

Wald Family Histories

Collected by Allen H Wald

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Abstract

The first known history of our family was written in 1939 titled: “The Wald History” by Cleve Darling. I am aware of several errors in Cleve’s work. I hope that I have been able to bring out the truth where evidence was available. Nevertheless, I am not so proud as to suggest that any of my work will be found perfect in the end. The

stories here are based upon the documents I have found, and where possible I have tried to include copies of the originals or at least a credible reference. Please feel free to contact me and let me know what you think.

The earliest Norwegian immigrants in our family came to the Fox River Settlement in Illinois during the mid 1850's. During the 1860's they moved to Iowa and were among the first to homestead near the towns of Cambridge and Slater in Story county. The original family farm was actually on the northern most boarder of Polk county close to Cambridge. Our grandfather, Ferdinand Oliver Wald, was born 27 July, 1896 in Fertile Iowa (a cousin to Cleva Darling). Ferdinand married Velma Howe on 31 December, 1925. On his birth records from Fertile Iowa his last name was originally written "Wold". This name was later crossed out and changed to "Wald" in the county court records. Ferdinand's father was named Ole Olson Wold, and signed his name "O. O. Wold". He was a Lutheran minister who served in Moreland Illinois for two years, and then in Fertile Iowa and surrounding towns for fifteen years. He died of pneumonia in 1908 and left behind his wife Augusta and eight children. The youngest, Oletta, was born after he died. Pastor Wold's parents came to America with the great Norwegian immigration of the 19th century. His father, Ole J. Olsen Wold (Vold), came from the township of Årdal in Rogaland county, Norway. His mother, Udbjörg Bertine Andersdatter Gaard (Bertha Gaard), came from the island of Talgje, also in Rogaland county. On 7 July, in the year 1891, O. O. Wold married Augusta Simerson from Belmont Iowa, daughter of Frederick Simerson (Simonsen) Molstad and Pernille Larsdatter Bratten. Both of Augusta's parents were born within the Veldre parish, in Hedmark county, Norway. In the church book from Veldre it states that Pernille and Frederick left for America in 1867, just four days after being married. The records of their family can be found in the Norwegian bygdebok for Veldre where there is a rich family history. There you will read of Pernille's family lines which can be followed back to King Håkon V Magnussen who was king of Norway from 1299 to 1319. We have also discovered another royal lineage in the Gaard family lines. This family can be traced back to Gard Tøresen, b. 1373, who was Lagmann (literally: 'law man', modern equivalent: high court judge) for that entire region. His family history includes many royal lines including the 'Holy Birgitta' of Sweden.



¹Our Wald family name comes from the beautiful valleys of Ryfylke fjord and the ancient farms of rural Årdal, Norway. Today you will still find a farm there called Vadla, which in earlier times was spelled Walde or Valle. Many of our ancestors lived on Vadla as well as a neighboring farm called Valheim or Wallem. At one time Valheim was part of Vadla, but today they are separate farms. There are several individual farms and dwellings that were given variants of these names, and many similar spellings were used through the centuries. The letters 'V' and 'W' were often used interchangeably in ancient Norwegian documents and would sound the same when spoken.

We know from Årdal histories that our great great grandfather, Ole J. Olsen, b. 1831, was raised in a dwelling called Vold or Volden. This is the specific origin of our name. Ole came to America in 1854, and the surnames Vold, Wold and Wald are all found in documents that originated here. His birth was recorded in the Årdal kirkbok where his father was called Ole Iversen Volden. The place, Volden, was not part of the larger Vadla group, but it was close in location. The family at that time was poor.

1 This calligraphy was penned in the year 1680 where it represents the actual place of our Wald heritage. There are many examples of such artful writing in the various land and tax records of these early times. Often these are the only records we have of the people who lived then.

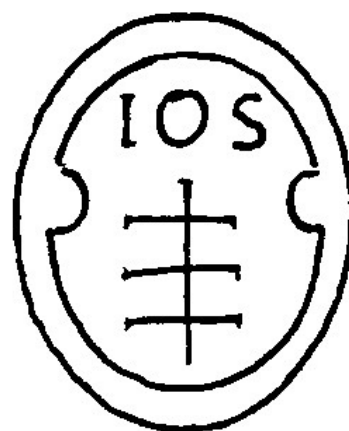
Folklore from Årdal tells of one individual they called 'Spel-Ola' who was notorious for his ability to 'spelle' which means 'to play', and his skill was with the fiddle. Spel-Ola also loved to drink and was not above thievery to make his livelihood. After a questionable carrier he was sent to prison for stealing several items from the local people including three copper cheese kettles and a bull. Ole was sentenced to five years hard labor. In 1860 he died of tuberculosis while still in prison, and he left behind eight children and a wife. We know from the record of the prison priest at Kristiansand tukthus that Spel-Ola was indeed the same person as Ole Iversen Volden, b. 1808. Also in that folklore it describes their home as "an old smoke-house with a turfed-roof on the meadow between the oldest school-house and Lonn". The Norwegian word 'vold' means 'a meadow or a field'. The story tells that the dwelling they called Volden was torn down when the property was sold in 1861. Therefore, the place of our family's origin no longer exists.

Nevertheless, the Wald name also follows from the greater history of these farms of Årdal, and many of those places do still exist. Spel-Ola's father was called Iver Olsen Lillemoe, b. 1773, because he lived at Lillemoe which means 'little mountain'. The farm records tell us that Lillemoe was part of Valheim and also part of Vadla. Iver's birth record tells that his father was called Ole Wallem, b.~1754. There is a confirmation record for Ole Iversen Valde, age 16 in 1770. This was likely the same individual. The church records before 1760 were lost, so there is very little known of the earlier generations. A probate record from 1778 lists Ole Wallem as the son of Iver Olsen and Lisbet Halvorsdatter Valle. In 1762 the same place was called Valheim. This Iver would have been born about 1730. There is evidence that he owned part of the land that he farmed even though he and later generations were all called 'huusmand' which means they were tenant farmers. Census and tax records from 1701 and earlier list men with similar names at these same places, but there is little to tie the generations together and nothing about the women. In 1701 we find Olle Olssen age 25 on Walde and Ifwdr Olssen age 54 on Wallem. In 1663 we find another Olle with a son named Olle on Valle, no ages given, and two men named Iffuer on Vallim. In 1665 we again find Ole Olsen on Valle, no age given, and Iffuer on Vallin age 60. This Iffuer (b.~1605) is the earliest known ancestor of the Wald paternal line given the assumption that the family lines from this place are in some way contiguous. With these early generations evidence is sparse.

For those interested, you can look on a map or view these places using satellite photos. Just look north and east of Stavanger for Årdal, Hjelmeland and Finnøy. The Gaard farm on the island of Talgje, part of Finnøy, was another place where many of our ancestors lived. Most of these farms are kept today just as they were hundreds of years ago. Even the original church building at Årdal still stands.



Ola Vadla.
1668.



Ivar Valheim.
1669.