

# Tidbits about Norwegian Genealogy & Our Family History

*Lessons learned from the Knaphus Family History  
by Allen Gerritsen*

- ◆ Before record keeping began, only first names were used, for example Jon or Eric. With the small population and the lack of mobility of the people, individuals only went by one name. That's why you'll see some names in our pedigree as just one name. Sometimes you'll see the place where someone is from, like Paul of Torsnes.
- ◆ As the population grew, individuals needed to be identified with last names. Patronymic names were established in Norway (and most of Scandinavia). "Patronymic names" means that the son takes on the name of the father, as his last name, with "son" on the end. For example, Eric's son Paul would have the name Paul Ericson. In 1901 a law was passed which virtually "froze" people's last name. Patronymic names didn't continue.
- ◆ As most know, Knaphus is a farm name. Norwegians commonly took on the farm name where they lived as a second last name. In our pedigree, you'll see some individuals with the patronymic name including the farm name after.
- ◆ As Norwegian's came to America, many kept their patronymic name (like Larson); others kept their farm name (like Knaphus).
- ◆ The pedigree chart on Personal Ancestral File (PAF) will show three identifying locations (if known) of our ancestors' birth, etc. the Town or Parish, County, and Country (Norway).
- ◆ Some of the old county's names have been changed in Norway. Of particular interest for our family, the county of "Stavanger" has changed to "Rogaland". However, there is still the major port city of Stavanger. So, when we used to see Torleif's genealogical records the name of Vats, Stavanger, Norway, it is now Vats, Rogaland, Norway. It was recommended that we use the new county names on our pedigree since current research would use the new names.
- ◆ In some instances, the Clerical District is known, and the Parish is not. The Clerical District is larger than the Parish in size, but smaller than the county.
- ◆ Most parishes throughout Norway began keeping records in the 1700s. In Vats, the parish started in 1786. Prior to that time, court records and family records were used. It's rare to know Norwegian ancestors prior to the 1600s.
- ◆ Ancestors in our pedigree have several known occupations including ministers, sheriffs, court members, mayors, and even a book printer.

Here are some interesting facts about our direct-line ancestors:

- **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 abt. 1542) assisted **Bishop Jorgen Eriksen** in the Reformation. He was a Lutheran Minister in Finnoy, Rogaland, Norway.
  - There are several (about ten) Lutheran Ministers in our line. One of them, **Daniel Jorgensen** (born 1582) was a Minister for 32 years in Hjelmeland.
  - **Oluf Hotch** (born 1484) and his son **Laurits Olufsen Hotch** (born 1517) were both the mayor of Tonsberg.
  - **Viking of Torsnes** (born abt. 1174) is our oldest known non-royal line ancestor.
  - **Gecelia Hokansen** (born abt. 1220) was the Princess of Norway. Her father, **Hokan Hokansen**, was the King of Norway.
  - **King Harald of Jynland** (born abt. 840 A.D.) is our oldest known royal-line ancestor.
- ◆ Early on much of the farmland in Norway was leased. It is a general opinion that around the year 1500 only between 1/4 to 1/3 of the land was cultivated by freeholders. Much of the land belonged to the Church, some of it to the Crown, some to the Nobility, and some to the townspeople. Eventually, many of the farm users bought the land for themselves, much of this happened during the 1700's, and conditions generally changed, and by 1814 about 2/3 of the land were owned by the farmers themselves.
- ◆ General Historical Outline of Norway:

800-1000 AD Viking Age

872 AD King Harald Fairhair united Norway into one kingdom. Before his time, Norway was comprised of small, military kingdoms.

1000 AD King Olav Trygvasson and King Olav Haraldsson *The Holy* brought Christianity to Norway.

1319 AD The old royal line died out. Norway united with Denmark.

1380-1523 AD The Union of Kalmar in which Denmark, Norway, and Sweden were united under one king.

1523-1814 AD Denmark and Norway united.

1536 AD The king of Denmark and Norway appropriated the land holdings of the Catholic Church.

1814-1905 AD Norway united with Sweden. The Norwegian parliament ruled under the new Norwegian constitution, but there was only one King for Norway and Sweden.

1905-1957 AD Prince Carl Fredrik of Denmark (named Hakon VII) was elected king of Norway. He ruled as a constitutional monarch.

Prehistorical and historical times are usually divided by the time when a written record appears. Historical times in Norway then, begin about 800 AD. Prior to this time the record depends upon archeological information.