

Rootstech 2019

500 Years at Your Fingertips Belgium and Beyond

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Werner Vols, happily married to Christel for 34 years with one son, Matthias, and two dogs living in a suburb of Antwerp. Genealogy started, as with everyone writing down the names of parents, grandparents and uncles and aunts. My grandmother was still alive, so I could ask her quite a lot. And so, I was bitten by the bug and have never stopped. I learned from my own research and from colleagues over the years. From a schoolteacher, I was taught old Flemish and Latin and from a niece the old French. Many of my years spent searching for acts to be sure that my own research was correct.

Researching in other countries is not easy and where to begin is sometimes the most difficult part.

As you might guess genealogy has changed over the past four decades. When I began 37 years ago I started calling the church or townhall to ask if I could stop in to have a look in the registers. The vicar would get a couple of books and you could write some names down and that was it. If you were lucky you had one hour of their precious time.

No copy machines, no faxes and no computers with the same at the town hall. One would have to ask permission to look at a book and not even be allowed to touch it. In 1999 the first websites started to appear.

Now almost everything is a click at your fingertips in many countries.

Also, in Belgium.

The Belgium State Archives are accessible online with all documents or Acts scanned by volunteers. However, some acts can only be viewed within the State Archives facility.

The State Archives website makes accessible more than 32.8 million pages of genealogical sources at no cost consisting of parish registers and civil status registers.

The digitization of civil status registers has not yet been completed. As the digital images are processed, they are added to the website.

Consultation is free, but whomever wants to access the images must have a login and password and these can be created on the website.

The Belgium State Archives website:

<https://search.arch.be/nl/>

You can change the main page to English, so the Provinces are named in English.



There are two helpful tutorials available on YouTube in Flemish and French on how to use the State Archives website for searches.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nAc8PZDAWM> in Flemish

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czoscJ1h5TA> in French

No YouTube tutorial available in English currently.

Some things that will be helpful when researching records in Belgium:

- Approximately during the years 1550-1795, languages are in old Latin, modern Latin and some old Flemish on acts. From about 1792-1806 acts are in French and Flemish. At about 1810 in most registers they are in Flemish while some kept with the French language for several years.
- Parish registers: Birth, death, marriage and ten-year indexes in almost every town or city.
- <https://search.arch.be/nl/tips/98-parochieregisters> from Abt. 1560–Abt. 22 Sept 1792.
- Parish registers for most of the cities begin around 1600 till 1797 with some exceptions that begin earlier, approximately 1560 up to 1800.
- Civil registers: Birth, death, marriage and ten-year indexes in almost every town or city
- <https://search.arch.be/nl/tips/101-burgerlijke-stand> from Abt. 1796–Abt. 1910-1918.
- The records for some towns begin with the French records around 1792 and end about 1910 because there is a law on privacy. Records are not to be available before 100 years of the current year. However, some towns have already scanned the years 1917-18.
- The State Archives website is best utilized if you know when and where your starting point ancestor lived in Belgium.
- Each year has a searchable index at the start or at the end. There are also 10-year indexes which makes it sometimes easier when you don't have an exact year for searching.
- Remember to try alternate spellings of surnames too.
- Immigrants to the U.S. spoke little or no English and many could not read or write. Often names, birth dates and the town or city were available on their documents in their native language only and consequently immigration officials relied on verbal information from the immigrant. "Franciscus Van De Voorde" said with the heavy accent of the immigrant was misheard by the U.S. official and only a portion of the name would be recorded and they inevitably would "Americanize" it to Frank VanDeVoorde. This happened frequently and should be kept in mind when doing research.

- Marriage records in Belgium are a treasure trove of family information. The couple were required to provide the townhall with several documents. If a parent/parents were deceased, the death certificates were required. Proof of military service (from when it was obligated) and birth certificates of the bride and groom were necessary especially when they came from another town. The bride kept her maiden name after marriage and did not replace it with the groom's surname. These documents sometimes are found in "huwelijksbijlagen"- additional wedding acts.
- Important words in acts:

