

## **Doing Research and Temple Work for Ancestors Born Prior to 1500 AD: Examples from My Personal Ancestral File**

Brigham Vernon Cheney

As a child I heard many stories from my parents, Silas Lavell Cheney and Klara Young, about their faithful and courageous pioneer ancestors. Later, upon reviewing the family research, it became evident that my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had been deeply engaged in doing temple work for themselves and their ancestors. Their work had ended on many lines in the British Isles of the sixteenth century. As my own research began, I had no expectation that the work would take me far beyond that starting point. It has been exciting to discover that several McAllister and McGregor lines of my wife, Marsali, branch into those of my parents. Together, we have done temple work for many of our common great grandparents and their children who lived in centuries past. These spiritual experiences create intense feelings of love and joy for family members who did not receive these blessings in their lifetime.

Our family-history research continued to times and places that we never could have imagined. My wife and I desire to tell our children about discoveries which add greatly to the knowledge of their heritage. Many family names in our personal ancestral file have been found in the submissions to the IGI of other seemingly unrelated LDS members. This suggests that we do indeed share a common heritage as descendants of Abraham in accordance with our patriarchal blessings.

We will explore the family file to discover the truth of some “legends” told by our family historians as the stories came to them generation by generation from the distant past.

Some of the practical topics that will be addressed are:

1. Basic assumptions for making estimates of dates when there is limited information about the individual, a child or a parent.
2. Spelling of names:  
Language as a method of communication is primarily spoken and secondarily written. The manner of representing the sound of a name in the written symbols of the language often differs among clerks and historians who produced the records. Record keepers in the medieval era were generally churchmen whose writings of names and events were recorded in Latin. These primary sources are not generally available. Many scholars have produced compilations from these primary records in modern languages that serve as good secondary sources. However, one finds variation in the spelling of names by different historians. When different spellings of the names of medieval ancestors are found, it is imperative not to submit a name for an individual if the Temple work has already been done under an obvious variant of the spelling.
3. Requirements for obtaining Temple-work approval for individuals born prior to 1500 AD:
  - a) Search the IGI to find whether work has already been completed. This must be done exhaustively to avoid duplication.
  - b) Submit a GEDCOM file processed by Temple Ready for Windows on a 3½” floppy disk to the Medieval Section of the Family History Department at the following address:  
Ruth Inman  
JSM 6W  
50 East North Temple Street  
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-6400
  - c) Do not submit too many names in one file. It is possible for Sister Inman to process 20-30 names within a week of receiving the file. More names will take much longer.
  - d) The submission should be accompanied by a letter explaining your relationship to those ancestors included in the file and any evidence found in your research that clarifies their identity.

## Family-History Mystery #6

Alister mac Alistair (born ca 1229 near West Tarbert, Argyll and Bute, Scotland) is the first chieftain of the MacAlister clan of Scotland. Roughly 439 years separate the birth of this chieftain from the next established ancestor in this ancient clan, Patrick McAllister Sr, who migrated to Maryland from Scotland as a young indentured servant about 1680.

Alister, who became constable of Tarbert Castle, is a grandson of Donald mac Ranald, the 3rd Lord of the Isles and great great grandson of Somerled, the 1st Lord of the Isles in Scotland. Somerled has long been considered a pure Gaelic hero who drove the Vikings from the ancient homeland of his family on the Kintyre peninsula in Scotland. He followed this conquest by taking control of the Hebrides and the Isle of Man from the Norwegians. As Lord of the Isles, he was as powerful as the Scottish king, Malcolm IV. On the eve of a battle to determine whether Somerled would in fact reign as king over the Isles independent of Malcolm, Somerled was assassinated by his own young nephew at the behest of the Scottish king.

From annals of Scotland and Ireland, we know that his grandfather, Gilledomnan, was driven from his lands on the Kintyre peninsula by Magnus III Barfod, king of Norway. The family fled to Ireland, where his father, Gillebride, eventually married the daughter of Princess Blathmin Ua Briain. In 1130, after the death of King Sigurd I of Norway, Gillebride attempted to regain their ancient homeland of Kintyre, but his forces were defeated by the Vikings. Nevertheless, the family remained in hiding on the peninsula using guerrilla tactics to drive the Norseman from their territory in the course of a long campaign. Eventually Olaf, the Viking king of the Isle of Man, gave his daughter, Ragnhild, to Somerled in marriage with a contract allowing each to rule his own domain in peace. In 1156, after the death of Olaf, Somerled defeated the Vikings in a great sea battle that made him Lord of the Isles.

The fact that royal Norwegian blood flowed in the veins of Somerled's mother was known to the McAllister clan, since John D. T. McAllister stated in his journal that Somerled descended from the very king of Norway who drove the family from its homeland. Your task as a family-history detective is to discover the relationship of Somerled to Magnus III. What interesting stories do you find as you study the notes for family members in the patriarchal line of Alister mac Alistair to Gilledomnan and the matriarchal line of Somerled to Magnus III?\*

While it is not yet possible to trace descent through the McAllister line, you are related to Somerled and Magnus III through other family lines. Use the relationship calculator in the PAF 5.2 program to find lines of descent from Somerled and Magnus III to you.

\*One of the interesting stories is how Magnus III came to claim the Kintyre peninsula through a famous portage across the peninsula ending at West Tarbert. A Google map showing the approximate route along modern highway A83 may be located by typing West Tarbert, Argyll and Bute in the search box. Reduce the scale of the map by clicking on the zoom-out button to see the whole peninsula as it points southward toward Ireland.

