the history space
Making family connections

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 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 genealogical 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 space.

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COURTESY VERMONT FRENCH-CANADIAN GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
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 2003 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, microfiche/film room, a large classroom, break room, and offices. The book collection has grown to over 4,500 books, journals, family

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

of the city to visit the church and record the baptisms.”

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, primary sources are preferred when obtaining and citing genealogical information. The source of primary records proves family connections and helps 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.

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Genealogy

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and breadth of the state from 1850 to 1885. It took four years for our vol-
unteers 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 real-
ize that most Vermonters have roots
in other cultures as well. In 2013 the
Society expanded its mission, began
to enlarge its collection and named
the library The Vermont Genealogy
Library. The library's growing col-
lection for other nationalities in-
cludes English, Irish, Scottish, and
German ancestry since these
groups have the strongest connec-
tions to Vermont. The online re-
sources cover a much wider range of
locations and nationalities.

Outreach activities

Readers may have seen VT-FCGS
display booths at various events
around Vermont such as French-Ca-
nadian festivals in Barre, Hardwick,
Morristown, St. Albans, and Ver-
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tom. Open House in September
The Vermont Genealogy Library at Fort Ethan Allen in Colches-
ter 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.