

WANT A SECOND DATE?

TIP: *Records from other countries may be in a foreign language, as well as in a unique calendar style, so expand your world and learn both.*

Ah, don't we all love the romance languages, the mellifluous multisyllabic voices, the accents and dialects, the mysterious italicized words in novels and textbooks. Maybe, until we look for or at old documents about our ancestors. *No comprender*, you say?

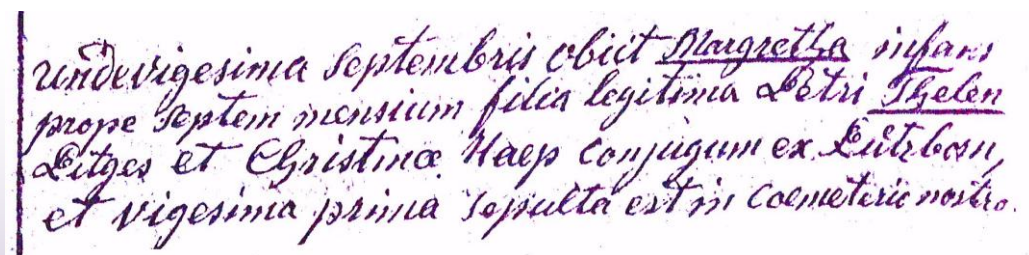
QUIRK 1: Old church records, particularly in Europe, were often written in **Latin**. Dates may have numbers in three styles: **Cardinal**, **Ordinal**, and **Roman**, sometimes in combination.

Cardinal numbers are essentially digits: 1, 2, 3 (or spelled out *unus, duo, tres*, etc.).

Ordinal numbers pertain to the order in which they appear (first, second, third, fourth), and have "st," "nd," "rd," and "th" added to the digits: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th. In Latin, they may be spelled out *primus, secundus, tertius, quartus*, etc., or a digit followed by "da," "ma," "na," "ta," or "va."

Roman "numerals" aren't numbers at all, but letters signifying certain numbers: I = 1; V = 5; X = 10; L = 50; C = 100; D = 500; M = 1000. When all strung together, they look like alien code: MDCLXVI (which is 1666—easy, right? Good luck finding ancestral records back that far!).

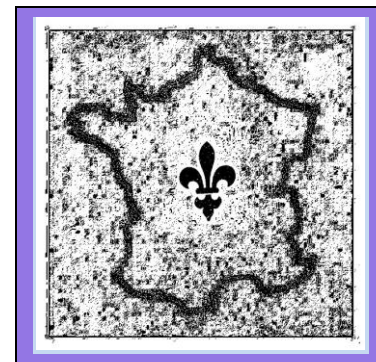
More fun comes in when you have to add or subtract a day or two if dates are spelled out. For example, the 21st of a month is *viginti una* (Cardinal) or *vigesima prima* (Ordinal)—twenty plus one. But the 18th of a month is *odeviginti* (Cardinal) or *duodevigesima* (Ordinal), meaning two days before the 20th; and the 19th is *undeviginti* (Cardinal) or *undevigesima* (Ordinal), *viz.*, one day before the 20th. This doesn't apply to the 28th and 29th, which are *viginti octo* / *vigesima octava* (twenty plus eight) and *viginti novem* / *vigesima nona* (twenty plus nine). The terms may end in *-us* rather than *-a*. Here is an example of a typical death entry in a Catholic parish book:



*undevigesima Septembris obiit Margretha infans
prope septem mensium filia legitima Petri Thelen
Litges et Christinae Haep conjugum ex Puetzborn,
et vigesima prima sepulta est in Coemeterio nostro.*

TRANSLATION: *Nineteenth September died Margretha infant
nearly seven months legitimate daughter of Peter Thelen
Litges and Christina Haep married couple of Puetzborn,
and twenty first she is buried in our cemetery*

QUIRK 2: After a royal family was guillotined, a new government of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* established the **French** Revolutionary or Republican calendar, stripping out the pagan and bourgeois names of months, replacing them with *au naturel* terms. The months of Spring, for example, were *Germinal, Floreal, Prairial*. All months had 30 days, and the five days left over, equivalent to Gregorian calendar days in mid-September, were “complimentary” feast days dedicated to virtues, genie (genius), labor, opinion, and rewards. (I guess the extra day in leap years was for just goofing around.) It takes a genie—or a good chart—to magically convert 17 Pluviose IV into 5 February 1796.



This calendar started on 1 Vendémiaire I (22 September 1792) and lasted until Napoleon Bonaparte nixed it, effective 10 Nivose XIV (31 December 1805). But anyone who had ancestors in **areas controlled by France** during these 13 years needs to know this arcane dating system. Two good sources for calendar conversion charts are *Acadians In Exile* by Rev. Donald J. Hebert (Cecilia, Louisiana: Hebert Publications), pages 734-747, and www.windhorst.org/calendar.

If the original record was written using German terms for the newly-named months, as occurred in parts of the Rheinland (now Rhine Province), Luxembourg, and Elsass-Lothringen (Alsace-Lorraine), you get to do a multistep conversion. Here’s a chart to help:

FRENCH MONTHS	GERMAN TERMS	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	DATE RANGES
<i>Vendémiaire</i>	<i>Weinmonat, Herbstmonat</i>	<i>Vintage (wine) month</i>	<i>late Sept-Oct</i>
<i>Brumaire</i>	<i>Nebelmonat, Dunstreich</i>	<i>Fog month</i>	<i>late Oct-Nov</i>
<i>Frimaire</i>	<i>Frostmonat, Reifmonat</i>	<i>Frost (or sleet) month</i>	<i>late Nov-Dec</i>
<i>Nivose</i>	<i>Scheemonat, Schneulf</i>	<i>Snow month</i>	<i>late Dec-Jan</i>
<i>Pluviose</i>	<i>Regenmonat, Regenuf</i>	<i>Rain month</i>	<i>late Jan-Feb</i>
<i>Ventose</i>	<i>Windmonat, Windulf</i>	<i>Wind month</i>	<i>late Feb-Mar</i>
<i>Germinal</i>	<i>Keimmonat, Keimbar</i>	<i>Sprouts month</i>	<i>late Mar-Apr</i>
<i>Floreal</i>	<i>Blütermonat, Blühbar</i>	<i>Flower month</i>	<i>late Apr-May</i>
<i>Prairial</i>	<i>Wiesenmonat, Grasbar</i>	<i>Pasture month</i>	<i>late May-Jun</i>
<i>Messidor</i>	<i>Erntemonat, Erntegiebig</i>	<i>Harvest month</i>	<i>late Jun-Jul</i>
<i>Thermidor</i>	<i>Hitzemonat, Hitzegiebig</i>	<i>Hot month</i>	<i>late Jul-Aug</i>
<i>Fructidor</i>	<i>Fruchtmonat, Früchtegiebig</i>	<i>Fruit month</i>	<i>late Aug-Sep</i>

Next Month: ALPHABET GOOP

This fact sheet is a public service by Evelyn Roehl to help people find records about their ancestors. Contact her by e-mail, kinhunters@gmail.com, or phone 206-634-1709.

Please feel free to share this with friends, fellow kin-seekers, and family history and genealogical organizations.