



Roger Flick - Squaw Peak Chapter President



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Provo Library at Academy Square at **BYU Academy Library**. **November 19, 2014** Diane addressed the “Sons of Utah Pioneers.” Roger Flick, Squaw Peak Chapter President.

“The Mormon Waldensians, Who they were. What they accomplished. Why everyone should write their family history.

Thanks to Roger Flick and Pioneer Magazine for devoting the entire May issue to the History of Utah’s Italian Pioneers. With Henry B. Eyring at a conference at the Vatican on family values and a Mormon temple now under construction in Rome, this a timely subject.

Let’s start with a little background. In 1981 I enrolled in a BYU class taught on Wednesday nights in Salt Lake City. After completing 2 more classes in the series, which I needed to renew my teaching certificate, I decided to continue since these classes led to a master’s degree in Family and Local History. It was a lot of work. Often I would say to classmate Lanora Meeks, “I can’t believe we are paying them to put us through this!”

Most were teachers. I did not have a contract and was substituting. Still the heavy reading and writing assignments were time consuming and becoming a burden. When Professor York required us to read 800 pages each week, the class rebelled. Neil York is the husband of Carol Makita and this was in the fall of 1982. Carol and I were both pregnant. Carol delivered a girl I gave birth to my 6th son that November. I only missed one class. When Professor York saw me he said, “Wow! that’s the pioneer spirit!” When he learned we had named our son Neil, he was delighted assuming we had named the baby after him. I never revealed that he was not my favorite professor nor that my husband had chosen that name. I was hoping for a girl that I planned to name “Tia Moriah.”

When it came time to choose a subject for my thesis I decided to write on polygamy. While researching that subject in the genealogical library, Jim Kimball, the church historian, called me into his office and strongly suggested that I switch to something else. He felt it was the wrong time to write on polygamy. As various groups were looking for historical material to justify this practice Jim felt a thesis on this subject might prove embarrassing to the church.

Since little had been written on the Waldensians and there were many discrepancies in the official records, I decided to write a collective biography on the Italian Saints who emigrated to Utah between 1854 and 1870. I felt it important to set the record straight. I had Farley relatives who believed that Lydia Pons, our Waldensian grandmother, had descended from French aristocracy. They did not know the real story which is much more compelling. Tonight I'll focus on Chapters 1 & 2 of my thesis. Roger Illustrated and printed Chapter 3 in the May Issue of Pioneer Magazine. I've posted the thesis and story of my trip to Italy on line.

Chapter 1, Who were these people?

Was it possible that the Waldensian Church had preserved Christianity in its purity? Were these valleys the last strongholds of ancient Christianity? I had found one small piece of evidence that seemed to tie the Malan family into the early Christian Era. Family tradition had it that the surname Malan originated in North Western Italy and was originally a term of abuse used on the early Christians. It meant "the Leper." The Malan family possessed a very old family crest which bore the date 1250 and the motto GOD IS MY REFUGE with mountain peaks in the background (symbolizing the Cottian Alps.) Were these families among the early Christians whose ancient ancestors were persecuted in the arenas of Rome? These Mountain Christians were known as the Vaudois in French, Valdese in Italian or Waldenses in English.

I had researched old documents in the Cambridge University Library but the results were disappointing. I wanted to know from whence did the Waldensian Church derive its authority? In 1850, the authority issue was of primary importance to the Italian converts. I wanted to know specifically what caused Berthelemy Pons, my ancestor, to be dissatisfied with the Mountain church and how it compared with Mormonism.

Do they go back in unbroken succession to the Apostles? Are they descendants of various groups of dissenters who fled to the wild mountains of Piedmont to escape religious persecution? Or are they the heirs of Peter Waldo, the 12th century religious reformer?

I concluded, it appeared that the Waldensians had faith or "light" enough to sustain them through seven hundred years of intense persecution. Whether this "light" came directly from Christ's apostles, or was distilled through Peter Waldo and his Poor Men, or came to them as a result of regular scripture reading, is difficult to judge. Their piety and submission to civil authority, while defending their right to liberty of conscience, is evidence of strong character.

The fact that they persisted for so many centuries despite every attempt to extinguish them denotes determination and commitment. Their history testified that they were a unique people in the annals of religious history.”

Michael Quinn, chairman of my committee, took exception to Chapter 1. He felt I had included too much speculation and as neither of us were experts in early religious history, he wanted me to delete it. I argued that it established who these people were. Mike and I spent an hour on the phone on Halloween night 1984 arguing about this. We finally agreed to let the committee decide. So I rewrote Chapter 1 once again moving lots of material into the footnotes. During my oral exam Dr. Quinn brought up the subject. Luckily Louie Cardon, a history professor and Waldensian descendent said, *“Chapter 1 establishes who these people were. It should be included.”*

You become an authority on a subject if you are the only person in the world who has written on it. I visited the Waldensian valleys in the fall of 1984 and happened to arrive when the Waldensian church was having their annual Synod (international conference.) I was warmly welcomed and treated as the delegate from the “Mormon Colonies.” We Mormons may not know much about Waldensians but the Mountain church had not forgotten us. I learned that the valleys had become so overcrowded from the mid 1850’s onwards that many were forced to leave. Then the Waldensian church did a very courageous thing. They encouraged those emigrating not to organize churches in their new locations but to go into the world and become part of established Protestant churches. They were told to *“Do as the spirit directs.”* Several delegates asked me whatever happened to the Mormon Colonies? I replied that this was the subject of my master’s thesis. My son owns a printing company and so published 100 copies to fill the request I received from New York, Italy and other locations. I finally posted my thesis online at dianestokoe.com.

