

French-Canadian Family Connections

A Presentation for the Dakota County (Minnesota) Historical Society

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If you have 18th-19th century ancestors in a Great Lakes state or province, you may have a French-Canadian connection. Your German, Native American, or British Isles ancestor or sibling may have married into a French-Canadian family. If you have Dakota County, Minnesota connections, you may have at least a cousin with French Canadian ancestry. Learn about the general history of the people, the fantastic records created, the books and online resources, the repositories, and meet some new cousins. Check the Minnesota Genealogical Society (MGS), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), and the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) for nearby books and periodicals. On the Canadian side, Check Library and Archives Canada (LAC) and Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ).

1. **The best part of French-Canadian ancestry.** Three words: THE CHURCH RECORDS. If the religion is Catholic in Canada and in the province of Quebec, that's even better. Parents of marrying couples are generally named in church records and a growing number of databases connect families. My own French-Canadian ancestors married into Protestant families in Quebec. Even without those marriage connections, you might find that non-French Canadian family members have some helpful church records in Canada and in the Great Lakes area of the U.S. where larger groups of French-Canadians settled.
2. **The worst parts of French-Canadian ancestry.** It's pretty much the same no matter your background. A place of origin is needed in the "Canadian" province where they resided at baptism, marriage, and death. Two more issues are spelling and dit names. My Nana Dow was English or Irish. Wrong. Dow was originally French Canadian and spelled Daoust. Other names that were anglicized: Fugère/Fisher; LeBlanc/White; Bois/Wood. Many had dit names, such as Eugenie Vinet dit Larente. A dit name could be a nickname, military name, to distinguish between families or individuals, or may connect the person to a geographic place. It means you need to search for both surnames in records. Many women were baptized with Marie as their first name and men as Joseph, but they were known by the "middle" name. Many online and printed resources help with the naming issues.

3. **Start with U.S. records.** If you are not familiar with doing family history research, guidebooks, classes, webinars, seminars, and institute courses introduce you to the research basics and beyond. Genealogical societies and other organizations offer these opportunities for learning. The movements of fur traders, voyageurs, trappers, missionaries, Indigenous, military, lumbermen, and others were continuous, and many had family members on each side of the “border.” I have listed a few basic books here <http://genealogybypaula.com/2018/05/repost-some-great-basic-genealogy-guidebooks/>
4. **Determining your Canadian places.** In the U.S., censuses, county histories, probate records, church records, obituaries, cemeteries, and other records may provide the specific places in Quebec. Online family trees, even those with no source documentation, may provide clues.
5. **CANADA?** It wasn’t always Canada! A few basic Canada name changes:

| Date | Acts, events, and results |
|------|--|
| 1663 | New France is officially a royal colony. |
| 1774 | Quebec’s now includes what are today parts of southern Ontario, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Often called the Old Northwest area. |
| 1763 | Treaty of Paris; end of New France and the St. Lawrence Valley becomes the Province of Quebec. |
| 1783 | The Treaty of Paris ends the Revolutionary War, and the British gave up land from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River and along the Great lakes southward. |
| 1791 | Quebec divided into Upper (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) which are sometimes known as French Canada and English Canada. |
| 1841 | Upper and Lower Canada united to form Province of Canada by Britain. Upper Canada was renamed Canada West (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec) was renamed Canada East. |
| 1867 | Canadian Confederation and Canada East is now officially The Province of Quebec. |

6. **Reading the church records.** In both countries, the records related to French-Canadians might be in French, Latin, or English. Use Google Translator, Cyndi’s List category of “Languages & Translations,” FamilySearch Wiki under “French Genealogical Word List,” and for Latin. Facebook translation groups, and a French or Latin to English dictionary.
7. **Indigenous population.** My September webinar for DCHS was on Native American research in the U.S. If you attend tonight’s webinar and would like a copy of that previous handout, [email me](#) and I will send it via email. Whether your ancestry is Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, Ojibwe, Dakota, or Menominee in Quebec or the U.S., help is available online and in print. Families and individuals with Indigenous blood in the Great Lakes states and provinces means research in both countries. The FamilySearch Wiki and major repositories in Quebec have extensive information on the Indigenous in Quebec. The Metis in Ontario, Manitoba, Minnesota, and North Dakota are the subject of many books and by historical societies.

