

Chapter 5

THE BELKNAP-BELNAP FAMILY AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM AND EXPANSION

American nationalism appeared in mature form only after the War of 1812. The American people came to see themselves as one united people without regard to section or region or vast distances that separated them. They identified themselves with the national community and felt that their nation was different from all others. They were different in the language they spoke, their origins, history, customs, traditions, in their beliefs in the "common man", in the individual, in democracy, in a free and "classless" society — and responded profoundly to appeals to their uniqueness, their "differentness". Americans were, in fact, now bound by obligations which flowed from habitation of the common soil and loyalty to a united nation which they stood ready to defend with their lives. Westward expansion and settlement was pivotal to the realization of the American system. Following the War of 1812 there was a vast population movement into the western territory. Our antecedent, Jesse Belnap II settled himself in Erie, Pennsylvania in what was called the Western Reserve Land Grant, a program designed to encourage people to expand beyond the Appalachians. Half a million people moved into this territory and the population expanded south into Kentucky and Tennessee. The population expanded beyond the Appalachians from 40,000 in 1810 to 203,000 in 1820.

To foster this movement into unoccupied regions, the Congress was forced into considering more liberal land policies. The land acts fixed the price for as little as \$2 an acre and induced installment plans of multiple payments. Land increased rapidly in value and perhaps this is why Jesse Belnap was able to offer \$1,000 for the finding of his grandchildren.

The frontier was, in reality as well as imagination, a land of opportunity. An area where one could make a fresh start and rise in economic scale where there was no frozen class structure to impede an individual's advance. On the edge of American civilization opportunity lay in exploitation of land and its resources. Along the seaboard it lay in the chance to rise from the laboring to the employing class. The important qualities it was felt were personal ones, hard work and ingenuity. No one wanted all men to remain equal, only that they would begin equal and rise according to their merits. Frontiersmen admired and were inspired

The correspondence between members of the family and governmental agencies in Canada substantiating the locality and whereabouts of our Canadian ancestry is found in the Appendix.

by those who were successful under frontier conditions, but resented and opposed a "privileged" class that pre-empted opportunity for itself alone. And since such permanent classes can control government, the frontier demanded democratic participation.

The growth of the United States population in the first half of the 19th century was phenomenal. Natural increase and immigration swelled the population from 5.3 million in 1800 to 31.4 million in 1860. Only one tenth of the expansion extended into the southern states; most of it moved westward. Largely there was an antithesis and resentment toward the slave pattern in the southern states. Freedom was the keynote to evoke the northeast, northwest, and westward movements of both United States and Canadian expansion.

The settlement of the West was in the face of great hazards and at great personal cost. It is difficult for us today to appreciate the hardships of travel in Conestoga wagons, or on canals and river boats. The wheels registered every rut in the crude roads or dragged at a snail's pace through endless parry. Pioneering was no romance — it meant cutting, clearing out of timber lands, river bottom; acclimating to unknown and extreme weather conditions; solving problems of seed gathering, of primitive methods of planting, sowing, harvesting, and transporting goods to distant centers; establishing communities from nothing. The miracle is that it was done and done quickly.

The Belnap family played a significant role in this expansion. We find that now the ever-growing offspring from large families of our Belnap antecedents spreading rapidly, not only into Canada, but into the Western Reserve Land Grants, into Kentucky where they became prominent in the government of that state, south into Texas, west with the ever changing movement of geographical location with the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Mormon pioneers, far west into Oregon territory and into the land of California.

Little did Abraham Belnap realize as the gangplank lowered and the last cinch ropes were secured and he looked with wonder on the New World, that his posterity would be so influential in the expansion of the greatest civilization and culture that had ever dwelled on the earth. Abraham's children developed to maturity. One of them, Joseph Belnap, was instrumental through his efforts in founding the "old South Church" in Boston in the year 1658. There were no thoughts among our early antecedents of a land dotted with vast agricultural resources, ever mushrooming industry, skyscrapers and bright lights of New York City, vast industrial complexes, huge agricultural holdings, a nation whose boundaries would expand even to Alaska and Hawaii, where some of our Belnaps have located.

But now 450 years later, descendants of these great men make their homes in all of the states of the United States and many of the great cities of the world. In the many years that have passed, the progeny of these antecedents have made their mark on the pages of history.

