

# Louisiana Family History Research: Four Centuries of History of Genealogy

*Class 4: Twentieth Century Louisiana: Economy and Industry*

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## Twentieth Century Louisiana: A Brief History

Louisiana was historically an agricultural society. In the antebellum era, its plantations drove the economy. After the Civil War, the state continued to be largely agricultural, with exports of farm goods such as cotton and sugar fueling a large part of the economy. In the late nineteenth century, the lumber, oil, and gas industries began to develop as alternatives to agricultural products. Early on, these industries were often funded by capital from the North.

Both the lumber (long-leaf pine and cypress) and oil and gas industries saw booms and busts. The discovery and exploitation of these resources often brought speculation and population growth to an area. As the resource was harvested, land values increased and towns became more prosperous. Other local businesses flourished, too. As production slowed and the industry declined, both wealth and people left the area. This means that many industrial towns had their heyday in the mid-twentieth century.

In some instances, both lumber and oil companies developed company towns, where the employer owned all the buildings and businesses. These towns were often in remote areas far from other goods and services. In some cases, workers were paid in company scrip rather than in the U.S. dollar. Some towns also strove to provide “workers’ utopias” where the company had strict control over all goings-on in the town.

An offshoot of the oil and gas industry was the development of the petrochemical industry in the late twentieth century. Today, 25% of petrochemical production in the United States is concentrated in one region of Louisiana. This had detrimental effects on the health of locals, and the region has gained the nickname “Cancer Alley.”

Perhaps the most influential political leader of the twentieth century was Gov. Huey P. Long, who is sometimes viewed as a populist champion and sometimes as a corrupt dictator. In his four years in office (1928-1932) he brought in many social reforms such as free schoolbooks, improved infrastructure, and expanded state education and health institutions. Though he died in 1935, his political machine had a grip on the state for decades after.

## Louisiana History Resources

- 64 Parishes Encyclopedia, <https://64parishes.org/encyclopedia>



- Donald W. Davis and John L. Place, “The Oil and Gas Industry of Coastal Louisiana and its Effect on Land Use and Socioeconomic Patterns,” (USGS, 1983), <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/1983/0118/report.pdf>
- Donna Fricker, “The Louisiana Lumber Boom, c. 1800-1925,” [https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/historic\\_contexts/The Louisiana Lumber Boom c1880-1925.pdf](https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/OCD/hp/nationalregister/historic_contexts/The_Louisiana_Lumber_Boom_c1880-1925.pdf)
- Kenny A. Franks and Paul F. Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil: A Photographic History, 1901-1946*, (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University, 1982), <https://archive.org/details/earlylouisianaar0000fran/mode/2up>

## Genealogical Records

The biggest change to record-keeping in Louisiana in the twentieth century was the implantation of birth and death records, which began at the state level in 1911. Access to these records is restricted by privacy laws. Death records older than 50 years and birth records older than 100 years are held at the State Archives. Marriage certificates are issued by and held by the clerk of court for each parish.

A variety of other state and parish-level records are useful for twentieth-century genealogical research, including wills and succession records (probate), conveyances (land), and World War I service records. In some instances, institutional records such as prison records or police records can provide details about an ancestor’s criminal record. Local records such as newspapers, cemetery records, church records, and city directories are also useful.

While not specific to Louisiana, federal records can be key. The federal census continued throughout the twentieth century, and records from 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1940 are widely available and easily searchable. World War I and II draft cards can act as birth record substitutes and provide occupation and residence details. For recent arrivals, passenger lists and naturalizations from the twentieth century contain specific information about an individual’s birthplace and entry into the United States.

## General Research Resources

- Association of Louisiana Clerks of Court, <https://www.laclerksofcourt.org/clerks-of-court> [contains contact information for the clerk of court of each parish]
- “Free Databases for Louisiana Genealogy,” Southeastern Louisiana University, <https://selu.libguides.com/c.php?g=690266&p=4881205>
- “Guide to Genealogical Materials,” New Orleans City Archive, <https://nolacityarchives.org/guide-to-genealogical-materials/>
- “Louisiana Genealogy,” FamilySearch.org, [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Louisiana\\_United\\_States\\_Genealogy](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Louisiana_United_States_Genealogy)
- Louisiana Library Connection, <https://lilibcon.state.lib.la.us/> [research databases available for free to Louisiana residents]



- LSU Libraries, *Louisiana Genealogical Materials* (Jan 2015), [https://guides.lib.lsu.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=20345972](https://guides.lib.lsu.edu/ld.php?content_id=20345972) [guide to genealogical materials at the LSU Libraries]

## Vital Records

- *Louisiana Births and Christenings, 1811-1830, 1854-1934*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1674847>
- *Louisiana Compiled Marriage Index, 1718-1925*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7837/> [also includes 1946-1961]
- *Louisiana Deaths, 1850-1875, 1894-1960*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1609793>
- *Louisiana Parish Marriages, 1837-1957*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1807364>
- *Louisiana Statewide Death Index, 1819-1964*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/6697/>
- *Louisiana Vital Records Index*, Louisiana Secretary of State, <https://www.sos.la.gov/HistoricalResources/ResearchHistoricalRecords/Pages/OnlinePublicVitalRecordsIndex.aspx> [includes births 1911-1922, Orleans Parish births 1819-1922, deaths 1911-1973, and Orleans Parish marriages 1870-1973]
- Ancestry.com has several separate databases for Orleans Parish vital records. Parish vital records can also be located on FamilySearch.org by searching the parish name in the catalog at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog> and then navigating to the “Vital Records” category.

