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**Waldensian History – Part 1  
By Louis B. Cardon**

Most of the recipients of this Piedmont Families Organization newsletter are descendants of the 54 former Waldensians ("Vaudois" in French; "Valdesi" in Italian) who emigrated to Utah from the Piedmont valleys of what is now northern Italy.



between 1854 and 1860. Comprising individuals from 12 families, these emigrants were among the approximately 180 Waldensians who had been converted to the LDS Church between 1850 and 1856.

The dramatic – even miraculous – incidents surrounding the missionary work of Apostle Lorenzo Snow and a few companions in the Piedmont area are a fairly well known part of the general history of the Church. Apostle Snow had felt inspired to begin the first LDS proselytizing in Italy in 1850 among the few thousand members of the Waldensian Church, rather than among the Catholic population of the several separate states of the Italian peninsula. (The combining of these states into a unified Italian nation would occur a few years later: 1859-1870.) As Elder Snow wrote at the time: "With a heart full of gratitude, I find an opening is presented in the valleys of Piedmont, when all the other parts of Italy are closed against our efforts. I believe that the Lord has here a branch of the House of Israel, and it is the voice of the Spirit that I shall commence something of importance in that part of this dark nation."

Today, many of the descendents of these 54 hardy Waldensian converts who came to Utah may be only dimly aware of our truly remarkable heritage as descendants of the oldest non-Catholic church group of Europe. Whereas the other non-Catholic (or "protestant") churches date in general from the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Waldensians date from several centuries earlier. In fact, theirs is the only one of the several break-away (heretical) movements of the medieval era to survive the Inquisition and all other persecutions, and to persist to the modern age.

Extensive scholarly studies in recent years have shed considerable light on the origins and incredible endurance of the Waldensians.\* However, one intriguing story regarding the origins of the Waldensian faith is rejected by all the modern scholars, as well as by the Waldensian Church of our day. This is the legend that in their remote Alpine valleys this small group had preserved the pure New Testament Christianity from Apostolic times, without ever partaking of the great apostasy or ever becoming part of the Catholic fold. (See Stephens, p. 60). Strong historical evidence now places the beginnings of the Waldensian movement as an offshoot of Catholicism in Lyons, France in the mid-1170s.

Even this date of origin, however, means that the Waldensian faith is more than 300 years older than the other protestant faiths of our time.

Evidence indicates that in the 1170s there lived in the rising city of Lyons in southeastern France a merchant named Waldo (Valdes of Vaudes in the Franco-Provencal dialect of the area, Valdesius in Latin, Valdo in modern Italian). His given name may have been Peter, but this only began to appear in documents 200 years later, and is therefore doubtful. Waldo was evidently a man of wealth and, according to tradition, was married and had two daughters. Then, quite suddenly, some spiritual experience (stories vary) convinced him that his way of life was wrong – that Christ would want him to follow the advice which he gave to a rich young man (Matthew 19:21) to sell all his goods, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Him. Waldo was also impressed with the teaching of the Apostles James that faith without works is dead, but that one "who gives alms, does other good works with one's own possessions and observes the Lord's commandments will be saved. (Valdesius Testament of Faith, 1180, Tourn, p. 20-21.) Convinced that it was important for lay persons as well as priests to have access to the teachings of the Bible, Waldo used part of his wealth to have substantial portions of the Bible translated from Latin into the Franco-Provencal dialect spoken in and around Lyons. And then, after providing for his wife and daughters, he gave the rest of his money to those in need. He thus became a poor man himself, but also an inspiration to a growing body of disciples. These lived from charity, as he did, and became known as "The Poor Men of Lyons." Dressed in rough clothing and carrying no money, they went about two by two (women as well as men) preaching on the streets and in the homes the doctrines of the Bible as they understood them.

At first the Poor of Lyons did not challenge the authority of the Catholic Church, but sought to improve the lives of all the Christians they could influence. And the Catholic authorities, at first, did not denounce them. In 1179, a group of the Poor of Lyons took advantage of the convening of the third Lateral Council in Rome (the first great Council of the Roman Catholic Church in the medieval era) to go to Rome and to present to the Pope a copy of their common-language version of the Bible. The Pope recognized their good intentions, but told them that their local bishop would have to decide whether they could preach in

public. (Tourn, p. 17.) Some of the theologians at the Council made light of their unsophisticated theology, but there was no formal excommunications as yet.