Our story, of course, concerns largely from this point on, the story of our convert ancestor, Gilbert Belnap, in relationship to the great history of the Restored Gospel. We know that our destiny entwines his with the great migration and trek across the plains in 1847 and through the coming of the railroad. Another part of the family, with the name Belnap, took a similar trek from Iowa in 1847 over the Oregon Trail and settled in Oregon. Their history, recorded by Franklin Belnap Hall, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon, is a fascinating story of sacrifice.

One can find other remarkable stories as they review and peruse library references in many parts of the United States and Canada: "Tears streaming down dirty faces, tears from the acrid smoke of gunfire, and tears from fear. Ear piercing noise from the din of war, tense nerves, and fear as the Kamikaze keeps coming, then holocaust as the suicide pilot reaches his target. The S.S. Belknap during the Leyte invasion, 1944 in the Phillipines." (See U.S. Naval Records, Washington, D.C.) Thirty eight men die on the decks of the battle weary sub-chaser "Belknap". The ship was named after Admiral Charles E. Belknap of Jersey City, New Jersey. Admiral Belknap served during World War I in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations and was instrumental in the planning and strategy of naval conflict during World War I. (It is interesting to note that Admiral Charles E. Belknap was moved on by the spirit of Elijah and has compiled vast genealogical records himself of his antecedents and descendents and those of his immediate relations. This has been an invaluable help to us in preparations for compiling Volume 2 of our Belnap Family Record.)

From the records of the Department of Interior, Indian Affairs, we read of Fort Belknap, one of the largest Indian reservations in the west. Another interesting press report speaks of "screaming sirens; men racing down echoing concrete hallways; commands from the loudspeaker. During a prison riot two were killed. Furniture and fixtures were destroyed. Ray Belknap, Honolulu prison official, fights to bring back order and control."

On a clear crisp day one can see a panorama scene of nature's masterpiece of forests, mountain slopes, and bright snow from the tops of the mountains of New Hampshire looking over "Belknap Recreation Center," a playground nationally famous for its winter recreation.

At the base of "Mount Belknap" the school bells of "Belknap Elementary School" in Beaver, Utah can be heard ringing for blocks in all directions. It signals the start of another school day for children who will learn in the course of their school's history that it and the mountain above, which overlooks them, was named after Secretary of War General William Worth Belknap. William Worth Belknap was born at Newburg, New York on September 22, 1829, and he was the son of William Goldsmith Belknap, who fought in the War of 1812. After graduation from the high school and academy at Newburg, he entered Princeton University in 1846 and graduated in 1848. He studied law at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and was admitted to the Washington, D. C. bar. In 1851 he moved to Keokuk, Iowa, where he practiced law, was a member of the State Legislature in 1857. When the Civil War began he was appointed Major of the 15th Iowa Volunteers in 1861. He was brevetted a Major in 1865 for gallant and meritorious service. He had his horse shot from under him at Shilo, was in the battles of Atlanta, Georgia, and Bentonville, North Carolina, the siege of Corinth, Vicks-burg, and Atlanta, and accompanied General Sherman in his march from Atlanta to the sea. In the Battle of Atlanta he took prisoner Colonel Lampey of the 45th Alabama Regulars by pulling him over the works by his coat collar. He was honorably mustered out of the service in 1865 and was appointed Internal Revenue Collector for the 1st District of Iowa. In 1869 he was appointed Secretary of War by General Grant, President of the United States, where he remained until 1876, when he resigned. He would not allow himself to be subjected to the attempts at political crucifixion and refused to be sacrificed to the hungry populace as impeachment proceedings ground out against him under the threat of impeachment for malfeasance in office. (See Encyclopedia of American Biography, Volume 2).

Another news report carries the story of hearty applause rising from the grandstand as the last strains of the band's music drift away into the happy day. The men, all sharply in their freshly-pressed uniforms, stand ready to receive their honors. The speaker for the day addresses the crowd and the proud "Belknap Rifles" of Texas stand at attention in honor of the great historical events that occurred at the Alamo. (See "Belknap Rifles", Alamo Library, San Antonio, Texas.)

Although the days of the crest worn by Belknaps are gone, the Belnaps can wear a shield of honor in the knowledge that their family history is full of honest and hearty people. "Belknaps, Patriots All" are the words emblazoned on the door of Samuel Belknap's ancestral home in Newburgh, New York and "patriots" we are, have been, and will be!

