



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Québec Records and Searching Them

For general enquiries, it is a difficult task to institute an in-depth search without knowing a place-name for your ancestor when researching the Canadian province of Québec. Most records are arranged by town or district locations. In some minor circumstances we have a few limited province-wide indexes that at the least will give us a distribution of the family name and most of these constitute pre-1900 information; at best, a pioneer ancestor might be located. This is always first priority, to locate the family, and these index searches are covered by the minimum retainer.



Figure 1 - Map of Canada

If you do know a place-name, you'll receive some research and additional research suggestions based on information you've supplied. In this case, the minimum retainer covers evaluation of your information, a preliminary research plan, implementation of some basic research strategies and evaluation of those research results in the Report.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

First Nations and European Exploration

“At the time of first European contact and later colonization, Algonquian, Iroquois and Inuit tribes were the peoples who inhabited what is now Québec. Basque whalers and fishermen traded furs with Saguenay natives throughout the 16th century. The first French explorer to reach Québec was Jacques Cartier, who planted a cross in 1534 at either Gaspé or Old Fort Bay on the Lower North Shore. He sailed into the St. Lawrence River in 1535 and established an ill-fated colony near present-day Québec City at the site of Stadacona, a village of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. Linguists and archeologists have determined these people were distinct from the Iroquoian nations encountered by

later French and Europeans, such as the five nations of the Haudenosaunee. Their language was Laurentian, one of the Iroquoian family. By the late 16th century, they had disappeared from the St. Lawrence Valley.

New France

Around 1522-1523, the Italian navigator Giovanni da Verrazzano persuaded King Francis I of France to commission an expedition to find a western route to Cathay (China). Late in 1523, Verrazzano set sail in Dieppe, crossing the Atlantic on a small caravel with 53 men. After exploring the coast of the present-day Carolinas early the following year, he headed north along the coast, eventually anchoring in the Narrows of New York Bay. The first European to discover the site of present-day New York, he named it Nouvelle-Angoulême in honour of the king, the former count of Angoulême. Verrazzano's voyage convinced the king to seek to establish a colony in the newly discovered land. Verrazzano gave the names Francesca and Nova Gallia to that land between New Spain (Mexico) and English Newfoundland.



Figure 2 - Québec in Canada

In 1534, Jacques Cartier planted a cross in the Gaspé Peninsula and claimed the land in the name of King Francis I. It was the first province of New France. However, initial French attempts at settling the region met with failure. French fishing fleets, however, continued to sail to the Atlantic coast and into the St. Lawrence River, making alliances with First Nations that would become important once France began to occupy the land. French merchants soon realized the St. Lawrence region was full of valuable fur-bearing animals, especially the beaver, an important commodity as the European beaver had almost been driven to extinction. Eventually, the French crown decided to colonize the territory to secure and expand its influence in America.

Samuel de Champlain was part of a 1603 expedition from France that travelled into the St. Lawrence River. In 1608, he returned as head of an exploration party and founded Québec City with the intention of making the area part of the French colonial empire. Champlain's Habitation de Québec, built as a permanent fur trading outpost, was where he would forge a trading, and ultimately a military alliance, with the Algonquin and Huron nations. Natives traded their furs for many French goods such as metal objects, guns, alcohol, and clothing.

From Québec, coureurs des bois, voyageurs and Catholic missionaries used river canoes to explore the interior of the North American continent, establishing fur trading forts on the Great Lakes (Étienne Brûlé 1615), Hudson Bay (Radisson and Groseilliers 1659–60), Ohio River and Mississippi River (La Salle 1682), as well as the Prairie River and Missouri River (de la Verendrye 1734–1738).

After 1627, King Louis XIII of France introduced the seigneurial system and forbade settlement in New France by anyone other than Roman Catholics. Sulpician and Jesuit clerics founded missions in Trois-Rivières (Lavolette) and Montreal or Ville-Marie (Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve and Jeanne Mance) to convert New France's Huron and Algonquian allies to Catholicism. The seigneurial system of governing New France also encouraged immigration from the motherland.

