CHAPTER TWO

PARISH CHRISTENING AND CIVIL BIRTH ENTRIES

The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with an example of a parish christening and a civil birth entry. It is designed to explain the various parts of each entry and give the keywords and characteristics that identify each part of the entry. This chapter will also point out differences and similarities between the parish christening entry and the civil birth entry.

Each christening or birth entry consists of several parts arranged in a particular order. Each part contains some phrases which change little from entry to entry. Often the specific information that will be extracted, such as names and dates, are the only words that change. Thus, by being able to identify each part by its keywords and phrases, you will be able to quickly locate the specific information and extract it.

Many times parish registers contain not only christening entries, but also burial and marriage entries. There may also be nongenealogical information entered, such as bishops' visitations, marriage information, confessions, and confirmations. These other types of entries are covered in chapter four.

You may find misspellings, words run together and diacritical marks missing in the transcription of parish and civil entries. The transcriptions are meant to be written as they appear in the original record. The recorders often did not pay close attention to correct grammar and spelling.
Example of Parish Entry

Le Lundi onzième jour de Septembre Mil 
Six Cent et quatre-vingt quatre Francois fils de Pierre 
duval et de francoise Berenger Les pere et mere 
né du Jour precedent et a esté baptisé par nous Soussigné 
pbre curé de Bouquelon et nommé par francois Martin 
et Marguerite colombel ses parrain et marraine qui 
on ont Signé en notre autre Registre L Perier.

Transcription

Le Lundy onziesme jour de Septembre Mil 
Six Cent et quatre-vingt quatre Francois fils de Pierre 
duval et de francoise Berenger Les pere et mere 
né du Jour precedent et a esté baptisé par nous Soussigné 
pbre curé de Bouquelon et nommé par francois Martin 
et Marguerite colombel ses parrain et marraine qui 
on ont Signé en notre autre Registre L Perier.

Translation

Monday the eleventh day of September one thousand 
six hundred and eighty-four. Francois, son of Pierre 
Duval and of Francoise Berenger, the father and mother, 
born the day before and was baptized by us the undersigned 
priest of Bouqueton and named by Francois Martin 
and Marguerite Colombel, his godfather and godmother, who 
have signed in our other register. L Perier
Example of Civil Entry

Mairie Dehousséville
Arrondissement Communal De Luneville

Du Dix Sept Germinal an onze Dela Republique Francaise une indivisible
Acte de Naissance Deanne houbeaut né a housséville Departement Dela
Meurthe, le même Jour neuf heures Du Matin, fille Defrancois houbeaut
journalier a housséville et De Elizabeth Nagent Son Epouse le sex
Delanfant a Été Reconue Etre la fille Dudit françois houbeaut et De Son
Epouse; premier témoin Joseph Nagent age De Vingt et un an Garcon
Chez Son père a forcelle Sous Guguey, Departement Dela Meurthe Cousin
issus Germain a la ditte Anne houbeaut, Seconde témoin Anne houbeaut, agee
De Vingt trois ans, fille Dentelière Demeurante Audit housséville, Cousinee
issus Germaine aladitte Anne houbeaut, Sur la déclaration a Moi faite parle
Citoyen françois houbeaut pere Delanfant Denommée ey dessus et onts
Signes, Exceptes laditte annes houbeaut qui a fait Sa Marque ordinaire
Nayant pas lusage Décrire.

francois houbeaut
Joseph Najan
Translation
Mayoral of Housséville
Communal District of Lunéville

Of the 17th of Germinal, year eleven of the French Republic, one indivisible act of birth of Anne Houbeaut, born in Housséville, Department of Meurthe, the same day (at) nine hours in the morning, daughter of Francois Houbeaut, day laborer from Housséville, and of Elizabeth Nagent his wife. The sex of the child has been recognized as the daughter of the said Francois Houbeaut and of his wife. First witness Joseph Nagent, age of twenty-one years, a young man, residing at his father's house in Forcelle Sous Guguey, Department of Meurthe, second cousin of the said Anne Houbeaut. Second witness Anne Houbeaut, age of twenty-three years, maiden, lace worker, residing at the said Housséville, second cousin of the said Anne Houbeaut. By the declaration to me made by the citizen Francois Houbeaut, father of the above named child, and they signed, except the said Anne Houbeaut who made her customary mark, not having the ability to write.

