Reading French Civil Registration Records

Brandon L. Baird, M.Ed., AG®

Objective: At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify birth, marriage, and death records, key words, and genealogical information in the records.

Introduction

Civil registration is one of the most valuable resources available for French research. Beginning in 1792, civil registration marked the start of separation of church and state in France. These government records tracked the birth, marriage, and deaths of all individuals throughout France. It is vital that you learn how to read these records to trace your family.

Keywords and Phrases

For a more comprehensive list of genealogical words and phrases, go to the [French Genealogical Word List](#) in the FamilySearch Research Wiki. Below you can find a list of the most common words and phrases found in the records.

All Record Types

These keywords and phrases can be found in all types of civil registration records.

French	English
commune	town
aujourd'hui	today
hier	yesterday
témoins	witnesses
comparu(s)	appeared
feu(e)	deceased
fils	son
fille	daughter
âgé(e)	age
natif de	native of
domicilié(e)	resident of
demeurant à	residing at

Births – *Naissances*

Combined with the abovementioned list, these are the keywords and phrases you will find most commonly in birth records.

French	English
né(e)	was born
masculin	male
fémenin(e)	female
fils/fille naturel(le)	illegitimate son/daughter
fils/fille légitime	legitimate son/daughter
donnes le prenomes de	was given the name
son épouse	his wife
un enfant du sexe …	a child of … sex

Marriages – *Mariages*

Combined with the abovementioned list, these are the keywords and phrases you will find most commonly in marriage records.

French	English
future(e)	groom (bride)
époux(se)	groom (bride)
célibataire	single, unmarried
divorcé(e)	divorced
veuf (veuve)	widower (widow)
père	father
mère	mother
majeur	of legal age
mineur	under legal age

Deaths – *Décès*

Combined with the abovementioned list, these are the keywords and phrases you will find most commonly in death records.

French	English
décédé	died/deceased
mort	Dead
époux(se) de	spouse of
célibataire	single, unmarried
veuf (veuve)	widower (widow)
enfant	Infant

Record Format

Civil registration records usually follow a standard format. Records can usually be found in the same order; however, some locations will change the order of the information. Use the below format to help you know what to expect and the order to expect the information.

Births – *Naissances*

The following list gives the standard format of a birth record. In a birth, you need to pay special attention to the dates. You are typically given two dates in the record. The first is the record date. The second is the birth date. The birth date may only be given by using the words "today" or "yesterday."

1. Registration Date
2. Recorder and Town Information
3. Informant Information (usually the father or midwife)
4. Sex of the Child
5. Birth Information (birth date, birthplace, etc.)
6. Parent's Information
7. Child's Name
8. Witness Information (could be a relative; however, not usually)

Marriages – *Mariages*

The following list gives the standard format of a marriage record. You may find that the marriage date is given at either the beginning or end of the record.

1. Marriage Date
2. Recorder and Town Information
3. Groom Information (name, birthplace, birth date, residence, age, parent's names, etc.)
4. Bride Information (name, birthplace, birth date, residence, age, parent's names, etc.)
5. Preliminary Marriage Records Included (birth records, death records, etc.)
6. Legal Information
7. Witness Information (pay special attention to these as they are usually relatives)

Deaths – *Décès*

The following list gives the standard format of a death record. You may find that the legal information can be found at either the beginning or end of the record.

1. Registration Date
2. Recorder and Town Information
3. Informant Information (individuals that reported the death to the civil registration office, potential relative)

4. Death Information (death date, death place, etc.)
5. Information of the Deceased (Name, relationships, birthplace, birth date, residence, etc.)
6. Witness Information (can be the same as the informants)
7. Affirmation (legal information found in all death records)