Typical is the story of Simeon Belknap, the grandson of our antecedent, Samuel Belknap, the father of Jesse Belknap Sr. This is a story of the life and captivity of Simeon Belknap, written by his son, Levi Belknap of East Barnard, Vermont, who told this story regarding his father. The occurrence took place in the heat of the Revolutionary War.

It is interesting that he finally ended up reaching Castleton, Vermont, and there was able to stay with his uncle, our antecedent, Jesse Belknap Sr.

Another interesting story of heroics is descended from our second Samuel Belknap through his son and grandson, Samuel Belknap, and the father of Secretary of War, William Worth Belknap. William Worth Belknap's father was William Goldsmith Belknap, who was born September 7, 1794. He entered the military service at the age of 18 years and took part in the War of 1812. He was a professional soldier all of his life and probably set the pattern for his son who later became Secretary of War. He was able to distinguish himself early in his career as an officer and brought great honor not only to himself, but to his country. His conduct during the attack by the British on Fort Erie on August 15, 1814, drew from General Ripley the following remarks in his report: "The manner in which Lieutenant Belknap of the 23rd retired with his picquet guard from before the enemy's column excites my particular commendation. He gave orders to fire three times as he was retreating to the camp, himself bringing up the rear. In this manner he kept the light advance of the enemy in check for a distance of two or three hundred yards. I have to regret that when he entered our lines after his troops, the enemy pushed so close upon him that he received a severe wound with the bayonet."

In the Mexican War he shared largely in the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. The citizens of his home town of Newburgh, New York, at a public meeting held June 27, 1846, caused a sword to be made and presented to him in their name as a mark of appreciation of his distinguished services. He died near Fort Washita, in the Chickasaw Nation on November 10, 1851. His military campaigns took him from southern Canada to Florida to the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast and back again. He certainly covered all of the United States during his military career during that critical time when we were expanding our nation from coast to coast. It is interesting in retrospect to note that by his sacrifices (as well as others), there was brought about a situation of freedom that has guaranteed the affiliation of the Rocky Mountain States with the United States.

Many of these interesting stories are published in an old rare and precious book which is in the possession of our family organization entitled "The Belknap Family of Newburgh and Vicinity," published in Newburgh, New York, January 1889. From this same Newburgh, New York, some of the descendents of Samuel Belknap, the fourth generation down, sold their earthly possessions in the winter of 1847, and on May 5, 1847 started across the plains. They were Oran Belknap, Pansome Belknap, and Lorenzo Belknap. After a tedious six month journey, largely up the Missouri River Valley, they reached the end of their trip and wintered near where Corvallis, Oregon now is. In the Spring of 1848 they started south and staked out their homesteads in what is now called Belknap Springs. Their shacks were made by laying heavy poles across forks of timber, puncheons of split poles were placed upright for the walls and the roof was made of "shakes." The wall of the eaves was just high enough for a man to stand upright under the roof. There was a fireplace made of mud and sticks, the earth was the floor, and a blanket was the door. All of the Belknap relatives settled within a mile or so of each other, about three miles east of Monroe, Oregon.

In October 1848, a second delegation of immigrants arrived at the Belknap Springs settlement. Five families all connected with the family of Jesse Belknap. I have had an interesting exchange of correspondence and communication with these Belknap families, as your compiler has attended medical conventions and post-graduate courses with some of the descendents of these families now in the medical profession.

Of interest to your compiler is the large number of individuals serving as ministers in various Christian faiths. Particularly noteworthy is a father-son team of Reverend Jeremiah D. Belknap Sr. and Jr. These individuals became prominent in religious circles in New York and extended their Congregationalist Church activities all throughout the New England States. Their story is typical of so many stories that your compilers have read and reflect the aggressive initiative taken by those in the family to establish a pattern of advancement of the culture at all levels — spiritual, economic, political, social. It has also been fascinating to see how widely these people ranged, reflective once again of the restlessness and intensity of motivation typical of descendents of Ephraim. I have strong feelings (shared by President David O. McKay) that the vast majority of our peoples in our particular lineage of those of us who join the Church, will on this or the other side of the veil be willing and ready to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Your compilers have never met any Belnaps but what they had a warm feeling and affinity toward us, independent of our affiliation with the Church. Typical of this is the family of Mary E. Belknap Bailey and her husband, Charles Kimball Bailey. The Baileys were married on January 8, 1863 and both crossed the plains in the 1860's before the railroad came and settled in California. Mary came with her father, James D. Belknap, who crossed the plains by covered wagon in 1850 to California and settled in San Jose area of the San Francisco Bay. They were able to establish themselves on a landholding of almost 6,000 acres. They were active in establishing that community area and have left their mark on the history of Northern California. Also of interest to us, as a family organization, is the intense interest on the part of these people for those of us who have affiliated with the Church. It seems easy to develop good offices with them if we relate to them on the plane of genealogy. I am sure that carefully produced volumes on our part will additionally tie the family in all parts of the country and in all the world, for that matter, to us as a descendent group from Abraham Belknap.