Francois Houbeaut
Joseph Najan

Marginal Notation

In some registers the officiating agent entered a short note in the margin next to the entry. This was used as an indexing system to enable a rapid search for a particular record. At times, this marginal notation contained information not found in the entry, such as legal name changes and adoptions.

As long as these notes are signed, the information given is accepted as legal. However, marginal notes were not always entered at the time the entry was made nor by the same person who originally created the entry. When they are unsigned, they should be used with caution. Entering marginal notes was a local procedure, and as a general rule they are only occasionally found in civil and parish records.

Example: Civil Entry

houbeaut

Oui

né à 17

Germinal

Date Phrase

Laws dictated that each entry be dated. This is generally one of the first phrases in an entry. However, because these laws were not strictly followed, the date may appear anywhere in an entry.

A parish entry will contain the date of baptism or christening and possibly the date of birth. A civil entry contains the date of registration which is the date of the entry and may give the actual birth date of the child.

Dates were most often entered in one of two formats. Usually the day, month, and year appear together in an entry. However, in a few localities the year was separated from the day and month.
The date is easily recognized for two reasons:

1. The date phrase contains words or numerals which are easily recognized.

2. The French words for the months of the Gregorian calendar are very similar to the English equivalents, and the months of the Republican calendar are very distinctive.

The keywords used to identify the date phrase are:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{Jour} & \text{mois} & \text{an} & \text{année} \\
\text{Day} & \text{month} & \text{year} & \text{year}
\end{array}
\]

Days of the week, months, and numbers for the years, which are also keywords, are covered in chapter eight.

Example: Parish Entry (Day, Month, Year)

\[
\text{Le dimanche, octobre, dix-huit du calendrier républicain.}
\]

Monday 11th day of September of One Thousand Six Hundred Eighty-Four.  
(11 SEP 1684)

Example: Civil Entry (Year, Day, Month)

\[
\text{On neuf de la république française le vingt deuxième jour de Germinal.}
\]

Year nine of the French republic, the twenty-second day of Germinal.  
(22 GERM 9)

Locality or Residence Phrase

The registration laws also required the officiating agent to define the locality where the register was created and where the people involved were from. The department, commune, canton, town hall, and city were all recorded at different times, leaving no doubt as to the locality.

The locality phrase generally follows the date phrase. However, many times the locality is divided in the entry.

There are occasions when the place of birth and even the residence of the parents differs from the locality of the records. This could be because they were residents of a smaller unit within the jurisdiction of the town hall and came there to register a birth.
**Example: Parish Entry**

**De Bouquelon**

of Bouquelon

The keywords used for localities in a parish entry are:

- **Paroisse**: parish
- **Autorité ecclésiastique**: ecclesiastical authority
- **(de) l'église**: (of) the church
- **Ville**: town
- **Village**: village
- **Cité**: city
- **De la localité**: of the locality

The residence of the parents is given as well as the place of birth of the child—Housséville, department of Meurthe. In this entry the child was born in the same locality where the record was created.

**Example: Civil Entry**

**Mairie de Housséville**

**Arrondissement**: county (district)
**Canton**: canton
**Commune**: community
**Département**: state
**Les autorités**: the authorities
**Citoyen**: citizen
**Citoyenne**: citizen (female)
**Droits de**: rights of
**L'Etat**: the state
**La République**: the republic

**Ceremony Phrase**

Somewhere in the entry is a phrase that indicates what is being done. This is important because a birth or christening differs radically from a marriage or a death.

**Example: Parish Entry**

*a été baptisé*

has been baptized

The following keywords appear in parish entries, indicating a christening:

- **présentation**: presentation
- **présenté un enfant**: presented a child
- **baptisé**: baptized
- **nommé par**: named by

**Example: Civil Entry**

**Acte De Naissance**

Birth Certificate

This example gives:

1. Mayoral of Housséville
2. Communal district of Lunévile
3. Born at Housséville
4. Department of Meurthe

The keywords used for localities in a civil entry are:

- **Mairie, maison commune or hôtel de ville**: town hall
The keywords used in civil records indicating a birth entry are:

**acte de naissance:** birth certificate

**né:** born (male)

**née:** born (female)

**né(e) au domicile:** born at home

**faire naître:** to give birth

**accouchée:** gave birth

**jour de naissance:** day of birth

**jour natal de:** birthday of

**enfant naturel:** illegitimate child

**fils or fille (de):** son or daughter (of)

**accompagné de:** accompanied by

**est comparu:** was presented

**sont comparus:** were presented

(a) **été nommé:** was named or has been named

**donné le prénom (de):** given the name (of)

### Officiating Agent Phrase

The Council of Trent and subsequent laws enacted by the state, required that whoever officiated in the events recorded, be named in both parish and civil records along with a description of his position and authority. The title or position and name of the agent was always listed in some part of the entry, either at the front or, as in the example below, at the end.

In a parish register the officiating agent will hold some ecclesiastical office instead of a civil position.

**Example: Parish Entry**

![Parish Entry Image]

ptre. (prêtre) curé de Bouquetel

L. Perier

Head priest of Bouquetel

L. Perier

The following keywords are used to identify officiating agents in parish entries:

**Curé:** head priest

**Calotin:** priest

**Prêtre:** priest

**Diacre:** deacon

**Juge Ecclesiastique:** ecclesiastical judge

**Example: Civil Entry**

![Civil Entry Image]

**Transcription**

Constaté par moi

Jean Dominique Jeandel

Maire De la Commune De Housséville

faisant les fonctions D'officier public

de l'état Civil.

**Translation**

Verified by me

Jean Dominique Jeandel,

mayor of the city of Housséville,
performing the functions of public officer of the civil government.

The following keywords indicate officiating agent in civil entries:

**Officier Public:** public officer

**Greffier:** Registrar or recorder

**Conservateur de Registre:** keeper of the register

**Garde:** keeper

**Maire:** Mayor
Child Phrase

In a christening or birth entry, only the given name of the child normally appears. The surname is usually given with the parents' names.

At times the date of the child's birth is given as well as the hour of the day. The child's name may appear in several locations in the record. It may—

precede: fils or fille de
[son or daughter of]

precede: né(e)
[born]

follow: a été nommé
[has been or was named]

follow: donné le prénom de
[given the name of]

follow: acte de naissance de
[birth]

Example: Parish Entry

François fils de...

Transcription
Francois fils de...

Translation
François, son of...

Example: Civil Entry

Acte de Naissance De
anne houbeaut, nee...

Transcription

Acte de Naissance De
anne houbeaut, nee...

Translation

Birth certificate of
Anne Houbeaut, born...

Notice that the children are exactly where they should be, before fils de in the parish example, and after the acte de naissance in the civil example. Many times, however, the child (fils or fille) may be in another position in the entry; therefore, you need to be flexible and search the entire record until you find the child's name. On rare occasions the name has been omitted entirely. In these cases, it is still possible to determine the sex so that the entry can be extracted.

Sex and Legitimacy Phrase

At times a phrase is inserted which precisely states the child's gender.

For example, the civil entry reads:

le Sex Delenfant a Eté Reconue
Etre la fille Dudit Francois
Houbeaut et De Son Epouse.

[The sex of the child has been recognized to be the daughter of the said Francois Houbeaut and of his wife.]

In French, nouns and pronouns carry gender, and from these words you can establish the gender of the child or principal.

However, as a general rule, you can determine the sex from the name itself. Names such as Pierrette, Françoise, and Nicollette denote a female, while names such as Pierre, François, and Nicolas denote a male.
Words denoting gender for either civil or parish entries are:

**un enfant:** child (male)

**une enfant:** child (female)

**né:** born (male)

**née:** born (female)

**fils:** son (male)

**fille:** daughter (female)

Using these three guides, the sex of the child is relatively simple to determine. For further information on determining sex, see chapter seven.

Phrases which denote legitimacy appear with the nouns and pronouns denoting sex. Although legitimacy is not extracted, the adjectives carry gender and can be used to determine the sex.

