

How to find French ancestors

Annick Foucrier, April 5, 2022

* In California sources :

- censuses
- probates (with documents proving family ties in France, like a will, letters, copy of a vital record)
- church records : baptisms and marriages since 1856 at San Francisco for catholics (not only French)

Notre Dame des Victoires, French Church

566 Bush St

San Francisco CA 94108

- also : associations, local societies, consular archives (in Nantes, except for San Francisco before 1906)

* In French Departemental archives (archives départementales) :

There is one in each county (département).

The organization of the archives is the same in each département, with the same call numbers.

Remark : Alsace (Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin) and Moselle may be slightly different, because of history.

Many documents have been digitized (numérisés) and are available on line (en ligne). Several web sites give access to archives and vital records. Two examples :

To access : archives.name of the departement.fr

Also, a map with a link to each departement <https://www.archives-departementales.com/>

There are differences but you can find at least :

- Registres paroissiaux et d'état-civil : vital records, church (BMS from 16th c) and state (NMD since 1792)

With alphabetical tables by decades (from 1793) to find the precise date, and books with the documents

Remark : Marriage records are the most complete. The marriage was celebrated where the bride's parents lived. There were announcement (banns) of intended marriage in both communes, to make sure there was no impediment.

Remark : the spelling of family names might change even between two birth records. The first name declared at birth was often a name of a godparent. The name used in the family could be different.

- Listes nominatives de recensement de la population (census nominal lists) 6M

Mainly from 1836, every 5 years, except in time of war.

- Matricules militaires (military enrollement) 1R

Remark : Men had to register when they were 20. They were recorded at the place where their parents lived, or where they themselves lived if they were already married. In 1792, the civil majority was fixed at 21 years for men and women. In 1804, it is changed to 25 yrs for men, until 1907 (then 21 yrs for all).

- Cadastre (3PP)

a register of property showing the extent, value, and ownership of land for taxation

- Minutes notariales (archives of notaries)

- For Seine Maritime (Havre), disarming of ships (6P6), with index (1750-1898) :

Lists of crew and lists of passengers

And many more...

Some other documents of interest, that are not always on line :

- Marriage contracts in notary archives (2E). With tables.

- Declarations of succession (3Q). With tables.

- Passports (4M) ; not in all departements.

* **Military records of World War I on line :**

[https : www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/fr](https://www.memoiredeshommes.sga.defense.gouv.fr/fr)

<http://www.culture.fr/Genealogie/Grand-Memorial>

Annick Foucrier wrote, among other publications :

Le rêve californien. Migrants français sur la côte Pacifique, XVIIIe-XXe siècles (The California Dream. French Migrants on the Pacific Coast, 18th-20th c), Belin, 1999, 428 p.

« French Mills in Santa Cruz in the 1840s », *Santa Cruz County History Journal, Redwood Logging and Conservation in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A Split History*, vol.7, 2014, pp.47-49.

« Gold Rush California Bound: New Evidences from French Passenger Lists », in D.O. Flynn, A. Giráldez, and J. Sobredo, eds., *Studies in Pacific History: Economics, Politics and Migration*, Aldershot, UK, Ashgate Publishing Co, 2002, pp.95-107.

« The French in Gold Rush San Francisco and spiritual kinship », in Guido Alfani et Vincent Gourdon (dirs), *Spiritual Kinship in Europe, 1500-1900*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 275-291.