

Around 1508, when the Waldensians were starting to come out from under the latest episode of persecution, what were they like? In many ways, they behaved like ordinary Catholics: many attended Mass, confessed to the parish priest and were baptized, confirmed, married and buried in the Church. But they were also Catholics with a difference. The Waldensians, in addition to their parish priests, also had their own pastors, called barbes, who came around every six or twelve months to hold clandestine worship services and confession in homes at night. And these barbes also carried with them manuscript Bibles translated into a language their members could understand. Finally, it is probably safe to say that many of the Waldensians aspired to a higher standard of faith than ordinary Catholics.

Shortly after 1508, with the Protestant Reformation looming on the horizon, the Waldensians were about to undergo momentous change in their faith. After the Reformation was launched, the Waldensians came in contact with both Lutherans and Calvinists. The Calvinists in particular sent missionaries to the Alps, and after several generations the Waldensians effectively became Protestants. They commissioned John Calvin's cousin to translate the Bible into French, producing the first French Protestant Bible. But change did not come easily. For example, before contact with the Protestants, the Waldensians did not appear to oppose the notion that one could attain salvation through good works, and in that they did not differ from ordinary Catholics. However, after the wrenching transition to Protestantism, they adhered to justification by faith, believing that forgiveness and salvation came from God regardless of human merit.

The end of the next century once again brought upheaval in their lives. In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes that had afforded some protection to Protestants. French troops entered the Alps in an effort to force the Waldensians to convert back to Catholicism.

Our Waldensian ancestors were forced to leave, spending time in Switzerland and eventually settling near Darmstadt, Germany, on land leased to them by Count Ernst Ludwig. But soon the French

invaded Germany, Ernst Ludwig was forced to flee with his court and the Waldensians had to tag along. They then heard things had improved in the Alps, returned to their old homes only to be forced to go back to Germany. In transit for more than ten years, by 1699 the Waldensians settled down and formed a colony in the three villages of Rohrbach, Wembach and Hahn.

There, finally, the Waldensians prospered and were able to practice their faith openly and keep their French language. They built homes and farmed the land. From other French Huguenots they learned how to weave stockings and earned good livings as long as men's stockings were in fashion. Eventually, however, the stocking trade became less lucrative, and the Waldensians' strict system of land division meant that each child ended up with less land. As a result, a number were forced to leave the colony.

By the early 19th century, many in the colony were miserable because of the strife that underlay their lives. Napoleon, for example, conscripted some members of the Darmstadt colony for his Russian campaign, and a few died in Russia in 1812. By 1830 and 1851, some of the Waldensians had had enough of the various kings, popes, and emperors and their inquisitions, crusades and wars, and they decided to immigrate to the United States. Just in time for the Civil War!

--David Jaymes, Traverse City, Michigan

(Sources: Numerous documents provided by Brigitte Köhler of Wembach, Germany; Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics*; "Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français"; *A History and Genealogy of Peter Bert to 1987*.)

Editors Note: George Flood, spouse of Ella Jaymes mentioned in this article is the son of Emanuel Flott (Flood), and Grandson of Jean "Daniel" Flott (II). See timeline next page.