

## France: Jewish Family History Research Guide

### Historical Background

Jews first settled in the Roman province of Gaul (roughly the same area as modern France) in the first and second centuries A.D. These were mostly refugees who were exiled from or who fled Palestine in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple and the Second Jewish Revolt. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Jews faced periodic expulsions from the Kingdom of France, in addition to massacres of whole communities, confiscations of property, confinement to separate quarters in urban areas, and severe restrictions of their rights. Jews were only able to maintain a continuous presence during the Middle Ages in the Papal States (Comtat Venaissin and Avignon) of southeastern France and in Alsace in northeastern France.

Beginning in 1472, following the devastation of the Hundred Years' War, King Louis XI solicited the immigration of Spanish and Portuguese merchants to Bordeaux and Saint-Esprit in southwestern France. Many of the merchants that arrived were conversos or crypto-Jews (Jews who had converted to Christianity during the Inquisition but secretly retained their Jewish identity). Gradually, these conversos began to openly identify as Jewish, but were not officially recognized as Jews until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Jews that settled in Metz and Lorraine in northeastern France, beginning in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and late 17<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively, were predominantly German. The Jewish population of northeastern France grew the most rapidly in the centuries following the end of the Middle Ages, accounting for about three-quarters of the total Jewish population by the eve of the French Revolution. Finally, a tiny enclave of about 500 Jewish émigrés, primarily from the older French Jewish communities, emerged in Paris in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The French Revolution was a watershed moment in French Jewish history. Prior to the Revolution, Jews in the three older areas of settlement lived in self-governing communities with autonomous religious, legal, educational, and charitable institutions. In 1791, France became the first country in Europe to grant all of its Jews full citizenship. With citizenship, however, came a loss of religious freedom, as the Revolution banned Jewish customs that outwardly distinguished them from the larger French culture, such as the observance of the Sabbath. In 1808, Napoleon passed a series of laws that sought to further erode Jewish separateness by restricting Jews' engagement in commerce and moneylending, bringing synagogues under state supervision, and ordering all Jews to declare fixed personal and family names. According to Hyman, Napoleon's laws "reinforced the very sense of group cohesiveness and identity" that they were meant to demolish (*The Jews of Modern France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 48). Nevertheless, the century following Jewish emancipation was marked by significant, albeit gradual and not universal, Jewish migration to formerly exclusionary cities and regions (especially Paris), professional diversification, social mobility, integration in the public school system, political participation, and the adoption of French language, dress, and manners.

From 1881 until the outbreak of World War II, French Jewry absorbed an unprecedented influx of immigrants. By the end of this period, immigrant Jews would comprise the majority of French Jewry. Before 1933, the vast majority of Jewish immigrants came from Eastern Europe. From 1933 to 1940, the demographics of Jewish immigration shifted largely to Germans and Austrians fleeing Nazism. While modern political anti-Semitism in France predated the onset of the mass migration period in the 1880's, France experienced a virulent resurgence of anti-Semitism in the 1930's. In June-July 1940, the German occupation of northern France and the establishment of the collaborationist Vichy government in southern France ushered in "a period of unprecedented persecution" (Hyman, 1998, p. 161). By the time France was liberated in June 1944, more than 75,000 French Jews had been deported to death camps and about 3,000 died in French internment camps; in total, approximately one-quarter of French Jewry were exterminated in this period.

In the decades following World War II, the Jewish population of France rebounded to become the largest in western and central Europe. This was due, in large part, to the mass migration of Jews from North Africa, which was spurred by the outbreak of nationalist xenophobia and declining economic opportunities following these countries' achievement of independence. Between 1950 and 1970, France absorbed the second largest number of Jewish immigrants (after Israel), most of whom were from the former French colonies of North Africa and, therefore, already had French citizenship and identified as culturally French. Once again, immigrant Jews comprised the majority of French Jewry.

Sources: Benbassa, Esther. *The Jews of France*. 1999; Hyman, Paula E. *The Jews of Modern France*, 1998; Ginger, Basil. "France." in *AVOTAYNU Guide to Jewish Genealogy*, 2004, p. 320-343.

## Primary Sources

French genealogical records are scattered throughout France's archival system (known as Archives de France), which is comprised of 2 national archives facilities (at Paris and at Fontainebleau), 96 departmental archives, and hundreds of municipal and town hall archives. In addition, France maintains separate archives for records of French citizens overseas, the French colonies, and the military.

