



Understanding and Converting Calendar Dates In Genealogical Records

Bernard N. Meisner

German Genealogy Group of North Texas

Which calendar(s) did your ancestors use? You may be familiar with the Julian and Gregorian calendars, with their Old and New Style dates, but do you know when your ancestors' country moved from one to the other? Have you found records for your ancestors that include dates from the Catholic or Lutheran Liturgical Calendars, the Jewish/Hebrew calendar or the French Republican Calendar? Learn about these calendars and how to convert dates from one to another.

Calendar Origins

The earliest calendars were likely used for:

- Agricultural purposes:
 - Timing of monsoon rainfalls. When was it safe to plant crops without freezing?
- Astronomical purposes:
 - Timing of religious holidays. Celebration of solstices and equinoxes.

Historical Calendars Found in Genealogical Records

The Julian Calendar

- Adopted in 45 BC.
- Consisted of 365¼ days divided into 12 months of either 30 or 31 days, except for February (28 days).
- Every fourth year was a leap year.

The Gregorian Calendar

- Proclaimed by Pope Gregory XIII to go into effect in October 1582.
- Century years were no longer leap years (1700, 1800, 1900), except those years divisible by 400 (think 2000!).
- To correct the errors of the Julian calendar Thursday 4 Oct 1582 was followed by Friday 15 Oct 1582.
- Actual year of adoption varied by country and religion (the last was Greece in 1923).
- Great Britain, including the American colonies, adopted it in 1752.
 - To correct the (then) 11 day error Wed 2 Sep 1752 was followed by Thur 14 Sep 1752.
- From 1155 until 1752, the legal year in England, Wales, Ireland and Britain's American colonies began on 25 March.
 - Scotland had made the change to starting the new year on 1 January in 1600.

The Liturgical Calendar

- Determines when feast days, including celebrations of saints, are to be observed, and which portions of Scripture are to be read on any given day.
- The year is divided into six seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, The Triduum, Easter, and what is now called Ordinary Time.
- Each year begins on the First Sunday of Advent.
- In addition to feast days, the Sundays all have had specific names, which were sometimes specified as dates in parish registers:
 - Septuagesima, Easter, Whitsunday/Pentecost, Tenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday.
- Eastern Orthodox churches followed the Julian calendar, while Western churches follow the Gregorian calendar. In some years there may be a month's difference in the days of celebrations.
 - Since 1923 many Orthodox churches have converted to using the Gregorian calendar.
- The Liturgical calendar has been changed/amended over time.

Historical Calendars Found in Genealogical Records (cont.)

The French Republican Calendar (1793-1805)

- Intent was to remove all religious and royalist influences, and part of a larger attempt at decimalization.
- Used in government records in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Malta, and Italy.
- Years began on the Autumnal Equinox, and were numbered I to XIV.
- There were 12 months of 30 days each, divided into ten-day weeks called decades.
- The months were grouped into four seasons. The month names in each season rhymed.
- Five complementary days were placed after the final month of each year, with an additional “leap” day added every four years.

The Jewish/Hebrew Calendar

- The official calendar of the State of Israel. Also used as a religious calendar worldwide.
- Many historic Jewish records have Hebrew calendar dates.
- Years are generally counted from 3761 Before the Common Era, the year of the creation of the world according to the Genesis creation narrative and subsequent Biblical stories.
 - A new day on the Hebrew calendar starts at sundown.
 - There are 12 (or 13) months in each year and seven days in the week. Months in the Jewish calendar alternate between 30 & 29 days.
 - In leap years a 30 day intercalary month, Adar II, is added.
 - Hebrew dates are written right-to-left: day, month, Hebrew year.
 - Transliterations of dates are often written left to right.
 - Numerical values may be written using letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Converting Dates Between Calendars

- There are websites available for converting dates among the Julian, Gregorian, French Republican and Jewish/Hebrew calendars. Confirm when the place where the record was made moved from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, if appropriate.
- For dates on the Liturgical Calendars, locate a calendar for the year in question to determine the day of the week on which Christmas occurred.
- Easter Sunday can fall on any date between March 22nd and April 25th. The U.S. Bureau of the Census website is one of many that provides the date of Easter Sunday for any given year.
 - Once the date of Easter is known, you can count backward and forward as appropriate to determine the dates of the various Sundays before and after Easter.
 - Septuagesima, Sexagesima & Quinquagesima are the three Sundays before Lent.
 - Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter.
 - White/Quasimodogeniti Sunday is the first Sunday after Easter.
 - Exaudi Sunday is the Sunday before Pentecost.
 - Whitsunday/Pentecost is the seventh Sunday after Easter.
 - Trinity Sunday is the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Western Christian Liturgical calendar, and the Sunday of Pentecost in the Eastern Christian calendar.
 - The number of Sundays after Trinity Sunday can vary from 22 to 26.

Length of Time Between Two Dates.

- Online tools are available to compute the length of time between two dates or, given the age of an individual on the date of their death, compute the date they were born.