- a. Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs.html>.
 - b. Francis, Daniel. *A History of the Native Peoples of Quebec 1760-1867*. Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1983.
 - c. *Indians of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces (An Historical Review)*. Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1971.
8. **Vital Records.** Early in Quebec, it was required to register baptisms (births), marriages, and burials (deaths) by churches (majority Catholic). A copy was to stay with the church and the other copy filed with a designated local court. In the 19th century this was extended to more Protestant denominations and Jewish congregations. As with many places, not all events were registered, some duplicates were not kept or forwarded, and there was record destruction. In 1926 civil registrations of births, marriages, and deaths were kept in addition to, or in place of, church records in the province. In 1994, the law required all vital statistics registrations to be separate from church record keeping in the province. Online indexes and databases exist for many church registers and for civil registrations older than 100 years. Before these, genealogists and historians created abstracts and indexes of marriage records called repertoires; most are Catholic parish records. A few are still being done. Some repertoires do have details on baptisms and burials. The largest concentration of the records is from Quebec, but some are for U.S French-Canadian parishes. MGS, MHS, and WHS have an extensive number of published repertoires.
9. **Notarial Records.** The records of Notaries in Québec are legal records of estates, land transfers, marriage contracts, guardianships, estate inventories, and wills. Most over 100 years old are with the BAnQ but free and subscription sites have extensive portions as do some of the other archives and organizations listed later. If your person was in a big city, the number of notaries is extensive. For one of my locations, there are only four notaries. The notarial records are organized by the name of the notary. One guide is Robert J. Quintin's *The Notaries of French-Canada, 1626-1900: Alphabetical, Chronologically, by Area Served*. Pawtucket, RI: Quinton Publications, 1994, which is digitized on FamilySearch books.
10. **Cemeteries.** Databases with Quebec cemetery entries include FindAGrave, and Billion Graves. Some databases or published indexes and abstracts of gravestones and/or records exist for individual cemeteries. CanadaGenWeb's Quebec cemetery project is at <https://cemetery.canadagenweb.org/>. Ancestry has a searchable index covering 1849-2011. For the U.S., check the same cemetery databases. Many burial details are published and at libraries, and many are online for individual cemeteries. For example, do a search for St. Peter's Cemetery in Mendota to find extensive information on French-Canadian families.
11. **Newspapers.** Check LAC and BAnQ for Quebec newspapers and for some that are digitized. Others are at libraries, archives, historical societies, and university libraries. Some Canadian

newspapers are found on general newspaper subscription websites. The Ancestor Hunt <https://theancestorhunt.com/newspaper-research-links.html> has links to digitized Quebec newspapers. Google News Archive has Quebec newspapers but it's not an easy search algorithm. *The Canadian Gazette*, a government newspaper, is on LAC from 1841-1997. <https://libguides.bgsu.edu/c.php?g=227443&p=1507147> has a list of digitized Quebec newspapers. LAC has *French-Canadian Newspapers: An Essential Historical Source (1809-1919)* and includes some digitized French language newspapers. <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/canadian-newspapers-french/index-e.html>. For the U.S., check the various digital newspaper websites (Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank, NewspaperArchive.com, Chronicling America, etc.) MHS is digitizing many early newspapers. *Le Canadian* and *Echo de l'Ouest* are two historic Minnesota French-Canadian newspapers. WHS has many ethnic newspapers.