All of the Belnaps (Belknap) we have read about are remarkable people. They are versatile, strong of heart, and mind and body, and were the men and women who laid the foundations of this nation. Spiritual, economic, and political foundations of an enduring kind, they were laid simultaneously with the foundations and walls of their houses, equally well conceived and serviceable to their posterity.

While they worked under conditions of the crudest, most difficult and dangerous sort, they developed a way of life, created a government, established it among the nations of the world in the face of the greatest odds, and built out of the materials hewn from earth and forest by their own hands homes comparable only to the character of the men and women themselves. This chapter is designed to give only a glimpse of the historical role of the family in many parts of the development of the New World. It is also to give most of us who will read this book the feeling that our isolated role in reference to the western movement of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ is not the only incident of significance as it pertains to the family. It is designed, and hopefully so, to motivate each of us to pursue the effort of a Volume 2 of our family history and publications designed to serve not only those of us within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the entire family as well. We keep in mind the eternal destiny that we hope that all of us will share together in the future.

Life and Captivity of Simeon Belknap

by Levi Belknap, his son, of East Barnard, Vt. Levi Belknap was 81 years of age when he told this story.

Simeon Belknap was born at Ellington Connecticut April 6 1758, and spent his childhood in Connecticut. He set out to visit his brother who lived at Hanover, N.H. in the spring of 1780 and settled in the new town of Middlesex; now Randolph, Vt. where he cleared timber land expecting to sow grain. That fall he started on a visit back to Conn. He got as far as Royalton, where he hired out for a month to Mr. Elias Curtis of Turnbridge Branch. There on Monday morning in October while in bed, he heard the hideous yell of Indian Tories and the language is too foul to describe. The horror of the people as they awaited captivity. The savages burned houses, killed men, captured some, and left the women and children behind. The first night of encampment they were surprised by a party of militia under Colonel House, who had followed. After a double fire the Indians killed two prisoners and fled. The Militia went back because they feared death for the prisoners if they pursued farther. Jeromiah Conant, Esq. of Pomfret, father of Seth Conant, Esqant grand father of the Honorable Edward Consant of Randolph, was one of the volunteers who pursued the Indians. The savages then went to Canada to Caughnewaga, the Indians home.

Belknap was claimed by a distinguished Indian, who took him home. The Indian ordered Belknap to hew logs to make a stable floor for a favorite horse. Belknap hewed the logs all round, which act spoiled the floor. And through an interpreter told the Indian that he did not come there to work. The Indian promised not to make him work any more if he would do this work. He then did the work well and the Indian kept his word.

He found in the Indian village a few hundred inhabitants living in log houses without means of education. There enjoyments were very low. Idleness and drinking were indulged in freely. They had come through a wilderness full of wild

beasts and fierce men. Belknap suffered greatly from home sickness for a civilized land where people observed the Sabbath and lived decent lives. After three months he persuaded his captors to sell him to the British for the sum of \$5.00. To his great disappointment the British promptly shut him up in a close prison.

There he found some of his fellow captives. He stayed there five months, then was moved fifty miles up the St. Lawrence River to Prison Island, for safe keeping. Here two hundred men were confined in an old block house with short rations and no conveniences. They were allowed to go outside at times in small companies and make a small garden to raise vegetables. They were there two summers and one winter. And were much abused by their Tory guards. They had heard no news of the Revolution and we can well imagine the horror and despair that was in the minds of those unhappy prisoners. At the beginning of the second winter they decided that death was preferable to remaining there.

