

## **Bridging the Gap between Parish Registers and Notary Records**

Unfortunately, there is a major gap—from about 1709 back to about 1685, about 24 years or virtually a whole generation—between the first surviving parish registers and the useful notary records before them. We call them “useful” because, although there are notary records during those years, most of the people named in them were not Waldensians, at least between 1686-1690.

That is because most of the surviving Waldensians were in exile in Switzerland or Germany at that time. The exceptions were Waldensians who had abjured—becoming, in name, Catholic to save their lives or the lives of their loved ones. (After the Return, these happily returned to and were happily received back into the Waldensian Church.)

Starting in 1690, the Notary Records begin to be somewhat more useful, for the survivors had returned. But these acts refer to people who are, in many cases, not easy to identify with the people named in the records before 1685. Many have the same names, but it is very difficult, from these records alone, to determine if they are, in fact, the same people, or merely relatives with the same name.

Waldensian historians estimate that there were probably about 14,000 Waldensians in the Valleys when 1685 began. A compilation of the rosters and other records of the exiles in Switzerland and Germany showed that only about 3,950 of them survived.

There are two main types of records that help bridge the gap between the parish registers and the “useful” notary records. The first we will explore is the record made when the survivors returned and the Duke ordered them to justify their right to their ancestral inheritance. The second is a record concerning the exiles themselves.