GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

For the Archives Summit in Canada in 2014, the Fédération québécoise des sociétés de généalogie (FQSG) wishes to contribute to the debate by presenting the needs and concerns of genealogists in Quebec, with regard to their expectations for archive centers. The FQSG is a non-profit consortium of more than 70 genealogical and history societies, representing more than 25,000 members. Its mission is to promote genealogy in Quebec, represent the interests of its member organisations and participate in partnership projects with national and international genealogy societies. We will begin with a brief overview of the evolution of family research and the impact of new technologies. We will then present the various categories of researchers, their objectives and main documentary sources. We will conclude on the contribution of genealogical research and an examination of its future.

Genealogy is recognized as a process of identity search, individual or collective. While in its infancy it was mainly used to prove the noble ancestry of individuals to maintain and protect their rights and privileges, the proof of ancestry became useful for all to assert inheritance rights, the degree of inbreeding in the marriage, proof of citizenship… Since the twentieth century, it contributes more and more to the search for identity of families and communities, for historical and commemorative purposes, and to demographic and medical research.

In the Middle Ages, genealogical research could only rely on the testimony of individuals and statements contained in kinship charters. Registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, acts of civil status, marriage contracts are the primary sources for genealogical research today. There are also secondary sources such as genealogical dictionaries and directories.

The development of personal computing and the Internet now allow access to various databases, virtual libraries and documentation and archives centers that have been digitized. Whereas previously genealogists had to travel to consult documents and collate data in notebooks or on cards, they can now, in the comfort of their own

home, consult a wealth of information and documents offered by individuals, public or private organizations, commercial enterprises. Genealogy software allows them to collect, store and classify data and produce various research reports. This greater access to different sources of information facilitates the exchange of information among researchers, regardless of the distances. The growth in popularity of genealogy has also favored the emergence a lucrative business of which the products and services' quality is neither constant nor guaranteed, hence the importance of genealogical societies to train genealogists and recognize their skills.

Greater accessibility of information sources, the new interest in the use of DNA to trace origins (belonging to haplogroups) and possible familial relations with people with the same surname (genetic genealogy), the participation in projects of genetic genealogy (e.g. DNA Tribes from Ancestry, Genographic, project of National Geographic), the trading and uploading of information and data, the marketing of information, all these developments that facilitate the work genealogists require rigor and methodology. Therefore, the consultation of primary and secondary source documents remains mandatory.

Genealogical researchers do not all have the same needs or the same objectives. We can identify three broad categories of genealogists, categories which are also recognized by the Bureau québécois d'attestation des compétences en généalogie under the responsibility of the FQSG. These are the filiation genealogist, the genealogist researcher and the master genealogist. These categories do imply a gradation of skills, but also one of needs and objectives.

Filiation genealogists operate various search tools to find the information allowing them to establish a pedigree chart. They must be able to support this research with authentic documents, such as parish registers, civil status and wedding contracts, when available. In the absence of primary sources, they may complete the research with secondary sources such as directories and dictionaries or genealogical research done by other genealogists.

Genealogist researchers, in addition to working on pedigree charts, are dedicated to the settlement of cases or complex research problems. Their research often results in the writing of a family's history. To this end, they will use various archival fonds including censuses, military records, immigration, judicial and notarial fonds, maps, photographs, directories, electoral rolls… Their field of investigation is broad and the results of this research are often produced by the combination of several sources of information and the validation of assumptions. Censuses allow them to identify other individuals of the same family, to get the date or year of birth, to find people who have changed their place of residence, to know their occupation… The city directories and voter lists are useful for pinpointing individuals. Finally, all these sources allow to collect as much information as possible, which, once combined, will reconstitute a family's history.

In addition to the above skills and activities, master have the ability to perform complex searches requiring extensive knowledge of available resources, archival or otherwise, the ability to read them (paleography) and analyze them. Their work results in publications, conferences, training sessions and major research projects (universities, private companies, government, media). Let us mention, for example, commemoration projects for institutions or communities, or the production of television programs such as *Québec, une histoire de famille* and *Qui êtes-vous?*

Having extensively researched their ancestors, more and more genealogists will then want to enrich their knowledge of Quebec history and conduct increasingly pointed research on one or another aspect of this history. Whether this interest is local, regional or national, at the level of daily life or civil or religious society, these researchers need access to the archives of the various groups that have marked history and participated in its construction. The reduced access to information sources will have restrictive effects on the development of this research. When we know that the course of history was at best sketchy, it is important to give everyone the opportunity to continue learning, even if it is about personal knowledge and does not necessarily lead to a scientific publication.

A majority of genealogists fit into the first and second categories, but this does not exclude the fact that they can sometimes use the same sources of information as those needed by master genealogists.

As mentioned earlier, technology now allows for a better access to research documents. In Quebec, like in many Western countries, it is easy (and sometimes free) to access parish and civil status registers that have been scanned or uploaded on the websites of archives,

non-profit organizations (Family Search) or commercial enterprises (e.g., Ancestry). There currently is a debate about government responsibility over the availability of archived documents when retention periods have expired and the need for it to invest in their scanning and indexing for easy access. In this regard, partnerships between archives and other agencies (commercial or non-profit) have made possible projects that otherwise would never have seen the light of day, at least in the short or medium term. The recent uploading of images from the 1921 Canadian census, although indexing is not complete, is one of these instances. However, one should not conclude that free access, even if it is desirable in itself, is an obligation. More and more genealogists accept to pay a reasonable price for online access to archives and documents that would be difficult or impossible to consult otherwise (disability, geographic distance, conservation and consultation sites…). There are nevertheless several archives fonds, interesting for genealogical research (private funds, administration, public, reports…) but less consulted because information is difficult to find, that will remain in a physical media form, unless the management of their conservation requires their transfer onto digital media. At the very least, these records must remain accessible to the public. The collaboration of genealogical societies and their members is something that deserves to be explored for scanning and indexing projects. For example, members of the Cercle de généalogie de la Manche in France have done data entry work on the seafarers' registration numbers kept at the Cherbourg navy archives center, in order to accelerate indexing on the Cimarconet site.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of genealogical research is no longer limited to the production of pedigree charts. Writing family history has become increasingly common. Once the family skeleton is built (the line), there remains simply to add muscles and flesh, which is the experience of ancestors and their relatives. Thanks to archival documents, researchers can discover the occupation and assets (acquisitions, donations, bequests) of their ancestors, their problems with the law, their contribution to society (militia, army, alderman, churchwarden…), the socio-political context of their time… They can share this history with their own family so that everyone understands how they got to where they are. Linked to other such histories, family history will lead to a broader history of the community and thus help strengthening a sense of belonging. In other cases, the research results serve as supporting evidence to findings made by others in history, demography, sociology, medicine… We can just take a look at conference organized by genealogy societies or national and international conferences on genealogy to measure the extent of the reach enjoyed by genealogical research.

We also wish to draw your attention to the promotion of genealogy for the younger generations. To introduce youths to genealogy, the FQSG created an initiation program for schools, in collaboration with its member societies. This program enables young people, as part of a school activity, to develop their research and writing skills while using archival documents (paper or virtual), reference publications and databases. As they discover a part of their family history, they also develop an interest in other histories. It is therefore important that future generations can rely on the services offered by the archives, and not only on what is offered by commercial organizations.

We believe that even in a context of rationalized government spending, we should not question the necessity and relevance of the preservation and dissemination of our heritage, but we do think it is necessary to innovate in the means to do so.

We hope that this modest contribution to your reflection will be useful, and the Fédération québécoise des sociétés de généalogie hopes that this Archives Summit will lead to new and promising possibilities for archivists and genealogists.