12. Archives, libraries, organizations.

- a. **American-Canadian Genealogical Society:** <https://acgs.org/> In New Hampshire but an excellent source for education and records.
- b. **American-French Genealogical Society:** <https://afgs.org/site/> Based in Rhode Island but another excellent source for education and records.
- c. **Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ):** genealogy databases, census info, newspapers and journals, library, notarial records <https://www.banq.qc.ca/accueil/>
- d. **French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota:** <http://fahfminn.org/french-american-heritage-articles/> This site includes links to many articles, books, and websites related to Upper Midwest French Canadians.
- e. **French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan:** <https://habitantheritage.org/index.php>
- f. **La Société généalogique canadienne-française:** <https://www.sgcf.com/>.
- g. **Library and Archives Canada:** <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx>.
- h. **Minnesota Genealogical Society:** <https://mngs.org/> The Hoffman Research Library at the Minnesota Genealogy Center houses extensive material relating to French-Canadians in places including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Quebec. Canadian Interest Group: <http://mncig.org/index.html>
- i. **Minnesota Historical Society:** <https://www.mnhs.org/> Search for French Canadian on the main page and in the Library and Archives catalog for extensive material. Excellent

details on federal and state censuses.

- j. **Quebec Family History Society:** <http://www.qfhs.ca/> This is an English-language genealogical society. Its journal is *Connections*.
- k. **Société de généalogie de Québec:** <https://www.sgq.qc.ca/>. Its publication is *L'Ancêtre*.
- l. **Wisconsin Historical Society:** <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/>

13. **French-Canadian Collections.** The dates of actual coverage do vary on various websites as do the subscription costs.

- a. **GenealogyQuebec/GénéalogieQuebec:** Subscription site with the Drouin collection of parish and notarial records, obituaries, grave markers, some 20th century marriage and death details and other material. <https://www.genealogiequebec.com/en/>.
- b. **Drouin Collection:** Joseph Drouin abstracted and indexed church records from the government's copies. His son Gabriel was instrumental in getting the material microfilmed (2300+ microfilms). The FamilySearch Wiki is vital to understand these. https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/The_Drouin_Collection:_Six_Databases.
- c. **Jette:** *Dictionnaire genealogique des familles du Quebec des origines a 1730*. By Rene Jette (Montreal: Presses de l'Universite de Montreal, 1983).
- d. **Loiselle:** This index to and a supplement include marriages from the mid-1600s to circa 1960. It covers 500+ Catholic parishes in Québec and a few parishes outside Québec.
- e. **Tanguay:** *Dictionnaire Généalogique Des Familles Canadiennes Depuis La Fondation De La Colonie Jusqu'à Nos Jours: 1701-1763*. A-Z. Quebec: 1871-1890 in 7 volumes. A multi-volume *Supplement to Tanguay's Genealogical Dictionary* has additions and corrections.
- f. **Parchemin Project:** Société de recherche historique Archiv-Histo's database of notarial records from 1626-1801. <https://www.archiv-histo.com/EN/>.
- g. **PRDH:** Programme de recherche en démographie historique (Research Program in Historical Demography) with 2.5+ million records and genealogies of French-Canadians 1621-1849. Most are from church record copies and some beyond 1849. This is an amazing map showing the parishes covered: <https://www.prdh-igd.com/en/carte>.

14. **More background information and websites**

- a. Balesi, Charles J. "Exploring the Midwest's French Roots." *Illinois Heritage*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1 & 2, (Fall-Winter 1999). <https://www.lib.niu.edu/1999/ihwt9904.html>

