

# FAMILY RESEARCH

## HOW DO I GET STARTED



◆ LOUISIANA CREOLE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION ◆  
*New Orleans, Louisiana*

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*"There is no State in the Union, hardly any spot of like size on the globe, where the man of color has lived so intensely, made so much progress, been of such historical importance and about whom so comparatively little is known. His history is like the Mardi Gras of the city of New Orleans, beautiful and mysterious and wonderful, but with a serious thought underlying it all. May it be better known to the world someday."*

*-- Madame Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar Nelson, 1917*

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## **I. Census Records**

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- The 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. census of Louisiana was taken in 1810.
- From 1810-1840, only the head of household was listed by name. Other family members were identified only by gender and age range.
- From 1850-1930 every member of the household was listed by name.
- Most people of color will benefit from census records from 1870-1930. If your ancestors were free people of color, they can be located on the 1850 and 1860 census. If you are unable to locate your ancestors in the 1850 or 1860 census, it is more than likely that they resided on a plantation, and can only be found in slave schedules, etc.
- Some of the items covered on the census at various times include:
  - Name
  - Age
  - Sex
  - Color
  - Occupation
  - Residence
  - Place of Birth
  - Educational Level
  - Date of Birth
  - Birthplace of Father
  - Birthplace of Mother
  - Home Ownership
  - Value of Home
  - Rent Amount
  - Military Service
  - Length of Marriage
- Census records in Louisiana are arranged by parishes. To use the census you should know the parish in which your ancestors lived.
- There are printed indexes for census records of Louisiana starting with the 1810 and continuing up to the 1870 census.

## II. Church Records

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### A. Baptisms

- Along with the dates of the baptisms, the baptismal records give dates of birth for persons baptized.
- Names of parents, including the mother's maiden name are also recorded on baptismal certificates.
- It is important to note the godparents, as they are often very close relatives.
- If you are not successful when searching for a surname, search under all possible variations in spelling and the mother's maiden name. *Example:* Breaux, Braud, Brault, Braux, Brot, Brod, Breau, Bro.
- Consider the fact that names often switched between French, Spanish, and English versions, *i.e.* Pierre + Pedro + Peter ; Antoine + Antonio + Anthony.
- Many males were baptized as Joseph and females as Marie + other names of saints. In many cases these names were rarely used if at all in other records.

### B. Marriages

- Along with the date the marriage was performed, marriage certificates *may* give the names of the parents of the parties being married.
- Always note the witnesses to the marriage because they are often close family members.
- Don't hold the names given on the certificate to be definite. *Example:* A bride and groom were married as Leandre and Eglantine Le Blanc but were found in all other records as Leandre & Eglantine Dominique.
- Always consider variations in spelling.

- As a general rule, to calculate a date of birth, subtract 20 years from the date of marriage.

### **C. Funerals**

- Funeral records give the least information of all sacramental records. Generally, only date of burial, date of death, and age are given.
- Many times women were listed under their maiden names in the funeral register. Example: Angelina Melatti (Mrs. Arthur Braud) last rights administered, died 13 Oct. 1922 buried 14 Oct. 1922 age 75 years. (signed) Fr. Jos. P. Van Baast.
- Although the ages given at death can be very helpful, the age may be incorrect by 5-10 years.

### **D. Repositories of Sacramental Records**

- When conducting research into events that took place in a church, you should first check with the specific church where the event occurred.
- A list of churches arranged by civil parish and the extent of each churches' holdings can be found in the book *A Guide to Church Records in Louisiana* by Fr. Donald Hebert.
- The Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans are closed to the general public and all genealogical requests are handled by mail for a fee.
- The Archdiocesan Archives holds records fro the following civil parishes:  
**Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Plaquemine, St. Tammany, and Washington.**

- The Archives has published its sacramental holdings from 1718-1831 in a series of gray books available at the N.O. Main Library and other libraries with Louisiana Divisions. Only entries with last names (whites and free people of color) were published.
- Contact: Archdiocese Archives  
7887 Walmsley Avenue, New Orleans, La. 70125
- The Archives of the Diocese of Baton Rouge (DBRA) are open to the public if **prior** arrangements for an appointment have been made.
- The DBRA holds records for the following civil parishes: **Assumption, Ascension, St. James, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Tangipahoa, Livingston, East Feliciana, and West Feliciana.**
- The Archives has published its holdings from 1701-1900 in a series of red books available at major libraries. Prior to 1865 only entries with surnames (whites and free people of color) are included; however, sacramental records for those without surnames (mostly slaves) can be seen by making an appointment with the Archives. The records for those without surnames (mostly slaves) from Pointe Coupee civil parish have been published up to 1900. Other books in the “slave” series are forthcoming.

Contact: Department of the Archives

Diocese of Baton Rouge

1800 South Acadian Thruway, Baton Rouge, La. 70821

(225) 387-0561 [www.diobr.org/archives](http://www.diobr.org/archives)

### **III. Vital Records**

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#### **A. Birth Certificates**

- Orleans Parish birth certificates go back to the year 1790.
- All other parishes in Louisiana did not record birth certificates until 1914.
- Birth records (Orleans Parish) older than 100 years (1790-1905) are available at the La. State Archives in Baton Rouge. For birth records less than 100 years, contact the Vital Records Registry in your nearest major city.

#### **B. Marriage Records**

- Marriage certificates (less than 50 years in Orleans Parish and all marriages in other parishes) can be obtained by writing or visiting the parish where the marriage occurred.
- Orleans Parish marriage records from 1831-1955 are at the La. State Archives in Baton Rouge.
- The La. Division of the N.O. Public Library has Orleans Parish marriages from 1846-1915, and an index for 1916-1984, as well as several other parishes.

#### **C. Death Records**

- Orleans Parish death certificates (1804-1955) can be found at the La. State Archives.
- Death certificates for all other parishes are available (1914-1955) at the State Archives.
- Death records for all parishes since 1955 are available at the Vital Records Registry.
- The La. Division of N.O. Public Library has Orleans Parish deaths from 1804-1915.

- An extensive newspaper obituary file from 1804-1972 is also available in the La. Division. Prior to 1864, obituaries and death certificates are of whites & free people of color only.

## IV. Helpful Internet Research Websites

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- [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

This website is hosted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It contains the entire 1880 U.S. census and the Social Security Death Index. Free.

- <http://nutrias.org/~nopl/guides/genguide/slavery.htm>

This website is a guide to the genealogical materials available at the New Orleans Main Public Library. It is an index to the vast amount of information available to those whose ancestors were from the New Orleans area. Free.

- [www.rootseb.com](http://www.rootseb.com)

This website hosts the USGeWeb Archives Project for Orleans Parish (among others) which consists of the vital records for New Orleans and Algiers. Its birth records provides the name of the child, the birth date, parents' names, and most importantly the book, volume, and page of the actual record. Free.

- [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

This is a very helpful website but it has very limited access unless you are a paid member. A two week free trial membership is available. Ancestry provides extensive information on census, vital records, military documents, land records, slave records, etc.