



(1)  
78 - YVELYNES  
91 - ESSONNE  
95 - VAL D'OISE

**What was required in the *registres paroissiaux* by *Le Code Louis 1667***

**Baptismal Records – *L'Acte de Baptême***

Date of event and birth

Given name of child

Names of parents, residence and profession

Names of godparents

Signatures of the pastor, parents and godparents

**Marriage Record – *L'Acte de Mariage***

Date of event, and date banns were posted

Full name of bride and groom, age and profession, permission to marry

Consent of the parents, reference to a marriage contract

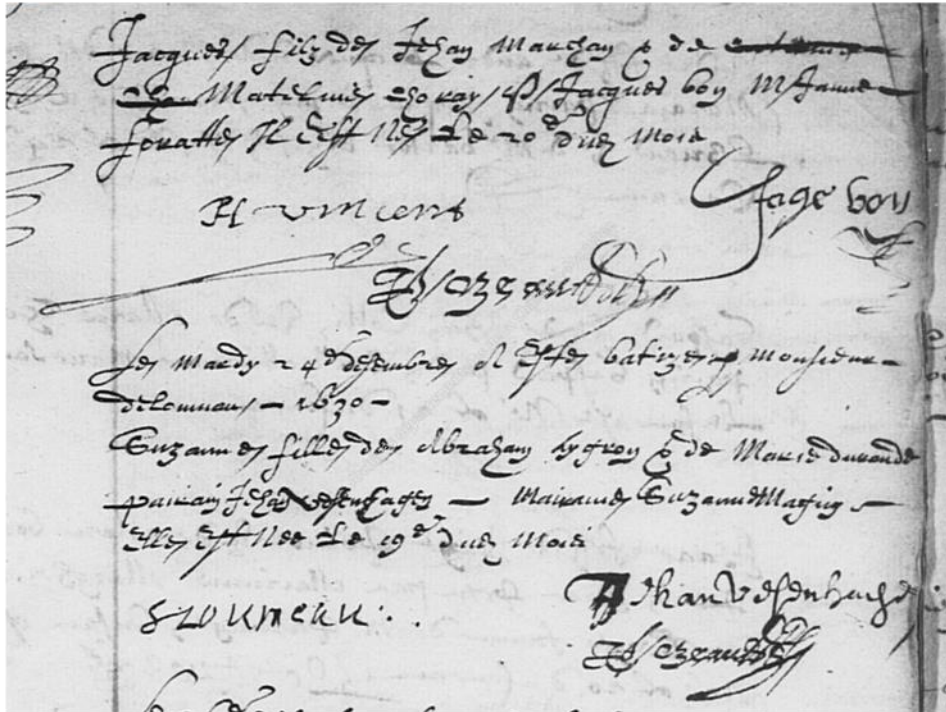
Signatures of witnesses

**Burial Record – *L'Acte de Sépulture***

Date of burial and death

Name of deceased, age and occupation

Signatures of witnesses



Page from *Registres du Temple de la Villeneuve*, La Rochelle, 1630

## The Digitization of French Protestant Church Records

### Not Provinces but Départements and Communes

A bit of history begins this note. On 4 March 1790, the old system of provinces created by the *Ancien Régime* were reconfigured as departments or *départements*. The current 96 departments in metropolitan France date to 1968. They are in alphabetic order from 1 Ain to 95 Val d'Oise in the Île-de-France region north of Paris. (Corsica has two departments numbered 2A and 2B.) There are also five overseas departments.

The departments were configured to break-up the ethnic and cultural identities of the provinces. For improved governmental and bureaucratic control, the departments were planned to make certain that no part of a department was too far from its capital.

Thus, when one is dealing with records with old provincial names, one should consult a modern map of cities, towns, and villages to ascertain the modern department and its capital or *prefecture* where the archives are generally located, and the names of the *communes* where the Reformed temple or Lutheran church was located. Useful websites for identifying departments and their capitals and *communes* are: <http://www.map-france.com/departments/> and <https://francearchives.fr/fr/annuaire/departements>.