New France became a Royal Province in 1663 under King Louis XIV of France with a Sovereign Council that included intendant Jean Talon. This ushered in a golden era of settlement and colonization in New France, including the arrival of les "Filles du Roi". The population grew from about 3,000 to 60,000 people between 1666 and 1760. Colonists built farms on the banks of St. Lawrence River and called themselves "Canadiens" or "Habitants". The colony's total population was limited, however, by a winter climate much harsher than that of France, by the spread of diseases, and by the refusal of the French crown to allow Huguenots, or French Protestants, to settle there. The population of New France lagged far behind that of the Thirteen Colonies to the south, leaving it vulnerable to

attack. Many *donnes* (the assistants to the Jesuit priests) tried to convert the natives of New France during the 17th century.

Seven Years' War and Capitulation of New France

In 1753 France began building a series of forts in the contested Ohio Country. They refused to leave after being notified by the British Governor, and in 1754 George Washington launched an attack on the French Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh) in the Ohio Valley in an attempt to enforce the British claim to the territory. This frontier battle set the stage for the *French and Indian War* in North America. By 1756, France and Britain were battling the *Seven Years' War* worldwide. In 1758, the British mounted an attack on New France by sea and took the French fort at Louisbourg.

On September 13, 1759, General James Wolfe defeated General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham outside Québec City. With the exception of the small islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, located off the coast of Newfoundland, France ceded its North American possessions to Great Britain through the *Treaty of Paris* (1763) in favor of the island of Guadeloupe for its then-lucrative sugar cane industry. The British Royal Proclamation of 1763 renamed Canada (part of New France) as the Province of Québec. The proclamation restricted the province to an area along the banks of the Saint Lawrence River, however.

At roughly the same time as the northern parts of New France were being turned over to the British and beginning their evolution towards modern day Québec and Canada, the southern parts of New France (Louisiana) were signed over to Spain by the *Treaty of Fontainebleau* of 1762. As a result of double cession of Québec to the British and Louisiana to the Spanish, the first French colonial empire collapsed, with France being expelled almost entirely from the continental Americas, left only with a rump set of colonies restricted principally to scattered territories and islands in the Caribbean.

After the capture of New France the British implemented a plan to control the French and entice them to assimilate into the British way of life. They prevented Catholics from holding public office and forbade the recruitment of priests and brothers, effectively shutting down Québec's schools and colleges. This first British policy of assimilation (1763–1774) was deemed a failure. Both the demands in the petitions of the *Canadiens'* élites and the recommendations by Governor Guy Carleton played an important role in persuading London to drop the assimilation scheme, but the looming American revolt was certainly also a factor as the British were fearful that the French-speaking population of Québec would side with the rebellious Thirteen Colonies to the south, especially if France allied with the Americans as it appeared it would.

Québec Act and the American Revolution

In 1774, the British Parliament passed the *Québec Act* through which the Québec people obtained their first Charter of Rights. This paved the way to later official recognition of the French language and French culture. The act also allowed *Canadiens* to maintain French civil law and sanctioned freedom of religion, allowing the Roman Catholic Church to remain, one of the first cases in history of state-sanctioned freedom of practice. Further, it restored the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley to Québec, reserving the territory for the fur trade.

The *Québec Act*, while designed to placate one North American colony, had the opposite effect among the Americans to the south. The act was among the so called "Intolerable Acts" that infuriated the American colonists, leading them to the armed insurrection of the *American Revolution*.

On June 27, 1775, General George Washington decided to attempt an invasion of Canada by the American Continental Army to wrest Québec and the St. Lawrence River from the British. A force led by Brigadier General Richard Montgomery headed north from Fort Ticonderoga along Lake Champlain and up the St. Lawrence River valley. Meanwhile, Colonel Benedict Arnold persuaded Washington to have him lead a separate expedition through

the Maine wilderness. The two forces joined at Québec City, but were defeated at the Battle of Québec in December 1775. Prior to this battle Montgomery (killed in the battle) had met with some early successes but the invasion failed when British reinforcements came down the St. Lawrence in May 1776 and the Battle of Trois-Rivières turned into a disaster for the Americans. The army withdrew back to Ticonderoga.

Although some help was given to the Americans by the locals, Governor Carleton punished American sympathizers and public support of the American cause came to an end.

The *American Revolutionary War* was ultimately successful in winning independence for the Thirteen Colonies. In the *Treaty of Paris* (1783), the British ceded their territory south of the Great Lakes to the newly formed United States of America.

