

A Most Extraordinary,  
Everyday Family Story  
of Coming to the New  
World, 1660 – 2016



# A Most Extraordinary, Everyday Family Story of Coming to the New World, 1660 – 2016

By

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.

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For Fynn

“All scholarship is—or ought to be—a kind of intellectual autobiography.”

—T. J. Jackson Lears

“Let us present a book containing the records of our dead.”

—LDS Doctrine and Covenants 128: 24





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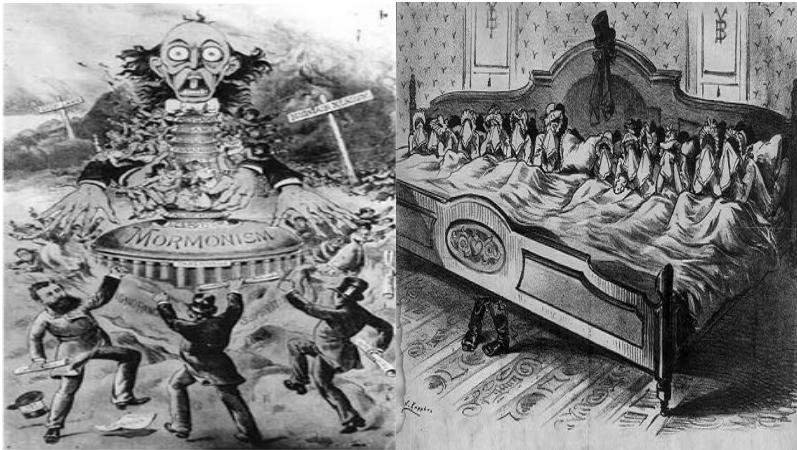
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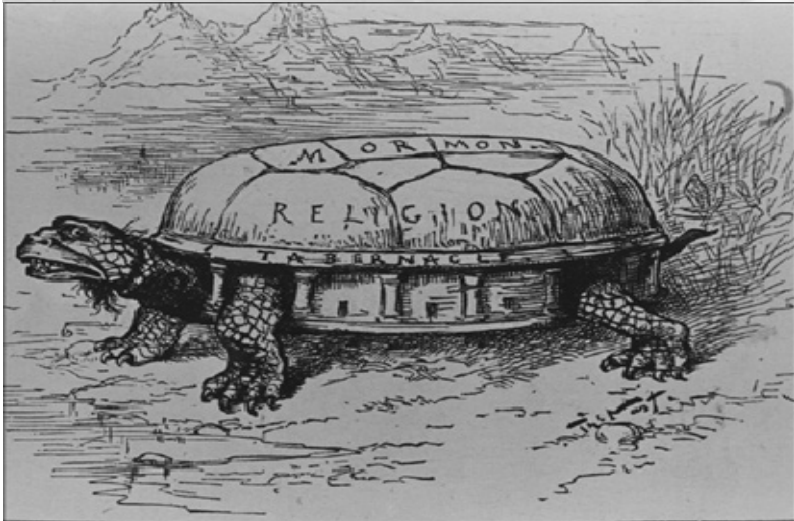
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Period anti-Mormon, anti-polygamy cartoons: “A. Arthur, Declaring Polygamy a Felony.... No Need to Prove that Actual Marriages had Occurred before Punishing These Dangerous Felons” (*Snail Hollow Gazette*) (left); “In Memorium Brigham Young” (*Juvenile Instructor*) (right)



Period anti-Mormon, anti-polygamy cartoons: “Religious Liberty is Guaranteed—But can we Allow Foreign Reptiles to Crawl all over Us?” (Thomas Nast) (above);  
 “He Thinks his Shell will Protect Him” (Thomas Nast) (below)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This is not at all the sort of book I ever imagined writing, or indeed taking the time to write. To my great shame, I must admit that it can rightly be called “Mormon history.” Having vilified Mormon historians in particular for perpetrating what I consider to be a kind of “Court History of David,” I now find myself in danger of doing the same. The subject matter is very close to me. Having left the Mormon church a long time ago in favor of Unitarianism, and still flirting with the idea of becoming a Muslim—out of consideration for my wife Cholpon Alieva, a Muslim Central Asian married to a non-Muslim, me in other words—I feel I have created the necessary distance between myself and Mormonism to write in a somewhat objective vein. Although not on the best of terms with my family, I have not entirely left them—as hard as I might try. For this reason, I must acknowledge a certain bias, but one which, in my case, inclines toward more critical rather than apologetic. What I have written here is no hagiography, to be sure, but I have also come to love these people, warts and all, from which I come. I could not help but see myself in them, and them in me, losing what real objectivity I might have claimed. In familiarizing myself with these most extraordinary, everyday people, who left their European homelands for the Americas so long ago now, I am in their debt and humbled by them, to be frank. I begin, therefore, by acknowledging and thanking all of them, first and foremost, for their lives and the stories they left. Not everyone in this world is as fortunate as I to have such a family story to tell.

