



# the history space

## Making family connections



Updates during 2015 made for a total of 13 computers at the Vermont Genealogy Library in Colchester. Wifi is also available.

COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

## Vermont Genealogy Library in Colchester a treasure trove for visitors searching for their roots

### TEAM OF VT-FCGS MEMBERS FOR THE FREE PRESS

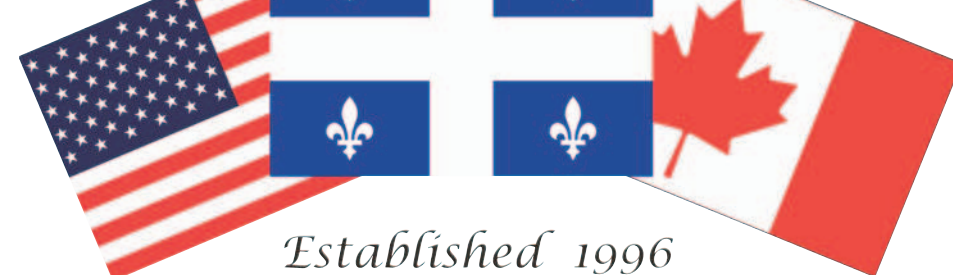
COLCHESTER - Nestled in a first floor wing of the Dupont Building at Fort Ethan Allen in Colchester is Vermont's only library dedicated to genealogy. This unique library is a treasure trove for family historians with ties to Vermont, New England, Quebec, France, the British Isles and other places.

Here visitors will find many resources to help fill in their family trees with the help of an all-volunteer staff. A full calendar of events includes a series of fall and winter classes; monthly special interest groups on Genetic Genealogy, French-Canadian, Irish, English and Scottish ancestry; an annual open house; annual conference and more. There are often "ah-ha's" and stories of new family revelations heard from across a table as visitors learn details about an ancestor

they had not previously known.

From beginners to well-seasoned family researchers, this is *the* place in Vermont with the most resources under one roof to find out more about one's family history.

This year, the founding non-profit organization of this library, the Vermont French-Canadian



dian Genealogical Society (VT-FCGS), celebrates 20 years of service to Vermonters, and others from further afield, seeking their family roots.

### It all began with seven people

In January 1996 seven people met to discuss the possibility of starting a genea-

logical society in the Burlington area with a focus on their shared French-Canadian ancestry. The attendees traded ideas, talked about materials they were willing to share, and brainstormed the names of others who might be interested in joining this endeavor.

Just a few months later the growing group of members had met three times and established a name, The Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society and their first meeting place, St. Joseph's Catholic School in Burlington. The group's shared resources fit into two milk crates.

Through the hard work of its members, the Society's holdings and membership grew quickly. By 1997 it had to look for a larger space for the library. In the fall of that year, ten cabinets of books and supplies were moved into the new

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COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society members attend and offer information to the public at events such as French Heritage Days in Winooski.

## HOST AN EXCHANGE STUDENT TODAY!

(for 3, 5 or 10 months)



Marco from Italy, 17 yrs. Loves soccer and would like to learn to play baseball. Marco is a boy scout and enjoys the outdoors.



Julie from Denmark, 16 yrs. Enjoys gymnastics, swimming and photography. She's positive, fun loving and easy to get along with.

Make this year the most exciting, enriching year ever for you and your family. Welcome a high school student, 15-18 years old, from Italy, France, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Germany, Brazil, Thailand or China as part of your family for a school year (or less) and make an overseas friend for life. For more information or to select your own exchange student please call:

Call Alison at 203-815-5881  
or Marcy at 1-800-888-9040 (Toll Free) or e-mail us at [info@world-heritage.org](mailto:info@world-heritage.org).

For privacy reasons, photos above are not photos of actual students

**www.whhosts.com**  
World Heritage is a public benefit, non-profit organization based in Laguna Beach, CA.



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## Genealogy

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location, the basement of the St. John's Club in Burlington.

