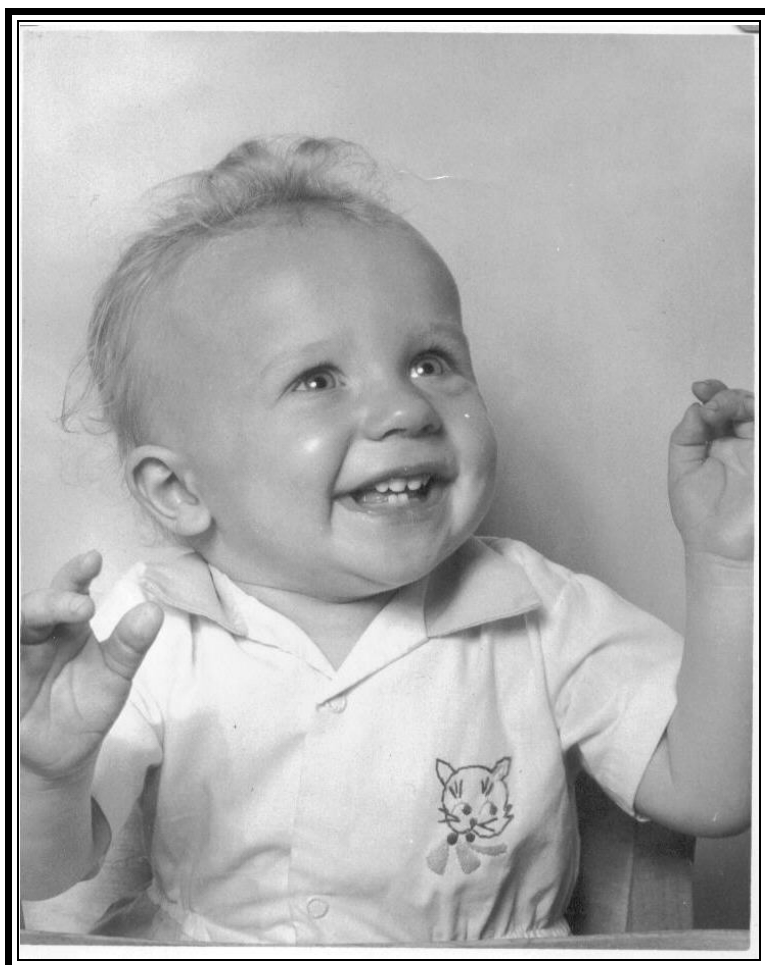


A Trek on The Paper Trial, part I

I've spent years looking through thousands of books and films at the Family History Library. Among all those ancient documents I had never expected to find a picture of myself. Nevertheless, one day I decided to read the news on the day that I was born. I looked it up in the Salt Lake City Deseret News, and while browsing through that paper, I noticed that all of the children who had their first birthdays on that date were listed with their pictures. Immediately I went and got the news paper of the following year. Sure enough, there was a picture of me right there with my smiling face and my curly blond hair, one year old. This document is significant not only for the fact that I found it there in the historical library, but it also tells me who my parents were, it gives our home address, and it confirms my birth date, the same birthday I have been using all my life. I probably could have found the same information in the county birth records, or I could have ordered a duplicate birth certificate from the county health department (I actually

*Allen
1st Birthday*



have my original), but this particular document was even better because it had my picture. This is a picture I am very familiar with having seen it many times in my own picture album with my mother's hand writing next to it:

Most people probably wouldn't believe this, but I actually remember the day that we went downtown to take this picture. I also remember how fun it was to be one year old, and I remember being able to understand what everyone else was saying but unable to express words to make myself understood. I also remember my father laughing at me while I was trying to babble on about something that I couldn't make the words for.

This story brings up some important points about family history research. First, historical facts must be documented if at all possible. If documents can't be found, then any assumptions that are made must be continually questioned and subject to the results of further research. Frankly, why should I assume that I was not covertly adopted into my family? If that assumption is false then I could spend my entire life researching the ancestors of a family that is not my own! Even the document referred to above does not prove unequivocally my parentage. Nevertheless, I have many other lines of evidence to support it and none which do not. Second, historical research should never be limited by goals that are too specific such as 'gathering names for the temple' or 'researching just my direct line ancestors'. The Family History Library is filled to overflowing with books and records produced and gathered by people who have all had a much larger vision in mind. That vision, in part, is to gather and preserve all of the information available, usually within a specific field of interest, and then to organize and publish it in such a way that others can use it as well. Finally, this picture of myself, found in the film archives of the library, is certainly a reflection of the fact that ours is the first generation which has produced huge amounts of visual materials that can be passed on to future generations. With that in mind, I have often wondered just what pictures and videos will still exist and will be in possession of my own great great grand children that will document my own life and the life of my family. I believe we should not only work toward the discovery of the past, but we must continually prepare the present for the archives of the future using all forms of media that are available.