Let me also confess, if I may, a debt to a grandmother I never liked very much and who undoubtedly felt more or less the same about me. That said, I now sincerely regret not getting to know Birdie Isabella Robison Swasey (1914—1997) better when she was alive, although, in writing this book, I feel as though I came to a better understanding of who she was and from whence she came. She was among the very first in the family to graduate from university, for one thing. Remarkably, this very poor but obviously bright Anglo-Dutch girl from Beaver, Utah, took some twenty-

five years to complete her studies. She never gave up! The year she graduated, 1957, her first grandson was born—me. Birdie Isabella and I shared a bond I never really knew or appreciated. Indeed, shame on me! She ended up in another little Dutch-Mormon ghetto, Duchesne County, where she taught school, fell in love, married a common laborer from a distinguished Mormon family, Sherman Martin Swasey (1912—2004), co-farmed with him, and opened a first high school library. Birdie Isabella went to church every Sunday, raised nine children—including a number of Native American foster children—and much, much more. She could be annoying, but I would give anything to sit and chat with her about, well, everything one last time.

Before she died, Birdie Isabella took it upon herself to write a family history in memory of her father, Alma Pratt Robison (1887—1941), and her maternal grandfather, John Mickelson Lang (1861—1945), as well. Copies were sent to everyone in the family. I suspect that not many read even a single page. I am sure I was not the only one to file her “Book of Remembrance,” as these tomes are titled in Mormon parlance, in a bottom drawer for safe keeping. Thirty years later, I became a grandfather and looked to see if her little octavo volume was still there. Unlike my Mormon faith, which had long sense disappeared, Birdie Isabella’s family history remained intact. I must wait until we meet again on the other side, as they say, to thank her in person for what she wrote, but, here and now, I want to acknowledge and thank her for what she did and hoped to pass along.

A few colleagues of mine, some in Mormon history, were kind enough to read an early draft of this book manuscript and offer suggestions on how it might be improved. In particular, I greatly appreciate Danny Jorgensen’s suggestion to include pedigree charts. At first I resisted, in part because I wanted to create a narrative that might stand on its own, but also because pedigree charts seemed rather quaint and all too Mormon. Who reads pedigree charts? Eventually, I came to see the wisdom of this and even caught a number of errors as a consequence of following his sage advice. Danny is a gifted and accomplished Religious Studies scholar (University of South Florida), having written extensively in the auto-ethnographical vein vis-à-vis a radical and communitarian “Mormon” faction known as the Cutlerites, from which he in part descends. Suffice it to say that his help and support of my work in this case means a great deal to me, both personally and professionally. I cannot thank him enough.

Others to read and comment on the book manuscript at various stages in its evolution include my dear colleague from Turkey, Hatice Mescioglu; long-time friend and mentor from Alberta, Canada, Arta Johnson; Vickie

Cleverley Speek, formerly with the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal and John Whitmer Books; and William D. Morain, distinguished Community of Christ historian, plastic surgeon, and someone I am proud to call a friend. I should like to add here that my friends on the erstwhile “Reorganized” side of things Mormon may well be delighted to know that at least one member of my family, Frances Mary Goodsell (1841—1915), left the Latter-day Saints for the Reorganized LDS church, now the Community of Christ, shortly after arriving in Utah, having made the long trek from England with her husband, the venerable Elder James Kemp (1834—1917) of the Reorganization in Colorado.

Last, but by no means least, two dear friends, readers, and copy editors gave their time and genius to bring the writing of this book up to speed. Firstly, Alaina Beth Young Haerbig saved me from myself more than once. A devout Evangelical Christian, Alaina did not balk or rush to judgment at any point along the way, especially when so much of the content of this work must have rubbed her the wrong way—not simply as a disciple of the Christian Messiah, but as a woman of remarkable intelligence, faith, and humanity. She must have wondered at times how my Mormon family suffered *because* of their faith, for the plight of so many of the women in my family was, no doubt, extremely troubling. A lesser soul might have said something, even a parenthetical “Good Lord,” but not Alaina. Indeed, she was and is exemplary of a rare Christian faith, and truer to her Savior’s command to judge not, lest ye be judged, than any I have known. As perhaps the best way to express my sincere appreciation for everything she has done for me, let me quote the following in her honor, which says it better than I:

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.  
And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me  
this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.  
(KJV, Acts 26:28-29)

Secondly, I was blessed, indeed, also to solicit the help of a long-time family friend and no less extraordinary writing talent, Jeannie Clements Mackintosh. Jeannie is married to the increasingly renowned Canadian historical geographer Phil Mackintosh of Brock University (Ontario, Canada), whom I have known for many years and with whom I have had the good fortune to collaborate. It is not simply politically correct, but correct simply put, to rank my friend Phil as the husband of this remarkable and kind friend, now also at Brock. Anyone familiar with Canadian fine arts ought to know the Clements family. To be honest, I never dreamed that Jeannie would give the entire manuscript such a

thorough and definitive final copyedit. She caught errors which had slipped through the cracks and her no less outstanding stylistic sense helped to further polish the manuscript. Most astonishing of all, she brought about an even greater sense of balance and fairness. Knowing Mormonism as she does, having experimented with it for a time, she set aside any personal misgivings and erred on the side of kindness. I learned a great deal about a variety of academic necessities I thought I knew. From the bottom of my heart, I must thank her for going the extra mile for me, and for the sake of friendship.