At the end of the war, 50,000 British Loyalists from America came to Canada and settled amongst a population of 90,000 French people. Many of the loyalist refugees settled into the Eastern Townships of Québec, in the area of Sherbrooke, Drummondville and Lennoxville.

Patriotes' Rebellion in Lower Canada

In 1837 residents of Lower Canada, led by Louis-Joseph Papineau and Robert Nelson, formed an armed resistance group to seek an end to the unilateral control of the British governors. They made a Declaration of Rights with equality for all citizens without discrimination and a Declaration of Independence of Lower-Canada in 1838. Their actions resulted in rebellions in both Lower and Upper Canada. An unprepared British Army had to raise militia forces, the rebel forces scored a victory in Saint-Denis but were soon defeated. The British army burned the Church of St-Eustache, killing the rebels who were hiding within it. After the rebellions, Lord Durham was asked to undertake a study and prepare a report on the matter and to offer a solution for the British Parliament to assess.

The final report recommended that the two provinces of Upper and Lower Canada be united, and that the French speaking population of Lower Canada be assimilated into British culture. Durham's second recommendation was the implementation of responsible government across the colonies. Following Durham's Report, the British government merged the two colonial provinces into one Province of Canada in 1840 with the *Act of Union*.

However, the political union proved contentious. Reformers in both Canada West (formerly Upper Canada) and Canada East (formerly Lower Canada) worked to repeal limitations on the use of the French language in the Legislature. The two colonies remained distinct in administration, election, and law.

In 1848, Baldwin and LaFontaine, allies and leaders of the Reformist party, were asked by Lord Elgin to form an administration together under the new policy of responsible government. The French language subsequently regained legal status in the Legislature.

In the 1860s, the delegates from the colonies of British North America (Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland) met in a series of conferences to discuss self-governing status for a new confederation. The first Charlottetown Conference took place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, followed by the Québec Conference in Québec City which led to a delegation going to London, Britain, to put forth a proposal for a national union. As a result of those deliberations, in 1867 the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the *British North America Act*, providing for the Confederation of most of these provinces. The former Province of Canada was divided into its two previous parts as the provinces of Ontario (Upper Canada) and Québec (Lower Canada). New Brunswick and Nova Scotia joined Ontario and Québec in the new Dominion of Canada.

In 1870, Canada purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. Over the next few decades the Parliament of Canada transferred portions of this territory to Québec that more than tripled the size of the province.

In 1898, the Canadian Parliament passed the first *Québec Boundary Extension Act* that expanded the provincial boundaries northward to include the lands of the Cree. This was followed by the addition of the District of Ungava through the *Québec Boundaries Extension Act of 1912* that added the northernmost lands of the aboriginal Inuit to create the modern Province of Québec. In 1927, the border between Québec and Newfoundland and Labrador was established by the British Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Québec officially to this day disputes this boundary.”¹

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

Church registration of vital records in Québec concerning baptisms, marriages, and deaths has been compulsory since 1621. The local Catholic priests were responsible for this, and in the more remote districts the records are neither complete nor accurate. Theoretically, produced in duplicate since 1679, the priests of all the parishes in Québec have been required to submit one copy of these documents to the office of the Prothonotary of the Superior Court of each judicial district at the local civil archives (Palais de Justice) and retain one at the parish church. In fact, however, this system of record-keeping was not always done until the early 18th century. In 1760 the same system was introduced for Protestants in the province.

Since 1926, governmentally required **civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths** has been in effect in Québec, however there was the usual period of adjustment with gaps in record-keeping. For copies of the actual original documents and the indexes after this date, you will need to contact the Le Directeur de l'état civil, 2535, boulevard Laurier, Québec City, Québec G1V 5C6. Till 1969, all marriages had to be performed in and registered by a church and all births needed to be registered this way as well. Now all this can be done in a local city hall or municipal office. The province's extracts are somewhat informative if successful in locating the correct entry though they lack behind similar documents in other provinces. Remember that there are regulations on who can access copies of these documents and these are strictly followed. In order to get a copy of a certificate in Québec it is almost essential that you know in which parish your ancestor lived at the time of the event. The Judicial District can then be determined and the actual record obtained. On the other hand, if you do not know the name of the town or village, or even worse, the parish, you will have great problems researching your ancestors in Québec. Although the records of the Prothonotaries go back in many cases to 1621, you must keep in mind that there will be many gaps in the early years. It was not until about 1870 that the records really became dependable. For records prior to 1885, direct your enquiries first to the National Archives of Québec (Sainte Foy). It is important to note, which is of significance to genealogists, married women retain their maiden surname in all records.

