

Inheritance Claims of the Exile Survivors (1697)

After the "Glorious Return" in 1690, other Waldensian exiles began returning to the Valleys. But the devastation had created great turmoil. Whole branches of most families had been completely destroyed. Property ownership was unclear; the Waldensians had simply never had to deal with inheritance questions of such great complexity, and confusion abounded.

The Duke of Savoy finally ordered the surviving Waldensians to appear before his agents, each claimant providing two knowledgeable witnesses to attest to the basis of their claims to their ancestral inheritance. The result is a very rich source of information about Waldensian families that helps bridge the gap between the notary records before the imprisonment and exile (that is, the notary records before 1686) and the notary records after the Glorious Return (notary records beginning in 1690), and the renewal of the parish registers (1709 for some parishes, shortly thereafter for others).

In these records, the survivor almost always names his or her father (and, often, when and where the father died) and any surviving siblings; and if the claimant had any rights to an inheritance left by his mother, she also is named, as well as any other immediate relatives who might have claim to the property. At least part of the mother's inheritance typically went to the daughter(s).

To benefit from these records, by now **you should have already identified your Waldensian ancestry through the earliest ancestor(s) named in the parish registers**. That should give you a clear idea as to which locality you should search first. Please note that not every town had its own set of Claims records. For smaller towns, check the larger ones, starting with the larger town nearest to the town of your ancestors.

Sometimes you can determine which line of people with so many of the same names living in the same town are your ancestors by comparing their land holdings over time. A man holding specific land in one generation was likely an heir of another man with the same surname holding that same specific land in an earlier generation—unless the earlier man sold the land or died without children.

Of course, in those days they didn't have home addresses, so to distinguish land ownership for legal purposes (inheritances, marriage settlements, and such), the notary record described the adjacent land and its owners. At times, you can find in these Claims the same neighboring land held by a family of the same surname you seek, mentioned perhaps in a land sale several years earlier. That is, the Claims records and the Notary records of the same land with the same people help you to recognize that both sets of records likely pertain to the same family.

How to Find the Different Ways a Surname Is Spelled

In order to find all the acts referring to your ancestors, you need to know the different ways the surname might be spelled in the records. Spelling was not standardized then; the recorder spelled the name as he heard it, and if his hearing was failing, or if the informant were tired and didn't speak up, the result could vary considerably.

Important: Before you start to search any of the Claims records or the Notary Records to seek for your ancestral surname, you must decide on a way to find **all** the various ways the surname you seek may be spelled in the records.