Two institutions deserve honorable mention. The free online pedigree tool known as Progeny was indispensable to the creation of the pedigree charts and family lines that appear at the end of this book. The owners and operators of this internet application generously allowed me to use their full program free of charge. In fact, Progeny is not a family history application only, but a clinical tool for medical professionals intended to gather data in order to offer risk assessment in relation to family medical histories. As I discuss at the end of the book, an important discovery that came of my research was medical in nature. Indeed, while surveying the lives of my progenitors, how they died has proven just as important as how they lived. A significant number of untimely and freakish deaths on the Swedish side of the family are attributable to heart disease, and myocarditis in particular. I appear to suffer from the same condition, attesting to the practical and medical justifications for undertaking such a study. I want to thank Progeny for their kindness and for the use of their superb online genogram and pedigree program in the course of my research.

The other institution I must thank—and this will shock my enemies in the Mormon history community—is the Mormon church and its free online genealogical databases and search engines, in particular. Familysearch.org proved such a wealth of information and means of accessing and analyzing data that I could not have done any of this without it. Of course, family historians deserve most of the credit. In this vein, I want to single out two other family members who have been doing our family's history for some time: Jerry Sanders and Erik Forsberg. They may or may not approve of what I have written, but their pioneering work was of great assistance all along the way and I thank them for, in essence, paving the way.

Once again, Cambridge Scholars Publishing agreed to publish another of my book manuscripts. Their unwavering support of my work, as well as the continued financial assistance of my academic institution, the American University of Central Asia, has made all the difference. I want to thank

one and all for their support, especially my department head, Professor Duane Lacey.

Finally, this book has been particularly hard on my wife, Cholpon, and children, Acacia and Attila, taking up extraordinary amounts of my time and energy, and taking me away from them when I should have been home. Ironically, a book about family has come at the expense of family, the needs of the dead eclipsing those of the living, and thus very Mormon of me, in some respects. No one in the Latter-day Saint tradition knows this better than a Mormon bishop's wife. In this instance, I can only apologize for losing myself in yet another book so soon after completing my last one. (Also published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, it discussed a segment of the persecution of academics in the New Turkey, myself included.) And, I cannot say that the next book will be a long time in coming—a history of jazz music in Central Asia tugs at my heartstrings and is long overdue. After that, I dare not promise to stop writing, either—begging Cholpon's pardon and forgiveness the best and most I can offer her and my poor children—without simply lying through my teeth.

Of course, any errors are mine and mine alone.



Period anti-Mormon, anti-polygamy cartoon: “Joseph F. Smith and Family”  
(*Ohio Newspapers*, 1900–1909)





## FOREWORD

### BRIDGING THE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHICAL, EVOCATIVE/ANALYTICAL GREAT DIVIDE



This is a deeply personal book, so much so that some readers may well balk at its scholarly pretense and use of such phrasing as “auto-ethnographical” when, in truth, it can exact no more or less for itself than a genealogical flight of fantasy of no particular worth. Its readers ought to be only those it implicates, related to the subject matter by blood as it were. Ordinarily, that number would be small were it not for the fact that this particular family extends further than most, indeed, one line of its descendants rightfully adds up to more than 20,000 living souls. The entire figure of living relatives/descendants of the author might well be in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, because of one incontrovertible religious matter of fact: Mormonism and, indeed, its core doctrine, polygamy, which wreaked a kind of matrimonial/mathematical havoc. There are so many “bodies” as it were that one is tempted to lose count, or, for that matter, pay little attention to such indubitable facts as being related to Mitt Romney, who ran unsuccessfully against Barack Obama for the Presidency of the United States, or a distant relative of the captain of the Mayflower, John Swasey, and possibly even a descendant of Charlemagne the Great. While all this may sound quite extraordinary, polygamy renders it rather less than impressive. Because of polygamy in this case, one comes by such “connections” somewhat honestly, but dishonestly, too, and therein lies the problem.

Suffice it to say that, were I to appear on the threshold of the Romneys, claiming to be their long-lost kin, I am rather sure that Mitt would call the police and have me forcibly removed from the premises. Of course, genealogy straight up is too often the stuff of neo-Nazis, members of the K.K.K. and a legion of other poor white trash in search of some reason to think that the “greatness” which escapes them, or proves beyond their reach, is nonetheless in the castanets. I drop such names as John Swasey, captain of the charter Puritan sea vessel that brought America’s founding



Europeans to the New World in the seventeenth century, Europe's Christian Holy Roman Emperor, and Mitt Romney in the same breath as my hapless relations, not to impress, but rather to make a point—a clear instance of what might be termed genealogical *reductio ad absurdum*.

Again, at least on the surface, genealogy has been too often the stuff of fascists down on their luck, in search of a biological rationale to explain a fall from grace of some unpredictable and henceforth unexplainable sort. In fact, in that respect there is no beating around the truth, that polygamy, in sum, makes for strange bedfellows, family connections that might be supposed to defy logic, the sort I mention here, albeit tongue in cheek, meant to drive home that point. Leaving to one side the issue of my and mine being *bona fide* members of a royal rank-and-file vis-à-vis mythopoetic American and European regal family bloodlines, I want to make the opposite case—that my extended and distended family is worthy of study, not because of alleged distinguished affiliations, but a conspicuous lack thereof. What greatness there might be among the ranks is the proverbial exception that proves the rule, but good news, in fact—for if postmodern trends in both literature and history are any guide, our day has finally and everlastingly come.