Before 1926, **church registers** may be the only source for baptisms, marriages and burials. Like other provinces, finding church registers in Québec is not a straight-forward task: A) religious affiliation must be determined, B) then the name of a local church the family may have attended, C) next whether the church still exists, and D) where its registers are now located. Registers may remain at the original church, they may have been lost, or they may have been sent to another local church or to a church archives. It takes some historical research to reach a likely objective. In some cases the records we want may only be at a distant archive. Many of the early historical church records have been housed at the National Archives of Québec while others may be found at the National Library & Archives of Canada though this is not a comprehensive collection for any of the ecclesiastical bodies. Consider investigating the archives of the various ecclesiastical bodies for the area first in your search. As well, the prothonotaries hold substantial collections throughout the province as do the various church' diocese' archives. Some collections of parish registers will also be found outside of the province such as those of the Baptist and United Church faiths.

¹'Québec' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Québec> extracted 18th April 2011.

Another source of vital information in Québec is the **Marriage Bonds** which are not indexed and are only in county/parish order. These date from 1642 in the case of Montreal. Prior to 1970 it was usual for a Québec engaged couple to enter into a formal marriage contract prepared by a notary and these documents still exist and are held in the various regional archives throughout the province filed by names & document date and cover the period 1636 to 1874. Since 1874 they are in the local Registry Offices and since 1970 these contracts are scarce as couples now keep pre-marriage assets to themselves and divide equally those acquired during the marriage.

A further resource is the **Loiselle Marriage Index** covering the period 1642 to 1963 and the **Rivest Marriage Index** encompassing the period 1670 to 1972. Both collections are available at the National Archives of Québec, Library and Archives Canada or through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library branches.

There are many **censuses** for Québec over its history and that for Québec City (and parish) was first taken in 1666 and then again in 1667, 1681, 1716, 1762, 1773, 1792, 1795, 1798, 1805, 1815, and 1818. The first census of Montreal was in 1731 and then again in 1741, 1744, 1762, 1781, and 1825. A census was taken of Trois Rivières in 1760, 1762, and 1765. From 1666 to 1681 every member of the household is listed. In the later years only the head of the family was listed. From 1851 to 1911, inclusive, all family members were included. All of these returns have been completely indexed, microfilmed and digitized. It is important to remember that many of the early censuses were not official, not complete, and not accurate! For example, Protestants were NOT included in the census until 1795 where the Catholic Church was involved with doing the recordings (1792-1805).

No further federal census returns exist currently past 1911 other than a 1940 War Registration Census which provides excellent detail information on those enumerated however it is not open for public inspection. Should you know place of residence where the subject was at the time of the enumeration in 1940, Statistics Canada (Ottawa) will search the return for you for fee and provide you with an abstract of that entry. Some of the major communities also have listings of civic censuses' taken for their areas and these should be investigated in local archives or at the National Archives of Québec.

Never forget as well the importance of will and probate records or what is known as **notary records** in Québec. These can encompass testaments/wills, petitions & grants of probate, letters of administration, inventories of estates, miscellaneous affidavits and all may be found at the Chambre des Notaires (Québec City). In this province you have something called Prothonotarial records and these are very similar to probate records and notary records in the rest of Canada but contain a lot more information. The problem with these records in this province is that the original prothonotarial record was kept by the notary concerned thereby scattering the historical resource documents hither and yon throughout the province. When the notary died, these records would have been transferred to his successor, however if the practice died with him then the documents were sent to the local Palais de Justice. You must know approximately where the deceased may have lived and settled his estate in order to determine who the notary may have been and what became of his records.

