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Huguenots Genealogy Research

The Huguenots of France have drawn the attention of researchers, scholars, and genealogists for centuries. If you have a Huguenot ancestor in your family tree, the Midwest Genealogy Center (MGC) of Mid-Continent Public Library is the right place to start.

The MGC has books, microform, and periodicals related to this subject. In addition, the library offers online research databases you can learn about Huguenots <https://www.mymcpl.org/>.

Who were Huguenots? – The French Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries, who distanced themselves from Roman Catholic Church as the followers of John Calvin and his religious views.

The Huguenots were primarily educated people from various spectrum of life and profession, involved in crafts, military, and scholars. They held various important positions.

Many of them fled their homeland to other countries to seek freedom of belief. Mostly, they merged to the society they came in.

History

France – In the 16th century, it was a Catholic country. Reformation - a religious movement, which led to Protestantism (Protests against the Church). Martin Luther's teachings, objecting to Roman Catholic Church practices, and his writings started to become widespread in Europe (printing press).

Lutherans – followers of Luther. Followers of John Calvin in England - *Puritans*, In Scotland - *Presbyterians*, in Holland - *Walloon*s and in France - *Huguenots*.

St. Bartholomew's Day massacre on August 24, 1572 – Huguenot leaders and later thousands killed in religious war. The situation would not improve until the King Henry IV of France signed the **Edict of Nantes in 1598** (in French - **édit de Nantes**).



Edict of Nantes

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Proclamation_de_l%27%C3%A9dit_de_Nantes

The Edict of Nantes reaffirmed the Roman Catholic position as the official religion; however, the Huguenots could finally worship freely, and hold public offices.

Revocation. During the 17th century, Protestants faced growing restrictions and suppression. Louis XIV - Tax exemptions were offered to converts. The emigration was forbidden, and from 1680, the conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism was illegal.

The unity of religion was essential to social and political unity. Most of Europe wanted one religion (Cujus regio, Ejus religio - Whose Reign, His religion – Whose Realm, Their Religion).

Huguenots numbered around one million at their peak in 1620, concentrated in the south and southwest of France. Many went to exile but the vast majority converted to Catholicism. About one fifth, 150,000-to 200,000 - chose exile, took their wealth and skills to other countries, including England, Holland, Switzerland, German states, the New World, Russia, and South Africa.

The **Edict of Fontainebleau** - on Oct 18, 1685. The so-called reformed religion was no more legal. (Few excerpts: *The Edict of Nantes shall be abolished in its entirety. The Protestant temples shall be destroyed, the children born to Reformed parents are to be baptized Catholic.*).



Edict of Fontainebleau

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revocation_of_the_Edict_of_Nantes.jpg

The revocation of Edict of Nantes may be also understood as a response to preserve absolute monarchy, integrity of the kingdom under *one king, one law, and one faith*.

Migration Path and Emigration

Netherlands - The most significant population ended up in the Netherlands. Walloons and fleeing Huguenots established churches in Netherlands and Belgium.

The city of Leiden, Netherlands – Huguenot Refugee Center. Note: The Pilgrim Fathers remained in Leiden, Netherlands (Holland), before sailing for America, as well.

Sources - Bibliotheque Wallonne - the most valuable research aid. The card indexes from churches in Netherlands and Belgium from 1566-1812, also German congregations, check FHL microfilm [here](#) . Keep in mind – the change of the French name to Dutch name.

In Germany (Prussia) – they found support of Great Elector, Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg. He realized the importance of these refugees for rebuilding of his country. Berlin was transformed to a major city and the city of Brandenburg developed. Huguenots became known for their arts, crafts, and education. The issued *Edict of Potsdam* offered them asylum and assistance for further development of their industrial and agriculture knowledge. In 1687, Huguenots founded the town of Friedrichsdorf (Hesse-Nassau).

Sources for Research - assistance rolls. Check FHL, Catalog, Place Name (under your place, click at Minorities, Colonization, Movement, Churches, and other subcategory links). Explore church records and other resources in Brandbenburg area, Frankfurt an der Oder, Magdeburg, Frankfurt (Hesse), Mittelfranken, Frankenthal, Kurpfalz.

Note: Some Huguenots first moved from France to Switzerland and then moved to Germany.

