

RESEARCH IN FRANCE

2019

Determine the place of origin of your ancestor.

French records are not centralized therefore before any research can be undertaken, you need to first establish the exact town or village (commune) and county (département) that your ancestor was born in or that a particular event occurred in.

The golden rule of genealogy is to always work back from the known to the unknown. Therefore the place of origin of your ancestor should be looked for in New Zealand records, or if your family came via Australia or Britain then in those records.

The place of origin of your ancestor should be mentioned on N.Z. birth and death certificates after 1876 and on N.Z. marriage certificates after 1882.

It should appear in naturalisation papers so if your ancestor became naturalised then the full file for this should be applied for.

It may also appear in an obituary, on a headstone, in army records, shipping lists, as well of course as family sources. If the family were in Britain then the census there may show the place of origin.

Researching in France

The three most important types of records for French research are civil registration, church records and notary records.

Civil Registration

State registration of births, deaths and marriages began in 1792 and is done at the civil registration office (*bureau de l'état civil*), usually at the town hall (*mairie*) of the commune where the event took place. Large cities are divided into *arrondissements* (districts) each with its own *mairie*. Registrations are recorded in duplicate. Decennial tables (ten year indexes) are also produced.

Full certificates for events over 100 years ago, the corresponding decennial tables and deaths until recent times are available to anyone. Events of over 100 years ago can be viewed at both the *mairie* and the *archives départementales* which is where the duplicate copies have been sent. Many are appearing online on the websites of the *archives départementales*.

Details in civil registers

Births (*naissances*): will show the place, date and time of birth and registration; the child's name; the names of the parents (the mother in her maiden name), ages, occupations and address; and the names, ages, occupations and addresses of two witnesses.

From 1897 the birth record includes margin entries (*mentions marginales*) which record subsequent events of the individual.

Marriages (*mariages*): include the date and place of marriage; the names of the couple, their ages, addresses and occupations; names of their parents and whether deceased or alive; and the names, addresses, ages and occupations of two witnesses.

From 1850 there are details of any marriage contract and any previous marriage. There will usually be acknowledgement and legitimacy of any children born before the marriage.

Deaths (*décès*): will show the place, date and time of death and registration; the deceased's name and residential address; and the names, addresses, ages and occupations of two witnesses.

From variable dates the name of the spouse, the date and place of birth and parental details are included. Until 1865 a death had to be registered in the deceased person's place of birth. The death was entered into the *tables de mutations* (transfer tables) of death and mention whether or not there was a will and who the successors were.

Parish Registers

Until 1787 the Catholic religion was the state religion.

Church registers (*registres paroissiaux*) of baptisms, marriages and burials up to 1792 will generally be found in either the *mairie* or the *archives départementales*. Many are coming online.

More recent registers will usually be found in the parish church or, if that has closed, probably in the diocesan archives (*archives diocésaines*).

Details in parish registers

Baptisms (*baptêmes*): include with time more details. From 1667 is recorded the date of baptism; name of the child; the names of the parents (the mother in her maiden name); and the signatures of the father and two god-parents. From 1736 the actual date of birth is included.

Marriages (*mariages*): from 1667 include the full names of the couple and the dates and parishes where banns were announced; and the signatures of the couple and two witnesses. From 1736 the couples' ages, addresses, occupations and their parents' full names and address are included.

Burials (*sépultures*): recorded the deceased's names and date and place of death. From 1667 the record had to be signed by two relatives or witnesses and from 1736 the age of the deceased, their occupation and the name of the spouse are included.

Notarial Records (lawyers)

Notaries drew up marriage contracts, wills and inheritance documents, inventories after death, papers for adoption or the separation of a married couple, as well as property deeds. They also provided authenticated substituted records of birth, marriage and death, including when the originals were lost or destroyed.

The documents are commonly referred to as *Actes de Notoriété*. Most families have notarial records relating to them. Records over 100 years are defined as public archives and notaries are required to deposit their older records in the archives of the department (*archives départementales*).

To locate notarial records it is very helpful to know the name of the notary and where he worked. Generally the records are indexed by the name of the notary, then by date, then by the person or family concerned. Many of the indexes, sometimes with images of the documents, are coming online.

What you already know

Map of France showing Department Borders and Historical Provinces

Surname

To locate the archives for a particular Department e.g. Calvados, use Google as below:
"Archives departementales calvados" then press enter/search

Christian name

Country

County/Province

Town/Parish

Birth

Marriage

Arrival in NZ Year

Children born not in NZ

Parents

NZ Certificates to obtain

Birth

Marriage

Death

Naturalisation

Check List

Hamburg Passenger list

UK Census

UK Alien Arrival

UK Naturalization

Archives



Websites

www.familysearch.org

www.genealogy.tm.fr/archives/archives.htm

www.geopatronyme.com/

www.geneanet.org

FamilySearch

for Archives départementales

Surname maps for France

Genealogy portal

European Group Contact

Send research queries to the Contact on the **European Interest Contact** page at www.genealogy.org.nz

A group meets on the 1st Friday of most months at the Family Research Centre at 159 Queens Rd, Panmure from 4pm– 10pm. Continental advice is usually available, however please first check with the Contact to be quite sure.

Recommended Reading

Pontet, Patrick, *Ancestral Research in France*, 1998.

Pontet, Patrick, *Researches in Paris—a basic guide for Family Historians*, 1993.

Morddel, Anne, *French Genealogy from Afar*, 2013.

FamilySearch.org Research Wiki for information on records, how to use them and links to various archives.