Back in Lyons, however, the local Catholic hierarchy felt challenged by the preaching of the Poor and their use of a vernacular Bible. The Archbishop declared: "We bishops are here to do the preaching: it is a part of the task laid down for us as successors of the apostles." "On the contrary," replied the Poor, "preaching belongs to everyone who chooses to truly live like the apostles of Jesus." When Waldo and his followers were flatly ordered to discontinue their preaching they cited the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19): "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Expelled from the city of Lyons, the Poor then took their preaching mission across southern France, through Provence and Languedoc.

Here the Poor of Lyons became competitors, to a degree, of another unorthodox group, the Cathars. More radical than the Poor, the Cathars openly criticized the worldliness and power of the Catholic Church, and challenged its basic doctrines. The world, in their belief was absorbed in a great war between good and evil. The Poor wrote tracts and preached against the Cathars, but with time they themselves were becoming more critical of the Catholic Church as well. Thus, in 1184 the Poor were included with the Cathars and other dissidents in a Catholic Council's list of schismatic movements. In 1190 the Bishop of Narbonne declared them heretics.

In the meantime, missionaries were already carrying the Waldensian movement eastward across the Alps into Lombardy, an area of growing prominence in the economic development of Europe. During the long centuries of the Roman Empire, the area (basically the Po Valley in northern Italy, with Milan as the principal city) had participated in the Roman culture and economy. A major Roman road had facilitated economic and cultural relations between this area and the area just across the Alps in what is now southeastern France (called Provence in the Roman period.) The Piedmont valleys of the lower Alps were only a short distance off that route and a part of this culture. With the breakup of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., this area, like much of the Empire, knew sometimes-destructive raids and occupation by Germanic tribes (including the Lombards, whose name became attached to the

Po region.) Throughout Europe, the cities of the Roman era declined or disappeared, and were replaced for centuries (the early Middle Ages) by a more rural and localized economy. In the late or "high" Middle Ages, however (1100s and 1200s) cities were on the rise again in several parts of Europe – with cities of northern Italy becoming particularly prominent. Milan, Florence, Venice, Genoa, etc. were among the most rapidly growing and enterprising of these "new" cities. It was mainly in such cities that the great cultural movement known as the Italian Renaissance would take place in the 1300s and 1400s.

In the meantime, in the late 1100s, Milan was a bustling center of trade and small scale manufacturing of textiles, metal goods, etc. In the same period Milan had become a particularly active center of religious discussion and criticism of shortcomings of Catholicism. Several dissenting groups, including Cathars, were already active there when the first Waldensian missionaries arrived. At the time, city officials were generally tolerant of unorthodox Christian teachings, and the Waldensians, with their ability to support their teachings directly from the vernacular bibles, which they carried with them, soon became the leading dissident group of Milan and surrounding towns. In the same period, however, the Lombard Poor, as this branch of the Waldensians came to be called, developed certain differences from the original Poor of Lyons (now mainly spread through southern France.) A major difference was in the attitude towards work and marriage. For Waldo (Who died about 1206) and for his early disciples, family life and regular employment were distractions from their calling as itinerant preachers, and a temptation to accumulate wealth. The Lombard Poor, on the other hand, came to believe that a life devoted to pilgrim preaching was only one lifestyle legitimized by the Bible. They tended to emphasize the close-knit Christian community depicted in some parts of the New Testament. The typical figure among the Lombard Poor was an artisan, a textile worker, a baker or vegetable merchant, who pursued a settled lifestyle, while preaching to his neighbors and participating in joint activities (including group worship) with others of the Lombard Poor community. In the long run, it was this more settled lifestyle, which tended to shape the Waldensian movement, although itinerant preachers (barbas) continued to spread the faith and maintain contacts.

Over a period of several generations, scattered Waldensian groups were established over much of Western Europe, from southern Italy to the shores of the Baltic Sea. They were prominent for a time in such places as Austria, Flanders, and southern France, as well as the cities and towns of the Lombard plain, including Milan, Turin, and Pinerolo. But the Catholic Church became increasingly determined to eliminate heresy, and used the Inquisition and even armies for this purpose. Waldensians perished along with the Cathars in the Albigensian Crusade in southern France, and along with Hussites in the Hussite wars in Bohemia. Even Milan, faced with an economic blockade and threat of a crusade, allowed the Inquisition to begin its work in that city in 1228. Eventually it was only in "the bastion of the Alps," the relatively secluded "Waldensian Valleys" of Piedmont, that faithful and stubborn Waldensians were able to survive down to modern times.

In future issues of the PFO Report we'll try to get better acquainted with these valiant ancestors and their many trials.