Chapter 2 “Conversion to Mormonism.”

When Lorenzo Snow read of the Waldensians in Liverpool, enroute to Italy, he discovered that the Vadios, like the Mormons, had suffered severe religious persecution and had been forced to seek sanctuary in a mountain retreat. Because of similarities in the faith, he predicted *“thousands would, ere long, embrace the gospel in Italy, and that from the commencement of labors in Piedmont the work should extend triumphantly.”*

Many were prepared to receive the missionaries. Some even had prophetic dreams. One sister greeted Lorenzo Snow with these words: *“Mr. Snow, it is the first time I see you with my bodily eyes, but the Lord gave me a manifestation a few weeks ago, in which I saw you as plain as I see you now.”*

Madeline Cardon's childhood dream convinced her father to contact the elders when they came to the valley many years later. *"I well remember my father coming home on Saturday afternoon and asking my mother to get his Sunday clothes ready. He had just heard of three strangers in Palais de La Tour, preaching the same doctrine which the three had taught in my childhood dream. . . So unusual was the word which the missionaries carried that the men stayed up all night learning of the newly revealed truths."* Jessie Farley Johnson, my own mother, often had prophetic dreams. I've wondered if the tendency could be in our DNA?

John D. Malan, son of a prominent landowner, had become dissatisfied with many of the teachings of the mountain church. Barthelemy Pons, my ancestor, became convinced and exclaimed, *"This is the church for me; I know it is truth."* Pons was baptized less than a month after the Malan clan. Many Italian saints called ours, "the American Church" which I find interesting. This is how the newly baptized Blacks in South Africa describe Mormonism.

Still, finding converts did not come easy to the missionaries. Snow complained in a letter to President Hyde, dated Jan. 25, 1851:

Every man holds a creed which has been transmitted from sire to son for a thousand years, whether he be Protestant or Catholic; and often he will lay his hand on his heart and swear by the faith of his forefathers, that he will live and die as they have lived and died."

Elder Snow had expected to convert thousands and wondered why it was not happening until he had a dream. He dreamed he was fishing and disappointed over such a small catch. *"I thought it very strange, that among such a multitude of noble, superior looking fish, I should have made so small a haul. But all my disappointment vanished when I discovered that its qualities were of a very extraordinary character."*

What was accomplished is best described in a poem by Felicia Hermans.

"We are watchers of a beacon, Whose light must never die;

We are guardians of an altar, Midst the silence of the sky.

The rocks yield founts of courage, Struck forth as by Thy Rod.

For the strength of the hills we bless Thee, Our God, our father's God. . ."

For those who joined the church there was no alternative but emigration: Marie Madeleine Cardon records:

"We loved our native land. We had a deep regard for our associates and especially for the Vaudois who had struggled for so many centuries to obtain freedom of worship. Regardless of

the strong ties which we had for that land and people, we were willing to sacrifice them for the gospel's sake. The spirit of gathering rested upon us."

This is a remarkable story of 700 years of commitment to truth. It's a story of faith, courage and integrity. A story that is badly needed in today's world of confusion and eroding moral values.

Why write your family history? We are told over and over in the scriptures—Oh Remember! Remember! Did your mother ever say, "Remember who you are!" How can you remember if you don't know?

Mothers have a huge impact on society - in effect, women are generally the last strong hold against the downfall of a nation and when the nation turns to pride and personal wickedness as a lifestyle, the nation is doomed. Isaiah 3:16.

Family values are under attack. Over the past three days President Eyring has been meeting with the Pope and religious leaders from 28 countries. In his opening address Pope Francis confirmed that *"marriage between a man and woman is a "fundamental pillar" of society and children have the right to grow up with a mother and a father."*

We visited Tom's 97 year old mother in 2011 and at that time long term memory was good. We visited her again in February after returning from our mission to South Africa. Her condition had deteriorated. She did not even know who she was. This inspired me to finish writing the Stokoe Family History and post it online. I wondered at the time if anyone would bother to read it. We went back to Hawaii for the funeral of my sister-in-law in July and Tom's nephew's wife, Kele, thanked me for posting it saying, *"I read it to my children every night."*

Elephants and Trauma – Culling of the older elephants in South Africa resulted in abnormal responses to high-level threats to the young. According to a 10 year study conducted by the University of Sussex young elephants orphaned by culling operations came to exhibit symptoms similar to those experienced by people diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. This says a lot about the importance of elders and grandparents in a society.

I want to thank my sister Laraine for typing up "Farley Roots," a collection of bios and stories compiled by two Farley aunts over forty years ago. I found the typescript in a box of genealogy material I had stored in the garage. Now, I can edit and add photos to these faith promoting stories and bios in "New Family Search" for those who do not know these ancestors. "Oh Remember, Remember!"

After the article appeared in the May issue of Pioneer Magazine I had a call from a man asking why people don't know about the faith of the Italian saints. He was particularly concerned

about young people who do not know about their Waldensian ancestors. *“They need to know, he said. And it’s our job to tell them!”*

I must acknowledge the help of my husband Tom who held down two jobs in an effort to support our family as I worked on my master’s degree. He’s a great editor. Late one night we were going over the manuscript when we decided at 3 A.M. it was time to go to bed. Tired, I concluded our prayer by saying, *“Please dear Lord, help us bring this thesis to a successful confusion,”* and we burst out laughing.

I hope what I’ve shared with you tonight is not “successful confusion.” I hope you’ve learned who the Mormon Waldensians were and why they are so important, and I hope you’ve been motivated to write and share your own history.