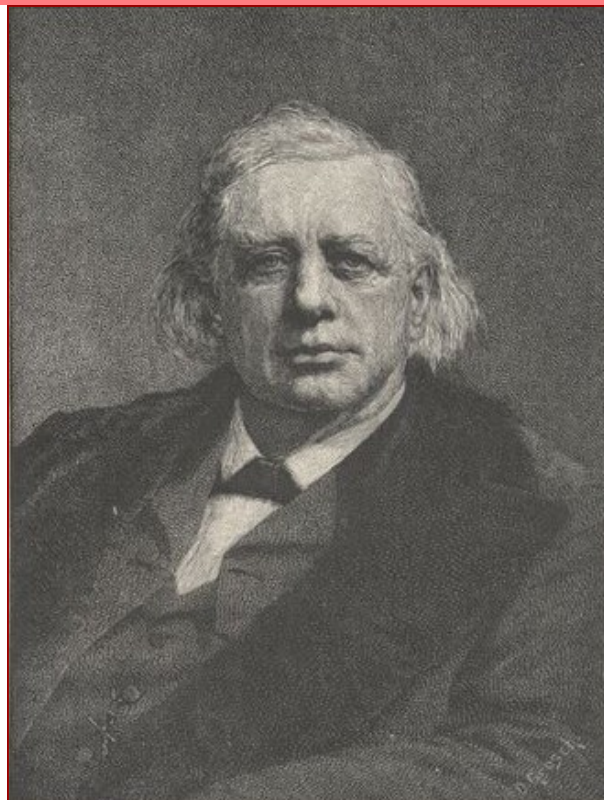


## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR "COUSINS" ...



## DEVOTED, FAITHFUL PROPONENTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 – 1896)

Henry Ward Beecher (1813 – 1887)

— *Bradley Rymph*

Lyman Beecher (1775–1863) was a leading American Presbyterian preacher in the early and mid-19th century. He was a leader of the “Second Great Awakening” in the United States. He and his wife, Roxana (Foote) Beecher (1775–1818) — great-great-great-great-granddaughter of immigrant ancestors William and Agnes (Harris) Spencer — were the parents of nine children.

Two their most notable children were the devoted abolitionists, Harriet (Beecher) Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and minister Henry Ward Beecher.

### HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

**Harriet Elizabeth Beecher** was born June 14, 1811, in Litchfield, Connecticut. Her mother died when she was only five years old. She was educated at a girls’ school run by her older sister Catherine. She received an education that, at the time, was more traditionally reserved for boys, focusing on the classics such as language and mathematics. When she was 21, she moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, to join her father, who had become the first president of the new Presbyterian school, Lane Theological Seminary.

Text © 2010, 2011, by Bradley B. Rymph

In 1836, Harriet married Calvin Ellis Stowe, a widower who was a professor at Lane and an ardent critic of slavery. Calvin and Elizabeth became strong supporters of the Underground Railroad, hiding and housing several fugitive slaves in their Cincinnati home.

After Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, making it illegal to provide assistance to runaway slaves, Stowe used writing to explain and advance her objections to slavery and the new law. In June 1851, when she was 40, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* began appearing as installments in the antislavery journal, *National Era*. Her novel, which emotionally portrayed the impact of slavery, caught the nation's attention and added to the debate over the institution. It also aroused vehement opposition in the slave-holding South. When one reporter asked her for a response to the national reaction to her writing, she responded, "I only pray that God Almighty shall bring this cruelty to a swift end."

Harriet Beecher Stowe lived to the age of 85, dying on July 1, 1896, in Hartford, Connecticut.

## HENRY WARD BEECHER

**Henry Ward Beecher** was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, on June 24, 1813, two years after his sister Harriet and three years before their mother's death.

Henry received his basic education at the Boston Latin School. He attended Amherst College, from which he graduated in 1834, then studied at Lane Theological Seminary (where his father was president).

After graduating from Lane in 1837, Henry served as pastor of Presbyterian congregations in Indiana. In 1847, he was appointed the first minister of the newly established Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York.

While at Plymouth, Beecher developed a national reputation for his preaching and religious writing. After achieving fame on the lecture circuit, he became editor of various religious magazines and also received large advances for writing a novel and a biography of Jesus.