## Family-History Mystery #7

Brigham Vernon Cheney

Anak Suren-Pahlav (c225-287AD) was a noble of the family holding the hereditary right to crown Persian kings. He was an agent of Bahram II, the fifth great king\* of Persia in the Sassanid dynasty, which was established in 228AD by Ardashir I with the defeat and death in battle of the last great king of the Parthian Empire, Vologases VI Arsakuni. Bahram II desired to add Armenia to his realm, but it was ruled by Khosroes II Arsakuni (c225-287AD), a descendant of the second king of Parthia, Tiridates I Arsakuni (c280-214 BC). Since the predecessors of Bahram had been unable overcome Armenia by military means, the king sent Anak as an emissary to the Armenian king with the ulterior motive of assassinating this potential rival. Although the act was accomplished, Anak could not escape the ensuing manhunt. He and his family were tracked down and executed with the exception of a son, Grigor, who was being schooled in Cappadocia. Bahram could not capitalize on his treachery since Trdat III (c255-330 AD) succeeded his father on the throne of Armenia with full support of the people.

We are descended from both Grigor and Trdat III, who were instrumental in establishing Christianity as the state religion of Armenia in 301AD. Your task as a family-history detective is to search the family-file names and notes for the following information: 1) the roles played by Grigor and Trdat III in bringing Christianity to Armenia; 2) your relationship to Grigor and Trdat III; 3) the marriage that links the Arsakuni and Suren-Pahlav families; 4) the name of the trade route between the Parthian and Chinese empires established during the lifetime of the great king Sanatruk I Arsakuni; 5) the name by which commercial traffic involving the Roman, Parthian, and Indian empires is known; 6) the name of the Parthian ruler who lived during the time of Herod the Great (73-4BC), and your opinion of my ideas concerning the wise men from the east who gave homage to the infant Messiah; 7) names of Armenian Christians of the first century AD, one of whom recanted his faith, and another who was martyred because she would not recant. Hint: look for a namesake of a Parthian great king born between 150 and 170 BC.

\*The title “great king” (“shahanshah” or “king of kings”) was applied to the rulers of the oriental empires centered in the modern state of Iran. Subkings of regions within the empire were accorded the title “shah.” The title “King of *Region*” is used in the family file for all rulers, where Parthia is understood to be the entire empire and provinces of the empire are given their ancient names. Most of the earlier kings had many wives and concubines, although only one wife held the title of queen during her lifetime. The heir of the king was the oldest son of the queen. In listing only those who succeeded to throne, or were known for other reasons, the families in the ancestral file are very incomplete.

## **A Viking Family-History Mystery for My Grandchildren**

Brigham Vernon Cheney

Is it history or myth? This is the question many ask about stories that come down from generation to generation by word of mouth. It is easier to believe written accounts recorded near the time of the events as being true narrations by historians who have obtained the facts from credible sources. The carefully memorized names of important ancestors told by a family historian to his successor are more likely to be correct than remembered details of the individual lives as the generations increase. However, variations in the spelling of those names when recorded on paper by different historians are to be expected.

We have many Viking progenitors who kept the oral genealogy of their ancestral chieftains. Work has been done in the temple for these chieftains, their wives, and known children back to the time of Godwulf, who was born about 90 AD in the region north of the Black Sea known anciently as Scythia and Sarmatia. According to Norse legends this ancient homeland was Asgard. To put things in historical perspective, Godwulf began life approximately when John the Beloved recorded the biblical record known as Revelation. Of particular interest is Odin, the 3rd great-grandson of Godwulf, who was born circa 215 AD. All of the Germanic and Scandinavian tribes of later centuries prior to the acceptance of Christianity came to regard Odin and his wife Frigga as the chief gods of their pagan religion. In 300 AD, the young chieftain of Godwulf's tribe was Frodi, a great-grandson of Odin. According to Norse legends Frodi was killed during the attack of a great sea-king named Mysing. Odin, the patriarch of the tribe, assumed leadership in directing the migration of his people northward to escape the peril. In Scandinavia, one of Odin's sons became king of the Danes and a second became King of the Saxons in northern Germany.

Another Viking tribe was led by Yngvi who was a king in Turkey--most likely in the mountainous northeastern area. His son, Njord, who lived at the same time as Odin, led his followers to Asgard. Freya, the daughter of Njord, was deified as the goddess of fertility in the pagan Norse religion. The chieftain of the tribe of Njord at the time when migration from Asgard occurred was named Svegdi. He vainly tried to unite with Odin as they fled north. His people ultimately settled in Sweden where they established family ties to chieftains in Norway and Finland.

The vivid imaginations of Scandinavian and German story tellers, who provided entertainment in the halls of the tribal leaders during long, cold winters, turned the real events in the lives of their progenitors into fables filled with strange beings and wondrous happenings. Yet, a kernel of truth remains hidden in the tales. My speculations about that kernel of truth are given in the notes for Odin, Frodi, Svegdi, and Svegdi's father.

You will note that the Vikings used patronymic names. In this system the surname for a son is formed by adding the suffix "sson" to the father's given name, while the suffix for a daughter is "sdottir."

I think these ancestors are descendants of a certain biblical people. I also think that Godwulf had a wonderful experience during his lifetime involving John the Beloved and the Savior. What do you think after reading the notes for Odin, Frodi, Svegdi and his father? Do the patriarchal blessings of your father and mother lend some support to this belief? As part of our family history, unknown to most others, these thoughts should not be discussed casually with friends and acquaintances. Most will not be ready to accept the ideas.

