

The Tree and Its Branches: Chapter Two

By Anna Von Reitz



The Belchers have, as a whole and throughout the last several centuries, been blessed with a very large family of skilled workmen who were also skilled farmers and by day or night, also possessed additional skills -- they, in their "spare time" after high school, acquired training as lawyers, engineers, linguists, theologians, surveyors, architects, biologists, chemists, and other professions.

This family tradition of having both a skilled trade and a profession served them well. In hard times, they could always find work, no matter what. As tradesmen they kept in touch with the work life of honest laborers, and as professionals, they could walk among the elite.

This tradition has followed down the years so that my husband is a highly skilled fisherman and sea captain (as his trade) and fine artist of national reputation, having been a Signature Member of the Oil Painters of America, the oil painters equivalent of the National Watercolor Society.

Whether homely or rarified, the Belcher men slip seamlessly into their environment, humble with the humble, and comfortable with the great men of society, having trained both their hands and brains.

In this process, they also train their hearts, and develop the habit of picking up skills whenever the opportunity presents itself.

My husband, for example, can sew. He can build things, be it cabins or cabinets. He can make and smoke sausages, brew whiskey, rebuild motors, grow a garden, macrame a net, tie any kind of knot, operate a ham radio station, run a road grader.... and so the list goes on and on, of skills he "just picked up" along the way.

His ancestor at the time of the Revolution, William Belcher, was a similar character, being a "jack of all trades and master of some". He fit easily into the company of officers and statesmen surrounding General Washington, but had the practical skills needed in the field, too.

It's a rare combination then or now, because people tend to specialize and live their lives either as workman or professionals; the Belchers contrive to do both and thereby gain a wider range of usefulness and a deeper insight into life.

In such a way, a man becomes a master of himself and rises easily to become a popular leader among other men, simply because his own life broadens his view and hones his edge until other men can respect him and trust him on more than one level.

His loyalty to and love of family recommends him. His knowledgeable care of land and animals also speaks well of him. His many skills are a benefit to all those around him. His deep understanding of life viewed from different perspectives is comforting and healing. His professional and intellectual abilities inspire admiration.

With such a tradition of hard work, adaptability, enterprise, and self-responsibility behind them, the Belchers were particularly well-suited to life in the New World, and quick to adapt to its peculiar challenges. They were also well-adapted to cope and survive the challenges presented by the Civil War Conflict.

In the Southern States and the then-Western States of Tennessee and Kentucky, the Southern Belchers regrouped and recouped. Some of them drifted away from their British and Anglican roots and became affirmed Southern Baptists, while the more traditional members of the family established the first Anglican Congregations and, awash with many new cultural influences, firmed up their commitment to their British and Church of England roots.

The Northern Branch which continued to live in the Northeastern United States and down the Coast to Virginia, then drifting Westward with the rest of the country, was overall more given to intellectual and academic pursuits.

The Northern Belchers embraced a variety of religions, some remaining steadfast members of the Church of England, but others becoming Transcendentalists,

Buddhists, Hindus, and especially in Maryland and Virginia, Catholics. They took on a sense of identity that was not dependent on their British heritage, and if anything, harkened further back to their Norman French ancestors and culture.

These gradual changes further solidified the drifting apart of the two branches of the family; what started with a philosophical debate about God's Law (the freewill of mankind -- slavery issue) versus Man's Law (the rightful exercise of contracts -- secession issue) ultimately led to the two branches being separated by physical space, and increasingly, separated by culture and religion.

The conservative largely Anglophilic Southern Branch of the family has grown in numbers and popularity in the Appalachian and Southeastern United States, Tennessee, and Kentucky, where the name is both common and beloved.

The Northeastern Church of England remnant continues to live in the very place where the family first arrived in this country: Boston and surrounding Counties, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, but the numbers of Boston Brahmins and Rhode Island Sea Captains has dwindled and **today**, only a very few of the original Massachusetts Belchers remain.

In between, what we might call the southern part of the Northern Branch has been decimated in numbers, too, though there are towns still named after the Belchers in West Virginia and traces of them throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, they've largely moved on with their customary wanderlust leading them westward, even, as in our case, to Alaska.

After 416 years in this country, and 542 years in England before that, the Norman French Belle Cher Clan has undergone massive changes. The hereditary leadership has changed, too, with each successive encounter with new cultures adding their value to the grand American adventure and new meaning to the name.

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