To be clear, what makes my decidedly insignificant family and their story/stories worth telling is not a factor of how many they are or how many can rightfully be called “rich and famous.” The idea is not to perpetrate a genealogy worthy of nobility, as it were, and thus a registry of persons high up the ladder of preferment, but rather a chronicle of nobodies for the most part, men and women who lived, as Henry David Thoreau writes in his nineteenth-century utopian novel, *Walden*, lives of “quiet desperation.” In this case, “quiet” is the operative word, rather than “desperate,” such as their lives were in many instances. But to fixate on mere social status or lack thereof misses the point, for the objective in this instance is to give voice to the voiceless, to turn silence into noise that begs to be felt, if not heard per se.

There is a risk, of course, that such a literary-historical-genealogical striving and justification may run afoul of what the French literary theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, called “differend” or the double bind. In this case, if the voiceless speak up, they throw up the right to be heard, in sum. Yet, the problem, and the dependable nature of my family's “silence” as it were, is not a case of their stories dying with them, for they left a sort of voluminous paper trail to say the least. Rather, the problem is that no one (who is anyone, that is) has cared to listen to their stories and testimony—in part, because they contradict in too many ways that grand meta-narrative known as the American dream. Their religion commanded these

miscreants to keep a Book of Remembrance, which most did, but to no avail. Their religious choices and social practices virtually guaranteed that their voices would never be heard, no one of rank in the “old-boys club” inclined to read such incongruous remembrances into the record of the making of a great nation.

For the vast majority of the members of my family, going back nearly four centuries, all told, *their* American dream was not *the* American dream, their stories and narratives standing well outside the grand narrative of religious freedom and/or “liberty and justice for all.” Nor did their economic fortunes, or lack thereof, conform to the pattern. Most failed to go from the vanquished of Europe to the victorious of America, neither themselves nor their children rising up the ranks; a few, yes, a precious few, to be sure, but generation after generation fared no better, ending up pretty much as helpless and hopeless as they began.

For those who came first, there was land to be had for pennies on the dollar, which could not be held in their native Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, Scotland, or England. But even the New England side of the family, on my mother’s side, Puritans in every sense of the economic word who managed to grab hold of the brass ring, kept hold of it for only a generation or two. Westward expansion and the trek across the Plains in search of bigger and better proved to be a case of falling returns. Only one struck it rich on the goldfields of California, a veritable “forty-niner” who used his winnings to buy a herd of cattle which he drove to Utah. Even then, because of polygamy, and with far too many wives and kids to support, everything this singularly lucky member of the family piled up for himself and his offspring quickly evaporated.

My early Mormon progenitors suffered more than their average portion of criminal judgments, once more a factor of the religion to which they subscribed, and, of course, polygamy, a social organization that Americans simply found abhorrent. The quandary of women and minors in the ranks, mothers and daughters, as easily as the risky ventures of their men do not conform to the pattern of sacrifice refunded. Instead of conquerors of an untamed wilderness, more frequently than not, they were the ones to be suppressed, either by the elements or just as victims of a regime-directed effort to exterminate them from the face of the globe. They were resourceful, to be certain, but not trained in any sense—not until much, much later, and not all. But resourceful they had to be (or else). Each generation began anew, no further forward in many respects than the last, and in some cases, worse off.

Because of their religious orientation, and somewhat tragic devotion to polygamy in particular, they were not welcome and, indeed, considered

aliens in their own land. Having endured a perilous sea voyage, they then passed over nearly the entire length of the country by wagon train, handcart and/or rail to the Great Salt Lake. Some walked the remainder of their way once in Utah to their designated millennial outposts in Logan to the north and Provo to the south, as well as points eastward and westward. They made the slog to the Mormon Promised Land with fear and trepidation, nearly starving to death along the way, losing loved ones (many of them children), as the country mocked their naïve determination and slavish devotion to a faith that seemed to run contrary to Republican values. For their trouble, they were cast in the role of America's Caliban and thus "not honour'd with a human shape." Poor Caliban, befriended by Prospero only to be accused of the attempted violation of Miranda; his harsh treatment and subsequent enslavement was a necessary evil, as he laments mockingly to Prospero: "Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else this isle with Calibans." Such was the fear that drove much of the anti-Mormon crusade and anti-polygamy publicity: Mormons might people else this country with Mormons, God forbid!

A few managed to make the journey with a reasonable cache of wagons and livestock; one or two came from Europe's better sort and prospered, despite settling in Mormon Utah. Most, however, had nothing but a strong back and an even stronger desire to "make it," working the land, or the railroads, digging canals and cutting down the forests—anything and everything to make ends meet. Some found work in the local mills and learned trades, but struggled their entire lives. As a rule, what they did accumulate over the course of a lifetime would not be passed down to their children. There were simply too many mouths to feed, not enough ground or personal property to dole out, and so no one got more than a warm pat on the back and/or boot up the side of the head. What made America great, at least for these folks and my family was a thing of pure luck—the Gold Rush—and that was, more or less, as good as it was likely ever to get.