# Family Group Record

<b>Husband</b> <b>Odin Frithuwaldsson</b>				
Born	Abt 0215	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	Temple
			Baptized    20 Jun 1911	
			Endowed    19 Mar 1925	
			SealPar    28 Apr 1925	SGEOR
			SealSp    16 Dec 1954	SLAKE
<b>Married</b>	Abt 0235	Place , , Ukraine		
Other Spouse	Skadi of Asgard			
<b>Married</b>	Abt 0236	Place , , Ukraine	SealSp    19 May 1955	
Other Spouse	Rind of Asgard			
<b>Married</b>	Abt 0241	Place , , Ukraine	SealSp    19 May 1955	
Husband's father	Frithuwald Freothlafsson			
Husband's mother	Beltsa of Asgard			
<b>Wife</b> <b>Frigga of Asgard</b>				
Born	Abt 0219	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	Temple
			Baptized    6 Jan 1934	
			Endowed    10 Jan 1934	
			SealPar	
Wife's father				
Wife's mother				
<b>Children</b> List each child in order of birth.			LDS ordinance dates	Temple
1	<b>M</b>	<b>Skjold Odinson King of the Danes</b>		
	Born	Abt 0237    Place , , Ukraine	Baptized    10 Nov 1953	
			Endowed    25 May 1954	
			SealPar    16 Dec 1954	SLAKE
	Spouse	Gefion of Asgard		
	<b>Married</b>	Abt 0258    Place , , Ukraine	SealSp    19 May 1955	
2	<b>M</b>	<b>Balder Odinson King of the Saxons</b>		
	Born	Abt 0243    Place , , Ukraine	Baptized    20 Jun 1911	
	Died	Aft 0305    Place , Sachsen, Germany	Endowed    19 Mar 1925	
			SealPar    31 Mar 1925	SGEOR
	Spouse	Nanna Gewarsdottir		
	<b>Married</b>	Abt 0269    Place , , Ukraine	SealSp    27 Mar 1925	SGEOR

# Family Group Record

Husband	<b>Odin Frithuwaldsson</b>
Wife	<b>Frigga of Asgard</b>
Notes	<p><b>HUSBAND - Odin Frithuwaldsson</b></p> <p>Odin led the migration of his people to Scandinavia from the ancient homeland of Asgard, which is thought to be the region north of the Black Sea. The sons of Frigga, were Skjold, ancestor of Danes, and Balder, ancestor of the Saxons. The son of Skadi was Saeming, ancestor of the Swedes. It is probable that Odin's ancestors were associated with the ancient Scythians who were fierce, freedom-loving warriors. The Persians, Greeks, and Romans were unable to bring them into submission.</p> <p>It is tempting to speculate that these people were part of the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel" who migrated northward (Ether 13:11) across the Caucasus Mountains following the downfall of Assyria in 609 BC. It is known that Christ showed himself to the lost tribes following his resurrection (3 Nephi 17:4, 21:6). An angel (Rev 10:10, D&amp;C 77:14) told John the Beloved that he was to undertake a mission which would be "in thy mouth sweet as honey" and would "make thy belly bitter." I (BVC) believe a part of John's mission involved taking the gospel to Scythia, which was well received at first in preparation for Christ's visit. If this occurred at the time of Godwulf, his third great grandfather, it must have led to a golden age much like the period of the Nephites and Lamanites described in Fourth Nephi. Bitterness followed as John watched the people fall away into apostasy and barbarism. The scriptural record of these events remains hidden, as was the Book of Mormon until the time of the restoration, but it will be found near the time when the New Jerusalem is established.</p> <p>In the Ukraine and southern Russia, the land consists of deep forests, broad prairies, and barren steppes. Summers are short and temperate, but the days are long, allowing for good crop growth and large harvests. Winters are cold, snowy, and long. Scythia was a region where warlike nomadic tribes from the East and the West met in violent raids. If God desired the lost tribes to be scattered into Europe and Asia, it was an ideal location for their initial settlement following the release from captivity. Those who later migrated north to Scandinavia found an even less hospitable climate. As a result, after becoming strong in Scandinavia, the Vikings began to search for new homelands through raids and settlements in the richer areas of Europe. This manner of the scattering of Israel seems to fit the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees given by the prophet Zenos (Jacob 5:21-22) where the lost covenant people are placed in poor ground to suit the purposes of the Lord.</p> <p>Some vestiges of gospel truth remained in the traditions of the pagan people of the Ukraine and southern Russia, as well as those of their Viking descendants in Scandinavia. They had a patriarchal form of government, with a council of elders to advise the chief, and they held all things in common. Perhaps, a corrupted form of the concept that good people may become exalted brought about the deification of Odin and Frigga as their chief Gods long after the migration. Their original homeland of Asgard was designated as the abode of the Gods in the pagan Norse mythology. Family loyalty was a great virtue and they maintained an oral genealogy of their ancestral chieftains.</p> <p><b>CHILD 2 - Balder Odinson King of the Saxons</b></p> <p>Balder became King of the Saxons in northern Germany. He was later deified as the god of innocence, beauty, joy, purity, and peace in the pagan Norse religion.</p>

# Family Group Record

<b>Husband Frodi Fridleifsson</b>				
Born	Abt 0281	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	Temple
Died	Abt 0304	Place , , Ukraine	Baptized	10 Nov 1953
			Endowed	17 May 1955
Married	Abt 0299	Place , , Ukraine	SealPar	29 Sep 1955 SLAKE
			SealSp	16 Sep 1955 SLAKE
Husband's father	Fridleif Skjoldsson			
Husband's mother	Mrs Fridleif Skjoldsson			

<b>Wife Mrs Frodi Fridleifsson</b>				
Born	Abt 0286	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	Temple
			Baptized	10 Nov 1953
			Endowed	9 Mar 1955 SLAKE
			SealPar	
Wife's father				
Wife's mother				