Geboorte (Flemish), né (French), natus (Latin)=born
 Huwelijk (FL), le mariage (F), contraxerunt matrimonium (L)= marriage
 Overlijden (FL), deces (F), obit (L) = death
 Vontheffers (FL), susceptores (L) parain / maraine (F) = godfather, godmother
 Gecompareerden (FL), comparée (F) = the people who appear before the magistrate
 Getuigen (FL), témoins (F), testibus (L) = witnesses
 Schepenen van de Burgerlijke stand (FL) = officier de l'état civil (F) Alderman
 Ambtenaar (FL), officier (F), officiel (L) = civil servant
 Van wijlen (FL), de la fin (F) = from the decease
 Verschenen (FL), apparu (F) = appeared
 Vroedvrouw (FL), obstetrice (L), sage-femme/accoucheuse (F) = midwife
 Woonachtig (FL), résident (F), habitans (L) = living in
 Vandaag (FL), aujourd'hui (F), hodie (L) = today
 Gisteren (FL), hier (F), heri (L) = yesterday
 Eergisteren (FL), avant hier (F), dies anti heri (L) = day before yesterday
 Deze avond (FL), ces soir (F), vesperum (L) = this evening
 Deze namiddag (FL), c'est apres midi (F), post meridium (L) = this afternoon
 Deze ochtend (FL), c'est matin (F), mane (L) = this morning
 Vader (FL), père (F) = father In Latin commonly not used alone, rather Joannes *filius Petrus*, Joannes son of the same, Maria *filia Petrus*, Maria daughter of Petrus = father.
 Moeder (FL), mère (F) = mother The same here, the word mother is not used in Latin.
 Mostly you will see Joannes son of Petrus and then the mother's first name with her maiden name.
 Broer (FL), frère (F), frater (L) = brother
 Zus (FL), soeur (F), soror (L) = sister

When I started researching there was and still is a division of the State Archive, commonly known as the RAB or "Rijksarchief Beveren" (State Archives Beveren). This is a part of East-Flanders where they started a website before the Belgium State Archives had one.

This site also has a tab to click on to make the text English. Again, not all text becomes English unfortunately.

State Archives Beveren:

<https://www.vrijwilligersrab.be/>



Every tab unfolds in baptism, marriage and deceased by Parish records and civil records the most important ones.

Graphic below is a simple tool, but a great one especially in the different spelling variations of family surnames in the periods 1600-1800. It allows a search of names in baptism records by letter. An invaluable feature is provided when you click open one letter, you get as a complete menu the different spelling variations displayed per alphabet letter.



Since this was also done by volunteers they took the job seriously and wrote it down as they came across it. So, for example, my name was not always written the same way. The name Vols was written in about ten different ways throughout 450 years.

What also comes in handy is Geneanet, it's a website for genealogist beginners, intermediate and advanced researchers. In a way like Ancestry.com, but you cannot link it to your own tree.

Also, as I never change American Flemish surnames from the correct Belgian surnames of those living and born in America when doing research in Belgium. For instance, De Bock born in Belgium and those born in the U.S. often will be shown as DeBock. When searching the Belgian website archives be sure to use the Belgian De Bock. Be aware of that as you search. Also, as an example, Bernardus (Latin) De Bock born in Belgium in 1790; when he marries in Belgium in 1812 (French period), his name is recorded as Bernard De Bock and when he dies in the U.S. in 1860 his name is Bert DeBock (American way of writing Bernard and De Bock).

There are differences in the dates for research MM/DD/YY (American format, month, day, year) is not used in Belgian websites (and Europe in general). Instead you must use 7 Mar 1720 or day, month, year format as the proper way to do dates for the websites.

Websites that come in handy:

<https://gadwin-printscreens.nl.softonic.com/> Print screens

<https://nl.geneanet.org/> Geneanet where most Belgians have their tree. (requires an email and password)

<https://www.archiefbankbrugge.be/> The Archives of Bruges. (requires an email and password)

<http://www.familiekundevlaanderen-leuven.be/Familysearch.htm> All the direct links to FamilySearch by province which is very helpful.

I have understood from many colleagues that trying to explain the Latin acts in this session was out of the order. A beginner, intermediate or advanced user in the U.S. does not use Latin. But I would be glad to help.

http://www.bskempen.be/info_files_nl/parochieregisters.htm Translations and help in Latin.

Latin is a completely different matter and it's extremely complicated to explain.

I hope you have found some of your answers in this session and if not, you can email me.
But I'm only human

Best Regards

Werner Vols