



The Many Wives of Howard William Lowe: Working with Social History to Glean Genealogical Insights

2023 Reisinger Lectures



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THE CASE

Howard Lowe married five times, to four different women. One died. One divorced him. He divorced the last wife. How the other two marriages ended requires explanation.

Son of William F. and Pearl (Antonson) Lowe, Howard was born on 6 May 1902 at East Grand Forks, Polk County, Minnesota.¹ Clara Hegg, his first wife, was several years older than Howard. A daughter of Halvor and Martha (Solie) Hegg, she was born on 18 December 1894 in Winger Township, Polk County.² Howard and Clara married on 14 September 1921 at the home of

¹ North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 74-002158, Howard William Lowe, 22 May 1974; North Dakota Department of Health [NDDOH], Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher. Also, Howard Lowe, obituary, *Grand Forks Herald* (Grand Forks, N.D.), 23 May 1974, p. 5, col. 2.

² Minnesota Division of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death no. 11726, "Mrs. Howard W. Lowe (Clara)," 5 January 1925; Minnesota Historical Society [MnHS], St. Paul; digital image provided by MnHS and held privately by the researcher. Also, 1900 U.S. census, Minnesota, Polk County, population schedule, Winger Township, ED 236, sheet 3, dwelling 43, family 44, Halvor Hegg household; NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 781.

Howard's parents in East Grand Forks.³ Clara died of tuberculosis on 5 January 1925 at the home of her widowed mother in Winger Township.⁴

Within months, Howard remarried to Vera Urdahl on 4 September 1925 at Crookston, Polk County.⁵ Vera was also older than Howard, born on 14 January 1899 at Madison, Minnesota, the fourth daughter of Gudmund and Anna Urdahl.⁶ She had previously married Leo Ctibor, a band leader, on 14 November 1918 in Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota.⁷ By January 1920 Vera was living in her parents' home, using her maiden name, and being reported in the U.S. census as "single."⁸ Leo remarried on 28 June 1920 at Crookston to Grace Hansen.⁹

On 23 July 1928, Howard married for a third time, to a very pregnant Frances Enright.¹⁰ Michael Francis Lowe was born on 30 August 1928.¹¹ Frances (Enright) Lowe was born on 15 January 1907 at East Grand Forks to Michael and Anna (O'Connor) Enright.¹² (Meanwhile, Vera married for her third time on 25 June 1940 at Moorhead, Clay County, Minnesota, to Paul W. Palmer.¹³)

Howard's fourth marriage took place on 27 July 1937 at Crookston to Catherine Collins.¹⁴ Catherine was born on 12 October 1914 at Macedon, Wayne County, New York to Harry and Lillian (Youngs) Collins.¹⁵ After high school graduation in 1933, she moved to Grand Forks to

³ "Howe-Lowe Wedding Solemnized Wednesday," *Grand Forks Herald* (Grand Forks, N.D.), 17 September 1921, p. 2, col. 3. Also, Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Lowe-Hegg, 14 September 1921; Polk County Recorder's Office [PCRO], Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

⁴ Minnesota Division of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death no. 11726, "Mrs. Howard W. Lowe (Clara)," 5 January 1925; Minnesota Historical Society [MnHS], St. Paul; digital image provided by MnHS and held privately by the researcher. Also, "Mrs. Howard Lowe," obituary, *Winger Enterprise* (Winger, Minn.), 3 January 1925, p. 1, col. 3.

⁵ Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Lowe-Urdahl, 4 September 1925; Polk County Recorder's Office [PCRO], Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

⁶ "Vera Palmer Dies at 73," *Daily Inter Lake* (Kalispell, Mont.), 8 January 1973, p. 2, col. 3.

⁷ Grand Forks, North Dakota, County Court, License and Certificate of Marriage no. 16/120, Ctibor-Urdahl, 14 November 1918; digital image, "North Dakota, U.S., Select County Marriage Records, 1872–2017," *Ancestry* (ancestry.com : viewed 29 July 2021) > Grand Forks > 1912–1925 > images 652–653.

⁸ 1920 U.S. census, North Dakota, Grand Forks County, population schedule, Grand Forks, ED 54, sheet 13A, no dwelling or household number, Gudmund Urdahl household; NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 1334.

⁹ Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Ctibor-Hansen, 28 June 1920; Polk County Recorder's Office, Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

¹⁰ For marriage, Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Lowe-Enright, 23 July 1928; Polk County Recorder's Office [PCRO], Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

¹¹ North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 4921, Michael Francis Lowe, 26 December 1957; North Dakota Department of Health, Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher.

¹² North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 2022, Frances Catherine Granger, 21 July 1944; North Dakota Department of Health, Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher.

¹³ Clay County, Minnesota, District Court, Marriage Record 34, Palmer-Urdahl, 25 June 1940; Clay County Recorder [CCR], Moorhead, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by CCR and held privately by the researcher.