The keywords denoting legitimacy or illegitimacy are:

**enfant légitime:** legitimate child

**fils légitime:** legitimate son

**fille légitime:** legitimate daughter

**enfant naturel:** illegitimate child

**fils batard:** bastard son

**fille naturelle:** illegitimate daughter

**fille adulterine:** illegitimate daughter

**un batard:** a bastard

**Déclaré batard:** declared bastard

**Ma légitime:** my legitimate (wife)

### Parents’ Phrase

One of the outstanding features of French records, and especially the civil records, is the detail taken in recording the parents. The husband or father is usually listed first, then his occupation, his age, and origin. The the name of the wife, her age, and origin. This order may change due to such circumstances as illegitimacies or deaths.

Parents’ names are usually found after such phrases for either parish or civil entries:

**fils (or) fille de . . .
son (or) daughter of . . .**

**du mariage légitime de . . .
of the legitimate marriage of . . .**

**un(e) enfant né(e) à . . .
a child born to . . .**

Also the parents’ names will be found in front of such phrases as:

**. . . son père . . . sa mère:**

**. . . his father . . . his mother**

**. . . mère légitime de . . .
legitimate mother of**

**. . . père légitime de . . .
legitimate father of**

The father’s given names are recorded first, followed by the surname if it is given.

The mother’s given names are recorded first, followed by her maiden name.

In this entry below, the ages of the parents are not given; however, their names, François Houbaut and Elizabeth Nagent, and his occupation, day laborer, do appear.

**Example: Civil Entry**

*Je ne François houbaut*

*Journalier ahousséville et*

*De Elizabeth Nagent Son Epouse*

**Transcription**

fille Defrancois houbaut

Journalié ahousséville et

De Elizabet Nagent Son Epouse.

**Translation**

Daughter of Francois Houbaut,

day laborer from Housseville, and

of Elizabeth Nagent, his wife.

### Occupations

Occupations were usually entered directly after the father’s name or, on very rare occasions, after the
mother's name. In the example below, François Houbeaut is a day laborer. For a list of occupations, please refer to Appendix A.

Example: Civil Entry

fille de François Houbeaut
journalier à Housséville.

Transcription
fille Defrançois houbeaut
journalier ahousséville.

Translation
daughter of François Houbeaut
day laborer from Housséville.

Godparents or Grandparents and Warning Phrase in Parish Entries

The custom of having godparents has long been traditional among Catholic parishioners. The duty of the godparents was to take the place of the parents if the need arose. This duty could be temporarily caring for the child in their home or spiritually overseeing the child, ensuring that the proper acts and ordinances were performed for and by the child. When grandparents were named instead of godparents, they were placed under the same obligation as the godparents.

When the priest makes reference to these obligations in a record, it is known as the warning phrase and is identified by phrases such as:

Les a conseillé de leurs obligations paternelles: Having counseled them of their parental obligations.

L'a conseillé de son obligation paternelle: Having counseled him of his parental obligation.

These phrases bound the child and the godparents religiously together.

The keywords indicating godparents are:

parrain: godfather
marraine: godmother
le filleul de . . . the godson of . . .
la filleule de . . . the goddaughter of . . .

The keywords indicating grandparents are:
aïeul or grand-père: grandfather
aïeule or grand-mère: grandmother
aïeules or aieux: grandparents
père de la mariée: father of the wife
père du marié: father of the husband
mère de la mariée: mother of the wife
mère du marié: mother of the husband

Witness Phrase in Civil Entries

In civil registers, at least two witnesses testified to the action. At times these witnesses were the grandparents or the godparents of the child.

By law, their names and places of residence had to be recorded. Other information was also given, such as age, occupation, and relationship to the child.

The keywords indicating witnesses are:

témoin: witness
certificateur: certifier
citadin: townsman
citoyen: citizen
attester: to attest
certifier: to certify
constant: to confirm, verify
In this sample entry, Joseph Nagent is the first witness. He is 21 years old, single, living at home, and is second cousin to the child. The second witness is Anne Houbeaut, 23, maiden, lacemaker in Housséville. She is 23 years old and the second cousin of Anne Houbeaut.

**Example: Civil Entry**

```
premier témoin Joseph Nagent age de 21 ans
De Vincent en joignant ses lettres
matrie de l'Etat De Vincent
fils de Vincent et Marie
Patrick Nagent
second témoin Anne Houbeaut
De Vincent en joignant ses lettres
matrie de l'Etat De Vincent
fille
di Vincent et Marie
Patrick Nagent

Anne Houbeaut
Joseph Nagent
```

**Certification Phrase**

To certify that the acts or events were legal, the officiating agent had to sign each entry. This signature was preceded by a phrase setting it apart from the entry by citing the office and authority of the officiating agent.

