



**Spring 2025**

*Généalogie et Archives Saint-Laurent*

# *Newsletter*

## **Pope Leo – A look through the genealogy lens**



*Leo P.P. XIV*

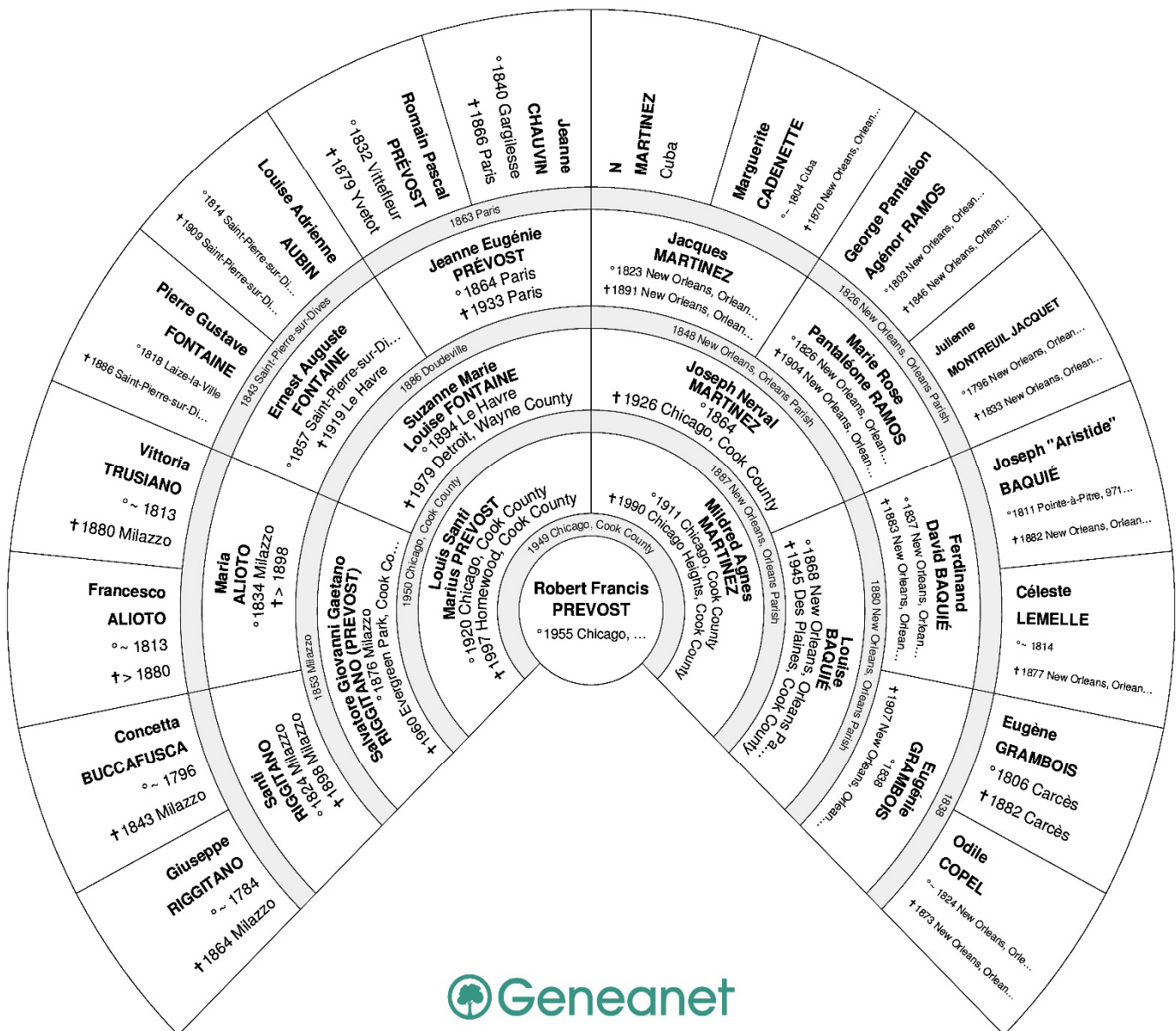
Since the election of a new Pope, genealogists have been delving into Pope Leo XIV's ancestry. His European roots are difficult to trace due to missing records and inconsistent names. Born Robert Francis Prevost, Pope Leo XIV is the first American-born pontiff and has deep ties to Peru, where he lived for many years and became a citizen in 2015. Fluent in multiple languages, he comes from an educated family: his father, Louis Marius Prevost, was a WWII naval officer and school administrator, and his mother, Mildred Agnes Martínez, was a librarian with a master's in education. His uncle John was a French professor, as was the Pope's grandfather.