Beginning in 1792, France mandated the civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths for all residents, including Jews, along with the creation of alphabetical one-year and ten-year indexes for each town. Some earlier Jewish vital records exist for the regions of Bordeaux, Metz, Comtat Venaissin, and Alsace. In southwestern France prior to 1792, Jewish vital records were frequently recorded in Catholic registers. Civil registers and indexes more than 100 years old are publicly accessible, but photocopies are only provided on a case by case basis. Original civil registers and indexes less than 100 years are sealed. However, anyone can request a copy of death record or an extract of a birth or marriage record. Direct relatives can request complete copies of birth or marriage records (if they can provide the names of the individual's parents).

### Archives de France (Archives of France)

The website of France's nationwide archival system contains a directory of France's archives, information on accessing records at France's archives, and research guides.

<http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/> [French only]

### Archives Nationales (National Archives): Centre and Research National Archives (CARAN) in Paris

This archive holds naturalization records until 1930.

Address: 11, rue des Quatre Fils, 75003 Paris

Telephone: (33) 01 40 27 64 19

Fax: (33) 01 40 27 66 28

Website: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/chan/paris/index.html> [French only]

### Archives Nationales at Fontainebleau

This archive holds naturalization records from 1930 on, pre-French Revolution Jewish records (vital records, tax lists, cemetery records, etc.), Holocaust records (information on individuals arrested, deported, and interned), and Paris and Bas-Rhin consistory records.

Address: 2, rue des Archives, 77300 Fontainebleau

Telephone: (33) 01 64 31 73 00

Website: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/chan/fontainebleau/index.html>  
[French only]

## Departmental Archives

Continental France is divided into 96 departments, each of which has its own archives located in the department's capital city. Paris is an exception in that it has its own departmental archive and each of its arrondissements (neighborhoods) has its own "town hall" archive. Genealogical records from the region of Alsace are now held by the departmental archives of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin. Genealogical records from the region of Lorraine are now held by the departmental archives of Meurthe-et-Moselle, Meuse, Moselle, and Vosges.

For a directory of France's departmental archives, visit

<http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/annuaire-services/departement/> [French only]

Departmental archives may contain civil registers/indexes more than 150 years old for towns with more than 2,000 inhabitants and more than 100 years old for towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants, census records, voter lists, conscription records, Jewish community tax lists, Jewish name adoption registers (resulting from Napoleon's 1808 decree), Holocaust records (police files, Jewish census files), and synagogue/Jewish community records.

To find out what types of records are available online for a particular department, visit

<http://www.francegenweb.org/~archives/archivesgenweb/?id=adfrance> [French only]

## Archives de Paris

This archive holds Paris' vital, census, voter, funeral, and estate records.

<http://www.paris.fr/politiques/paris-d-hier-a-aujourd-hui/archives-de-paris/p149> [French only]

A database of Paris vital records may be accessed at [http://canadp-archivesenligne.paris.fr/archives\\_etat\\_civil/index.php](http://canadp-archivesenligne.paris.fr/archives_etat_civil/index.php) [French only].

## Municipal/Town Hall Archives

Municipal/town hall archives may contain civil registers/indexes less than 100 years old for all towns and between 100 and 150 years old for towns with more than 2,000 inhabitants, census records, voter lists, and synagogue/Jewish community records.

For a directory of France's municipal/town hall archives, visit

<http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/annuaire-services/departement/> (click on the department where your city is located) [French only]

To request vital records less than 100 years old from a particular town hall, you may complete the online form at <https://www.acte-etat-civil.fr/DemandeActe/Accueil.do> [French only].

To find out whether there are vital records online for a particular city or town, visit

<http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/ressources/en-ligne/etat-civil/> [French only]

## Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (ANOM)

This archive holds the records of the vital events of French nationals occurring abroad, in current French territories, or in the former French colonies, except Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria (see "Centre des Archives Diplomatiques" section below), more than 100 years ago.

Address: 29, chemin du moulin de Testa, 13090 Aix-en-Provence

Telephone: + 33 (0) 4 42 93 38 50

Fax: + 33 (0) 4 42 93 38 89

E-mail: [anom.aix@culture.gouv.fr](mailto:anom.aix@culture.gouv.fr)

Website: <http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/anom/en/index.html> [English version]

A database of vital records from the former French colonies is available at <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr> [French only].

