object to compile in this book. Wm. was for many years the steward over Lord Oxford's estates, and in time became wealthy. He was considered one of the largest, if not the largest man in England. We are informed by Mary Davis, whose ancestors were well acquainted with the family, that five ordinary men were buttoned in his waistcoat (vest), her great uncle being one of the men. In driving about the estates he had an attendant, who was seated in the back part of his chaise, who would get off and open and close the gates for him. He no doubt was a resident of Wales, as one of his own estates, designated and known as "Masselau" was situated in Radnorshire, in the Province of Wales, and in the parish of Lanblester. Another known as "Brincough" was located in Llandegley Parish. His son Thomas was left only a life interest in said estates, it being then as now the custom in England, that the estates should be kept intact, and handed down to each succeeding generation, through the oldest son. We are informed that William's wife was a well educated and highly esteemed woman; she was a very affectionate mother and devoted a great deal of her time to teaching her daughters, not only book learning, but in every day's life work.



## Parents of Henrietta Howells

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On the Howells side of our family, I believe I can start back about the year 1600, with our great great grand father, of whom W. C. Howells in his memoir "Life in Ohio 1813-1840," thus writes,— "He was a watch and clock maker, and it is probable that a genius for mechanics, that is active at this time in the family, may have descended from him;" and W. D. Howells writes me, "I know nothing of our families back of our great grand father Howells, unless it may be that his father was settled as a clock maker in London, in Queen Anne's time. I have a great grandfather's clock with the inscription on the dial 'George Howells, Dearfold,' and I conjecture this George Howells to have been our great great grandfather."

Our great grandfather, Thomas Howells, was born in the county of Radnor, Wales, and when a young man went to London to begin life as a watch maker, where he met Miss Susannah Beesley whom he later married. She was a woman of superior qualities, with a strong religious sentiment and taste for poetry, which traits we well know our grandmother (her daughter) inherited to a very great degree. W. D. Howells writes with reference to the Howells ancestry,— "We were all entirely Welsh until our great grandmother came into the family, she was English and apparently the best of us." Soon after their marriage, they removed to Hay, where he engaged in the manufacture of Welsh flannels, a favorite style of woolen goods at that time. So that all may see what a task I have in the compilation of this family history, so that it may be entirely authentic, kindly allow me here to quote from different sources on the same subject.

From a sketch my mother wrote forty years ago, I quote thus, "Soon after the Revolutionary war my grandfather, Thomas Howells, came over to this country, with some woolen goods and with letters

of introduction to the governor of Penn., who offered him six thousand acres of land at a six pence per. a. if he would come over here and establish woolen mills. Grandfather wanted to come, but his wife would not consent to it." And I gather this from W. C. Howells' book. "I have often heard that my grandfather made a journey to this country during the presidency of Gen'l Washington, bringing with him a quantity of Welsh flannels, which he sold to good advantage. He landed these at Philadelphia, where he made the acquaintance of the president, who recommended him to settle in Virginia near the new city of Washington then just founded. He fell in with the project so far as to bargain for a large tract of land near the Potomac River, for which he was to pay an English shilling per acre. But after returning to England he gave it up. I have never learned exactly where the land was, but if the tract was as large as I have heard it was (several thousand acres) there is no doubt that much of it is not worth a shilling an acre now. Some members of grandfather's family have fancied that we had "Castles in Spain" on this land, but I could never learn that he ever acquired any title to the land, and I think his good business habits forbid the supposition that he laid out money in such a speculation." And from a sketch sent me recently from Ohio, by one of the descendants I find the following,—"Our great grandfather was extensively engaged in the manufacture of woolen goods in England, and was induced to come to the United States and establish a factory in New England, by Gen'l. George Washington. Doubtless his settlement in this country induced grandfather Powell to come to America."

In this case I am inclined to the belief that the W. C. Howells statement is more probably correct. In most cases where there are different reports, I choose the ones that are substantiated by old records and often by the old letters, a hundred and more years old, which I fortunately have in my possession.

In the manufacturing of flannels, he seems to have been very successful, amassing quite a fortune which gave him the means of maintaining a good social position. In a letter I received from W.

D. Howells, in 1892, I read as follows,—“I visited the Hay when I was last abroad, and found three old stone woolen mills, founded by our great grandfather; one is now a stable, one a printing office and book store, one still a woolen mill, where I bought a very ugly rug or blanket for father.”

I will here state, by way of explanation, that whenever I say OUR, I mean often only to include my first cousins and myself.

I think it well to quote in part from some old letters, which will better acquaint us with our forefathers, and will enable us to judge, somewhat, of their characters and understanding.

One from our great grandfather, Thomas Howells, to grandfather and grandmother Thomas and Henrietta (Howells) Powell, was dated at Hay 7th mo. 23th, 1808, began thus,

My Dear Children:

I am sorry to find by Henrietta's letter rec'd this day, that you think, I am not so mindful of you as you have a right to expect, but

In in this you are mistaken. \* \* \* \* It was folded so as to enclose the writing, and answer for an envelope; then sealed with a red wax wafer. I have not the exact date of the marriage of our grand parents, but the above shows they were married at that date. To more definitely fix the date of their marriage, I will quote from a letter I rec'd from Wm. Cooper Howells in 1892. He writes, \* \* \* \* “My father began life in England and with my dear mother and me emigrated to this country in 1808. Your grandfather married my aunt about the same time, and came to America several years later \* \* \* \*.”

In another letter from our great grandfather, I find the date when our grandparents came to America, quite definitely fixed. I quote it in part.

“Hay 11th Mo. 24th, 1817.

Dear Thomas:

When I left thee and thy dear family last time at Leominster, I had no kind of doubt but thou would have rote to me from Liverpool, as thou promised, but not being so indulged, I still expected thou