Back to my original research. My principal goal has been to collect everything I can find regarding the Wald family line, focusing primarily on the Norwegian ancestry of my grandfather, Ferdinand Oliver Wald. With that goal, I decided to take a trip through Iowa and see what I could find in the town of Fertile which was Ferdi's boyhood home (gramma called him this). My journey began in the summer of 1997. Our daughter Julianne had spent a few weeks with her grandmother in Kansas. Since I was driving there to bring her home, I decided that this would be a good time to take a detour through

Iowa. The night that I reached Iowa it rained hard with lots of lightening. While I was sleeping in my car the rain made it nice and cool, but it was warm and humid the next morning. I woke up about 5 am and drove the last 100 miles to Fertile during the very early hours of the morning. I knew that I might make it there in time for church, but I didn't know what time that would be. I didn't even know where the church was. When I drove into town I noticed a large Christian church at the edge of town. Fertile is still a very small mid-western town just a few miles off the freeway in north central Iowa. Main street follows parallel to the river that flows through town. As I drove, I stopped briefly at the old Fertile river mill which is now a state historical site. There was no one there that morning, but I remembered the story that my grandfather told about going to swim in the river by the mill when he wasn't supposed to. When he arrived home his mother immediately knew what he had done because he had put his tee shirt on backwards after the swim. I continued down to the end of main street, then I followed the road as it turned north through a neighborhood of typical middle class homes and up to the top of the hill. There at the north western corner of town sat another church which looked similar but not exactly like the church that I was looking for. (It has been restored with several additions since the original building was built). I got out some pictures of the Fertile Lutheran church that I had brought with me, and as I sat in the car people began arriving for the Sunday services. I rolled down my window and asked an old lady if this was the Lutheran church. She politely said: "ah, yes" while shrugging her shoulders as if to say: "what other church would it be?" I had already changed my clothes at a gas station on the way, so I combed my hair and put on my good shoes and walked inside. When I entered the church at about 8:50 am, the pastor was there greeting people and I introduced myself as Allen Wald. Immediately he said: "Well, we know who you are! Welcome." He then told me that the lady had come in and said that "some strange man is parked outside and is asking questions about the church". It turns out that I had written letters to the 'Fertile Lutheran Church' earlier that year, and the pastor had received those letters but he had not yet responded. So he definitely knew who I was, and he also knew very well who my great grandfather was, pastor Ole Olson Wold, one of the very first pastors of their congregation. O. O. Wold (as he called himself) was my grandfather's father. This fact was told to me personally by my grandfather, and it has been well documented in our family history. Ferdinand's father had died when Ferdi was only ten years old, and his family was forced to move back to Slater Iowa because the church could not support them and they had no other family near Fertile. That was in 1908, over ninety years ago.

I went into the chapel and sat down near the back (with the hope of some anonymity), but as he began the service, the pastor asked me to stand up and introduced me as the great grandson of Pastor Wold. Although I hated this embarrassment, it was

later worth the trouble. After the meeting I was invited downstairs for coffee and cake (orange juice was optional). There I met several members of the congregation. One old gentleman told me that he didn't know pastor Wold, but that his father had known him. He said that pastor Wold's teachings and his work for the congregation were well respected for many years after his death. He also said that his father had taught him many things using pastor Wold as his example. Later I was able to talk more with the current pastor. He showed me the original church register for their congregation. The book was very old, bound with leather, and was entirely written in the Norwegian language. In that book we found the original record of the christening of my grandfather, "Ferdinand Oliver" as performed and recorded by his father who was "O. O. Wold", the current pastor at that time. (See the next page.) There were other records in that book of known family members, but Ferdinand's was very important to me because I knew my grandfather personally when I was younger. This original record of his birth and christening are now an essential link in the paper trail left by the family, and help to prove our lineage beyond any reasonable doubt. Unfortunately, such documents from the U. S. Lutheran church are not available at the Salt Lake Family History Library, and one must either travel to the place of origin to examine the records or purchase them directly from the Lutheran church archives. The same is true for other family documents I later found at the Palestine Lutheran church near Slater, Iowa. Those documents (mentioned in previous letters) link pastor O. O. Wold and the family in Fertile to his parents, Ole J. Olson Wold and his wife Bertha who both immigrated from Norway during the mid 1850's.²⁸