Some geographical references such as “Alsace” have no meaning when searching records. Alsace generally describes an area of north-eastern France that borders Germany. The province of Alsace is roughly covered by the departments of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin. The regional designation is Grand Est and now includes (as of 2016) Lorraine, and Ardennes-Champagne. The same is true for “Normandy” where the Protestant Reformation took root in the 1540s in towns such as Dieppe, Rouen, Luneray, Bolbec, and others. All these cities and towns are now in the department of Seine-Maritime. Saint-Lô,

another town that sent delegates to the First National Synod of Reformed Churches in Paris in 1559 is now the *prefecture* of the Department of Manche. These towns were all part of Normandy.

For example, the baptism of Jean La Pierre (a Qualified Ancestor) was performed in the town of LaSalle. At the time of Jean's baptism at LaSalle, the town was in the *province* of Languedoc. Now LaSalle is in the department of Gard (#30), in a region of *Occitanie*, though until relatively recently referred to as *Languedoc-Roussillon*, The *prefecture* for Gard is Nîmes. A useful reference is for *Occitanie* (eg. Languedoc in part): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occitanie>.

The subdivision of a department is the *canton*. In 2015, the cantonal system was revised substantially and reduced to 2054 *cantons*. (These political units are undergoing change and, as far as I can tell, have insignificant impact on departmental archives.) What can be confusing is that in an urban area, the *commune* may include a number of *cantons*, but in rural areas, a number of *communes* may make up a *canton*. The aforementioned department of Gard has 23 *cantons*. Thus, the town of LaSalle is in *canton Le Vigan*, *arrondissement Le Vigan*, the department of *Gard*, the *region* of *Occitanie* (as of 2016). The departmental archives are in Nîmes, but the genealogy records are not online there. This is a different story that will be discussed below.

Protestant church (temple) records are usually located in departmental archives

Most of us are going to be searching for Huguenot ancestors who left France on or before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Once you have been able to identify the correct *commune* when you only have a vague provincial reference, the next challenge is the registers themselves.

The baptismal, marriage and death records (referred to in French with the abbreviation **BMS**) for Protestants were kept in *registres paroissiaux*, usually labelled as "*Culte Protestant*." (For the period from 1685-1787, Protestants had no civil status in France and so research is difficult but not impossible. This deserves its own note at some future date.)

French Reformed Protestants usually called their churches **temples**. Even so church or parish records were governed by the laws of France that required certain information be kept in *registres paroissiaux*. After the Code-Louis ordinance of 1667, most Protestant temples kept two sets of registers as did Roman Catholic parishes.

Remember that different departments became part of France at various times. For example, *le département du Nord* did not become part of France until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This poses problems with those who have Walloon ancestry that may or may not be French.

When you reach the website for the archive, one needs to look for *les archives en ligne* or a similarly named link. If you cannot find the link, go to *Rechercher* and type in *registres paroissiaux*, a term that usually but not always covers Roman Catholic and Protestant register books. In some departments, such as la Charente-Maritime (La Rochelle and vicinity), the Protestant registers are called *Registres pastoraux*, to distinguish them from Roman Catholic registers (*Registres paroissiaux*). Once you have found reference to *Registres*, look for reference to *ancien régime*, or *BMS*, or *ante 1792*. References to *d'état civil* will generally have material from the French Revolution and later, but not always. So, if you do not see references to records before 1792, check *d'état civil*.

The departmental websites are unique for each department, and generalizations are difficult. Sometimes going to the bottom of the opening departmental webpage and clicking on *Plan du Site* may help you locate the online digitized registers.

The *Registres* are not indexed, though sometimes one does encounter an index for a specific volume. The index, when it is found, is one to two types-the first initial of first name of the child baptized or a surname index. Thus, in a first name index, *Judith* might be recorded before *Jean* who might come before *Jacques*, especially if Judith was baptized in July 1679, and John was baptized in August 1679, and *Jacques/James* was baptized in September 1679. Sometimes one encounters a surname index with a page reference but the page number of the register might be quite different from the page number of the digitization. Be patient! Finding an index is a bit like finding gold.

