

The Waldensian Parish Registers

A while back, a man in Argentina asked if we could help him identify his Waldensian ancestors. He sent the names and dates that had been passed down in his family. In reply, we asked for a few more details, which he was able to provide. He had already done that most important first step, namely collecting whatever information was available between himself and his immigrant ancestor.

After he sent the information he could find from sources in his family and in Argentina, we were in fact able to help him. Using the details he sent, we turned to the extractions of the parish registers to extend his pedigree and sent him information that took **sixty pedigree charts** to record. That was relatively easy to do by following the steps described in this section.

The Surviving Parish Registers

The surviving parish registers for Angrogna begin in 1691, but the registers for Pomaretto don't begin until 1715—twenty-five years after the return from exile. The others vary between those dates. Parish Registers were kept before the exile, of course, but they were destroyed when the Duke of Savoy tried to completely annihilate the Waldensians in 1686.

For a brief review of **Waldensian history**, go to: www.Waldensian.Info/History.htm

Even though the survivors returned, the families and the land had been so devastated that it took years to stabilize Waldensian society again. Children were born, couples married, and people died during those intervening years, of course, but society wasn't settled enough for a systematic recording of those events.

The Microfilms

In 1948, realizing that World War II had threatened the destruction of such records as these parish registers, the Utah Genealogical Society (with the permission of the Waldensian Church) microfilmed almost all of these surviving parish registers. The purpose was to preserve the records permanently. A copy of the microfilms was given to the Waldensian Archives, and of course copies are available through the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, and therefore through their network of Family History Centers.

However, two parishes were *not* microfilmed. The minister of Pral (Italian: Prali) was away from the Valleys and, without his permission, those records were not microfilmed. The second parish *not* microfilmed was Mentoulles, in the Pragela Valley. However, the Mentoulles records have since been printed.

For details about the **Mentoulles Parish Register**, go to: www.Waldensian.Info/PR-Mentoulles.htm

Parish Records on the Internet

Some of the information from the Parish Records is available from the FamilySearch Organization on one or more of its internet sites. FamilySearch is the umbrella organization for the various family history projects sponsored by the LDS Church. Their operations include the Family History Library in Salt Lake City as well as the 4,600 branch libraries in 126 countries. Their collection of genealogical holdings is the largest in the world.

Founded in 1894 as the Genealogical Society of Utah, they began microfilming genealogical records in 1938. In 1963, they sent copies of their microfilm records to a storage location deep inside large granite mountain vault to insure that the records would be permanently preserved. Beginning in 1998, digital imaging began replacing microfilming. As more records become available in digital format, images of original records have been added to the internet. Although 100 million digital images are added each year, conversion from microfilm to digital images is expected to take several years so you will need to search the microfilms to find most of the original records you need.

In 1999, FamilySearch launched a website called **FamilySearch** (familysearch.org) to make information extracted from microfilmed records more readily available. In 2007, they launched a **new** website, ironically named **New FamilySearch** (new.familysearch.org). Because of the similarity of the names, the two websites are often confused. The important thing to remember is that FamilySearch contains raw data extracted from genealogical records. New FamilySearch contains information that has been researched and organized into family groups and pedigrees. You may find information about your Waldensian ancestors in either or both of these databases. The newest version of New FamilySearch, called **FamilySearch Family Tree** (familysearch.org/tree/), is currently undergoing a public Beta Test. After completion of the testing, it will replace New FamilySearch. The FamilySearch web sites have over 10 million visits per day so it may seem slow at certain times of the day.

FamilySearch plans to eventually digitize and put on their websites the data currently contained in 2.4 million rolls of microfilm. Technology advances have helped to automate the transfer to digital images; however, indexing of the names of people on those images is still a very labor intensive process. Despite the herculean indexing efforts of 358,000 volunteers worldwide, this process is expected to take several years. One of the major projects currently in process is a joint effort with the National Archives of Italy to digitize and index 115 million pages of Italian government birth, marriage, and death certificates.

Nearly 71,000 images of Waldensian Church records have been put on FamilySearch.org in a collection called Waldensian Evangelical Church Records. The collection covers parish records in the following locations:

<u>Angrogna</u>	<u>Bobbio Pellice</u>	<u>Luserna San Giovanni</u>
<u>Massello</u>	<u>Perrero-Maniglia</u>	<u>Pinerolo</u>
<u>Pomaretto</u>	<u>Prali</u>	<u>Pramollo</u>
<u>Prarostino - Roccapiatta</u>	<u>Riclarretto - Villasecca</u>	<u>Roderetto</u>
<u>Rorà</u>	<u>San Germano</u>	<u>Torino</u>
<u>Torre Pellice</u>	<u>Villar Pellice</u>	

Most of the records are from the 1800s although some are earlier and a few later. So far, only the records from Torre Pellice have been indexed; however, if you know the location and approximate date, you can browse the collection by clicking on the location above. Although the coverage is far from complete for many locations, it is worth spending the time to see if your ancestor's records are online. Because the coverage so far is not complete, you will probably need to rely on the record collections described below to find most of your Waldensian ancestors.

The Piedmont Project

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Genealogical Society of Utah had a group of people who could read French (the language of most of the registers) extract the information from the Waldensian parish registers and group the results into families. That was a massive effort, of course, taking a few years to complete.

But as a result, you can quite easily obtain the information from the parish registers in 2 formats. How to access each format is described later, but first, here's a brief overview of them.

1. **The typed copies of the Family Group records.** Because they are the easiest to read and use, you will undoubtedly want to start with these.

To find your ancestors in the **typed Waldensian Family Group Records (Piedmont Project)**, go to: www.Waldensian.Info/PR-TypedFGR.htm

2. **The microfilmed original parish registers, written in French.** Because these were written by hand and long ago, these are more difficult to read than the typed Family Group Records, but the entries contain more detail than just the names, dates, and places that were extracted. You soon *will* need that additional detail in order to extend your pedigree.

To learn how to use the **microfilmed original Waldensian Parish Registers**, go to: www.Waldensian.Info/PR-Original.htm