<b>Children</b> List each child in order of birth.	LDS ordinance dates	Temple
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<b>M</b>	<b>Fridleif Frodisson</b>			
Born	Abt 0300	Place , , Ukraine	Baptized	10 Nov 1953
Died	Aft 0325	Place , , Denmark	Endowed	25 Mar 1954
			SealPar	16 Sep 1955 SLAKE
Spouse	Mrs Fridleif Frodisson			
Married	Abt 0324	Place , , Denmark	SealSp	11 Oct 1955 SLAKE

**Notes**  
**HUSBAND - Frodi Fridleifsson**

According to the Norse legend related in the Song of Grotti, a great peace prevailed in all the land until the time of Frodi who mistreated the two giantesses, Fenja and Menja, responsible for the prosperity. Prior to that time no man would hurt or rob another, and a gold ring could lie untouched in the open without being taken from its owner. The mistreatment of the giantesses led to attack by the hordes of Mysing, a great sea king. In the battle, Frodi met his death. Although, Mysing gained great booty in his attack, he too died as a result of mistreating the captured giantesses when his ships were destroyed in a great whirlpool at sea.

Ref: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grottas%C3%B6ngr>>

It appears that bits and pieces of truth may lie in this myth. I (BVC) believe that a golden age for these descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel began with the acceptance of the gospel taught by John the Apostle. Their faith was rewarded by the subsequent visit of the resurrected Christ. (See notes for Odin Frithuwaldsson.) During the time of Fjolnar Yngvisson and Frodi, it is probable that apostasy and war ended this golden age. As a result, the wise old chieftain, Odin, led a migration from the homeland of Asgard to Scandinavia in an attempt to find a peaceful haven for the fallen people. In the final pages of the Book of Mormon, a similar scenario played out when Mormon led the Nephites northward in a failed effort to escape the Lamanite enemies.

If the legend of Grotti has some historical basis, one may ask: Who was Mysing and the people he led in battle? The histories of the the two great empires of the time, Rome and Persia, mention no such king or campaign against the region of Scythia. However, Goths had migrated into the Roman province of Dacia on the northwest shore of the Black Sea during the third century. With the destruction of a Roman army and the death of its commander, Emperor Decius, in 251 AD near the mouth of the Danube River, Gothic control of Dacia was established. The Goths then built large fleets of ships to continue the attack on sea and land. However, they suffered defeat with great loss of life in 269 AD against Roman legions led by Emperor Claudius II. Thereafter, it is probable they turned their forces eastward against the Scythians with more success. Perhaps Mysing was a Gothic king who launched the invasion against the people of Frodi. After long years of peace, the Scythians were unprepared to defend their homeland. Although a great storm on the Black Sea apparently destroyed the booty-laden fleet of Mysing, the Gothic menace was not permanently removed. With the simultaneous advance of Huns from Mongolia on the east, the only way to escape these threats would be migration to the north. Although this account is speculative since no written records of the Goths and Scythians from this time are known, it is not inconsistent with facts of the barbarian invasions of Europe.

Ref: J. B. Bury, "The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians," W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1967, pp 21-22.

# Family Group Record

<b>Husband Svegdi Fjolnarsson</b>				
Born	Abt 0277	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	
Died	Aft 0305	Place , , Sweden	Baptized	10 Nov 1953
			Endowed	25 Mar 1954
			SealPar	16 Sep 1955
Married	Abt 0297	Place , , Sweden	SealSp	19 May 1955
SLAKE				
Husband's father Fjolnar Yngvisson				
Husband's mother Mrs Fjolnar Yngvisson				

<b>Wife Mrs Vana Fjolnarsson</b>				
Born	Abt 0281	Place , , Ukraine	LDS ordinance dates	
Died	Aft 0305	Place , , Sweden	Baptized	10 Nov 1953
			Endowed	9 Mar 1955
			SealPar	
Wife's father				
Wife's mother				

**Children** List each child in order of birth. LDS ordinance dates Temple

<b>1 M Vanlandi Svegdisson</b>				
Born	Abt 0298	Place , , Ukraine	Baptized	10 Nov 1953
Died	Aft 0319	Place , , Sweden	Endowed	8 Jun 1954
			SealPar	19 May 1955
SLAKE				
Spouse	Driva Snaersdottir			
Married	Abt 0291	Place , , Sweden	SealSp	16 Sep 1955
SLAKE				

**Notes**  
**HUSBAND - Svegdi Fjolnarsson**  
 The Yngling saga tells of Svegdi's search for Odin in Asgard following his father's death. Lacking success he returned to Sweden. This myth mistakenly places Svegdi at the final destination before the journey to Scandinavia began. The legendary account probably has a basis in Svegdi's unsuccessful efforts to join his people to those of Odin during the northward migration.  
  
 Ref: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sveigder>>



## **Heritage of Faith** Brigham Vernon Cheney

In a recent ward leadership meeting, during a discussion centered on challenges faced by today's youth, I began to contrast current problems with the simple difficulties of my boyhood. Merrill Jenson interrupted with the exclamation, "You must have been born in the time of Brigham Young!" This left me speechless for a moment, but I recovered with a true statement, "No, I'm not quite that old. However, I *was* well acquainted with one of his daughters-in-law, Abigail Stevens Young. She was the fifth wife of Brigham Young, Jr."

On June 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, some descendants of Brigham Young commemorated the 205<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth with a program at his gravesite. I was asked to present remarks on the heritage of faith from his great life that continues to bless our lives. Since his deeds as a prophet of the Lord, pioneer leader, colonizer of the West, governor of the territory of Utah, and founder of great universities are well known, my remarks did not dwell on those matters, but focused more on his influence within the family.

