

Genealogical Research

My Life's Hobby

by Torleif S. Knaphus, Sculptor

Salt Lake City, Utah

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In the years 1902, 1903, and 1904 (*Torleif was ages 21-23*), when I was a student of fine art in Oslo, Norway, I also became interested in religion and old family legends. I attended the famous lecture given by Jonas Lee who told those old sagas of long, long ago as though they had recently happened. At the end of my three years study, I was told by Prof. Lars Utne that I was first in line for the two years Roman scholarship; but to his great disappointment, I had joined the LDS Church and my interest in genealogical research work had become a vital thing to me; so in the summer of 1905 (*Torleif was 24 years old*) I took a trip from Oslo to my home in Vats on the Western Norway for this purpose. I was very successful as everyone I called on became interested, gave me of their time and all the help they could. I will briefly mention some of my proceedings in this work.

One early morning, I took a big hike over the high mountain east from our home to Sandied. I arrived there to some of my mother's relatives just as they had finished their dinner. It was harvest time and the man had two big teams ready to haul in the grain. The one tteam went on with the work, but he seemed to forget the importance of his work and enthusiastically helped me for over three hours while his one team and helpers were waiting. From there I went to Hedland on Sandied where my great grandfather Tollef Heldand used to live. There I met a 92-year-old great grand aunt. She was sitting by a spinning wheel chatting and joking, as she was spinning along. Because her brother had been a soldier in the war of 1815, I asked my many questions in this way - - "How old was your sister Talla when your brother Tollef Hedland went to war? How long before your brother went to war was your little nephew Amon born? She said, "That was tow weeks, but little Amon was very sick so they had to take him to the minister two miles across the cold stormy fjords to be baptized". So I asked, "How old was little Amon then?" She said, "One, perhaps two days." And as I expressed my surprise, she said, "They baptized them before they were dry behind the ears those days, and if he had died he would have gone straight to Hell." But there was a twist in her eye as though she did not hardly believe all that.

The next morning I walked to Vikedal 8 miles to the southeast. I called on the Lutheran minister who was also the prost of Rogaland. He treated me very kindly, gave me the church books, and made it most pleasant for me. I was at my work at 8:30 am. Things came very easy and in 4 hours I had found the birth and death dates of the 48 of

my relatives I had got the previous day. Then the prost invited me to have dinner with him after which I walked to upper Vikedal to see some of my relatives who lived there. On my return I called at the minister's office again for some records I had left there and again he invited me to have a late afternoon snack with him. So after a pleasant chat I expressed my appreciation for his help, and with a grateful heart I started on the way back to my home in Vats. Shortly afterwards, I heard that my father's cousin, John Torsdal, had some interest in this line. He had bought up the old records from the lensman's office in Vats; so I decided to visit him. His place was over the high mountain to the south. To come there, I had to walk west to Sjold and then southeast.

The fall floods were on and the water was high over the trail which crossed over the river so I took off my clothes, tied them on my neck and walked across and then went on to Torsdal in Nedra Vats. I was most welcome by my father's cousin, John. He immediately brought out all the old records from the lensman's office in Vats and what additional documents he had and we went on with the work for several hours. But then at 3:30 pm he had to walk to Aamesosen and meet the steamboat which came in there every Thursday, habit he had not broken for many years. But my wishes were so strong that after we had our late lunch, he decided to stay and we went on with our work to 9:30 that evening. After a delightful breakfast the next morning, we were again at work. Towards noon we were through. He showed me the way back home around the mountain to the east. I put some money in his hand as I expressed my thanks and **we both rejoiced for the work we had done**. And so I went on for several weeks.

I then said farewell to my parents to go back to Oslo. And as I got aboard the steamboat and walked on the deck that beautiful autumn day, carrying with me about 350 of my relatives' names which I had obtained, **I definitely felt that there is nothing according to the time spent so valuable for the eternal good of men as this work.**

When I came here to Utah, I decided after I had paid my tithing, to lay aside an additional 5% of my earnings for this work. Soon afterwards I sent \$36.00 (*worth over \$2,000 in today's dollar*) of this amount to Jens Jensen, the Danish genealogist. He took great interest in my work, made a special trip to Norway and found about 900 additional names which I added to my record and what additional I got through correspondence and otherwise.

In the fall of 1913 (*Torleif was 32 years old*), I went to France and the following summer I visited my parents in Norway and spent 2_ months in genealogical research work. In my procedure, before I called on the various families, I filled out all I knew as to their full name, where and when born, etc., the same as I always did in my correspondence, then asked them to see if I was right and help me to add to what more they knew. In this procedure I was very successful and obtained about 700 more names.

Then I went to our Lutheran minister who treated me very friendly, brought me the church books I needed and with his kind approval, I worked there 6 full days and obtained the dates of birth and death of the many relatives I had found. And as I then had to cross the ocean in the most dangerous time of World War I, I was most deeply concerned for the additional record I had obtained because it is to me, next to my family, the most precious thing I have.

After my return to Utah, I spend much time in recording and doing research work.

The on one evening towards 1930 (*Torleif was about 49 years old*), I was taking a hike to Ensign Peak, so well known in our history, **I felt very much of the spirit of thanksgiving and gratitude and as my thoughts were leading to my ancestors, I obtained faith there that I would be able to trace some of my lineage quite a few generations farther back, which previously had seemed impossible.**

Shortly afterwards, I met John Dalsbo, the Norwegian genealogist, and I felt impressed to trust my research work to him; and as he was going to Norway, I paid him \$65.00 in advance. He went ahead immediately, transferred all my names from my old records into the new loose-leaf books. I later continued to send him money for the continuation of this work in Norway. My younger brother, Andrew, who later came to Utah, started also to help.

I also corresponded with Mr. Berge Velde, a leading businessman in Oslo, who had his special genealogist to gather his ancestors; and as our lineage ran together, whatever he found he freely sent to me. Likewise from Johanna Nyhgaard Larsen I received many names. And so through our unanimous effort, I obtained about 800 more names, tracing some of my lineage fourteen, fifteen and sixteen generations back.

I have now continued this work for thirty-one years, and aim to continue on. **In all my research work I have used the greatest of care, have checked and rechecked every link and lineage, and the research work had been very difficult as the church books from that district burned in 1789.**

I have up to this time been able to find 2, 879 of my ancestors and relatives' names **and a crowning joy has come to me on account of this work.** To begin with, I only knew of my cousins, grandparents and one of my great grandfathers and now I have found 214 of my grandparents and much of their history. **And, although I have spent an immense amount of time concentrating and working, yet it has seemed like the blessings of the Lord have been with me so my family or my art work have not been neglected on account of this great work accomplished.**