The new location allowed the Society to expand its holdings over the next few years. The Society appreciated the St. John's Club's hospitality but the collections continued to grow and soon it was time to look for another home.

In the spring of 2001 St. Michael's College in Colchester offered VT-FCGS a favorable lease in a small space in the Dupont Building at the Fort Ethan Allen complex. This was the Society's home until 2005 when there was a move into a larger space on the opposite side of the building. The current library, now named the Vermont Genealogy Library, includes a book room, computer room, micro fiche/film room, a large classroom, break room, and offices. The book collection has grown to over 4,500 books, journals, family



COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

VT-FCGS volunteers assist visitors at the current Vermont Genealogy Library in Colchester.



histories, maps and much more.

### Books to computers and more

Genealogical research has changed considerably over the past 20 years. For many years, people used reference books and repertoires containing indexes of records of baptisms, marriages and deaths to build a family tree. Genealogists had to write letters or visit distant town offices or other holders of these records.

Over time the Society purchased the Vermont Vital Records on microfilm. Using the microfilm readers researchers can find information on Vermont births, marriages and deaths from 1760 to 1941 without traveling to Middlesex, Montpelier or local town offices. Scrolling through the alphabetical listings on the films can sometimes make it easier to make family connections than by searching the same records on various websites.

Microfiche with millions of French-Canadian marriages was added to the collections. These marriages from 1621 to 1942, are valuable because they name the parents of the bride and groom and include the maiden names of their mothers.

Sheila Morris, president of the Society, said recently: "French-Canadian genealogy is the easiest to research. With a few visits those with French-Canadian ancestors can typically trace a line or two of their ancestry all the way back to France — something that was not possible to do locally before VT-FCGS gained these wonderful resources."

Then just a few years ago, this special one-of-a-kind library in Vermont brought access to online databases such as Ancestry and Find My Past to their researchers.

Ed McGuire, past president of VT-FCGS said "These databases contain a wealth of information that has had a huge impact on how we do research now."

A simple search can often reveal primary records that were created at or around the time of an event. Someone with direct knowledge of the event wrote these documents and records. They can include vital records, such as certificates of births, deaths, or marriages, family bibles, military records, census information, naturalization records, and more. Because they are considered to be highly accurate, pri-



The entrance to the Dupont Building from parking on Hegeman Avenue in Colchester.

COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY



Early photo showing a gathering of family historians at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Burlington.

mary sources are preferred when obtaining and citing genealogical information. Documenting the source of primary records proves family connections and has helped many family researchers uncover mistakes in family trees found online. Subscriptions to these websites would cost an individual roughly \$700 per year. For a \$30 annual membership our members can use them all. To provide access to as many people as possible, our library recently expanded the computer room.

### Parish books in Vermont

In 2004 VT-FCGS received permission from the Catholic Diocese of Burlington and embarked

on a mission to copy and preserve the baptism, marriage and burial records from the Catholic churches throughout Vermont up to 1930. By agreement with the diocese this information will never be available online. This information often has to be translated from Latin, or French, and is then transcribed, organized and checked before publication by a dedicated group of volunteers.

John Fisher, who has headed up this project for many years said, "One of our early publications was the baptism records from St. Joseph's Church in Burlington. This was one of the earliest churches in the diocese, and the priests traveled the length