To me, Brigham's faith and determination to follow the will of the Lord with exactness are hallmarks of his character. One cannot speak of Brigham Young without mentioning his mentor and exemplar, Joseph Smith, Jr. Joseph was the visionary architect to whom the blueprints of a Zion society were revealed. Although he had time to create a model of this society in the City of Nauvoo before his martyrdom, it was destroyed by enemies of the Church within two years of his death. Brigham Young was a skilled carpenter, joiner, and glazier. He became the builder to follow Joseph's blueprints in creating the Zion society as a lasting reality. We only have to look about us in the valleys of these mountains to see that he did his work well. As Brigham lay on his deathbed in 1877, his final words were, "Joseph, Joseph, Joseph." There was no doubt in the minds of those in attendance that the words were spoken to his friend and teacher who had come to welcome him into the heavenly realms.

Although the world recognizes the greatness of Brigham Young as a leader, it cannot understand his faith and looks with aversion upon the plural marriages that defined his family life. One hears jokes about his failure to recognize a wife or a child upon a chance encounter in the streets of Salt Lake City. There are stories about which wife was his favorite. Such has been the idle talk of people who know nothing of the true facts. Only those within the family circle could understand the love and concern he felt for them as individuals. The hours spent with cherished wives and children were undoubtedly the happiest of his life since he could briefly lay down the burdens of Church and State to enjoy the blessings of family. He took seriously the obligation of teaching his children to pray, read the scriptures, and gain their own testimony of the gospel. He encouraged them to seek education, develop their talents, and work diligently. Brigham loved good music, dancing, the theater, and other wholesome recreational pursuits. Opportunities to experience these things were made available to all members of his family.

I saw the fruits of his example as a parent perpetuated through Brigham Young, Jr, Abigail Stevens, and their daughter, Klara Young Cheney, who was my mother. With your indulgence, I would like to speak of this continuing heritage learned through personal experience from my mother and my grandmother before her death in 1954 when I was 18 years of age.

Brigham Young, Jr did not exhibit the solemn demeanor that the world associates with the idea of an apostle. He had a sense of humor and was an accomplished horseman. One of his responsibilities was to oversee the Church settlements along the San Juan River in the territories of Utah and New Mexico. On an occasion while visiting Fruitland, New Mexico, he stayed at the ranch of my great-grandfather, Walter Stevens, who had acquired a fine, wild black stallion. Since Brigham couldn't resist the challenge of taming the horse to bridle and saddle, he sought permission to make the attempt. Although worried that his distinguished visitor could be injured, Walter Stevens granted the request. Unfortunately, Brigham was thrown from the stallion after a few seconds of hard twisting and bucking. As he got up and began to dust himself off, Brigham heard the humiliating sound of feminine laughter. He looked up and saw Walter's teenage daughter, Abigail, perched on the top rail of the corral fence. The girl was struggling to suppress the inappropriate merriment caused by his sudden, undignified pratfall. Her blushing embarrassment made Brigham join the laughter. To make a short story even shorter, some months later, Brigham had a second request to make of Walter Stevens--his daughter's hand in marriage. On October 1, 1887, seventeen year-old Abigail was sealed to fifty-one year-old Brigham in the Endowment House. In spite of the age difference, Brigham and his beloved "Abbie" were of one heart and mind from the outset of their married life. While in Salt Lake City, Abigail received professional training as a nurse and midwife from a certified school. Thereafter, she served for many years as the only skilled medical practitioner in a 250 square-mile area of northwestern New Mexico.

Abbie was the mother of a young son when Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto ending Church sanction of new plural-marriage contracts. Contrary to the expectations of the world, this did not terminate existing marriages. The *practice* of plural marriage, countenanced by the Lord in certain dispensations, was discontinued by the inspired pronouncement of a prophet of the Lord. On the other hand, the *principle* of eternal marriage and family stated in the 132<sup>nd</sup> Section of the Doctrine and Covenants *was* not, and *cannot* be altered. After the Manifesto, the government no longer actively threatened punishment for those living in existing plural marriages. However, it became difficult to maintain close family ties in the atmosphere of disapproval exhibited by the non-Mormon population throughout the West. Church leaders and their plural wives often suffered long separations and little time together. Abbie's love for Brigham was sustained by the knowledge that he was serving the Lord.

Abbie had the opportunity to travel with Brigham on a tour of the four-corners area with her active five year-old son, Walter, and her daughter, Klea, a toddler of two years. The journey was by buggy with an accompanying supply wagon. During a drive near Bluff, Utah that extended into evening, Walter became drowsy and fell from the high seat of the wagon. Before the teamster could halt the horses, a rear wheel passed over Walter's leg

near his hip. Abigail prayed earnestly for wisdom and skill to meet this emergency as she examined her son to determine the extent of his injuries. Then, with tenderness and care, she moved the leg into normal position and set the broken bone. Since there was nothing but twisted sagebrush in the area, the driver was sent back to Bluff for splints. After his return, Abbie made sure the injured leg was as long the other before strapping them together. Since this treatment left Walter near collapse, Brigham knelt down and administered to him. Abbie cried tears of gratitude at the power and spirit of the blessing. The boy didn't comprehend all that had taken place, but he knew that the pain was made bearable as he looked with thankfulness into his father's eyes.

Two days later they arrived in Fruitland, where Abbie remained until Walter had completely healed. During those weeks, she spent many hours massaging the leg and occasionally applying gentle tension to guard against its shrinking in length. She had never known anyone with such an injury to recover without becoming a cripple. This did not happen to Walter. Not only did he walk again without a limp, he grew into a husky, athletic young man who excelled in sports.