And yet, such "everyday" people can be called "extraordinary," in part because of the pain, sorrow, and heartbreak they suffered, which their chosen religion seemed to require and their adopted homeland rubbed in their noses. My predecessors, in the public mind at least, were little more than animals because of their Mormon faith, depicted as a giant squid whose doctrinal tentacles reached far and wide, squeezing the life out of its female victims, in particular. How hardened they had to be—and not only Mormon women—but also how saddened they must have been for much of their miserable existences. Their American dream may have been only to wake up from what quickly became a nightmare for all and sundry.

Their stories not only deserve to be told, but demand to be, for two more very important causes, and not simply because of the injustice heaped upon them. The foremost of these reasons is the simple fact that, as I attempt to show, they are great stories at bottom, chock full of the necessary dramatic ingredients that make for a *bona fide* epic adventure. As it turns out, not all of their remembrances were honest accounts; while that does—and, indeed, ought to matter—it need not weigh as heavily as one might think when compared to the reasons for and use of such prevarication in the broader cultural scheme of things. Often, it can be considered as typical of much that can be called storytelling, by which I mean, an endeavor to fashion the past in the image of the present.

Moreover, “lying” in the service of sacred family conceits—such as the Forsberg belief in their having come from a long line of woodworkers and shipbuilders—served a purpose: in this case, to justify the career choices of my father Clyde, an architect, and his father, Revere, and grandfather, Hildur, self-taught carpenters. Ironically, the real shipbuilders in the family are on my mother’s side, the New England Swaseys. That said, there seems to be no truth to the claim that they descend from French nobility. Despite a French-sounding name as they presumed, they are Brits through and through. It appears improbable, too, that the first Swaseys paddled up the Mississippi with their “Indian” wives in tow, as some in the family have said, their progenitors a French mercenary corps under General Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette during the Revolutionary War. And up to now, such fanciful and far-fetched family stories on the Swasey side—which include Charlemagne the Great as a charter member—explain the Swasey custom of taking Native foster children into their hearts and homes.

In that respect are good academic reasons to take such family stories seriously, real or imagined, which gets us back to where we started and so the place of auto-ethnography per se (storytelling) in the wider literary and historical scheme of things as something more serious than academic matters that go bump in the dark, as it were. On the one hand, “scientific historians”—and there are a few left, despite the fact that modern history has given itself over, almost completely, to “relativist” rather than “scientific” historicism, Mormon history a case in point—take issue with auto-ethnography; as a mode of self-reflection, it is meant to explore the “self” and is thus an inward-looking, psychological affair rather than an outward-looking, historical quest in the main. To be sure, auto-ethnographical writing walks a fine line between the ego, as the sole database for experience, and the need for “verification strategies,” which historical investigation demands. The two are connected, or rather can be,

as Kathy Charmaz and Richard Mitchell have shown vis-à-vis “the myth of silent authorship” (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996). Evidently, although students are encouraged to maintain a secure distance from the subject matter and, therefore, mute their voice (*animus*) in accordance with the demands of academic discipline, Charmaz and Mitchell contend that the antonym is not only possible, but preferable. Ideally, auto-ethnography is a compounding of the evocative (the self or author) and the analytical (the subject matter or history *per se*). For this reason, Charmaz and Mitchell are critical of the somewhat dated and conventional scientific and/or social scientific understanding of the author as seen, but not heard, akin to how Victorian children were expected to conduct themselves. Alternatively, authorial transparency is key, not just in the credits, but in the text as well.

At the same time, if the intention or hope is something academic, it is obligatory to “test” family stories and/or leitmotifs scientifically, triangulating them, in effect, with various government indices, such as census data; birth, marriage, divorce, and death records; cemetery lists; digital newspapers and city directories; high school and university transcripts and yearbooks; as well as voyage and passenger lists; LDS church records; baptismal catalogues and parish files (which are extensive); migration registries; and a variety of online and offline genealogical data bases and local family history libraries. In some respects, genealogy has never been easier.

Nevertheless, family history or genealogy void of proof, and thus “unfalsifiable” in the Popperian sense, can be understood as the academic equivalent of the theological sin of faith without works: dead, in other words. It is not enough simply to pass down the received wisdom via sincere autobiographies and loyal family histories, which may well be expertly crafted, but are likely to mislead and rise only to the level of hagiography. Polygamy proves especially problematic from a scientific point of view, in part because the record in some cases was deliberately falsified and intended to deceive federal authorities. Secret polygamous marriages and unlawful cohabitation, following the official suspension of polygamy in 1890, gave impetus to a variety of documentary sleights of hand, as I will show in the case of a number of my polygamous progenitors. Children of polygamy moved around quite a bit, as well, making it hard to know who belonged to whom.