Switzerland – settled in French speaking cantons – search should be done in the Swiss archives, Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchatel, Valais, Bern, Geneva cantons.

Sources for Research - Notarial records (Minutes de Notaires) from 13th century – marriage contracts, wills, division of property; Surveys of Feudal Property (once per century). Notarial records include inheritance, civil court records – estate division, wills. Letters of Origin – given to those who wanted to emigrate. Towsmen's Roll (like a census) - in Fribourg Canton – since 1341 – origin of new citizens given. Neuchatel – records as in the family genealogies form.

Russia - established French Protestant Church in St. Petersburg.

Huguenots in England - *Sources for research:* London and church records. Naturalization records in England and Ireland. Be aware of change names in church records!

English kings were willing to encourage foreign artisans to settle - would help the home industry - skilled mechanics, artisans, smiths, merchants, carpenters, glassmakers, cloth and hat makers, paper makers, silk makers, wine dressers, salt makers, art of cooking.

Transatlantic Journey

Beginning in 1624, Huguenots began to arrive in the New York and New Jersey areas. In 1628, some moved into what would become Bushwick, Brooklyn. Others moved to New Rochelle and New Paltz, New York, as well as Staten Island.

Northern Colonies. In New Amsterdam, the first settlers had been Walloons, French speakers from what is now Belgium. The real French migration began after 1680. New England had possibly 200 Huguenot men, women, and children in 1700.

Huguenot communities sprang up in MA, PA (some PA Germans may have the Huguenot background), VA and SC. Often, the Huguenots would assimilate with existing Protestant groups.

Research and Resources

Research must begin in the United States! Huguenot settlers integrated with the Dutch colonies and German settlers. ***The best resources are the Parish Registers in the counties they settled.***

Start the research as any other genealogy research. Consult all available family documents, memorabilia, and other resources in the libraries, archives, courthouses, and churches.

New York (NY) - the earliest settlement, check records of Reformed Dutch Church of Albany, NY
New England – CT, Maine, MS, RI and NJ – Dutch records

PA - check records in German churches in PA - they first fled to Germany, Germanized their names, came with Germans, intermarried, lost their identity - integrated with Germans

VA – earliest settlement in 1629, most prominent settlement in Manakin Town from 1699

SC – once styled as the Home of Huguenots, about 1686. First attempt at 1562 at Port Royal, SC

In 1666 - Maryland naturalized all French Protestants, and in 1671, VA did the same.

Thousands came in four years, taxes waived, encouraged to carry on the wine culture, tailoring, shoemaking, silk industry.

They also settled in Canada (Acadia and Quebec before 1685), but were persecuted so they fled.

Also settled in West Indies (Antilles Islands), Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Christopher, 1625 – 1685.

European Sources - If you are fortunate, you will trace their migration back to France – however, before doing research in France, see the sources mentioned above under individual countries (before emigrating to America, they lived as refugees in another European country or countries).

Note: Remember, there was always somebody who stayed behind. This means, there will be additional records created in the old country, such as property disposition and estate records.

In France - check **Parish Registers** – the best sources - registers before the Constitution of 1791. Both Protestants and Catholics kept registers. The earliest are from 1334, but most from 1600.

Notarial Records – **the most useful for genealogical information!** Check those before 1700 - when the church records are less complete.

Cartulary Records - collection of charters - deal with a title to an estate, property contracts, some vital records, legal rights.

Check National Archives, Departmental Archives, Municipal Archives, Notarial and Family Archives.

Huguenots today: Primarily assimilated to the mainstream culture everywhere they settled. They would stay Protestants.

Huguenot Society of America, *Hugenotten Museum* in Berlin. In Berlin is still a Parish church, whose members are all descendants of Huguenots.



Huguenot Church, Charleston, SC

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57770552>

Protestant Churches in various countries stay as remnants of their religious views.

The street and geographic names remind their contribution to cultural and political life in the countries they settled.

Books and Other Resources

MGC Books and Periodicals – [MCPL Catalog](#)

Search by keywords such as *Huguenot*, *Huguenot ancestors*, *Huguenot research*, *Huguenot emigration*, *Huguenot families*, *Huguenot Society*, and other search terms.

Consult **genealogy societies**, **libraries**, **archives**, and their resources, including Wikipedia, Family Search Wiki, and other online resources.