### **Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN)**

This archive holds the vital records of French nationals in the former French colonies of Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria more than 100 years old.

Address: 17, rue de Casterneau, 44000 Nantes

Telephone: (33) 2 51 77 24 59

Fax: (33) 2 51 77 24 60

E-mail: [archives.cadn@diplomatie.gouv.fr](mailto:archives.cadn@diplomatie.gouv.fr)

Website: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/les-ministres-et-le-ministere/archives-et-patrimoine/archives-diplomatiques/lieux-de-conservation/nantes/> [French only]

### **Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Service central d'Etat civil**

This archive holds the records of the vital events of French nationals occurring abroad or in the former French colonies less than 100 years ago.

Address: 11, rue de la Maison Blanche, 44941 Nantes Cedex 09

Website: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/les-francais-a-l-etranger/vos-droits-et-demarches/etat-civil/demarches-relatives-aux-actes-d/article/delivrance-d-un-acte-d-etat-civil> [French only]

### **Service Historique de la defense**

This archive holds the records of France's Ministry of Defense, including individual files on officers of the three armed forces and the national Gendarmerie from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, a register of French military casualties in the First World War, files on Holocaust resistance networks, and concentration camp registers.

Website: <http://www.servicehistorique.sga.defense.gouv.fr/?lang=en> [English version]

Conscription record databases for some departments are available at

<http://www.servicehistorique.defense.gouv.fr/> (Type the following in the search box "la liste des instruments de recherche publiés et disponibles en ligne")

### **Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)**

The Family History Library of the Church of Latter-day Saints has microfilmed a number of French records. To identify the relevant microfilms, go to <http://familysearch.org>, click on "Catalog," and do a "Place-Names" search for your town of interest.

For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, see

<http://www.jgsny.org/microfilms-at-cjh>. Microfilms that are not on long-term loan at the Genealogy Institute can be ordered on the LDS website at <http://www.familysearch.org/films>.

For further instructions on ordering microfilms, see <http://www.cjh.org/p/34#microloans>.

The Family History Library has been digitizing their collections and, therefore, many records are already available on their site as either image only, index only, or both image and index. To browse the digitized collections by country, visit <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>

## Sources at the Center for Jewish History

Though none of the Center partner organizations is specifically devoted to research on French Jewry, both the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and the Leo Baeck Institute have archival collections and library materials that can be helpful in French-Jewish genealogical research. Additional resources are available in the Genealogy Institute and in the Reading Room.

### Archival Collections:

**France 1.** Materials of Jewish cultural and social welfare organizations and landsmanshaftn (hometown organizations) of Yiddish-speaking immigrants to France from Poland. Groups include the Societe des Israelites Polonais, Kultur Lige, and Workmen's Circle Paris.

**YIVO RG 116 - France 1**

**Union Generale des Israelites de France (UGIF), 1940-1944.** This administrative body represented all Jews in the occupied and free zones of France. Occupied France was considered the Northern Zone and free France the Southern Zone. Included among Group II of the records of the Northern Zone are 65,000 cards of Jews who registered with the UGIF. Also included is a census of the Jews in France in 1943 (not including Paris).

**YIVO RG 210**

**HICEM Main Office in Europe, 1935-1953.** HICEM was formed in 1927 by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and several other organizations to run European immigration operations. In 1943, it was incorporated into the main office of the Union Generale des Israelites de France. Records include the case files of individual refugees whose cases were processed by the main office during World War II. These are currently housed off-site and take some time to access. Ask the YIVO archivists for further information. There is an inventory in English.

**YIVO RG 245.5**

**Records of organizations that aided French-Jewish children during World War II and its aftermath,** such as Kehillat HaHaredim, known in French as the Association des Israelites Praticquants (**YIVO RG 340**), and Rue Amelot (**YIVO RG 343**). Includes letters from children and lists of children with notes on their condition.

**Alsace and Lorraine Jewish Community Collection, 1809-2000.** This collection includes census records from various towns, the personal papers of individuals (genealogies, marriage contracts, correspondence), documents related to the religious life of the communities (synagogue construction and management, rabbinic correspondence), and an inventory of the archives of the Consistoire Israelite de Bas-Rhin, 1808-1945.