## Succession Records

- Succession or probate records are filed with the clerk of court in each parish. Some succession records are available online at FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com, though most collections end circa 1900.
- *Louisiana Wills and Probates, 1756-1984*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9067/>

## Conveyances

- Conveyances or land records are filed with the clerk of court in each parish. Availability of these records varies parish to parish. Some records are available on FamilySearch.org and can be found by searching the parish name in the catalog at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog> and then navigating to the “Land and Property” category.

## Prison and Police Records

- *Louisiana, state penitentiary records, 1866-1963*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/4092121>



- *Louisiana, state penitentiary records, 1866-1963*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60299/>
- “New Orleans Fire Department,” New Orleans City Archives, <https://nolacityarchives.org/new-orleans-fire-department/>
- *New Orleans, Louisiana, Police Department Arrest Books, 1881-1931*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/62385/>
- “Records of Police Departments,” New Orleans City Archives, <https://nolacityarchives.org/police-departments/>

## Newspapers

- *Catholic Commentator, 1963-2024*, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=CAC&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN----->
- *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
- “Digitizing Louisiana Newspaper Project,” Louisiana State University, <https://liblegacy.lsu.edu/collections/digital/dlnp>
- *Louisiana Biography & Obituary Index*, New Orleans Public Library, <https://nopl.minisisinc.com/NOPL/index.htm>
- *The New Orleans Bee*, Jefferson Parish Library, <https://nobee.jplibrary.net/> [French-language, browse only]
- *Obituaries Index*, East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library, <https://www.ebrpl.com/obits.html>
- Subscription sites such as Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com, and NewspaperArchive.com have various Louisiana newspapers.

## Cemetery Records

- There are many online grave memorial websites including FindAGrave.com, BillionGraves.com, and Interment.net. These websites should be used cautiously as they often lack source information. Online grave memorials should generally only be trusted if the memorial includes a legible photograph of the headstone.
- Some cemeteries have their own websites with burial search functions. Others will perform lookup requests by mail for a fee.
- Daughters of the American Revolution, *Louisiana Tombstone Inscriptions*, 11 vols., (Shreveport, La., 1957-?), <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/154891> [browsable online]

## City Directories

- “Louisiana Directories & Phonebooks,” Louisiana State University, <https://guides.lib.lsu.edu/Louisiana-History/Directories>



- U.S., *City Directories, 1822-1995*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2469/> [Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Monroe, New Iberia, New Orleans, Opelousas, Shreveport, various years]
- Webinar, “City and Rural Directories: More than Just Names,” <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/city-and-rural-directories-more-just-names>

## Church Records

- There are six Catholic dioceses in Louisiana along with the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Each has its own archive and record collection. Access to these collections varies by diocese. Contact information for all seven can be found at <https://www.usccb.org/find-a-bishop-and-diocese/#/state/LA>.
- The Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux has limited records available on its website.

## Census Records

- Census records are widely available and searchable at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and other genealogy websites.
- Census records can be browsed by address in addition to being searched. To find an enumeration district for any given address, see the “Unified Census ED Finder,” <https://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html>.
- “Obtaining Street Name Changes in One Step,” SteveMorse.org, <https://stevemorse.org/census/changes.html> [contains Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Shreveport]
- Webinar “Using the U.S. Federal Census,” <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/using-us-federal-census>
- Webinar, “Discover the 1950 U.S. Federal Census,” <https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/discover-1950-us-federal-census>

## Military Records

- Most 20<sup>th</sup>-century military records are federal records held by the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC or St. Louis, MO. For more on NARA’s military collections, see <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/genealogy>.
- Fold3.com is a subscription site with a focus on military records, including WWI and WWII-era records such as morning reports, Navy cruise books, and the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper.
- *Army Transport Service Arriving and Departing Passenger Lists, 1910-1939*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61174/>
- “Louisiana,” National Cemetery Association, <https://www.cem.va.gov/find-cemetery/state.asp?STATE=LA>
- *Louisiana World War I Service Records, 1917-1920*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2489920>



- *United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, FamilySearch.org, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2489920>
- “Veterans’ Service Records,” National Archives and Records Administration, <https://www.archives.gov/veterans>
- *World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/6482/>
- *World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1002/>
- *World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2238/>
- *World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8939/>

### **Passenger Lists and Naturalization Records**

- *Louisiana, U.S., Naturalization Records, 1836-2001*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2507/>
- *New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., Passenger Lists, 1813-1963*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7484/>
- “USCIS Genealogy Program,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, <https://genealogy.uscis.dhs.gov/#/>