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FP-000400319



**Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society**

**WHAT:** Vermont Genealogy Library  
**WHERE:** Dupont Building at Fort Ethan Allen in Colchester  
**HOURS:** Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Summer hours, July and August: Tuesdays 3 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Second Saturday of the month only 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
**DIRECTIONS:** Hegeman Avenue, Dupont Building, Fort Ethan Allen, Colchester. Parking and entrance on Hegeman Avenue. The library is handicapped accessible.  
**ONLINE:** Websites for the Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society are at [www.vtgenlib.org](http://www.vtgenlib.org) and [www.vt-fcgs.org](http://www.vt-fcgs.org). Find them on Facebook at [vermontgenealogylibrary](http://vermontgenealogylibrary).  
**ONLINE DATABASES AT THE LIBRARY**  
 » Ancestry.com  
 » American Ancestors by the New England Historical and Genealogical Society  
 » PRDH (all the Catholic birth, marriage, and burial certificates of Quebec and the Protestant marriages from 1621-1849)  
 » Généalogie Québec including the LaFrance database  
 » French America: Repertory of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials from the beginning of the French colony  
 » Find My Past (records of England, Ireland and Wales)  
 » Civil War Database by Historical Data Systems



COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
 Microfiche readers were added when the VT-FCGS was located at the St. John's Club.

**Open House in September**

The Vermont Genealogy Library at Fort Ethan Allen in Colchester will hold an open house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 10.

**There will be rotating 30-minute demonstrations:**

- » Family Tree Maker for the PC
  - » Ancestry.com — Tips and Tricks;
  - » DNA Tests — Which test to take? Which company to use.
- Volunteers will demonstrate six online subscriptions.

**There will be a huge family history book sale:**

- » Vermont, New York, Quebec and New England research.
  - » English, French-Canadian, Irish, Scottish, German and Italian guides.
  - » Using Census, probate, property, estate and courthouse records.
  - » Books and guides on DNA testing and interpretation.
- Event is open to the public.



COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
 The Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society has published more than 50 books of Vermont Catholic parish records to date — a rich resource for Vermont family research.



COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY  
 Family history book sales at the Open House and annual conference are a highlight for many attendees.

**Genealogy**

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and breadth of the state from 1850 to 1855. It took four years for our volunteers to complete the data entry and proofing for this two-volume publication, which contains 25,409 baptisms. Our volunteers have now completed over 50 volumes of this invaluable information.”

The VT-FCGS website contains the complete list of the Society's publications and prices.

**Expanding their reach**

While French-Canadian research will continue to be the specialty of VT-FCGS the Society's leaders realize that most Vermonters have roots in other cultures as well. In 2011 the Society expanded its mission, began to enlarge its collection and named the library The Vermont Genealogy Library. The library's growing collection for other nationalities includes English, Irish, Scottish, and German ancestry since these groups have the strongest connections to Vermont. The online resources cover a much wider range of

locations and nationalities.

Volunteer staff members help people get started in this fascinating and engrossing hobby. Each fall and winter the Society offers a number of Saturday morning classes which are open to the public. These classes include Beginning Genealogy and many other topics that can help family researchers break through those “brick walls”. Classes are \$5.00. The 2016 fall classes start in mid-September. Winter classes start in February. The list of upcoming classes will be available soon on the library's website.

**Genetic genealogy**

Another hot topic at the library is the expanding use of DNA tests to complement traditional research. DNA is often a useful tool in overcoming “brick walls” or the absence of records, especially in frontier settlements or areas where records were destroyed. The library offers several classes and hosts a working group on the fourth Tuesday evening of each month to help people decide which DNA tests to take and which companies to use. Once results arrive our volunteers can provide advice on how to interpret the results. Each Tuesday evening (except in

July and August) members and visitors meet to discuss and share techniques, advice, questions and successes in researching their ancestry. Currently the library hosts a group on Scottish/English on the first Tuesday, French-Canadian on the second, Irish on the third and DNA testing on the fourth. All are welcome regardless of level of experience.

**Outreach activities**

Readers may have seen VT-FCGS display booths at various events around Vermont such as French-Canadian festivals in Barre, Hardwick, Morrisville, St. Albans, and Vergennes.

The Society also participated in the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's explorations of the Lake Champlain basin. In recent years they have had booths at the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge and Winooski's French Heritage Day.

Visitors are welcome any time they are open, or attend the annual Open House, which will be held Sept. 10 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This is a great opportunity to take a tour of the library as well as checking out displays, computer demos, genealogy books for sale, and more.