- b. Bukowczyk, J. (2008). "The Permeable Border, the Great Lakes Region, and the Canadian-American Relationship. *"Michigan Historical Review*, 34(2), 1-16. [Found on JSTOR.]
- c. **Cyndi's List:** Canada > Provinces > Quebec:
<https://www.cyndislist.com/canada/provinces/qc/>
- d. Denissen, Christian, et al. *Genealogy of the French Families of the Detroit River Region 1701-1936*. Revision. Detroit: Detroit Society for Genealogical Research, 1987.
- e. Ekberg, Carl I. *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998. [History n early movement between Canada and the U.S. and on many who were in what became Minnesota.]
- f. **FamilySearch Wiki:** [familysearch.org/wiki/en/Quebec, Canada Genealogy](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Quebec,_Canada_Genealogy)
- g. Geyh, Patricia Kenney, et al. *French Canadian Sources: A Guide for Genealogists*. Orem, UT: Ancestry, 2002.
- h. Laforest, Thomas J., translator, and other authors. *Our French-Canadian Ancestors*. 30 volumes. Palm Harbor, Florida: Lisi Press, 1983- 1999. Biographical sketches of early French immigrants to Quebec and other information. Some volumes are digitized on FamilySearch and other places. Join Norman Hebert's Our Free French Canadian Ancestors on Facebook, for more information, other records, and access.
- i. Holmquist, June Drenning. *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*. Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981. [French Canadians pp 36-54.]
- j. **Hudson's Bay Company Archives** in Winnipeg, Manitoba:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/index.html>. Early voyageurs, fur traders, missionaries, and others are in HBC records. HBC merged with the North West Company and name indexes to both companies are online. The records include people from several areas, including some U.S with the majority are from Ontario (and Quebec).
- k. Lareau, Paul J. and Elmer Courteau. *French-Canadian Families of the North Central States: A Genealogical Dictionary*. Rev. ed. St. Paul, MN: [P.J. Lareau?]: 1980-1981
- l. McQuillan, D. Aidan. "Franch-Canadian Communities in the American Upper Midwest During the Nineteenth Century." *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* Vol. 23 , Number 58 , 1979 , p. 39-52. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/cgq/1979-v23-n58->

[cgq2631/021423ar.pdf](#) Translated from French.

- m. *Minnesota Beginnings: Records of St. Croix County Wisconsin Territory, 1840-1849*. Stillwater, MN: Washington County Historical Society, 1999. Mini biographies including many French-Canadians in the greater Twin Cities area and beyond.
- n. **Olive Tree Genealogy:** <http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/can/quebec/index.shtml>.
- o. Reisinger, Joy, ed. *Lost in Canada? Canadian-American Query Exchange*. Published 1975-1994. [Queries, responses, how-to articles, record abstracts, indexes. [MHS, MGS, WHS]

Note: Be sure to verify information contained in indexes and abstracts of information from records. Such material whether in a book or online may have unintended errors. Many older works did not have access to as many original or digitized records as we do today.

About the presenter: Paula Stuart-Warren, Certified Genealogist®, FMGS, FUGA

Paula is an internationally recognized genealogical educator, researcher, and consultant based in the Saint Paul, Minnesota area who focuses on unusual resources, manuscripts, methodology, analyzing records, and research planning. She also specializes in Native American research, the WPA, and railroad records. She has spent extensive research time at libraries, courthouses, libraries, state archives, historical societies, and at various locations of the U.S. National Archives. She is a long-time course coordinator and instructor for the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy and the Genealogical Research Institute of Pittsburgh. She has presented courses for Research Write Connect Academy, Ancestry Academy, Family Tree University, and continues to present webinars and seminars across the U.S. and Canada. She has done genealogy presentations aboard cruise ships.

She is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Genealogical Societies, of the Minnesota Genealogical Society, a former officer of the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), and a former president of the Northland Chapter of APG. She has been a Board-Certified Genealogist since 1988.

She and her children are descended from at least ten ancestral countries and has researched family connections across the U.S., Canada, and the oceans. She currently has her own educational website and blog at <http://genealogybypaula.com> and is enthusiastic about sharing knowledge and continuing education. Her presentation topics are listed on the website. If you wish to have her present a webinar or virtual all-day seminar for your organization, please contact her via email for full details and cost.

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