Years later Abbie talked about this incident with a non-Mormon doctor. After asking how she got the idea to care for Walter as she did, he informed her that doctors of that time did not know the importance of massaging the muscles and keeping just the right amount of tension on a leg with such a break. As a result muscle spasms during the painful early stages of healing caused the femur to twist and mend at an angle. The patient was invariably left with a misshapen limb shorter than the uninjured leg. Abbie answered his question simply, "I just felt it was the right thing to do." She couldn't explain to a nonbeliever that all her thoughts and actions came from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in answer to prayer.

When the Salt Lake Temple was completed in 1893, the general authorities of the Church accepted the obligation to pay the remaining debt. To aid her husband in accumulating his share, Abbie sold her home in New Mexico and brought the proceeds to Salt Lake City. She attended the temple dedication and there received a profound spiritual manifestation that her offering was accepted by the Lord.

Upon returning to New Mexico, Abbie established residence on her father's ranch. Since she was away for days at a time assisting in childbirth or caring for the sick and injured, her parents, Walter and Abigail Elizabeth Stevens, often provided childcare. My mother, Klara Young, was the third of seven children, born December 7, 1894. Although it was near the turn of the century, her early years were spent in an Old-West, horse-and-buggy environment with no resemblance to the modern era in which her life ended at 101 years of age on May 4, 1996. Klara was a tom-boy in some ways, and could expertly ride her pinto pony bareback by the age of six. She helped her grandparents in their trading post on the border of the Navajo reservation. Mother fondly remembered the times when her father could reunite with the family after a long absence since he always brought laughter into the home, as well as a feeling of warmth, love and security. His death on April 11, 1903, when she was eight years of age, brought loss and grief into her life. At that time, she learned to manage the household routine and care for her younger brother and sisters

while Abbie was away. She treasured books, which gave her active imagination the opportunity to explore times and places far beyond the small settlement where she lived. Mother also enjoyed taking part in school and Church plays. She was a student at B.Y.U. when she met my father, Silas Lavell Cheney. They were married in the Salt Lake Temple on June 22, 1917.

I was Klara's sixth and last child, born when she was forty-one years of age. Bedtime tales during my preschool years were chosen from *Hurlbut's Story of the Bible* or my father's writings for the Church seminary program. Being the youngest child in the family by several years and having older, more relaxed parents gave me freedom from many of the restraints imposed on my siblings. However, I knew the boundaries were being pushed beyond the limits of her patience when Mother's expression became as stern as some pictures of Brigham Young. Then would follow the disciplinary threat she always spoke through tight lips: "You keep that up young man, and I will knock you from Dan to Beer Sheba." The thought of a blow that would send me flying the length of the Holy Land was enough to end any misbehavior.

Throughout my childhood and teens, many hours were spent in conversations with Mother about all my varied interests. She never talked to me as though my issues were childish or unimportant. Books from our family library on science, history, and religion were handed to me as a means of answering most questions. Her gifts of a chemistry set, a crystal radio kit, and a microscope stimulated a growing interest in science as a career. She bore a simple testimony of the basic principles and doctrines of the gospel. My questions about Mormon theology were answered with the gift of two books, *The Articles of Faith* and *Jesus, The Christ* by James E. Talmage, which we discussed as I read. The leather-bound copies had been given to her and signed by grandmother Abbie. Mother never speculated about gospel matters that have not been fully revealed. Her faith and love were shown more in action than words. The 13<sup>th</sup> Article of Faith was the credo by which she lived. Mother's interest in all things "of good report or praiseworthy" struck a resonating chord in my heart and mind. It is part of the family legacy that has enriched my life immeasurably.

Everyone in this congregation has a heritage of faith that began with the restoration of the gospel and continued with the westward trek of the pioneers that we now celebrate. Some here are descendants of those men and women. This heritage has been extended by missionaries who have taken the gospel throughout the world. Some here are converts having acquired the gospel through the labor of those missionaries and your own prayerful efforts to learn the truth by the power of the Holy Ghost. May we keep the legacy of faith bright in our lives and pass it undiminished to our posterity. This is my hope and prayer in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sacrament Meeting Talk  
Grandview 10<sup>th</sup> Ward  
Provo, Utah  
July 23, 2006

## Catherine de Roet and John of Gaunt

Brigham Vernon Cheney

We have all heard inspiring stories of courageous and faithful pioneer ancestors. Many times we have been told of immigrant forefathers, who came to this land seeking freedom from tyranny and the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. But what of those ancestors who lived during the medieval era when the apostate Catholic Church held sway? In that time, people lived in a stratified society consisting of lower class peasants and unskilled laborers; middle class craftsmen, landowners and merchants; and upper class clergy, nobility and royalty. Although those in the upper class were a small minority, they held almost complete power. Our ancestors in that era forged an essential link in the chain that spanned the centuries between the darkness of apostasy and the brightness of the restored gospel. They must have had some guiding light that passed from generation to generation preparing their posterity to accept the full truth when it was made available. Their lives had meaning and purpose that we should discover in order to better understand the hand of the Lord in all things.

This story is about my 18<sup>th</sup> great grandparents in the line of my great grandfather, Walter Stevens. They began life when King Edward III and Queen Philippa de Hainault ruled England during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Hundred Years War between England and France was raging. Catherine de Roet was born in Picardy, France in 1350 AD, the daughter of Payn de Roet and his wife, whose name is unknown. Catherine's mother died in childbirth. The infant and her older sister, Philippa, were left in the care of her mother's parents who owned a large farm in Picardy. Her father, a herald in the service of King Edward III, gained knighthood on the field of battle shortly before he was killed during a siege of Paris in 1360.

