

# Researching Ancestors In France, Quebec, And The French Caribbean

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This handout provides a broad introduction for genealogical research of French-speaking ancestors, including those ancestors from Quebec, Louisiana, the French Caribbean, French Africa, French India, and French China, who may have records located in France. In particular, it provides an overview of: (1) the major repositories in France with records of genealogical value; (2) French genealogy online databases; and (3) the primary sources for genealogical research in France.

### I. SUMMARY OF RESOURCES AND DATABASES IN FRANCE

- A. **Major Repositories:** (1) National Archives; (2) Departmental Archives; (3) Communal Archives; and (4) Archives of Paris.
- B. **Significant Online Resources:** (1) Geneanet; (2) Filae; (3) Ancestry; (4) FamilySearch; and (5) FranceGenWeb.
- C. **Primary Records for Genealogical Research:** Birth-marriage-death, notarial, military, emigration and passenger, census, diplomatic, and other records.

### II. MAJOR REPOSITORIES: ARCHIVES OF FRANCE

- A. **National Archives (*Archives Nationales*)** - created during the French revolution of 1790. Located in two sites and expanding its online resources:
  - 1. **Pierrefitte-sur Seine (suburb of Paris; largest archives in Europe):** Contains public archives from the French Revolution (1790) to the present day, and certain private record groups (all periods).
  - 2. **Paris:** Public records from the *Ancien Regime* to 1790 and original documents produced by Paris notaries. Also maintains historical documents of Acadia, Louisiana, Acadian exiles in France (18th Century) and pre-1958 records of the crown / state.
  - 3. **Virtual Reading Room** (Salle Des Inventaires Virtuelle) – An online catalogue with over 8 million digitized images and 24,000 finding aids. <https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/cms/content/display.action?uuid=Accueil1RootUuid&onglet=1>
- B. **Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer (C.A.O.M.)**, repository of colonial records, formerly called “Archives of the Colonies”, located in Aix-en-Provence.

1. Repository of French colonial records, including historical documents about Louisiana (Series C13), the French Caribbean, French Africa, French India, French Indochina, and Quebec.
2. **Online Access** (Instruments De Recherche En Ligne) – contains over 470 instruments for conducting research online. <https://recherche-anom.culture.gouv.fr/>.

C. **Departmental Archives (*Archives Départementales*)** - Most genealogy research conducted at the departmental repositories.

1. There are 101 departments in France. Each department has a “capital” (chef-lieu) where the department’s archives are located.
2. Some of the most commonly accessed records in departments: (1) Birth, Marriage, Death records (État-Civil; Series E); (2) notarial records (Le Notariat; Series E); (3) Military records (Actes Militaires; Series R); and (4) Electoral lists; census lists (Series M).
3. **Physical Access:** no appointment needed; application for researcher card in French may be required; language proficiency needed; practical information online. **Online Access:** Many departmental archives have digitized vital records, indexes, and other records on their Websites. See <http://www.francegenweb.org/fgwaccreg.php>

D. **Communal / Municipal Archives (*Archives Communales*)**

1. Often contain duplicate copies of the Birth-Marriage-Death records; Parish registers in Series GG; civil registers in Series E. Can function as “backup” or complement to vital records in departmental archives
2. Usually located in town hall (Mairie, Hôtel de Ville); may be in municipal archives or library. **Physical Access** generally permitted without appointment. Some online records available.

E. **Archives of Paris (*Archives de la ville de Paris*)**

1. Contains both departmental and communal archives. Paris notarial records kept at the National Archives. Fire destroyed pre-1860 Birth-Marriage-Death records; about one-third of the records have been reconstituted from other sources. **Physical and Online Access** available.

### III. ONLINE DATABASES AND RESOURCES

- A. [Geneanet](https://en.geneanet.org/), *la référence* (<https://en.geneanet.org/>)

1. A member sharing website of genealogical data with around 7 billion names. Contains more than 3.8 million documents, 630,000 books, 14,600 journals and 2,800 magazines, with over 3.6 million members.
  2. Free and premium access. Requires an account. Available in English.
- B. [Filae](https://en.filae.com/), *l'état civil français indexé* (<https://en.filae.com/>)
1. Contains 490 million individuals, digitized civil statutes of all of France from 1792 to the beginning of the 20th Century, censuses in France digitized from 1872 to 1906, church records from 1700 to the French Revolution, military records for prisoners of war, distinguished soldiers, laws bulletins, marriages in Paris in the 17th and 18th centuries, and genealogical records of more than 60 partner associations.
  2. Free and premium access. Account required. Available in English.
- C. [Ancestry](https://www.ancestry.com/), *le leader Mondial* (<https://www.ancestry.com/>).
1. Access to 30 billion historical records and 100 million family trees in more than 80 countries. With membership permits access to more records, including census, birth, marriage, death, and immigration records.
  2. Free and membership access available. Available in English.
- D. [FamilySearch](https://www.familysearch.org/en/), *croissance en francais* (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/>)
1. Database includes 8 billion names, 3.2 billion digital images, and 490,000 digital books, with over 1 million new records added each day. 7 billion names from almost every country were added within the last 10 years. Free and requires an account.
- E. [FranceGenWeb](http://www.francegenweb.org/), *la protail de la généalogie en France, fait par et pour des généalogist amatuers* (<http://www.francegenweb.org/>).
1. Made by genealogists for genealogists. Includes access to specific databases, including notarial acts, cemetery records, coat-of-arms, French soldiers who fought American Revolutionary War, and more.
  2. No account or membership required. Not available in English.

#### IV. MOST VALUABLE RECORDS

- A. **Classification of Records.** Collections (*fonds*) are divided, using alpha-numeric classification: (1) *Fonds*: primary classification unit, similar to “record group” or “collection;” each has a name; (2) Series: *fonds* are divided into series; each series has an alpha designation (series A, B, C, D, E, etc.); and (3) Sub-series: sub-division of series; superscript numeric designation (i.e. series C).

- B. **Birth-Marriage-Death Records (*État-civil*)**. Located in departmental and communal archives. Before 1792, were located in church records (*Registres paroissiaux*; primarily Catholic registers). After 1792, Civil Registration (*État-civil*) began in each commune (town). Includes all persons, all religions, and are organized in yearly or (*tables annuelles*) ten-year indexes (*tables décennales*).
- C. **Notarial Records (*Le notariat*)**. Notaries' records are immensely valuable in France.
  - 1. Most common notarial records in genealogical research: marriage contracts, guardianships, wills, inventories after death, successions, administrations of estates, donations, and other documents.
- D. **Other Records**
  - 1. Military Records, Emigration and Passenger Records, Census Records and Diplomatic Records (consular records).
  - 2. Guardian nominations, pregnancy declarations, claims, contested successions (estate settlements), suits, naturalizations, "options" for Alsace / Lorraine residents, name changes, abandoned children, legitimizations, marriages abroad, permissions for military service abroad, wills registered in courts or other venues, and many others.

## V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- La Revue Francaise de Généalogie*, "Les 25 Meilleures Bases De Données," 10, Avenue Victor-Hugo 55800 Revigny, March 2021.
- La Revue Francaise de Généalogie*, "Archive Visites Guidée," 10, Avenue Victor-Hugo 55800 Revigny, March 2021.

## VI. FRENCH ARCHIVES ONLINE (URLs Updated August 2023)

- Archives Nationales*. <https://www.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/>
- Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer*. <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/anom/fr/>
- Archives de la ville de Paris*. <http://archives.paris.fr/>
- Links to Departmental Websites*. <http://www.francegenweb.org/fgwaccreg.php>