

# A LIFE-LONG PURSUIT OF GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

**Noted Church Sculptor Torleif S. Knaphus (1881-1965)  
also developed his talents in Family History Work**

Compiled by Allen Gerritsen, grandson

A reporter from *Life* magazine was interviewing noted sculptor Torleif S. Knaphus in his art studio in Salt Lake City surrounded by a myriad of projects of statues, oil paintings and clay sculptures. When asked what his greatest work was throughout his life, Torleif pointed to a picture of his family then motioned towards the giant family pedigree on the wall and responded that his family and his genealogical research has been his greatest work in life.<sup>1</sup>

**In 1903 at age 21** while studying art in Oslo, Norway, he was not only converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Torleif also became converted to the research of his family history. He wrote:

"My interest and great desire...has been to find my ancestors, their names and history, their place of birth, and the service they rendered."<sup>2</sup>

Regarding genealogical work he stated:

"The first and most important thing in this work is that we get a desire and then have sufficient love to go ahead and do something about it. As we carry on, things unfold themselves before us; and we find more and accomplish more than we ever dreamed to accomplish."

"As we precede four and five hundred years back, it becomes extremely interesting. The dark clouds which have rested over our ancestors' lives and existence have nearly altogether disappeared; and the Middle Ages seemingly become so near to us."

"As we find our forefathers who lived that long ago, and read about their good work, it gives us a feeling of joy similar to that of having a child or a grandchild born unto us; and we love them as our own family. As we find our ancestors, we also find their history; what offices they held in the church and state; and the service they rendered. This gives us joy. As time goes on we love them more and more. And as we make some preparation toward raising a family, so, likewise, we should be willing to give (financially) toward this research work."

Before leaving Norway to come to America, Torleif left Oslo, where he had studied art for three years, and went back to his home in Vats in western Norway. The purpose of his trip was to do genealogical research of his family.<sup>4</sup> After almost three months of much work in gathering family names he continues in his journal:

"I then said farewell to my parents to go back to Oslo...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 as valuable for the eternal good of men as this work."<sup>5</sup>

**In 1905 at age 24**, after immigrating to Utah, Torleif decided that after he paid his full tithing to the Church, he would dedicate 5% of his income to do genealogical work. In his journal he wrote of sending \$36.00 to Jens Jensen, a Danish genealogist, to help in the efforts.<sup>6</sup> One might think this was a small amount to spend on genealogical work, but in today's dollars this equated to over \$2,000 in 1905.<sup>7</sup>

This sacrifice was made despite the meager earnings of an artist. Later he would have the challenge of making ends meet with several children to raise and facing the Great Depression of the 1930's. Regardless, Torleif continued his financial sacrifice and commitment for this great work. His brother Andrew also helped fund the genealogical research for their family names and was able to help tremendously with the temple work for their ancestors.<sup>8</sup>

Several individuals assisted Torleif with his genealogical research efforts. He was amazed to see the willingness of individuals to help him in his pursuit. Based upon his encouragement of others in his native land of Norway, books were written, genealogical societies have been organized, and their leaders became his friends, all of whom helped him to get many names and data through contacts and friendly correspondence."<sup>9</sup>

With the names Torleif obtained, he spent much time in recording and getting things ready for Temple work. He had a strong testimony of the eternal salvation of the dead.<sup>10</sup> Torleif wrote about his commitment to Temple work and inspiration that came to him regarding his research efforts:

"I got a recommend to the temple and spent there all my time doing baptisms and endowment work for my dead. After I had done so for about four months, I was severely criticized by friends and Church members for doing so. I took their criticism and rather good advice, decided to quit temple work and go out and get a job.

"But the following morning about twenty minutes to seven, I was awakened by someone knocking on my door. I threw the covers aside, arose to a sitting position, and was just going to ask who was there, as a voice came from the direction of the door saying, 'Get up, make yourself ready, and go to the Temple. Quit the work on your father's line and start on your mother's line. Begin with Torleif Hedland on your mother's mother's line.

"I have now found this line fifteen generations back, and many of them have served the people and country in many high and valuable capacities. After this experience I went to the Temple, felt unusually fine, and continued to work there for several months.

"On Thanksgiving Day, 1909, I got married to Emelia H. C. Christensen who then attended the LDS High School. She quit the school and spent the following winter doing Temple work. And so together we carried on and did the best we could with the work."<sup>11</sup>

**In the fall of 1913 at age 32**, Torleif went to France to study art for 1\_ years. The next year he again returned to Norway to visit his parents and family for 2\_ months for the purpose of doing genealogical research work. He was successful and obtained about 700 more names. He then relates:

“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.”<sup>12</sup>

Torleif’s family also knew how valuable his genealogical records were to him and how he personally guarded them. His daughter Olive remembered: “All of us (children) were admonished to ‘save’ the genealogical records first in case of a fire. We laughed and ridiculed about it, but were proud of him and his great accomplishment.”<sup>13</sup>

**In 1939 at age 58**, Torleif was sent to Hawaii by the Church to do further art work at the LDS Temple in Laie. He wrote regarding an enlightening experience he had in Hawaii:

“One day while there, I took a hike high on those beautiful mountains and as I prayed words came to me which never before entered my mind. When I uttered these words asking that I could find my ancestors’ line back to the ancients, I was chastened by a voice speaking to me saying, ‘You fool, going to give \$5.00 and expect to find your ancestors back to the ancients.’ I understood, immediately arose, ran more than walked down the mountain trail, and just came in time before the post office closed, and sent off \$25.00 instead of the \$5.00 which I had intended to send.”<sup>14</sup>