The true paternity, or rather maternity of Rose Closner Forsberg is but one example; she may have taken the surname of her adoptive family, her biological mother’s name on her death certificate one Magdalena M. Kunz, not Elizabeth Closner, that of her adopted mother, it would seem. Rose was born out of wedlock and, technically at least, a member of the

German-Russian-Swiss Kunz family of Idaho fame. Children of polygamous families in Utah, Idaho, and beyond were regularly farmed out to relatives and, well, anyone willing to take them. That it is virtually impossible to know with any certainty who Rose really was, who her parents really were, is doubly troubling because, alas, she was Hildur Forsberg's wife, the mother of Revere, our grandfather and after whom both our father and I take our middle names. Because Revere was raised not by his father, but by his mother and Swiss stepfather(s), he thought of himself as ethnically Swiss, too, not Swedish—not in the least.

Moreover, I was shocked to discover in the course of my research that Revere gave his only son, Clyde "Revere," a Swiss middle name (Renore/Renoir), rather than Revere per se—assuming that the 1940 United States Census report can be believed. Like Revere, Clyde was raised by a single mother, neither of these Swedes having had the luxury of a father who chose to hang around. Ironically, Clyde clearly identified more with his maternal Scottish great grandfather, William McNeil, making him more Scottish than Swedish in his own estimation—in the same way that Revere was more Swiss than Swedish in his.

Indeed, when I was bidden to serve in the Edinburgh, Scotland Mission in 1977, Clyde was never more proud, claiming to behold a vision one day while on the bus home from work, of the entire family rejoicing at word of the first member of the family, me, to be called on such a delegation and who would thus take the Gospel to wayward relatives back in Scotland. And to ram home the point on that particular day, my father proudly presented me with William's gold ring which he had reserved for precisely such a special affair. As providence would have it, too, my very first assignment was merely a stone's throw from Trenant, East Lothian, which William and the residue of the Scottish side of the family had called home before departing for Utah in the 1860s.

In fact, the Swedophile in the family is neither my father nor me, but my younger brother Jack, having fashioned himself after the image of the Swedish master craftsmen and shipbuilders the Forsbergs never were, his woodworking business and workshop in Richmond County, Ontario, something straight out of *Beowulf* (Forsberg 2015, 52–72).

Perhaps other Utah Mormon family stories, no less entangled in polygamy, have fared better than mine—other extended families not so screwed up or unfathomable. Mormons may well be among the best genealogists in the world, but precisely because of this they desperately need to know who they are and from whence they came, polygamy muddying the well. To be Latter-day Saint, in the Utah-Mormon sense at least, might be said to suffer somewhat from a heightened longing for a

homeland that can be called one's own and, with this, a renewed sense of family, which is not to be found in the United States, but points far to the north, east, south, and west of "Zion." Little wonder the religion feels obliged to take its message overseas, proclaiming that "families can be together forever." Its clean-cut and pinstriped emissaries are given a chance to go home themselves, at least for a time, and thus a chance to see what home really looks like, feels like, and where a truer sense of belonging may be had vis-à-vis that lost and/or found in the New World by their predecessors.

I have included a digital photographic record throughout, too, as perhaps the best and only unswerving, eyewitness testimony in some respects to who they were, leaving readers to arrive at their own conclusions. As I read and researched for this book, the graphic record loomed large. Among my regrets, for example, is failing to locate a single picture of Hildur, the first in our Forsberg line to come to the New World from his native Sweden, and from whom Revere comes, as mentioned. Hildur was a lousy father by all accounts, dying in his early fifties for his sins. His only real crime in this case may have been poverty, for he died a slow and agonizing death, in his prime, and only because he lacked the financial means to have a deep cut to his hand checked by a doctor. No one claimed his body, either. I wished only to catch a glimpse of the man. Suffice it to say that the photographic record is an important part of his story and others I hope to tell here.

I have added another pictorial record alongside this one: a series of period anti-Mormon and anti-polygamy cartoons, which were/are most unkind, indeed painful, but no less telling and essential. What comes to the nub of the tale of my family of "everyday" people coming to the New World, more interesting than most, is their religion. and, as such, the degree to which its revolutionary, anti-American, political stance—as considerably as its anti-modern conventions and social practices (polygamy in particular)—located the Forsbergs writ large on the edge of empire, occupying the extremities of the Western hemisphere in hopes of carving out a place for themselves, but to no avail. As America's Caliban, they were befriended, then betrayed and excoriated by so-called civilized society.

What I have written here may well seem to some, especially the Mormon church and its phalanx of faithful historians, to cast aspersions on a faith, as well as a family. Far be it from me to judge the latter too harshly, for their lives bespeak a sadness that cuts me to the core. They are, they were family. Something of them resides in me, literally. I am bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh—their blood, sweat, and tears, and

heartache most of all, my deliverance in some respects—none of which is lost on me. For this reason, no doubt, what I have written is very Mormon indeed, amounting to a Book of Remembrance, a commandment and sacred duty in the Latter-day Saint tradition, but which I have clothed in academic ceremonial dress, or at least attempted to do so, for this reason calling it “A Most Extraordinary, Everyday Family Story of Coming to the New World, 1660—2016.” It is very American, too, but a Puritan Jeremiad of sorts, which argues that America still has a long way to go if it hopes to be worthy of the designation “Promised Land.” My progenitors the victims of a national dream/nightmare, as well as a religious utopia/dystopia, left home in hopes of a better life, but lost themselves along the way.