Queen Philippa, feeling concerned about the orphans, sent a messenger to learn of their condition. He discovered that the plague had struck down the household of the de Roet sisters leaving them alone in the world. Philippa had escaped the dread illness and Catherine was weak, but in recovery. The messenger, knowing the kindness of the Queen, brought the girls to England on his return trip. Thirteen-year-old Philippa, who had a practical nature, became a lady-in-waiting to the Queen with the duty of overseeing the pantry in Windsor Castle. Eleven-year-old Catherine was placed in the care of the prioress of a convent on the Isle of Sheppey. She grew into a bright, beautiful young woman, who received training and education unusual for a girl who was not of noble birth. After five years, upon reaching marriageable age, she chose to leave the convent and join her sister at the royal court.

Catherine, who had no dowry, was wed to Sir Hugh Swynford, a rough Saxon knight in the service of John of Gaunt, the fourth son of the king and the Duke of Lancaster. She became a good friend to Blanche, the wife of John. When Blanche died, a victim of the plague in 1369, Catherine was a teenage widow with two small children. John of Gaunt brought her to Kenilworth Castle to serve as governess to his three surviving children. We now come to the part of the story that would prevent me from giving this talk in Sacrament Meeting. The widow and widower fell in love, but Catherine's status as a commoner made it impossible to gain the king's permission for marriage. An affair began that lasted for eleven years and resulted in the birth of four illegitimate children. Their illicit love became adultery when John was wed to Constanza of Castile in 1371. This wedding resulted from a contract made for political reasons, and neither partner had love for the other in the beginning.

Catherine felt increasing guilt and shame as the years passed. Finally in 1381 she broke off the relationship and returned with her children to the Swynford holdings in Lincolnshire. One of her first decisions was to free the serfs who served on the estate. With their freedom, they changed from begrudging laborers into willing workers. Thereafter, the run-down buildings were refurbished and Kettlethorpe Manor became a well-managed operation.

Previously, Edward, the Prince of Wales, had died in 1376 leaving his nine-year-old son Richard as heir to the throne. The following year, King Edward III passed away. King Richard II could not serve effectively due to his youth, and John of Gaunt, the eldest surviving son of King Edward III, became the de facto ruler of England.

John was trained as a knight under the code of chivalry, where loyalty, honor, protection of the weak and respect for womanhood were the highest ideals. After Catherine left him, he became a dutiful, and in time, loving husband to Constanza. Still, he felt tremendous guilt because he had dishonored Catherine, and he could not forget his love for her. He tried to make amends by providing opportunities for training and advancement to her four sons and financial aid to the Swynford estate.

A year after Constanza died following a long illness, John went again to Catherine and asked for her hand in marriage with a vow to have their children declared legitimate. On January 13, 1396, they were wed in Lincoln Cathedral. By a royal declaration from King Richard II and a papal decree from Pope Boniface IX, Catherine's four children fathered by John were made legitimate. In the seven remaining years of her life, she was accorded full honor as the Duchess of Lancaster. Their children were given the surname Beaufort from one of the titles held by John: the Lord of Beaufort and Nogent.

This is not a fairy tale, though it ends like one. To me, the lives of Catherine and John were blessed in accordance with the atonement of the Savior: where there is sin, He has provided a way through His grace to find redemption. They learned that love has little to do with social status, and everything to do with spiritual affinity and feelings of the heart. The years of suffering, together and apart, ended with the triumph of a purer love, which has now been sanctified by the holy ordinances of the temple in our day.

There are a couple of interesting historical facts that I would like to mention in conclusion.

First, Catherine's sister, Philippa, married a minor civil servant and courier at the royal court, who became better known as an author. He was Geoffrey Chaucer, who wrote *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer was held in such high regard at the time of his death that he was buried in Westminster Abbey, beginning the tradition of the Poet's Corner.

Second, John of Gaunt was the protector of a priest at Oxford University named John Wycliffe, who preached against corruption in the hierarchy of the Church. Both men strongly opposed the accumulation of wealth by leaders of the Church through tax levies on the people. Having a royal protector made it possible for Wycliffe and his Oxford associates to publish their English translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible. This enabled the common people to understand its teachings and contrast them with erroneous doctrines of the Catholic Church. Wycliffe sent men known as Lollards, or poor preachers, throughout England, Wales and Scotland to promulgate his ideas. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London twice attempted to convict Wycliffe of heresy, but were prevented by the power of John of Gaunt. The reformer died a natural death, but Church leaders retained their intense anger. Decades later, his remains were disinterred and burned as posthumous punishment for heresy. John Wycliffe was acknowledged by the reformers, Martin Luther and Johann Hus, as the inspiration for their total break with the Catholic Church.

---Talk given to the high priests of the Grandview 10<sup>th</sup> Ward on March 6, 2005

## **The Light of Christ in a Dark Age of Apostasy**

Brigham Vernon Cheney

As a child I heard many stories from my parents, Silas Lavell Cheney and Klara Young, about their faithful and courageous pioneer ancestors. Later, upon reviewing the family research, it became evident that my parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had been deeply engaged in doing temple work for themselves and their ancestors. Their work had ended on many lines in the British Isles of the sixteenth century. As my own research began, I had no expectation that the work would take me far beyond that starting point. It has been exciting to discover that several McAllister and McGregor lines of my wife, Marsali, branch into those of my parents. Together, we have done temple work for many of our common great grandparents and their children who lived in centuries past. These spiritual experiences create intense feelings of love and joy for family members who did not receive these blessings in their lifetime.

Our family-history research continued to times and places that we never could have imagined. My wife and I desire to tell our children about discoveries which add greatly to the knowledge of their heritage. The subject of this story is a common great grandfather separated from our time by 50 generations or more in many lines of descent.