**Leo Baeck Institute AR 2863 (Microfilm: MF 220 & MF 509 reels 1-3)**

### Additional Materials containing French-Jewish Genealogical Records:

Fraenckel, Andre Aron. *Memoire Juive en Alsace: contrats de mariage au 18<sup>th</sup> siecle*. Strasbourg: Ed. du Cédrat, 1997. This book of abstracts of ketubot of Jews in Alsace in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is arranged by town. There is an accompanying surname index by Rosanne and Daniel Leeson.

**REF DS 135 .G32 .F73 1997 and REF DS 135 .G32 .F73 1999**

Klarsfeld, Serge. *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France, 1942-1944: Documentation of the Deportation of the Victims of the Final Solution in France*. New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983. Lists the Jews deported from France in order of transport, Jews who died in

French internment camps, and Jews executed in France (in pogroms and resistance). [See also supplementary volumes below.]

**Genealogy Institute DS 135 .F83 .K4313**

Klarsfeld, Serge. *Additif Au Mémorial De La Déportation Des Juifs De France*. Paris: Les Fils et filles des déportés juifs de France, 1980. Surname index for *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France* (convoys 1-45); photographs and clippings.

**YIVO 000076780**

Klarsfeld, Serge. *Le Memorial Des Enfants Juifs Deportés De France*. Paris: Les Fils et filles des déportés juifs de France, 1994. Lists the Jewish children deported from France.

**YIVO 00087687**

Leeson, Daniel N. *Four indices to the 1784 census of Alsatian Jews*. Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 1992. Documents some 20,000 Jews who were enumerated in this census. In four sequences: by surname; by given name; by town; for married women, by maiden name.

**Genealogy Institute Avotaynu Microfiche Box**

Meyer, Pierre-André. *Tables Du Registre D'état Civil De La Communauté Juive De Metz: 1717-1792*. Paris: P.-A. Meyer, 1987. Civil birth registers of the Jewish community of Metz (1717-1792). Includes an index.

**Leo Baeck Institute q DS 135 .F85 .M4 .M41 1987**

Muller, Auguste. *Le Cimetière Juif et la Communauté Israélite de Wissembourg*. [Unpublished manuscript], 2005. Study about the cemetery of the Jewish community in Wissembourg (Weissenburg) in Alsace. Includes a CD primarily containing photographs of the tombstones.

**Leo Baeck Institute (Archives) MS 891**

**Reference Books and Periodicals:**

Becker, Jean J, and Annette Wieviorka. *Les juifs de France: de la Révolution française à nos jours*. Paris: Liana Levi, 1998.

**YIVO 00092213**

Benbassa, Esther. *The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c1999.

**YIVO 00105600**

Berg, Roger, Chalom Chemouny, and Franklin Didi. *Guide Juif De France*. Paris: 1971.

**REF DS 135 .F8 .G8 1971**

Beth Hatefutsoth. *Guide Des Patronymes Juifs*. Arles, France: Solin, 1996.

**REF CS 3010 .G8 1996**

Blumenkranz, Bernhard, and Monique Lévy. *Bibliographie Des Juifs En France*. Paris: E. Privat, 1974. Listings include published community histories, institutional histories, family histories, and biographies.

**REF Z 6373 .F7 .B5 1974**

Caron, Vicki. *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871-1918*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1988.

**Leo Baeck Institute DS 135 .F85 .A52 .C27**

*Etsi: revue de généalogie et d'histoire séfarades*. Paris: Etsi, 1998-2009. Includes information about French Sephardim.

**Genealogy Institute CS 956 .J4 .E87**

Gasnault, François, and Bernard Vuillet. *Sur les traces de vos ancêtres à Paris: la recherche des origines: guide des recherches biographiques et généalogiques aux Archives de Paris*. Paris: Archives de Paris, 1997.

**Genealogy Institute CS 597 .P4 .A57x 1997**

*Genami: Bulletin Trimestriel*. Paris: Genami, 2000-. The journal of L'association de la généalogie juive (International Jewish Genealogy Association).

**Genealogy Institute CS31 .B857**

Ginger, Basile. *Guide Pratique de Genealogie Juive En France et a L'Etranger*. Paris: Cercle de Genealogie Juive, 2002.

**Genealogy Institute CS 596 .J4 .G56 2002**

Ginger, Basil. "France." in *AVOTAYNU Guide to Jewish Genealogy*. Eds. Sallyann Amdur Sack and Gary Mokotoff. Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2004, p. 320-343.