There has been however some challenges in tracing back his European grandparents on his father's side. It seems there was more than meet the eyes in that search. Perhaps, like many of us, the Pope's background was not a clear cut straight line. There were some inconsistencies in his grandmother's maiden name; from Fabre to Fontaine... There was also the absence of some key records from the early years.

The story of Suzanne Louise Marie Fontaine "Fabre", his grandmother, is fascinating on its own. Suzanne Louise Marie Fontaine was born in Le Havre, France, on February 2, 1894. She arrived in New York City on March 22, 1915 with her destination as the Jeanne d'Arc Home for Friendless French Women on West 24th Street. She stayed there for two years. She then became pregnant with her first child, Louis Santi (Pope's father), born out of wedlock from a married man, the father being Giovanni Riggitano. Riggitano never divorced, and it seems he and Suzanne never married. The couple lived together from 1917 to Giovanni's death in 1960 — a love story of 43 years.

At the time of the birth of her first son, Louis Santi, Riggitano's wife was suing him for infidelity. In order to protect everyone involved, he changed his name to John Santi Prevost and Suzanne used the name "Fabre" on the birth certificate. All this was later proven and matched with records and fingerprints. If you are fascinated with the story and would like to read more see the Geneanet article <https://en.geneanet.org/genealogyblog/post/2025/05/pope-leos-european-grandparents-the-mystery-solved>. The feature includes photos and source documents. Next page is the full family tree of our new Pope.

# Family tree of Robert Francis PREVOST



Geneanet



## Accessing Free Resources

If you have a library card, Cornwall or SDG, you can download the Libby app and get access to online books and magazines. On the library website look under “Books & More” and the “emedia” there you will find Libby. You can browse for free the UK magazine “Family Tree.” It is full of information and research aids and tools. Current and past issues are available to read.

Do you listen to podcasts? There are hundreds available at <https://familytreemagazine.com/genealogy-podcast>

## **News from your genealogy centre**



It's all here! For those who haven't visited in a while, our files keep growing and so does our partnership with Généalogie Québec. We have shared some of our files and they are being digitized and combined with the rest of the collection. We are part of the « Collection diverses Drouin » on their website.

Over the years we have grown to include more resources from Ontario and Quebec. Yes, we do have an extensive Franco-Ontarian library, but you can also find your relatives outside of the counties or the country, for that matter.

We are planning to offer two introductory genealogy workshops in November. One will be in French and one will be in English. More information about date and time will be available soon.

There is a new Facebook page. This is an addition to our Facebook group. The page will provide another way to interact with our members and the genealogy fans at large. You can like us and follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/genCornwall>

You can also find our latest newsletter on our website, along with the current list of books available for sale.



## **News from your genealogy centre....continued**

On February 22, GENASL took part in the Heritage Fair at the Cornwall Square. The event was popular and many stopped by our display to enquire about our services.



Thank you to our volunteers!

Pictured are left to right: Liliane Heagle, Larry McDonald and Louise Yelle.

The executive continues to engage with other like minded groups in our region and beyond. Visits have included the Dundas County Archives, Glengarry County Archives, Lost Villages Historical Society, OGS Brockville, Chesterville Historical Society and Patrimoine L'Orignal-Longueuil Heritage.

On June 12<sup>th</sup>, our president Nichole White will be doing a presentation "Searching for your genealogy" at the Glengarry Nor'Westers and Loyalist Museum. On July 10<sup>th</sup> it will be Ginette Guy Mayer's turn with "The Women of SDG & Akwesasne."

These events are part of museum's "Tea Talks" at 2pm. The presentation will be followed by a tea. It is \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members.

The museum is at 19651 John Street (County Rd. 17) in Williamstown.



### **Mark your calendar for our next Annual General Meeting!**

The planned date is Monday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at 1 pm. Our quest speaker is yet to be confirmed.

The AGM will be at the Cornwall Public Library, upstairs.

## **The Perils of Over-Reliance on Technology in Genealogy**

**by Ginette Guy Mayer**

In our group, I can identify the “Techies” and the “Paper” people quite easily. There is nothing wrong with either or both. We often work together to provide our members with complete pictures. I have no qualm with using modern technology. I don’t fear it. I embrace what it can provide in ease of access to research and documentation. But I don’t accept the results blindly. I remain a sceptic of every piece of information that comes my way...many of us do.