In parish registers the priest created a separate certification which also served as the certification phrase. He then signed his name at the end of each entry. Common certification phrases in parish entries are:

- _devant moi, ... le curé de_: before me ... the priest of
- _fait par moi, ... le pretre de_: made by me ... the priest of
- _or a Latin phrase such as:_
  - _ex (con) licencia parrochi_: by (with) permission of the priest.

The keywords indicating authorization or certification in a parish entry are:

- _a esté baptisé par moi_
  - was baptized by me
- _oussigné: (the) undersigned_

In civil entries the officiating agent and the certification phrase are one and the same:

**Example: Civil Entry**

```
constaté par moi
Jean Dominique Jeandel
Maire de ...
```

Verified by me
Jean Dominique Jeandel
mayor of ...

The certification phrase ends with the officiating agent's signature. As you can see above, the signatures themselves were very embellished and decorative. They served as an official seal.
The keywords indicating authorization or certification in a civil entry are:

- **constaté**: confirmed, verified
- **par moi**: by me

**Maire de**: Mayor of
**officier de l’état civil**: officer of the civil state
**officier public**: public officer
**secrétaire**: secretary
**greffier**: registrar

**citoyen**: citizen
**registre**: register

## Summary

Both christening and birth entries contain some information that should be extracted. The type of information and the order in which it appears will vary from entry to entry. The critical parts of the entry to look for are listed and briefly described below.

### Marginal Notation

This is a short notation found in the margin of the register which gives the name of the child and possibly the date of the entry.

It served as an index to the record.

### Date Phrase

Indicates the date, month, and year of the birth or christening. There can be more than one date given, such as the actual birth date, as opposed to the christening date or registration date.

### Locality or Residence Phrase

States the locality of the event. In parish registers, it lists the parish and city; and in civil registers, the commune, canton, and arrondissement.

### Ceremony Phrase

Identifies which type of ceremony is being performed.

### Officiating Agent Phrase

Names the officiating agent, whether priest or registrar, along with his position of authority.

## Child Phrase

Gives the name of the child or principal(s) the recipient(s) of the ceremony or ordinance.

## Sex and Legitimacy Phrase

Indicates the sex of an individual and is very important in both christening and birth entries.

The other parts of a birth and christening entry serve as reference material to aid in identifying the surname or irregularities in the entry, such as twins, or stillborn.

There are those occasions when a declaration of illegitimacy is used to extract needed information. For example, when establishing the reason the father’s name was never given, or when establishing the sex of the child or principal from the gender carried by the word *naturel* or *naturelle*.

## Parents’ Phrase

Gives the name of the father and the mother. In some cases of illegitimacy, only the mother’s name is given.

### Occupations

Occupation appears after the father’s surname or godfather’s (witness’s) surname. It is very useful to be able to distinguish the occupations and not confuse them with the surnames.

## Godparents and Grandparents and Warning Phrase in Parish Entries

The godparents’ names are not extracted. Once the godparents are mentioned in the text, it serves as a key indicating that the entry is ending, and no more vital information will be found.

Grandparents’ names are very useful in establishing the surnames and given names (and their spellings) of the parents and children.

The warning phrase explains the obligations of the godparents.

## Witness Phrase in Civil Entries

This phrase appears in civil records in lieu of the godparents phrase. The function is the same in both registers.
Certification Phrase
Contains the signature of the officiating agent and the position he held. It makes the entry a legal document.

Self-evaluation

CHAPTER TWO
On a separate sheet of paper, translate the following keywords:

Exercise 1                                         Exercise 2

1. baptisé                                       1. est comparu(s) ...
2. jour                                         2. donner le prénom de ...
3. curé                                         3. acte de naissance
4. mère                                         4. officier public
5. nom                                          5. Maire de la commune
6. naissance                                    6. Au mois de ...
7. fils                                         7. An 11 de la République Française
8. né                                           8. de Bouquelon
9. enfant                                       9. un enfant du sexe masculin
10. père                                        10. fille dudit citoyen

Please check your responses with the answers in Appendix C.