



## Researching Church Records Online

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Church records often contain facts about our ancestors that cannot easily be found elsewhere. They tend to start much earlier in time than other records. (see figure 1) They are a fabulous resource that dedicated genealogists should mine for information about ancestors.

Many church records are now digitized and made available to researchers. This means they are easier than ever to access. The question is, where online do we find these records?

There are a number of websites that include church records, some well known, others a little more obscure. Lets briefly take a look at some of them:

[Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)<sup>1</sup> or Ancestry Library Edition if you are using it through St. Louis County Library's subscription, is probably the best known of all the genealogical databases.

Ancestry contains records from Anglican, Baptist, Episcopal, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Presbyterian,

Figure 1-The Start of Church Records

1800s	1700s	1600s	1500s or Earlier	
Armenia	Albania	Estonia	Austria	Luxembourg
Bosnia	Belarus	Finland	Belguim	Netherlands
Bulgaria	Iceland	Latvia	Croatia	Norway
Georgia	Russia	Lithuania	Czech Republic	Poland
Ireland	Ukraine	Romania	England	Portugal
Kosovo		Scotland	France	Slovakia
Moldova		Sweden	Greece	Slovenia
Montenegro		Turkey	Hungary	Spain
Serbia			Italy	Switzerland

Reformed, and Roman Catholic Churches in several U.S. states and from countries around the world. This should not be interpreted as meaning every church of each of these denominations is represented. Rather, it means that some are represented. To check for an individual location, search the Ancestry card catalog in the search tab. Of particular interest to St. Louis Researchers, Ancestry recently digitized the parish registers of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield, Illinois.

[Find My Past](#)<sup>2</sup> emphasizes its collection of records from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. This includes registers from Roman Catholic parishes in Ireland, and some Anglican parishes in England. They also have records from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The site has been developing collections of Roman Catholic Parish Records and includes the Archdioceses of Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, and Philadelphia. They also have records from the Diocese of Toledo and inexplicably some parishes located in Moniteau County, Missouri.

[FamilySearch](#)<sup>3</sup> has been collecting records from around the world since the early part of the 20th century. These include church records from many parts of Europe, the United States, and Canada. There is no charge to access these records although a free registration is required. Due to contractual obligations, however, some of the records may only be available at an affiliated library, a Family History Center, or the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. FamilySearch records include the parish registers of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, the Diocese of Belleville, and some German Evangelical (UCC) churches. For specific instructions on accessing the St. Louis records, see "[Using Family Search to Research St. Louis Ancestors](#)" in the June 2020 edition of *PastPorts*.<sup>4</sup>

[Archion](#)<sup>5</sup> began digitizing church records from German protestant archives in 2014. They continue to add new records on a regular basis. There is no charge see what records they have available, but a membership is required to access the records. The individual records are not index, a researcher must search through the digitized church books to find the records they need. History & Genealogy has a subscription to Archion available for in library use only.

[Matricula Online](#)<sup>6</sup> began digitizing catholic parish registers about the same time as Archion began digitizing the protestant records. Covering Austria, Germany, and some neighboring areas, the website is free and easy to navigate. Like Archion, the individual records are not indexed, so a researcher needs to search through the church books to find information about their ancestors.

[French Departmental Archives](#)<sup>7</sup> hold most of the records concerning our French ancestors. Generally these will be civil registrations back to 1792, but prior to that they will be church records. This is important because a significant number of French settlers came to the North American colonies long before 1792. Tracing their ancestors will require us to get into these archival holdings. Fortunately, At the direction of the national government, the various archives have begun digitizing their holdings and placing them on their websites. The national

government did not specify how they should do this, so each archive created their own website. While some of the web designers used similar approaches, others went in completely different directions. If your French language skills are not up to navigating a website to find the records, consider using Google Translate to help you find your way around.

[The St. Louis Genealogical Society](#)<sup>8</sup> has begun indexing and digitizing the records of all St. Louis churches. These can be found in the Congregation Index found in the Congregation sub-menu under the research tab on their website. To protect the privacy of living individuals, birth/baptism records must be from at least 100 years ago, confirmations 85 years ago, deaths/funerals 50 years ago, and marriages 45 years ago. Membership in the society is required to access the index on their website.

[American Ancestors](#)<sup>9</sup>, the website of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, contains records from various churches in the New England area. These are available to members of the society at the research and contributing member level. Although History & Genealogy has a subscription to this site (available for in department use only), the level is not high enough to access these records. It is possible, however, to search the site to see if they have records of interest for your research.

[The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society](#)<sup>10</sup> has digitized records of some of New York's churches. Some of the records appear to be transcriptions others may be copies of the originals. Membership in the society is required to access the records.

[The National Library of Ireland](#)<sup>11</sup> digitized all of the Roman Catholic Parish records from Ireland and placed them on their website in 2015. The images are browsable but not searchable. Although the same records are indexed and searchable on Ancestry and Find My Past, sometimes having an easy browse option can facilitate research.

[The Ancestor Hunt](#)<sup>12</sup> is a free database that allows searching for publicly available records on the internet. The site provides links to other websites that contain the actual records. In many cases, these are links to FamilySearch, but sometimes they go to unique data sets that might be hard to find otherwise.

[The Genealogist](#)<sup>13</sup> is a subscription site based in the United Kingdom featuring church records. Some of the records appear unique to the site but others may be found on Find My Past or FamilySearch. There is no charge to visit the site to see what records are available.

[U.S. GenWeb Project](#)<sup>14</sup> began in 1996 and provides links to genealogical information organized by US counties. A county coordinator manages each county's website in terms of design and content. This means there can be wide discrepancies between the information provided by one county versus another. Check the website for any counties you are researching. There is no way to determine what is available other than checking. You might hit a goldmine.

[The Archdiocese of New Orleans](#)<sup>15</sup> digitized all their parish records from 100 years ago or older. These records can be viewed at no charge. This is an example of a one off website that was found by googling New Orleans Parish Records. The same approach could be done with any location. You will not know what is out there unless you try searching. Google is your friend.

### **Understanding and Using the Records**

Once we find the records for our ancestors, we need to understand how to research in them. To begin your search, start with an individual. Look for their baptism record. The baptism record will list the name of their parents. Then look for the marriage of the parents. Then look for his or her death record Then look for the parent's baptisms and repeat this process over and over again until you reach the earliest records available in the record set.

The biggest challenge to using church records is often finding them. As digitization proceeds across many websites, they are becoming easier and easier to find online, which makes accessing them increasingly simple.

#### Notes:

1. Ancestry.com or if accessing through a public library, use the link on their webpage.
2. FindMyPast.com
3. FamilySearch.org
4. "Using FamilySearch to research St. Louis ancestors" *Pastports*, (June 2020) E-Journal [https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/06\\_2020.pdf](https://www.slcl.org/sites/default/files/06_2020.pdf) (Accessed 6 Jan 2021).
5. Archion.de
6. data.matricula-online.eu/en/
7. Too many to list. Search [Google](#) for archives departementales [department name]
8. StLGS.org
9. americanancestors.org
10. newyorkfamilyhistory.org/
11. nli.ie/en/parish-register.aspx
12. theancestorhunt.com
13. thegenealogist.co.uk
14. usgenweb.org
15. nolacatholic.org/church-records



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