Fortunately, a record of such transfers is kept by the Chambre des Notaires. Documents more than 100 years old are in the various regional archives of the National Archives of Québec and are indexed. Documents less than 100 years old (other than the exceptions noted) remain in the offices of the respective notaries and are not open for public inspection, though if they are determined to be in one's possession the notary may extract the document for you. This generosity is not required by them, however. Contact the Chambre des Notaires for further information regarding these documents, or the local genealogical or historical society in your search area for leads on particular notaries.

Refer to the following publication for a good inventory of prothonotarial records in the province: *"Inventaire des greffes des notaires du regime francias"*. For a listing of many of the deceased prothonotaries, showing where and

when they served refer to: "*Index des greffes des notaires decedes (1645-1948)*". All legal transactions were brought before the prothonotaries and their registers included various records of varying genealogical value. These records start as early as about 1636 and include marriage contracts ("contrats de mariage"), donations to heirs ("donations entre vifs"), wills ("testaments"), inventories ("inventaires"), settlements ("partage"), guardianship & orphan records and indentures ("engagements"). You must have a working knowledge of the French language in order to make use of these records.

Lastly, of great importance, there are thousands of small cemeteries in the province many of which have had their **monumental inscriptions** (including headstones) transcribed. The local/regional/provincial genealogical societies have conducted the majority of this work and they should be consulted for more details on possible inscription recordings. A great number of the city cemeteries have not been recorded, however, and in both cases you should consult the local government body for interment register details on the subjects of interest. Remember, that most records of this nature of less than 25 years are generally not released to the public and it is at the discretion of the cemetery board to do so or not.

Besides these records, there are a host of other important sources that are available to the public which should be consulted further. The most important of these are the following, though the list is certainly not exhaustive:

- 1). Land Records & Seigneurial Records (Crown Grants, Petitions, Property Abstracts, Deeds as early as 1626)
- 2). City/Provincial Business/Telephone Directories & Local Histories (from 1879)
- 3). Québec Immigration and Settlement Programs
- 4). Funeral Home Records
- 5). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories (early 1600's)
- 6). Municipal Records
- 7). Ships' Passenger Lists from 1865 (Chronological, not Indexed)
- 8). British Military Records for North America (after 1828)
- 9). Canadian Expeditionary Forces Battalion Lists (1914-1918)
- 10). Hudson Bay Company Record Collection (1873-1930)
- 11). Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material (from c. 1793)
- 12). Education & School Records
- 13). Divorce Records (ca. 1867-1980)
- 14). Legal & Court Documents
- 15). Health and Social Service Records
- 16). Immigration and Naturalization Records (after 1835)
- 17). Employment Records
- 18). Association and Union Records
- 19). Business and Trades Licensing Record Collections
- 20). Election Records
- 21). Railway Records and Related Collections
- 22). Family Histories, Biographies, Personal Papers

Information concerning Québec preferred known to start a search:

- A). Approximate Date of Immigration into Canada & Arrival into the Region
- B). Name of Subject
- C). Name of Subject's Parents or Children (or both, if known)
- D). Approximate Dates of Birth, Marriage, & Death of either Subject, Parents or Children

- E). Place and/or Parish of Residency and Periods of Occupation
- F). Forms of Employment or Occupation (if known)

SUMMATION:

Pre-1926 information in Québec will sometimes be difficult to obtain but is always worth trying for. There is a wealth of information on Québec that precedes this and can extend you back into the mid-1600's in many cases, should your ancestor been in province that early. Of course, much of your success in any genealogical research will depend upon how prolific your ancestors were in documenting their existence from locality to locality, and Québec is certainly no different. You will need to know the parish, however, before proceeding very far. Fortunately, in Québec, a lot of work has been ongoing documenting a multitude of French ancestral lines and these massive compilations will help your search immensely if you are of French ancestry here.

For a more in-depth discussion of the available Alberta source records, please obtain a copy of the article by Brian W. Hutchison, CG, FSA Scot, titled "How to Begin Your Research in Canada - Part VII – Québec" printed as part of a series for the now-defunct magazine "*Family History Newsletter*" (Oshawa: Parr's Publishing, 1997). A copy of this publication may be purchased online from GEN-FIND Research Associates, Inc. by consulting our online GEN-Store site. Also, please consult GEN-Store for other wonderful publications for sale that we feel are exceptionally relevant to your search in this area. They will provide more background information on many of the resources and repositories covered herein as well as many others not addressed in these notes.

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