#### **PFO Italian Researcher Giovanni Cena Visits Salt Lake City**

January 4, 2003 Giovanni Cena, his wife, his son, Lorenzo and his wife, were present at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City to give us a very worthwhile presentation of his work in the notary records. He also gave an excellent history of the Waldense people. We had representatives from all the families who emigrated from the Piedmont valley. It was an historic occasion. Those who attended felt the presence of our noble ancestors.

**FINANCIAL REPORT:  
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS WILL BE  
GIVEN IN NEXT ISSUE.  
THANK YOU FOR OF YOUR GENEROUS  
DONATIONS TO CONTINUE OUR  
RESEARCH IN ITALY.**

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**Extend your Pedigree**  
**Another Cardon line:**  
**RIBET (RIBETTO) ANCESTRY**  
**By Boyd L. Cardon**

KEY. b=born; md=married; bro=brother;  
dau=daughter; dec=deceased; fu=child of  
deceased followed by the parent's name  
PP=Piedmont Project Group Sheets  
Film # 472233; Es=Gli Esuli Valdesi  
Add one to the number to get the spouse, double  
the number to get the father.

I found in the Notary Records sent by Giovanni Cena  
the parents and grandparents of Isabelle Ribet  
(Ribetto.)

1. Isabella Ribet b abt 1605  
Pramollo, Torino, Italy; md Jacques  
Jahier b abt 1602 Pramollo, Torino,  
Italy. Had siblings: Maguerite b abt.  
1606 md abt 1626 to Jacob Jahier b abt  
1602; Gioanna (Gioannina) b abt 1608;  
Bartholomeo b abt 1609; Paolo b abt  
1610; Marta b abt 1612.
2. Giacomo Ribet b abt 1580 Pramollo,  
Torino, Italy; md abt 1604 Maria  
Clotto b abt 1584 Pramollo, Torino,  
Italy. Had siblings: Michelle b abt  
1582; Giovanni b abt 1585; Paolo b  
abt 1587 md abt 1611 Maria Giavello;  
Pietro b abt 1590; Gioanna b abt 1592  
md abt 1612 Jacobo Clotto.
3. Maria Clotto b abt 1584 Pramollo,  
Torino, Italy
4. Bartholomeo Ribet b abt 1555  
Pramollo, Italy
5. (Francesca) Mrs. Bartholomeo ribet  
b abt 1559, Pramollo, Torino, Italy.
6. Giovanni Clotto b abt 1559  
Pramollo, Torino, Italy md abt 1583.
7. Mrs. Giovanni Clotto b abt 1563  
Pramollo, Torino, Italy.

Sources Pramollo 75[2] Will 1 June 1615; Pramollo  
75[20] Recognition of marriage 2 Feb 1626;  
Pramollo 75[25] Recognition of marriage 16 Dec.  
1627; Pramollo 75[1] Perosa 1[12] 30 Dec 1610  
Perosa 5[19] Quittance 4 Mar 1614

All ordinance work has been done except  
for 6 and 7. Look on the familysearch website IGI  
files for the information. You'll need your  
Membership ID number and the date of your

confirmation. Please do not submit these names  
for temple work.

**CARDON ROOTS RUN DEEP!**

**DON'T MISS THE EXTENDED  
CARDON FAMILY REUNION**

AUG. 2<sup>ND</sup> 2003 AT  
NORTH LOGAN STAKE CENTER  
2750 N. 800E, NORTH LOGAN, UTAH.

**PHILLIPE AND MARTHE CARDON,  
ALONG WITH OTHER CARDON  
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**BRING YOUR CHILDREN AND  
GRANDCHILDREN!  
LET THEM KNOW AND FEEL  
OF OUR CARDON ROOTS.**

**AGENDA:**

**REGISTRATION 9:30- 10:30 AM  
SPEAKER: RICHARD HOLZAPFEL,  
AUTHOR WALDENSIAN HISTORY  
REPORT ON PIEDMONT 2002 TOUR**

**LUNCH \$5.00/PERSON**

**SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN  
FAMILY HISTORY AND TEMPLE WORK**

**ADJOURN 3:30PM**

**MORE INFORMATION CONTACT LARRY  
PORTER 801-375-3730**

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**Books to Read.** Find on Amazon.com  
The Waldensian Story. A Study of Faith,  
Intolerance and Survival by Prescott Stephens,  
1998 **Your are My Witnesses; The Waldensians  
Across 800 Years** by Giorgio Tourn, 1989