

# The Drouin Institute

By Michael J. Leclerc

Once in a great while, a genealogist will make a contribution to the field so valuable that his or her name becomes synonymous with quality research and resources. French-Canadian genealogists are lucky to have several individuals of this caliber, such as Jetté, Tanguay, and Loiselle. One of the greatest twentieth-century genealogists left a legacy that is still one of the basic foundations for French-Canadian research: Joseph Drouin. Mention the name of Drouin to genealogists with French-Canadian ancestors and they will invariably be able to spout several major contributions without blinking an eye. However, many people are probably unaware of the story of how this legacy came to be.



*Joseph Drouin*

Joseph Drouin was born November 15, 1875, at Ste. Roch, the second child and eldest son of Ferdinand Drouin and Marie \_\_\_\_\_. Ferdinand was an engineer and sent his eldest son to the Seminary of St. Thérèse for his education. Young Joseph was an outstanding student, receiving top marks in every class and gaining a reputation for excellence that remained at the school for decades. Joseph then moved on to McGill University where he studied law. He quickly became a prominent lawyer, which allowed him to indulge his private passion—genealogy.

In 1899, Drouin began researching and selling compiled genealogies as a side business in Montréal, which he named *Les Généalogies Drouin enr.* The business was renamed *L'Institut Généalogique Drouin* in 1913. In 1912, his son, Gabriel, was born, and eventually joined his father in the family business.

Joseph Drouin worked at his passion for thirty-eight years, until his death on October 6, 1937. During the course of his work, Joseph sold over fifteen hundred family genealogies and compiled over five hundred thousand reference sheets for French-Canadian genealogical research.

Gabriel continued his father's work, and upon completion of his law education at the University of Montréal, opened a headquarters for the *Insitut* at 4184 rue St. Denis in Montréal. Pictures of the headquarters can be seen below. Gabriel soon set his sights on undertaking one of the largest French-Canadian genealogical projects ever.



*The Drouin Institute*

In 1938, *L'Institut Généalogique Drouin* set about microfilming church and civil records to document the history of French-Canadians. The Drouin microfilm collection contains approximately sixty-one million records on over twenty-three hundred reels of microfilm. These records represent information from over three thousand parishes in Québec, Ontario, Acadia, Maine, New York, and Michigan.

Once filmed, workers at the institute abstracted the information in Roman Catholic marriage records to create giant indexes. Microfilms were projected onto screens where workers read each record and abstracted the information. Below is a picture of the workers in the process of abstracting records.



*Institute workers abstracting records*

Records were grouped together in specific time frames. The earliest records were published as a group in the *Dictionnaire National des Canadiens Français 1608-1760*. The marriage abstractions comprised two volumes. Below is an example from the first volume concerning the marriage of Jean Boucher and Marie Roy. On the left is the surname Boucher, followed by the first name of the groom, Jean. Just beneath this are the names of his parents, Noël and Anne Deblois. In contrast to English women, French-Canadian females kept their maiden names throughout their lives without taking their husbands' names. Because fathers are assumed to have the same surname as their sons, the groom's surname is not listed in the record.

Première ligne: le marié. Deuxième ligne: son père et sa mère.		Première ligne: la mariée. Deuxième ligne: son père et sa mère.		Endroit et date de leur mariage.	
BOUCHER	Jean	Roy	Marie	St-Vallier	1770
Noël et Anne Deblois		Augustin et M.-Agathe Aubé ( page 1195 )		19 janvier	

Next is the bride's name, Marie Roy. Beneath are her parents' names, Augustin and Marie Agathe Aubé. Beneath the bride's parents' names is a reference to page 1195. This refers to the page number where the marriage of Augustin Roy and Marie-Agathe Aubé is found.

Finally, on the right side of the page, the date and place of the marriage of Jean Boucher and Marie Roy is listed. They were married 19 Janvier 1770 at St. Vallier. The books are all written in French, but it is easy to understand the information given.

Occasionally a second name will appear in the left column containing the surname. The example below for Vincent Franche shows the name Laframboise. This is a "dit" name. Vincent was known as "Vincent Franche dit Laframboise." For more information about dit names, refer to a previous article in this series, "[The Name Game – Tips for Finding the Real Names of French-Canadian Ancestors.](#)"

Première ligne: le marié. Deuxième ligne: son père et sa mère.		Première ligne: la mariée. Deuxième ligne: son père et sa mère.		Endroit et date de leur mariage.	
FRANCHE Vincent Laframboise André et Louise Bigras		Gladus M.-Josephite Pierre et M.-Josephite Rondeau ( page 588 )		Ile-Dupas 30 avril 1768	

The entries can also include titles, such as "Sieur" or "Seigneur." Double quotation marks are used to indicate the same surname as the previous entry. A second set of double quotations will sometimes appear in the column, which indicates that a dit name should be repeated from its previous entry (even if the dit name appeared several names earlier). The example below from Joseph Francoeur and Marie Geneviève Desrosier dit Lafrenière shows that the dit name Brulé, which last appeared several entries earlier for Jacques Francoeur, also applied to Joseph. He was Joseph Francoeur dit Brulé. The entry also shows that dit names for females are hyphenated in the entries. Joseph Francoeur dit Brulee's wife is listed as M.-Geneviève Desrosiers-Lafrenière. M. is the abbreviation for Marie. The hyphenated last name is a dit name. Her name would be read as Marie-Geneviève Desrosier dit Lafrenière.

"	Brulé	Jacques Antoine et M. -Angélique Mélain ( voir Brulé )	Jean-Tourangeau Marguerite Léonard et Marie Varin ( page 696 )	Québec 12 juin	1743
"		Jean	Baudon M. -Anne	-	-
"		Jean	Buteau M. -Anne	-	-
"		Joseph	Baron Madeleine	-	-
"	"	Joseph Antoine et M. -Josephite Ethier ( voir Brulé )	Desrosiers-Lafrenière M. -Geneviève Joseph et Madeleine Petit ( voir Lafrenière, page 733 )	St-Cuthbert 18 octobre	1790
"		Joseph-Charles ( voir Brulé )	Laurendeau M. -Anne	Ile-Dupas 30 janvier	1775
"		Joseph ( voir Charland )	Malliot Thérèse	-	-
"		Joseph ( voir Brulé )	Sylvestre M. -Anne	-	1749
"	"	Pierre Joseph et M. -Anne Sylvestre ( voir Brulé )	Denis M. -Geneviève Joseph et ---	St-Cuthbert 29 septembre	1788
"		Pierre	Bruneau Madeleine	-	-
"	"	Pierre Joseph et M. -Anne Sylvestre ( voir Brulé )	Mignier M. -Josephite Charles et Louise Ducros ( page 952 )	St-Cuthbert 24 juin	1793
"		Pierre ( voir Tastet )	Brazeau Marie	-	-

A third volume was compiled to complement the first two with historical information about prominent individuals and families. At the end of the volume are maps of the provinces of ancient France, as well as the *departementes* of modern-day France. Maps of Québec are also included, as well as several paintings of life in old Québec. There are also dozens of facsimiles of original signatures of individuals whose prodies are included in the book. At the very end are blank pages to include notes, souvenirs, and other family information.

The Drouin Institute folded in the late 1990s and their holdings were sold to the [American-French Genealogical Society](#) in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. In 1999, AFGS agreed to sell copies of these microfilms to NEHGS, and they remain the only two repositories in the United States where the entire collection is available.