“Who Are the Real Mormons: Caravan of Mormon Neophytes En Route to Salt Lake Camps In The Desert” ( in Lindsay Hansen Park, 22 August 2016)





# INTRODUCTION

## UNALIKE IN DIGNITY: CITY AND FAMILY INTERSECTIONS

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

—Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;  
The which if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

—Prologue, *Romeo and Juliet*



was born in Logan, Utah, in 1957. My parents were both the progeny of pioneer Mormons, their pious ancestors crossing the Atlantic Ocean by steamer and then the Plains by covered wagon and locomotive

for the Great Basin Kingdom in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The Swedish and Danish sides of the family, on my father's side, made the trek in the late 1880s, when the First Transcontinental Railroad transported immigrants by the tens of thousands all the way to California, pausing in Utah and other stops along the way. Nevertheless, the Scottish and British branches of the family, on both sides, came by wagon train, which proved far more difficult and annoying. When they arrived in Salt Lake City, they were dispatched to points north (Logan and Cache County) and south (Provo, Juab, and Millard County) to build up the Kingdom, digging canals by hand, squatting on "Indian land," and then making their own millennial lookout, one church and school and homestead at a time--all of it sufficed in the name of their Lord and at the behest of His prophet.

They were farmers, ranchers, railroad men, blacksmiths, and carpenters. The California gold rush accounts for the only case of what might be considered someone in the family (on my mother's side) acquiring a little of what might be called money. No one on either side of the family held education in high esteem, my father the first in his to attend university (Utah State University class of 1958). University graduates on my mother's side were few and far between, as well. Those who had attended never went beyond the undergraduate level and few could manage even that. Granted a full scholarship to a beauty academy, my mother hooked up with my father instead, scarcely a week after she graduated from high school, dedicating the rest of her childbearing years to childbearing. In fact, that is not only her story, but her entire family's story. One thing that her progenitors—Swaseys, Brothersens, Robisons, Langs, Mickelsons, Ipsons, and, especially, Pratts and Scovils—did better than most was to propagate with a kind of reckless abandon, leaving little time or energy for anything else. Wives and children were sometimes left to their own devices, forced to sink or swim. On my mother's side of the family, polygamy ruled supreme, whereas my father's predecessors—the Forsbergs, Closners, Goodsells, and McNeils—were petty polygamists, but mostly monogamists.

My mother came from a long line of cattlemen, statesmen and churchmen of standing, whereas my father fell from Swedish common folk for the most part; they meant well, but couldn't help but fade into insignificance, objects of ecclesiastical pity and censure. Scandinavians down on their luck and hoping to start afresh in the New World with a little help from "God's people," most simply scraped by, living proverbial lives of quiet desperation. If they were to be found in the annals of church history, it was consistently lower down the ladder of celestial preferment. Their names do not appear anywhere as a rule, not in local church

histories, university convocations, nor municipal administrations. They rose to no more eminent rank than temple janitor. (Indeed, the work they performed in the temple was most assuredly for the living, not the dead. They cleaned the toilets and mopped the floors of the liturgical faithful who tramped into the building nearly every day, opening the temple doors in the wee hours of the morning for their betters and then locking up for them at night.)

One and all were decent folk, to be sure, although the Swedes—the Forsbergs, that is—seemed to struggle a little harder than most with alcohol addiction and, to put it bluntly, spousal and child support. Being a Forsberg was no great blessing from On High. The Scots (Goodsells and McNeils) were, as one might expect, stoic to the bitter end, having little to show for themselves but a quiver full of hapless children they could ill afford to feed, clothe, or educate properly.

What soon becomes clear in any survey of early Mormon history, family, and church life, is that, while all its European converts were “white,” some were whiter than others. How this played out was often a matter of language, or a lack thereof; English was the language of the church and so non-English speakers (which included Scottish converts, it would seem) were not deemed entirely competent to be given anything like real administrative power—not until, that is, they mastered the language of their New England colonizers. Of course, they were more than happy to disavow everything and anything northern European, making a point not to pass any language or customs on to their children, so they might stand a better chance of climbing the social ladder. The British branch of my father’s side of the family had it only a little better, rising only slightly higher in the pioneer socioeconomic and religious pecking order. They might, and did, rush the process through intermarriage, throwing us the likes of the late LDS President, Ezra Taft Benson—or should I say, Ezra Taft Bengtson.

Nevertheless, in the former days of the church, and pioneer Logan in this case, Brits generally occupied the ecclesiastical first tier (Bishops, Elders Quorum Presidents and the like), Scots the second (that is, their first and second counselors), and Scandinavians the third (that is, Sunday School second counselors, Relief Society first and second counselors, and various offices in the Primary). As at church, so, too, in life. Being religious in Mormon Utah had its economic perks to say the least. Impious Brits might occupy lower positions, akin to those which their pious Scandinavian and Danish “brethren and sisters,” as junior partners in the Kingdom, felt fortunate to be called to administrate.

The Utah pioneers were white supremacists after a fashion; the church to which they belonged had banned people of color as a matter of principle from full fellowship. Nevertheless, this fact has confused an important aspect of the early Mormon and Eurocentric *Weltanschauung*, namely, that its mission to the huddled masses of northern Europe was no less racist in some regards. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the history of Logan. It is why, I suspect, the Logan Forsbergs were not particularly religious, playing no significant role in the history of the church there—or anywhere for that matter.

