

## **Waldensian Customs That Can Affect Your Research**

Although our Waldensian ancestors were in many ways distinct, they were of necessity a reflection of their times—just as we are in many ways a reflection of our times.

In the 1500s and 1600s, many areas still had echoes of the feudal system, and the Valleys were no exception. The people owed allegiance to the lords of the area as well as to the Duke of Savoy, and except when intense persecution threatened their very survival, they were for the most part loyal.

They were also a reflection of their times and the pragmatic necessity of providing for their children. When daughters married, they received a marriage settlement or dowry. The oldest son received the primary inheritance, with younger sons receiving lesser allotments. Over the course of a few generations, a family's holdings could be severely reduced unless a "beneficial" marriage could be arranged. Of course if someone in the family died without surviving children or grandchildren, the next in line would expand their holdings.

From early times, therefore, land became a practical consideration when a child married. One way to restore the family's prior holdings was to marry, for example, a second cousin or other relative, especially if she were the only surviving child, the heiress of a portion of property that had gone with that branch of the family in some previous generation.

In fact, most Waldensians in a given village were related. After centuries of intermarriage in a small village, how could it be otherwise? How could they not be related to virtually everyone else in the village, if not by blood, then by marriage?

Our modern feelings may perhaps be troubled at letting such crass considerations affect a marriage choice, but our ancestors did not feel that way. Do not be offended at the choices your ancestors made. There is ample evidence that they were thoughtful and careful and did the best they could under their times and circumstances.

We'll need our best, most consistent effort to do as well in our time as they did in theirs.