### Reading 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century French Handwriting or Paleography

A large dose of patience is needed to read 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> French script. A useful resource for reading the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> handwriting is: [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/French\\_Handwriting](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/French_Handwriting). Another resource (in French) that is helpful because of the examples given: <http://eric-camille.voirin.pagesperso-orange.fr/index.html>. Other websites that I have found helpful: <https://paleography.library.utoronto.ca/> and <http://theleme.enc.sorbonne.fr/>. I find some of the records nearly indecipherable because of the script and the condition of the manuscript pages but sometimes where the minister or pastor used the same formula for writing the same type of record such as baptisms, I can begin to make sense of the writing. I invite anyone who find more or better online helps, please contact me and I will add them.



Page from Marriage Register of the town of LaSalle, Gard, France

## Brief Comment on LDS sources

Before I continue with the online French records, I should note that some English language records from what seems to be a completely random collection of Protestant temples in France can be found online at: France, Protestant Church Records, 1536-1894-

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1582585?collectionNameFilter=false>.

If you are just beginning to search French records, the LDS also have two useful general sites on French Church Records [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/France\\_Church\\_Records](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/France_Church_Records) and French Huguenots [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/France\\_Huguenots](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/France_Huguenots). These sites provide helpful information about the laws for record keeping

If you search the online FamilySearch catalog, you will find microfilms for a number Protestant church records from France. These records are organized by department and commune. Ordered online for a fee, they are available at your local Family History Library for viewing. (See examples below when I discuss Haut-Rhin.) I am not sure if these are exactly the same records that the French departmental archives are putting online *gratis*. At least for some of the departmental archives that I have searched, the original microfilming was done by the LDS. (See Seine-Maritime below.)

While checking the card catalogue of Ancestry.com, I found thirty-two references to birth, marriage and death registers catalogued under a variety of place names including provincial names, regional names and department names. Mostly these are in French and they appear to be indexed, making searching easier, if not more productive.

### Huguenot Society of London now Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland

When searching “French Protestant” at the FamilySearch site, one also finds the microfilms for the French Protestant churches in England. The Francophone churches in England were remarkably numerous reflecting the tens of thousands of Huguenot refugees that came to Great Britain. These microfilms are useful for those searching ancestors who came through England before emigrating to America.

Most of the still existing records have been published by the Huguenot Society of London, now the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Some of the older publications can now be found online. When searching the University of Pennsylvania library website for Huguenot Society of London publications, one finds a useful listing of publications and those that are available online.

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/>. The publications of the Huguenot Society of London (Great Britain and Ireland) are available through various libraries as books, CD-Roms, and/or microfilms. See also: <http://www.huguenotsociety.org.uk/publications/cd-rom.html>.

### Not all Départements have pre-Revolution records online

Some of the French departments have only records from about 1792 onward online. An example of this is Haut-Rhin. Haut-Rhin is the departmental name for part of Alsace. Alsace was not a single political entity. Part was ruled by the Prince-Bishopric of Strassburg (Strasbourg), a principality of the Holy Roman Empire that was annexed to France in 1648. The rest of the area was the county of Sundgau, also part of the Holy Roman Empire. Within the county of Sundgau was the city of Mulhouse or

Mülhausen, one of the ten imperial free cities or *Décapole*. The *Décapole* were annexed to Switzerland in 1515, until 1798 when a plebiscite united Mulhouse to France.

Some useful genealogy resources for this area include a page from the FranceGenWeb site *Les Recherches en Alsace*: <http://alsacegenweb.online.fr/recherches.htm>. A general website on the *departements* and available records is helpful but sometimes out of date: *Archives départementales France* compiled by Jacques Gagné. (Look it up by title, not e-mail address).

Microfilms of *Registres de l'église réformée de Mulhouse (Haut-Rhin), 1578-1798* are in four rolls that are available through your local Family History Library for a fee.  
<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/199054?availability=Family%20History%20Library>.

Colmar in Haut-Rhin and Haguenau or Hagenau in Bas-Rhin were centers of the Lutheran Reformation. *Evangelische Kirche Colmar* microfilms are available at your local FHL for a fee:  
<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/302350?availability=Family%20History%20Library>. Colmar is considered a late Reformation city, not introducing public Protestant worship until 1575. Munster's Protestant church records ( *Evangelische Kirche Münster (Kr. Colmar)*) are on microfilm at:  
<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/374360?availability=Family%20History%20Library>. For the commune of Ribeauvillé/Rappoltsweiler, the microfilms owned by the LDS are found at *Evangelische Kirche Rappoltsweiler*:  
<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/380818?availability=Family%20History%20Library>.