While it is possible to build a family tree that will include 1,000 or more relatives, the “click and attach” methods have perils. Too much unverified information quickly becomes overwhelming. How did my great-grandfather’s daughter-in-law become his sister-in-law? (answer at the end of the article)

### **The Copy-Paste Problem: Misinformation on Digital Platforms**

Online family tree platforms like Ancestry, MyHeritage, and FindMyPast have made genealogy more accessible than ever, but they also come with a major drawback: the rapid spread of unchecked information.

- One Error Becomes Many: When one person incorrectly identifies a family link or misdates a birth, others often copy that information into their trees without checking original sources.
- Merging Without Vetting: Algorithms sometimes “suggest” family members based on similar names or locations, but these matches may be incorrect, especially with common surnames. This is often seen where multiple generations of men are called “William”...or for Quebec and Catholics where everyone is called “Marie” and “Joseph” somewhere along their commonly used name.
- Loss of Context: Digital trees often lack the nuance and detail that real lives contained; wars, illnesses, economic migrations, or name changes are often absent.

### **The Illusion of Completeness**

- Many new genealogists fall into the trap of thinking, “*If it’s not online, it doesn’t exist*” or “*If it’s online, it must be right.*”
- Digitization is still ongoing. Vast numbers of records, especially local newspapers, church registers, court documents, land deeds, and school archives, remain in physical repositories.
- Not including deceased children. Some who are building their family tree without including deceased children. That is a mistake. Why? Because often the names were “reused.” So if not included and labelled properly, you may later come across two family members with the same name, often born close together, but one lived and married while the other died soon after birth. It also completes the picture that your ancestors had 20 children, only 10 of whom survived to adulthood.

### **The Value of Offline Research: Newspapers, Archives, and Narrative Sources**

To create a fuller, more reliable family history, we may consider leaving the screen and exploring traditional sources.

#### **Newspapers: The Forgotten Goldmine**

- Obituaries and Birth Notices often contain family names, occupations, places of origin, and relationships not found in vital records.

- Social Columns: Reveal marriages, visitors from out of town, illnesses, or participation in community life that round out a person's story.
- Legal Notices: Announcements about probate, land sales, bankruptcy, or lawsuits can lead to previously unknown branches of a family.

### **Historical Narratives and Local Histories**

- Town and county histories, often written in the late 19th or early 20th centuries, offer rich context. Even if your ancestor isn't mentioned by name, these works describe the world they lived in—economies, migrations, disasters, and industries.
- Family memoirs or anniversary booklets (such as "centennial books" from churches or schools) often include family sketches with personal anecdotes, photos, and timelines.
- Oral history collections at libraries or historical societies may contain interviews with people who knew your ancestors.

### **Archives and Libraries**

- Local archives and genealogical societies often hold original documents that aren't available digitally: land grants, school attendance ledgers, immigration forms, and business records. Our GENASL library includes several fully completed family genealogies. Why reinvent the wheel and spend countless hours on research when a starting point is already available? You can build that in.
- Churches and cemeteries may have their own registers that predate government records or contain more detail (sponsors, witnesses, burial location).
- The census is a gold mine. At first, I did not rely on the census data very much. In time, though, I have come to see the information it contains as a window into a family. The census will include the trade or employment of the wage earners, some could be sons and daughters. In some years, the income was included, allowing you to see how well your ancestors were doing. It shows whether they owned or rented and the value of their property. Children, who are not well documented, will often show up on the census listing. It can be interesting to see that your grandmother lived with her mother-in-law for years after her marriage.

### **Conclusion: A Balanced Approach**

To avoid repeating and spreading falsehoods, genealogists must be sceptical of every piece of information they come across. Building a family tree is a process, more of a marathon than a sprint. It is more than names and dates. The information you find should be used to draw a portrait, a complete picture of your ancestors. It can include:

- Digital tools (indexes, DNA tests, scanned records). Do not dismiss DNA tests, as they can narrow the playing field when searching for missing information and relatives. The DNA test will put you in the right ball park, and the link to a traditional family tree will score the home run you need.
- Offline sources (newspapers, archives, personal interviews).
- Historical and social context.

Only by weaving all three together can we transform a skeleton of names and dates into a living, breathing story that honours the truth of our ancestors' lives.

So.... How did my great-grandfather's daughter-in-law become his sister-in-law? He married his daughter-in-law's sister. It happened in my family tree where father William and son William Jr. married sisters. Confusing much? The lines in the tree crissed crossed all over. William Jr.'s sister-in-law was also his step-mother! I'll leave at that!