28 Next page: Birth record from the original church book of the Lutheran congregation of Fertile, Iowa. In possession of the pastor. See entry #15 on page 100 / 101, from the year 1896: "Ferdinand Oliver, born 27 July '96, christened 30 August '96, parents: O. O. Wold and wife Augusta, witnesses: Augusta Wold, Hans Hovland, Maria Hovland, K. Steffenson, Marie Daley and Burthan Wold"

This brings up another important point about family history: You can find a lot of information in historical libraries, but you can never find all the information about your family in one single place. Often the best place to look is right where they lived. I have found many of the most important documents regarding this family during my travels through Iowa and Illinois.

After my visit to the church in Fertile, I drove south, back to Slater where the family moved after pastor Wold had died. I knew that several family members were buried there, but I didn't know exactly where the cemetery was. I stopped at a gas station as I entered the town, and I asked the clerk if she knew. She said that she didn't but the Lutheran church was just around the corner and about four blocks north. I drove to the church but it was empty, so I just kept driving north through that neighborhood hoping I would figure something out. A few blocks later I saw an old man and a woman out in their yard and it struck me that they might know where the cemetery was. I stopped and asked them, and they seemed confused at first. The old man asked me who I was looking for, and I told him I was looking for my great grandparents who were named Wald or Wold. Suddenly his eyes lit up and he said: "Oh! You mean judge Wald...yes, his name was Severin Wald (he pronounced it Sēē-ver-inn)." I told him that I thought that might be a brother whom I knew had been an attorney in Slater. He told me that he had been well acquainted with "Judge Wald" as a young man because he had had several problems with the law in those days. He was a very nice old Norwegian, and he told me that he was 92 years old. We sat and talked for a while and he told me that he had come to America with his father when he was just a boy. Before I left he not only told me how to find the cemetery, but he also told me exactly where in the cemetery I would find the Wald family plots.

Just for anyone else who might want to find the place, the 'Slater Cemetery' is about two miles south of the south east corner of town. Just turn west off I-35 toward Slater on highway 210 and turn south at the Conoco station as you enter town from the east. You can't miss it out in the middle of the corn fields. The Wald family plots are east of the path at the north west corner of the cemetery. There is a sexton's list posted at the south east corner if you need to look it up. One of my goals in visiting this cemetery was to find evidence linking Ole O. Wold with his father Ole J. Olson (also known as Vold, Wold and Wald). Clearly this is the site of our family burials with "Ole O. Wald" (was Wold) buried next to his wife "Augusta Wald". Next to them is the site of Severin Wald and his wife, and on the other side is a large stone with the name "Bertha Olson WALD". On this large stone there is a place for the husband's name, but Ole J.'s name was never inscribed there. In fact, there was never a stone placed over Ole J.'s grave, and the first time I went to this cemetery I didn't realize that he was in fact buried there. It is

recorded in our family history by Cleva Darling that Ole J. lived alone in Humboldt county after he and his wife divorced, and that his body was brought back to Slater for burial after his death. I was disappointed that I didn't find a stone there with his name on it, but the second time I came to Iowa I stopped at this cemetery again and I discovered that the sexton's list has two individuals listed, both named 'Ole O. Wald'. (There is also a list kept by the Daughters of the American Revolution, but their list only gives the one name). You might think that this was a typo on the sexton's list, but separate plot numbers are given for both. My investigation revealed that one of the plots is marked with the grave stone of our great grandfather, while the other--where his father is buried--is yet unmarked but placed within the other family plots. It might also be noted that he was not buried next to his wife, Bertha. On the larger stone over Bertha's grave there is only her name inscribed. There is also a very worn inscription under her name that was difficult to read. As I have previously mentioned, Bertha had come to considerable grief over her husband in the later years of their marriage. After he left the family she was not well off, and she and the children had many difficulties making ends meet. She lived only a few years after the divorce became final, and she had also suffered a long illness at the end of her life. If you look carefully at her stone you will see that the inscription there shows the faith that she had taught her children. It simply states: "Her end was peace".