Not only did Torleif just find out the names, birth dates and places of his ancestors, he came to know them as if they were his close friends. To help his descendents know of his ancestors as individuals, instead of just names, he wrote much about their lives.<sup>15</sup>

“It is wonderful to know of so many of our forefathers from that long ago, to know where they lived and served, know of their relationship to each other and the fun they had together...My love has been extended to everyone I have on this record as though they were my living family, so I have used the greatest of care in recording them correctly and attending to their temple work.”<sup>16</sup>

Ancestors in the direct-line Knaphus pedigree have several known occupations. In part they include: 11 Lutheran ministers, 2 Lutheran Bishops, 14 sheriffs (5 of which were selected by the people to represent the county of Rogaland to attend various King’s crowning ceremonies), 23 court members, and 3 mayors of big cities in Norway.<sup>17</sup> Here are some interesting facts regarding some individuals he found in his ancestry:

- **Jon Jonsen Packe** (born 1490 in England then moved to Norway) was the first book printer in Norway.
- **Jorgen Eriksen** (born 1535 in Denmark then moved to Norway) introduced the Lutheran faith into Norway; he was the Bishop in Bergen, Norway.
- **Elling Simonsen** (born about 1542) assisted **Jorgen Eriksen** in the Reformation. He was the Lutheran Minister in Finnoy, Rogaland, Norway.

- **Daniel Jorgensen** (born 1582) was a Lutheran Minister for 32 years in Hjelmeland, Norway.
- **Oluf Hotch** (born 1484) and his son **Laurit Olufsen Hotch** (born 1517) were both mayors of Tonsberg, Norway.
- **Viking of Torsnes** (born about 1174) is our oldest-known non-royal line ancestor.
- **Gecelia Holkansen** (born about 1220) was the Princess of Norway. Her father **Hokan Hokansen**, was the King of Norway.
- **King Harald of Jynland** (born about 840 AD) is our oldest known royal-line ancestor.

**Around 1954 at age 73**, he spoke at an LDS Ward and encouraged all to do genealogical work: "This work is so great and so essential for our salvation and for those who have put their trust in us. So I urge you to sincerely start this work. It is not too early, but for some of us it may soon be too late."<sup>18</sup>

In encouraging others to also become excited and involved in genealogical research, Torleif taught that the formula for individual qualifications for one doing this great work is to have:

1. Desire
2. Love
3. Sincerity
4. Determination
5. Patience

**In 1961 at almost 80**, four years before his death, Torleif wrote:

"So with this unanimous effort aided by divine guidance, I have now found 782 of my grandparents' names connecting me rightfully on many lines with my forefathers of 500, 600, and 700 years ago, as shown on my big pedigree chart which serves me as a blueprint in this work. I have also found the names and dates of about 9,400 additional relatives. So I have now about 10,132 names recorded and nicely kept in my three big loose-leaf record books."<sup>19</sup>

For many years his 4.5-ft. by 6.5-ft. family pedigree chart was mounted on the wall in the Church Office building as a showpiece, as one of the most complete records at that time."<sup>20</sup> Elder LeGrand Richards of the quorum of the twelve apostles spoke at his funeral in 1965. He stated that he knew of no single man in the church that has done more work in genealogy than Torleif Knaphus did.<sup>21</sup>

Torleif concluded his description of his life-long commitment to genealogical work by writing:

"...I have been grateful above words of expression that the Temples have been built and the condition has been so that I have been able to do this great work. 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."

“...I have also taken the greatest of care for this records safekeeping as I value it very highly. And I trust that it will always be preserved and someone of my descendants will likewise care for its safety and the continuation of this important work.”<sup>22</sup> (Highlights added)

The following sums up his feeling towards his life-long commitment to genealogical work:

**“...A crowning joy has come to me on account of this work.”<sup>23</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Anne Marie (Knaphus) James, daughter, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Introduction, October 4, 1961, page 1

<sup>3</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *Genealogical Research - The Greatest of All Hobbies*, date unknown

<sup>4</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus *My Life's Hobby*, Part 1, July 22, 1937, page 1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 3

<sup>7</sup> This assumes an average of 4% increase each year since 1905.

<sup>8</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *Brief Report of My Genealogical Work*, July 22, 1937, page 2

<sup>9</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Part II, October 4, 1961, page 1

<sup>10</sup> Grace (Knaphus) Humphrey, *T.S. Knaphus after his Daughter Grace's Birth*, about 1985

<sup>11</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *Brief Report of My Genealogical Work*, July 22, 1937, page 1

<sup>12</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus *My Life's Hobby*, Part 1, July 22, 1937, page 1

<sup>13</sup> Olive (Knaphus) Miller, *My Early Remembrances of Dad*, about 1985

<sup>14</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Introduction, October 4, 1961, page 1

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Introduction, October 4, 1961, page 1

<sup>17</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Part II, October 4, 1961, page 4

<sup>18</sup> Speech delivered by T.S. Knaphus titled: *Service they Rendered*, about 1954

<sup>19</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *My Life's Hobby*, Part II, October 4, 1961, page 6

<sup>20</sup> Kimball I. Knaphus, *My Early Remembrances of Dad*, about 1985

<sup>21</sup> Anne Marie (Knaphus) James, *My Remembrance of Dad – Torleif S. Knaphus*, about 1985

<sup>22</sup> Torleif S. Knaphus, *Genealogical Research - The Greatest of All Hobbies*, date unknown

<sup>23</sup> Ibid