The patrician pioneer Mormon stock on my mother's side were British to the man, woman, and tike, albeit with a dash of Danish. They were Bishops, Stake Presidents and senior members of the Relief Society. They were also local politicians. Sitting on boards of directors, they were in the enviable position of regulating local irrigation and water rights, which, in turn, guaranteed that their position at the very top of the Millard County food chain would be preserved in perpetuity. They were the polygamous scion once or twice removed from the Pratts and Scovils, both famous families, but neither particularly wealthy. The story of Parley P. Pratt, as exemplary, is really that of a "swinging dick" whose deeply held belief in polygamy would be the end of him, literally, but, more significantly, who left a string of married women and children to flap in the wind. The Pratts followed the tradition of some on my mother's side of the family: what little bit of money they managed to acquire seemed to disappear just as quickly.

The Swaseys followed suit, obeying the church's commandment to replenish the earth and build up their own small kingdoms, regardless of how many children they could educate, let alone support. They were farmers and so children might be put to work in the fields, but when they grew up, what then? The account of polygamy on my mother's side of the family is one of falling returns. My mother seemed to infer one thing: get out and then as far away as possible. There was nothing for her in Duchesne County.

How two pioneer Mormon families, in particular the Forsbergs and Swaseys (a study in contrasts), from their respective millennial ports of call (Logan and Provo), came together is part of a larger question I will explore here. Their narration is an American news report because it concerns the plight of common people, and, if I may say so implying no disrespect, "nobodies" for the most part who went on to become, well, nothing really dramatic. Theirs is not a classic example of *rags to riches*, but instead a case of *rags to rags*—of nothing very inspiring or alluring necessarily about their human spirits. Their story undoubtedly reflects a

truer caricature of what it was like for the great majority who came to America in search of everlasting fame and good fortune. The one or two who might be said to have struck it rich were exceptions that proved the rule, their only rewards those somewhat ethereal treasures stored in Heaven—good works, noble sacrifices, and the love and respect of family and friends. Even these were not to be had in rich supply, except on tombstones and the odd hagiography which we dare not trust as far as we can throw.

Their story—and mine, too—is a tale of two pioneer cities that would rise to preeminence long after them. Nevertheless, Logan and Provo were not made of brick and mortar, but of blood, sweat, and tears of such persons of no effect. The chronicle of my own pioneer Mormon ancestors and the two religious settlements they helped to erect are interconnected in important ways. What became of them and their descendants—of me, in essence—is the question. It is a narrative of two cities and two families, coming together and then apart, a catastrophe and comedy rolled into one which tries to speak to the subject of who we were and where we travel from here. Set in fair Logan, and Provo, this is a tale of two pioneer Mormon households, unlike in dignity and that “from forth the fatal loins of these two foes, a pair of star-cross'd lovers ... bury their parents' strife....”

In the summer of 1955, my father, Clyde Revere Forsberg (1935—present), having entered Utah State University to study landscape architecture, and having completed a carpenter apprenticeship under his father, returned home one day to find a mother and daughter from Duchesne County lodging in his mother's house, which she had turned into a student dormitory. Clyde was a scrawny nineteen-year-old from a single-parent family of Swedish, Swiss, and Scottish descent. His father, Revere Forsberg (1898—1984), had left his mother, Opal Goodsell (1902—1994), when Clyde was only five. His mother took the family domicile on 360 East and 7th North Street, which she turned into a rooming house. Opal was a graduate of the school of life, of hard knocks, not educated in the narrow academic sense, but she had inherited a strong work ethic and was self-reliant to a fault. The work she did was honest but menial; she worked long hours and often at two jobs to make ends meet. She never remarried, never really courted anyone else. And when her mother fell ill, she quit her job at a resort in Logan Canyon (Juniper Lodge), where she had worked nights for many years, to care for her. Opal, it must be stated, lived next door to her mother, Jeanie (Jane) Goodsell, negotiating a wooden plank over the muddy ground that separated mother and daughter whenever it rained hard. (My only memory

of “great grandma Goodsell” is of the sugar cookies she baked for her great grandchildren.) The mother and daughter team, lodging at Opal’s that summer, were the scion of New England pioneer stock, descendants of Parley P. Pratt and Lucius Nelson Scovil, to name but a few.

Birdie Isabella Robison Swasey (1914—1996) had come to Logan to attend the university and complete a teacher’s/librarian’s diploma of some sort. She brought her eldest daughter, Virginia (Lynn) Swasey (1938—2017), a beauty queen (Miss Basin Sweetheart 1955) who still had another year of high school, but the plan may have been to “marry her off” to a man on the rise—someone with a university degree, but with an impeccable Mormon pedigree, one assumes. Virginia was decidedly out of Clyde’s league, but that did not stop him from falling madly in love with her at first sight. One can hardly blame him.



Virginia Swasey, wedding announcement (*The Roosevelt Standard*, 24 May 1956) (left); Virginia Swasey, Miss Uinta Basin Sweetheart (Altamont) 1955 (*The Roosevelt Standard*) (right)