Nerses Suren-Pahlav<sup>1</sup> was born about 335 AD in the plains below Mt Ararat. His country, Armenia, was a Christian kingdom lying between the great empires of Rome and Persia. The emperors of Rome were generally tolerant of all religions, although there were several periods where Jews and Christians suffered intense persecution. On the other hand, Persian rulers sought to conquer the kingdom of Armenia and destroy Christianity.

The mother of Nerses was a royal princess, Bambishu Arsakuni. She was a granddaughter of King Trdat III, whose conversion to Christianity in 301 led to the acceptance of the religion by all of the aristocratic families in the nation. The father of Nerses was Athenagenes, a great grandson of Grigor Suren-Pahlav,<sup>2</sup> the missionary who was responsible for the king's conversion. Trdat III appointed Grigor as the primate of the Armenian Church with the title Katholikos signifying that he possessed general authority over the bishops of all Christian congregations throughout the nation.

When Nerses was about fifteen years of age the royal family arranged his marriage to a woman who was about twenty years of age. She was the daughter of Vardan Mamikonean, the commander in chief of the Armenian army. A later historian gave her name as Sandukt. A son, Sahak, resulted from this union. In 353, the office of Katholikos had been vacant for six years. King Arsak III desired to give the appointment to Nerses, but he declined citing as reasons his youth, unworthiness and family responsibility. However, he finally accepted at the urging of his mother, father-in-law and leaders of the local congregations.

In the fifty-two years of Armenian Christianity, it remained a religion of the aristocracy. Nerses put all of his heart, mind and strength into missionary work among the common people. He built churches, schools, orphanages and hospitals to better their lives. He also produced new laws governing marriage, worship, and fair treatment of the people by those in power. Since some of the changes displeased the king, Nerses was sent into exile until Arsak III was captured and imprisoned by King Shapur II of Persia.

During his exile, Valens, an unbelieving Roman emperor, called Nerses to Constantinople for the purpose of restoring his ailing son to health. He told Valens that healing would occur only if the emperor placed full faith on the power of Jesus Christ. Because of a hardened heart Valens was unable to comply. Becoming enraged upon the death of his heir, the emperor transported Nerses with seventy Christian leaders to a desert island where they were abandoned without provisions. However, they were sustained by occasional rainfall and food from the sea until rescued by sympathizers nine months later.

Pap, the son of Arsak III, had ascended the throne before Nerses returned to Armenia. On account of the king's immorality, Nerses refused to give him the sacrament. Offended at this injury to his pride, Pap plotted revenge while pretending to repent. Then in the year 373, the king issued an invitation to a royal banquet with words to the effect: "Let us celebrate together by partaking of my bread and wine before you offer me the sacred communion." The drink given to Nerses contained a fatal poison.<sup>3</sup>

Sahak was appointed Katholikos in 387. He extended his father's work by overseeing the formulation of an Armenian alphabet and translation of the scriptures into the language of the people.

Nerses was born about ten years after the Nicean Council in which the Christian bishops accepted a false doctrine concerning the nature of God. The apostasy of the Church at that time appeared to be complete. Before learning of this ancestor, I rapidly skipped through the pages of history from the year 325 until 1820 when truth was restored through the glorious vision of the Father and the Son revealed to Joseph Smith. Now I had to know what motivated Nerses as a Christian leader who lacked the fulness of the gospel. After struggling for many days with the question, understanding finally came through meditation in the temple as the sacred ordinances essential to exaltation were performed in his behalf. Although he never beheld God, Nerses possessed the records of Jesus Christ and his chosen apostles. He sought to follow the example of the Savior. His faith was based on a testimony of the atonement and resurrection which gave him hope for salvation. Nerses demonstrated his love of the Savior and his fellow man through a lifetime of service.

After being proxy for Nerses in an initiatory session, I met an ordinance worker of Armenian descent in the Provo Temple. There were tears in our eyes as we considered the significance of the blessings that had been pronounced upon him and his posterity. Marsali and I have been grateful for the opportunity to kneel at an altar of the temple in a sacred ceremony sealing Nerses to his family for all eternity. I know that the promised blessings will be fulfilled as they arise in the morning of the first resurrection.

In 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria proposed the list of books and epistles which are included in the New Testament as divinely inspired writings. Nerses joined with other Church leaders at that time in accepting this list as the canon of scripture to be preserved for generations to follow. These men demonstrated discernment and integrity in their decision to reject all other writings of Christian authorship, including their own, as not being in full harmony with apostolic teachings of the first century. By placing *The Revelation of John* at the end of the New Testament with the caveat given in *Rev 22:18-19*, it was made clear that no man should take it upon himself to alter the revealed word of God.<sup>4</sup> This preserved the biblical records in relatively untarnished form for many centuries as they were carefully copied and translated from one language to another. When the world was ready at last for the restoration of the gospel, the words of holy prophets and apostles were available to Joseph Smith. He was inspired by the scripture in *James 1:5* to pray for an answer to his question, "Which Church should I join?" To me, the light of Christ was shining brightly through the actions of these good men in an age of apostasy.

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<sup>1</sup> He is known as St Nerses the Great. The spelling of names in this article attempts to mimic pronunciation in the Armenian tongue which was a dialect of the Aramaic language common throughout the ancient Middle East. There are historical records with other spellings based on Greek and modern Armenian forms of the names.

<sup>2</sup> Grigor is known as St Gregory the Illuminator.

<sup>3</sup> In 374, Pap was assassinated by order of Emperor Valens who suspected the Armenian king was about to switch allegiance from Rome to Persia.

<sup>4</sup> This does not prevent God from revealing additional scriptures to those who receive a prophetic calling.