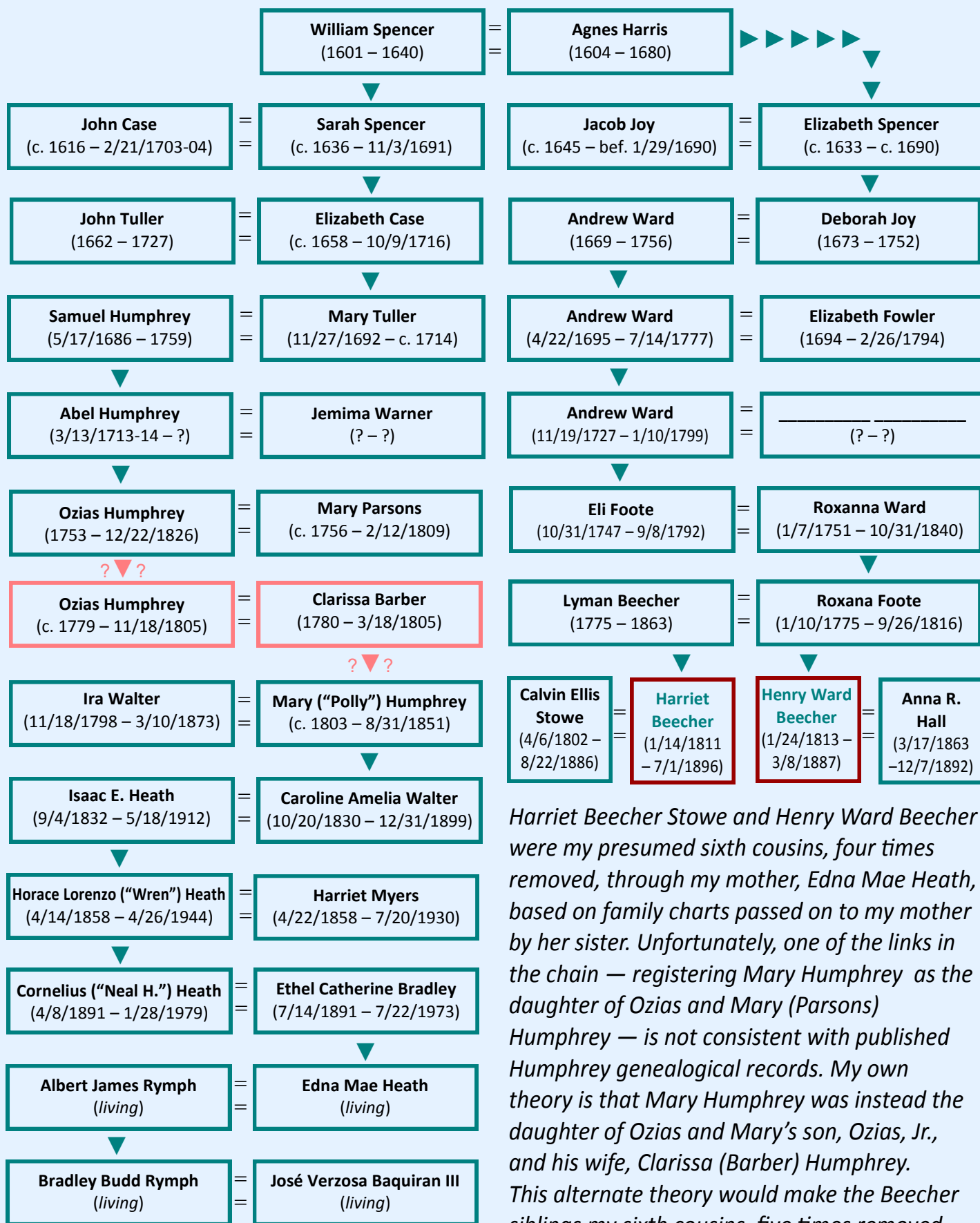
As noted in Wikipedia's biographical profile, "Beecher held that Christianity should adapt itself to the changing culture of the times." He became an outspoken advocate of the various progressive, moral issues of his day — supporting women's suffrage, temperance, and evolution, and opposing slavery and bigotry, whether religious, racial or social.

In the years preceding the Civil War, Beecher raised funds for those willing to fight against slavery in Kansas and Nebraska. Rifles purchased with the funds he raised became known as "Beecher's Bibles."

During the war, Beecher and his church raised and equipped a volunteer infantry regiment. He pressed President Abraham Lincoln to issue a proclamation to emancipate all slaves. He traveled to England for a speaking tour focused on explaining the North's war aims and undermining support in Britain for the South.

Beecher's general liberal leanings apparently did not extend to one of the major social issues of his day — concern for the working

# HOW WE'RE RELATED: Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher



Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher were my presumed sixth cousins, four times removed, through my mother, Edna Mae Heath, based on family charts passed on to my mother by her sister. Unfortunately, one of the links in the chain — registering Mary Humphrey as the daughter of Ozias and Mary (Parsons) Humphrey — is not consistent with published Humphrey genealogical records. My own theory is that Mary Humphrey was instead the daughter of Ozias and Mary's son, Ozias, Jr., and his wife, Clarissa (Barber) Humphrey. This alternate theory would make the Beecher siblings my sixth cousins, five times removed.

## FAMOUS PHRASES OF HENRY WARD BEECHER

“Love is the river of life in the world.”

“Discover what you are.”

“Hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anybody else expects of you. Never excuse yourself. Never pity yourself. Be a hard master to yourself — and be lenient to everybody else.”

“If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would ever be clever enough to be crows.”

class. When the nation’s railroad workers had had their wages cut, resulting in the “Great Railroad Strike of 1877,” he preached against the strikers. In his notorious “bread and water” sermon, he proclaimed “Man cannot live by bread alone, but the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live.” Then, in the following Sunday’s sermon, he declared, “If you are being reduced, go down boldly into poverty.”

Beecher’s fiery preaching style drew thousands of worshipers to his church in Brooklyn — among them, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, and Mark Twain. Lincoln said

of Beecher that no one in history had had “so productive a mind.” Twain described watching Beecher preach,

“sawing his arms in the air, howling sarcasms this way and that, discharging rockets of poetry and exploding mines of eloquence, halting now and then to stamp his foot three times in succession to emphasize a point.”

Beecher died at the age of 73 on March 8, 1887, of a cerebral hemorrhage. The city of Brooklyn declared a day of mourning. The New York state legislature recessed. Prominent national figures, including President Cleveland, sent telegrams of condolence.

### TO LEARN MORE

Wikipedia. “Harriet Beecher Stowe.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet\\_Beecher\\_Stowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet_Beecher_Stowe))

Wikipedia. “Henry Ward Beecher.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Ward\\_Beecher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Ward_Beecher))