

Genealogy Basics – Researching at One New England Repository; the American-French Genealogy Society in Woonsocket, RI

By Joe Petrie

BACKGROUND:

There are lots of genealogy repositories. A genealogy repository is where genealogy records are stored. Technically, the term covers the following sites where I have researched:

- National Archives of Canada in Ottawa and the National Archives (NARA) in Waltham, MA.
- Provincial and State Archives like the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland in St. John's Newfoundland; the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS) in Halifax NS and the Massachusetts Archives in Columbia Point, Boston MA.
- Libraries, like the Centre d'Études Acadiennes at the Moncton University, Moncton, New Brunswick; Boston College Library in Chestnut Hill MA and the Boston Public Library in Boston MA.
- Genealogy Libraries: like the Family History Center and the Family History Library in Salt Lake City UT; the Library at the Family History Society Newfoundland and Labrador in St John's Newfoundland; the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University in Sydney NS and the Genealogy Library at the Irish Cultural Centre of New England in Canton MA.
- Digital Genealogy Libraries like the web sites for Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia Genealogy and the Friends of Irish Research, Brockton, MA.
- Genealogical Societies like the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) in Boston MA and the American –French Genealogical Society in Woonsocket RI.

INTRODUCTION:

The American – French Genealogical Society (AFGS) in Woonsocket RI was latest repository that I visited. I was invited to visit by a gentleman who attended a seminar that I gave at the Fiske Public Library in Wrentham MA. Also, he volunteers at AFGS. He provided transportation. (I believe that it was the first time that I ever was in Woonsocket.) He gave me a tour of the facility.

The building was formerly a Universalist Church where AFGS rented rooms. AFGS eventually bought the building. The library occupied a lot of the basement. Conference rooms and meeting rooms were on the main floor. The largest conference room was the former chapel. In addition, there was plenty of free on-site parking.

AFGS is raising funds to install an elevator to make handicap access friendlier.

AFGS is open on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays. The hours vary.

Annual US Membership is \$35. Other members pay \$45. There is a small \$5 fee for daily use by non-members.

ACCOUTERMENTS:

The site had everything a researcher could want:

- PCs – I think that I counted a dozen PCs - all had internet access to Ancestry.com and AmericanAncestors.org.
- Databases – The AFGS web site contains cemetery databases – some are a work in progress and some records are for Massachusetts cemeteries.
- There is an extensive collection on CDs, microfilm and microfilm including Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire.
- Forget Files – records of Franco – American marriages in Rhode Island and other New England States.

- Shelved Books – there are over 10,000 volumes of Vitals (records of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and burials). I was especially impressed with two groups:
 - Acadian
 - Drouin (I believe that there were 3 or 4 Drouin Collections)
- Records of French Parishes in Massachusetts and Rhode Island were remarkable.
- Publications – AFGS and others (the next time that I visit, I'll donate my collection of the Newfoundland Ancestor).
- Family History Center - AFGS is an authorized Family History Center where members have the ability to order microfilm from the LDS Family History Headquarters in Salt Lake City, UT for viewing at the AFGS location in Woonsocket, RI.
- DNA - AFGS offers discounts for DNA tests via FamilyTreeDNA.

STAFF:

The librarian gave me another tour. I was further amazed at their holdings.

There were a number of volunteers available to help with research and especially with the PC retrievals.

WEB SITE:

The web site URL is www.afgs.org. The web site was being redesigned when I visited. It was installed recently. The catalog is an amazing collection.

There is a members-only portion. Webinars are being added to the Members-only portion of the web site. These webinars can be viewed at a member's leisure and are available for members located far from the Woonsocket location and in other countries.

SUMMARY:

AFGS is an extremely interesting resource.

The library focuses on French immigrants to the US from Quebec.

Webinars are an important educational tool. AFGS offers them free to members. I believe that more genealogical libraries should offer them free to members.

Also, in addition to the webinars, AFGS offers classes. Because of inter-marriage, I believe that there is interest in offering classes on Irish research. (I have volunteered to conduct seminars and classes.)

I believe that there is interest in expanding to other provinces such as Nova Scotia. I suggested that they look at free web sites in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island that focus on French settlements; especially the Lunenburg Foreign Protestant settlers in 1752. (Remember that my Lunenburg ancestors include French speaking families like my Boutilliers from Etoban, Montbeliard, Duchy of Württemberg – now part of France.)

A Nova Scotia web site worth visiting for Acadian and French settlements for its links is:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~grose/islelink.html> .

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Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at:

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Please note that Friends of Irish Research is repository for my published genealogy articles in:
Newfoundland Ancestor; EZINE, the electronic magazine of the Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association; and XO Chronicles, the electronic magazine of Ireland Reaching Out. (See friendsofirishresearch.org; specifically the Tabs for Publications and Joe's Free Web Sites.)