Thus, when one does not find Protestant church records in the departmental archives, these records might still be available from other sources.

### Protestant temple records posted by volunteer groups

In the south central Cévennes region of France are the departments of Gard (#30) and the adjacent Lozère (#48). A dozen or so genealogy organizations and municipal archives have formed an internet cooperative to publish records: *Archives en ligne cooperatives, Telearchives-Brozer*  
<http://www.brozer.fr/telearchives/#accueil.php>. Unfortunately, not all the online archives are open to the public. An example is the notary records published by *Association des Chercheurs et Généalogistes des Cévennes* or ACGC. The **BMS** records are open, but the notary registers from the department of Lozère are not. The **BMS** records are photographs of the original records arranged by commune. There is no index. In these records, the registers for villages like LaSalle are found with the entries arranged by date.

### French Records and English Indexing and Huguenot interest websites

Sometimes one comes across websites that are in English and French that provide useful background and indexing information. One such site is *Huguenots of France and Elsewhere-The site of French protestant genealogy*. <https://huguenots-france.org/english.htm> and <http://huguenots.free.fr/>. One helpful item at this site is an index to the Temple of Lintot/Bolbec in what used to be part of Normandy and now in the department of Seine-Maritime. But this easy to use index gives one an extensive but not quite complete record of the records of the reformed churches of the Seine-Maritime. One needs to go to the Departmental archive site: <http://www.archivesdepartementales76.net/rechercher/archives-en-ligne/etat-civil-en-ligne/>.

One of the lessons I learned when looking for Bolbec registers: A goodly number of the Huguenot weavers in Spitalfields, London, were from Bolbec, in north-western France, near to the seaport of Le Havre and not far from Caen or Rouen. The town is on the Bolbec River that flows into the Seine. Bolbec was an important textile producing town by the 1600s. Finding the records in the archive of Seine-Maritime took a bit of searching though. In Seine-Maritime departmental archives, Protestant church records are found among the online records for Etat Civil. Once one reaches “recherche simple,” choose “Protestants” under the drop-down list as though it were a commune. Be sure to include search dates. Rough dates such as 1520 to 1685 cover most of the records that Huguenot members would be searching. If you are searching another time period, put in those dates instead. The Bolbec baptismal registers begin in 1609. (The records of the Temple of Quevilly, a suburb of Rouen, begin in 1564/5.) Extensive records exist for the Temple de Quevilly in Rouen, also Brémontier, Lintot, Senitot, Bacqueville, Criquetot, Luneray, and others. The handwriting is difficult to read and the records themselves have lacunae on many pages, missing pages, water stains and missing dates. Among the records, there are some summary records in a more modern hand that are considerably easier to read. These are listed with the other registers for births, marriages and deaths. One must verify the summary records against the original record just as one would if you used the English online index mentioned just above. The microfilms of the records that are posted online for Seine-Maritime were filmed from the original records by the LDS in the 1970s and 1980s.

### Brief Conclusion

Some caveats are required since I am not a professional genealogist. I am very much an amateur. This is just a summary of own experience in identifying Huguenot or *Culte Protestant* or *Religion Prétendue Réformée* (RPR) records in France and especially the coastal and border areas that were Calvinist strongholds. The towns might not move but the boundaries within the Spanish Low Country certainly did as the Dutch gained independence and Louis XIV strengthened his northern barrier. The same can be said about northeastern France and Alsace-Lorraine. Controlled by the Holy Roman Empire with free imperial cities, France, Germany and in part, Switzerland. Thus, one needs not only a rudimentary grasp of French and German, but also time-period. Where might the records be, if they survived? For France, for the most part, the records are found in departmental archives. But be prepared to search creatively.

This essay is not definitive; I have so much more to learn. Hopefully I am not perpetuating my ignorance. Just as I found a goodly number of broken links, be prepared for some frustrating walls when searching. An online search is only the beginning. You will read rolls of microfilm online or at a microfilm reader. Hopefully what I have learned will be of interest and useful to others. Perhaps it will save some time and frustration. In the meantime, remember that you are learning paleography as you work. Bonne Chance! Bon Voyage!