**Genealogy Institute CS 21 .A98 2004**

Hyman, Paula E. *The Jews of Modern France*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

**YIVO 00095202**

Lifshitz-Krams, Anne. "Jewish Genealogical Resources in France." in *AVOTAYNU: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy*. Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (Fall 2011): p. 28-33.

**Genealogy Institute DS 101 .A87**

*Revue du Cercle de Genealogie Juive*. Paris: Le Cercle, 1985-. The journal of the French Jewish Genealogical Society.

**Genealogy Institute DS 135 .F8 .A38**

Winock, Michel. *La France et les juifs : de 1789 à nos jours*. Paris: Seuil, 2004.

**YIVO 000118129**

## **Web Resources**

### **General Resources:**

The website of the JewishGen French SIG, a special interest group of researchers of Jewish families from French-speaking countries, features a research guide and links relevant to French-Jewish genealogical research.

**<http://www.jewishgen.org/French/>**

JewishGen's France Info Files include a bibliography of resources for French-Jewish genealogy and guides for locating different types of French genealogical records.

**[www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/#France](http://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/#France)**

The website of the Memorial de la Shoah (France's Holocaust Memorial Museum) hosts a database containing the list of names on the "Wall of Names," the register of Jews killed in France other than in deportation, the list of persons who were executed or died in French internment camps, the list of Jewish resistance fighters in the network of the Jewish Combat Organization, and the names of the "Righteous of France" as registered by Yad Vashem.

**<http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/>**

SephardicGen hosts 3 France databases: French Jews exterminated in concentration camps, French Jews deported to Bergen-Belsen, and Sephardic ketubot from France.

**<http://www.sephardicgen.org>**

FranceGenWeb hosts a number of surname databases, including of cemetery and military casualty records, and other genealogy tools, such as research guides and historical maps.

**<http://www.francegenweb.org>** [French only]

The website of the Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a Paris-based organization founded in 1860 to improve the condition of Middle Eastern Jewry through political intervention, French education, and professional development, allows you to search its collection inventories.

**<http://www.archives-aiu.org/aiu/index.htm>** [French only]

The website of the Cercle de Genealogie Juive, the French Jewish Genealogical Society, provides research guides and links on various topics in French Jewish genealogy. Their database of genealogical records is only available to members.

**<http://www.genealoj.org>**

The website of Genami, the International Association for Jewish Genealogy contains research guides for France and specific regions within France. Their database of genealogical records is only available to members.

**<http://www.genami.org/en/>**

The official website of the French Government Tourist Office offers an online “France Guide for the Jewish Traveler” with an annotated directory of major Jewish sites.

**<http://us.franceguide.com/Special-Interests/Jewish-Traveler/home.html>**

Geopatronyme.com allows you to search for the geographical distribution of a surname in France.

**<http://www.geopatronyme.com/>** [French only]

### **Cemetery Resources:**

JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) is a database of names from cemeteries and burial records worldwide, including France.

**<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/>**

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies’ International Jewish Cemetery Project is in the process of compiling a comprehensive list of Jewish burial sites worldwide. Some listings include contact information, a location description, a brief history, burial societies, and/or links to cemetery websites.

France page: **<http://www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/france/index.html>**

### **Alsace/Lorraine Resources:**

The website of the JewishGen GerSIG, a special interest group of researchers of Jewish families from German-speaking and formerly German-ruled areas, features community histories, historic maps, and other resources relevant to Alsace/Lorraine research.

**<http://www.jewishgen.org/GerSIG/>**

JewishGen KehilaLinks, formerly “ShtetLinks,” provides profiles of towns where Jews lived, including histories, maps, photos, bibliographies, and links to databases and online records. There are several websites for towns in Alsace.

**[http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/W\\_Europe.html](http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/W_Europe.html)**

The website of Judaïsme d’Alsace et de Lorraine, the Jewish community of Alsace and Lorraine, offers links to histories of the regions’ synagogues and other Jewish sites.

**<http://judaisme.sdv.fr/>** [French only]



Courtesy of the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute

Revised January 2013  
Updated April 2013

The website of the Departmental Centre for Family History of the Haut-Rhin contains historic images (illustrations and photographs) of towns in Alsace.

**<http://www.cdhf.net/fr/>** [French only]