The Island was in the middle of a river three miles wide with no boat and the current very rapid. Belknap had dislocated his ankle, which made him lame for life and he could not swim. The prisoners knew that the boats that passed down the river must go four and one half miles before they could land. Knowing all the discouragements and dangers with a guard around the prison every night. They went to work in August and told only a few prisoners of their plan. They took up a board under their bunk and went under the prison, which stood up a little from the ground. Having nothing but a case knife, they dug a hole four feet square and four feet deep. Only one man could work at a time. They then took a horizontal course under the prison wall where the guard walked, and continued for twenty two feet to get beyond the Pickets. They then opened it on top of the ground. Once a rain filled it up, but they bailed it out.

In October Belknap told a guard that as they must remain another year, the prisoners wanted to save garden seeds. He cut up lettuce for seed and hung it between the fence pickets to dry where they would be coming out so they would not be seen. A large number of the prisoners were told of the intended escape with the threat of death if they told the guard.

They came out at midnight and as they emerged they heard the guard sing out "All's Well!" They separated into parties of four. Belknap, Steel, dark and Sprague went together. They made a raft of four cedar poles twelve feet long. Tied them together with strips of blanket from their bunk. Each man sat on a corner which caused the raft to settle so that they were half under water. In this position with boards for paddles they went down the river four and one half miles. But as they saw light on the shore they were afraid to land. So they went on much farther and landed on the north bank of the river for they saw some houses where they thought they could get some provisions. They had previously obtained a horn of tinder steel and flint with which to light a fire. They also had some parched corn and some flour mixed with lard.

At daylight they hid in the forest and hunted at night. On the third night they found a two year old heifer, which they killed with their old case knife; having taken some of the meat found a boat and started across the river. The boat leaked so badly that in spite of the fact that two of them dipped with their hats all the way, the boat was over half full of water when they arrived. Knowing that the Indians took no prisoners a second time, they traveled a number of days toward Vermont expecting to be killed by the Indians. Because the land was swampy it showed their tracks.

After several days of travel and resting and warming by a fire they built, as they were gathering wood one night for another fire they heard the report of a gun. After listening Belknap left the three at camp and went to discover from whence it came. On reaching the hill top he discovered in the valley, forty rods away about thirty Indians and Tories encamped for the night. They at once took a different direction and traveled all night. In twelve days after leaving the island they reached Lake Champlain. They feared to cross in daylight because of British sail boats. So they made a raft of withes and old logs and attempted to paddle across in the night. The wind arose and frustrated their efforts. After this hard night on the lake they were glad to get back to their starting place.

Later they traveled up shore to Split Rock where they succeeded in crossing. For the next nine days they suffered terrible privations and hardships. Their food was gone. It was the last of October and the weather was cold and cloudy. For a week they wandered exhausted and the sun did not shine. Some of the party decided to go back to the lake and give themselves up to the British rather than starve in the woods. Belknap said he would not go back that he would rather starve in the woods. However it cleared in the night and when the sun arose they took hope and also found they had been lost and had gone in the wrong direction. Before evening they came to Otter Creek. That night they found a mare and colt and turnips. They killed the colt for supper. For supper dined on roast colt and turnips. The supper made them sick. After a night of great distress and vomiting they started out again. At noon they found three horses which they caught and made bridles of bark and rode all afternoon. In the evening they came across a man chopping wood. When he saw them he was frightened and no wonder. They were short of clothes when they had left prison. Now they were ragged. They had not been shaved for weeks and were almost shoeless. This man went with them a mile to a fort at Pittsford, Vt. where a few families lived. They could not stop there on account of the British. They traveled on and stayed all night with a widow who owned a cow. She gave them bread and milk, and let them sleep on the floor. They thought they had good fare.

They had been 21 days without shelter, 9 days without food except things found in the wilderness, such as frogs etc. After leaving the widow they went to Castleton where Belknap's uncle lived. Here Mr. Steel and Belknap parted with their two comrades, dark and Sprague to meet no more on this earth. One lived in New York and the other in Virginia.

Belknap and Steel wanted to go home but were too exhausted by hardship and starvation. They wrote home and in a few days their fathers came and took them home; where they met parents, brothers and sisters who had not seen or heard of them for a year and a half.

In 1781 success came to the American soldiers and the remaining prisoners were released. From them Belknap learned that 21 prisoners came out that night. Twelve came home and nine were captured and taken back. Next day the Commander in charge offered a guinea (\$5) to the guards.