Calendar Oddities

- When Britain changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, it moved the beginning of its tax year from March 25th to April 5th so that it would not lose 11 days of tax income!
- When the French Republican calendar was introduced in November 1793, they specified 22 Sep 1792, the day the National Convention proclaimed France a republic and also the Autumnal Equinox, as the start of Year I.
 - So, there was no Year I. They just went from 1793 on the Gregorian calendar to Year II on the Revolutionary calendar.
- The Russian Bolsheviks switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1918.
 - The switch in calendars is the reason the November 1917 revolution is called the “October Revolution,” since it occurred in late October according to the Julian calendar.
- Sweden used the Julian calendar until 1699, when it changed to its own version of a leap year free calendar, planning to catch up to the Gregorian calendar by 1740.
 - They returned to using the Julian calendar in 1712, adding an additional leap day (30 Feb 1712), resulting in a 367 day year.
 - They re-adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1753, with Thursday 17 Feb 1753 followed by Friday 1 Mar 1753.
- Saudi Arabia decided to cut costs by switching from the lunar-based Hijri calendar to the Gregorian calendar on 1 Oct 2016.
 - The Hijri calendar is 11 days shorter than the 365-day solar year. As a result, government workers lost 11 days of work and wages, but employees of private companies, which already used the Gregorian calendar, did not lose any pay.

References

All links verified 19 April 2024

Gregorian and Julian Calendars.

FamilySearch.org. *A Guide to the Different Types of Calendars Used Around the World.*

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/types-of-calendars>

FamilySearch.org. *What Calendar Do We Use? | All about the Gregorian Calendar.*

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/what-calendar-do-we-use-gregorian>

FamilySearch.org. *All about the Julian Calendar.*

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/all-about-the-julian-calendar>

FamilySearch.org. *Julian and Gregorian Calendars.*

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Julian_and_Gregorian_Calendars

Wikipedia.org *Old Style and New Style Dates.*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Style_and_New_Style_dates

Ancestor Search, 2015. *The Change from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar.* Contains the dates many countries/regions changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar.

<http://www.searchforancestors.com/utility/gregorian.html>

References (cont.)

The Liturgical Calendar

The Catholic Church Liturgical Calendar. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgical_year

The Pillar, 2021. Christians Have Two Dates For Easter: Here's Why.

<https://www.pillarcatholic.com/p/christians-have-two-dates-for-easter>

Schober, Katherine. My Ancestor's Birthday is Septuagesima: Working with Feast Days in Church Records.

<https://germanologyunlocked.com/my-ancestors-birthday-is-septuagesima-working-with-feast-days-in-church-records/>

French Republican Calendar

Wikipedia.org. *French Republican Calendar*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Republican_calendar

FamilySearch.org. *French Republican Calendar*.

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/French_Republican_Calendar

Jewish Calendar

FamilySearch.org. *All About The Jewish Calendar*

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/jewish-hebrew-calendar>

Calendar Calculators and Converters

Fourmilab, 2015. *Calendar Converter*. Includes many calendars, including Gregorian, Julian, Hebrew, French Republican and several others. *Note year error when converting between those Julian years starting on March 25 and Gregorian years.* <https://www.fourmilab.ch/documents/calendar/>

CalendarHome.com. *Converts A Date*. Based on the Fourmilab calculator, but with all dates shown on one screen. Includes many calendars, including Gregorian, Julian, Hebrew, French Republican and several others. *Note year error when converting between those Julian years starting on March 25 and Gregorian years.* <https://calendarhome.com/calculate/convert-a-date>

United States Census Bureau, 2021. *Easter Dates from 1600 to 2099*.

<https://www.census.gov/data/software/x13as/genhol/easter-dates.html>

yourOnlineRoots.com, 2007. *Calendar Of Ecclesiastical Holidays in Norway*.

<https://kirchenkalender.com/>. To figure out which church holidays fell on which date during a certain year, type the year in the field "Geben Sie das Kalenderjahr ein", and the dates of all holidays will appear. *Note: Uses Julian Calendar dates until 18 Feb 1700.*

The Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Conference. *Liturgical Year Calculator*. This utility will generate a table of festivals for any given year, according to the calendar which was in use in most of Europe at the time of the Reformation, and thus adopted by the Lutheran Church. This calendar is also used in the Anglican church. <https://olcc.us/en/liturgical-resources/liturgical-year-calculator/>

Sterkh, Valeriy. *Calculator Of The Church Calendar Of The Russian Orthodox Church For Any Year*.

https://sterx.ru/en_a_kalendar.htm

International Communion Of The Charismatic Episcopal Church. *Calculate Calendar Dates of any Church Year*. <https://iccec.org/prayerandreadings/Seasons/>

Calendar Calculators and Converters (cont.)

Morse, Steve, 2011. *Converting between Julian and Gregorian Calendar in One Step*. Includes an extensive list of when many countries converted from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar.

<https://stevemorse.org/jcal/julian.html>

Morse, Steve, 1999. *Jewish Calendar Conversions in One Step*. Includes Gregorian and Julian calendars.

<https://stevemorse.org/jcal/jcal.html>

Calculator.net, 2024. *Date Calculator*. Compute days between two dates, or add/subtract the number of years, months and days to/from any given date. <https://www.calculator.net/date-calculator.html>