¹⁴ Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Lowe-Collins, 27 July 1937; Polk County Recorder's Office, Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

¹⁵ North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 82-001994, Catherine Mary Lowe, 1 May 1982; North Dakota Department of Health, Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher.

attend the Deaconess School of Nursing and met Howard.¹⁶ (Meanwhile, Frances remarried probably by 1937 to Marshall M. Granger.¹⁷) Catherine filed for divorce in 1952 but did not follow through.¹⁸ She filed again in 1961 alleging drunkenness, threatening violence, and avoiding creditors. Divorce was granted on 19 June.¹⁹

Six years later, on 4 September 1967, Howard and Catherine remarried at East Grand Forks.²⁰ This time, Howard filed for divorce in December 1972 alleging incompatibility. The divorce was granted when Catherine did not respond.²¹ Howard died on 22 May 1974 at Grand Forks.²² Catherine died on 1 May 1982 at West Fargo, Cass County, North Dakota.²³

Table 1 summarizes the marriage dates and endings of Howard Lowe's five marriages:

Table 1: The Five Marriages of Howard Lowe

WIFE	MARRIAGE DATE	MARRIAGE ENDED
Clara Hegg	14 September 1921	5 January 1925 by Clara's death
Vera Urdahl	4 September 1925	???
Frances Enright	23 July 1928	???
Catherine Collins	27 July 1937	19 June 1961 by divorce
Catherine (Collins) Lowe	4 September 1967	30 January 1973 by divorce

Howard's first marriage ended with Clara's death. Both marriages to Catherine ended by divorce. But how can the endings of his marriages to Vera and Frances be explained? Insights from studying the social history of Howard's early-twentieth-century East Grand Forks, Minnesota help provide the answer.

¹⁶ Catherine M. Lowe, obituary, *Grand Forks Herald* (Grand Forks, N.D.), 3 May 1982, p. 5A, col. 2.

¹⁷ 1940 U.S. census, Minnesota, Polk County, population schedule, Huntsville Township, ED 60-50, sheet 5A, household 70, Marshall M. Granger household; NARA microfilm publication 627, roll 1949.

¹⁸ Polk County, Minnesota, District Court, civil case file no. 19927, Lowe v. Lowe, divorce; Clerk of Court, Polk County District Court, Crookston, Minnesota.

¹⁹ Polk County, Minnesota, District Court, civil case file no. 22338, Lowe v. Lowe, divorce; Clerk of Court, Polk County District Court, Crookston, Minnesota.

²⁰ Polk County, Minnesota, marriage return, Lowe-Lowe, 4 September 1967; Polk County Recorder's Office, Crookston, Minnesota; facsimile certificate provided by PCRO and held privately by the researcher.

²¹ North Dakota, First Judicial District, District Court, Grand Forks County, Lowe v. Lowe, divorce complaint, 15 December 1972; Clerk of Court, North Central Judicial District, Grand Forks, North Dakota, file SKM C5582208; digital images provided by Clerk of Court and held privately by the researcher.

²² North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 74-002158, Howard William Lowe, 22 May 1974; North Dakota Department of Health, Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher.

²³ North Dakota Department of Health, Certificate of Death no. 82-019944, Catherine Mary Lowe, 22 May 1974; North Dakota Department of Health, Bismarck; facsimile Certification of Vital Record provided by NDDOH and held privately by the researcher.

SOCIAL HISTORY

“Social history is the study of ordinary people’s everyday life.”²⁴

Genealogical research typically involves constructing family trees and tracing lineage through vital records and other sources that document a person’s life. While this information is essential, it only provides a glimpse into our ancestor’s existence. The best genealogy work goes beyond a race to collect ancestors with their basic dates of birth, marriage, and death onto a family tree. Social history helps us bring these individuals into the context of the times, places, and societies in which they lived. We gain a more comprehensive picture of their lives and the dynamics that shaped them. Focusing on the quotidian experiences of ordinary people, social history sheds light on their daily lives, occupations, socioeconomic status, and community interactions. We work at understanding how our ancestors lived, the challenges they faced, and how their social environment impacted them.

An understanding of social history is an essential yet sometimes overlooked tool within the competent genealogist’s tool kit. Moreover, although the book *Genealogy Standards* does not mention the term *social history* as such, competently meeting at least four of the Genealogy Standards require using social history in our genealogical work.

Standards 12 and 14 require that we embrace broad context and topical breadth in developing our research plan.

Standard 12 (Broad context) tells us to “consider economic, ethnic, genetic, governmental, historical, legal, linguistic, military, paleographic, religious, social, and other factors that could affect the research plan.”²⁵

Standard 14 (Topical breadth) reminds us that our research plans “often include artifacts, authored narratives, oral histories, various kinds of records, and other sources concerning agriculture, demographics, DNA, economies, geography, government, history, inheritance, land, laws, migration, military activity, occupations, social customs and norms, religions, or other aspects of the research question under investigation.”²⁶

In other words, how will we plan to understand the multitude of unique time and place dynamics impacting the everyday lives of the person involved in our research question?

As we reason out our conclusions, Standard 41 (Evidence scope) calls us to be mindful of the scope of our evidence, that we can obtain useful evidence from sources that do not actually name

²⁴ Katherine Scott Sturdevant, *Bringing Your Family History to Life Through Social History* (Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2000), p. 6.

²⁵ Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, second edition, revised (Nashville: Ancestry.com, 2021), p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the people we are researching. “These include histories of the area, its population, and relevant time periods, and works describing customs, governance, laws, and regulations.”²⁷

As we put together what we have learned and prepare to place our conclusions in a report or article, Standard 64 (Background information) tells us that “assembled research results provide sufficient background information for readers to understand both what an information item says and what it means in the context of each source’s place and time. . . . Background information may include concepts from economics, ethnic studies, genetics, geography, government, history, law, religion, sociology, and other fields.”²⁸

All these other fields that inform us about what the lives of our research subjects were like are the stuff of social history.

WORKSHEET

In the chart below, note social history content included in the case study, the source in which the content was found, and the type of source represented.

<u>SOCIAL HISTORY CONTENT</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>TYPE OF SOURCE</u>
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²⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 36–37.

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