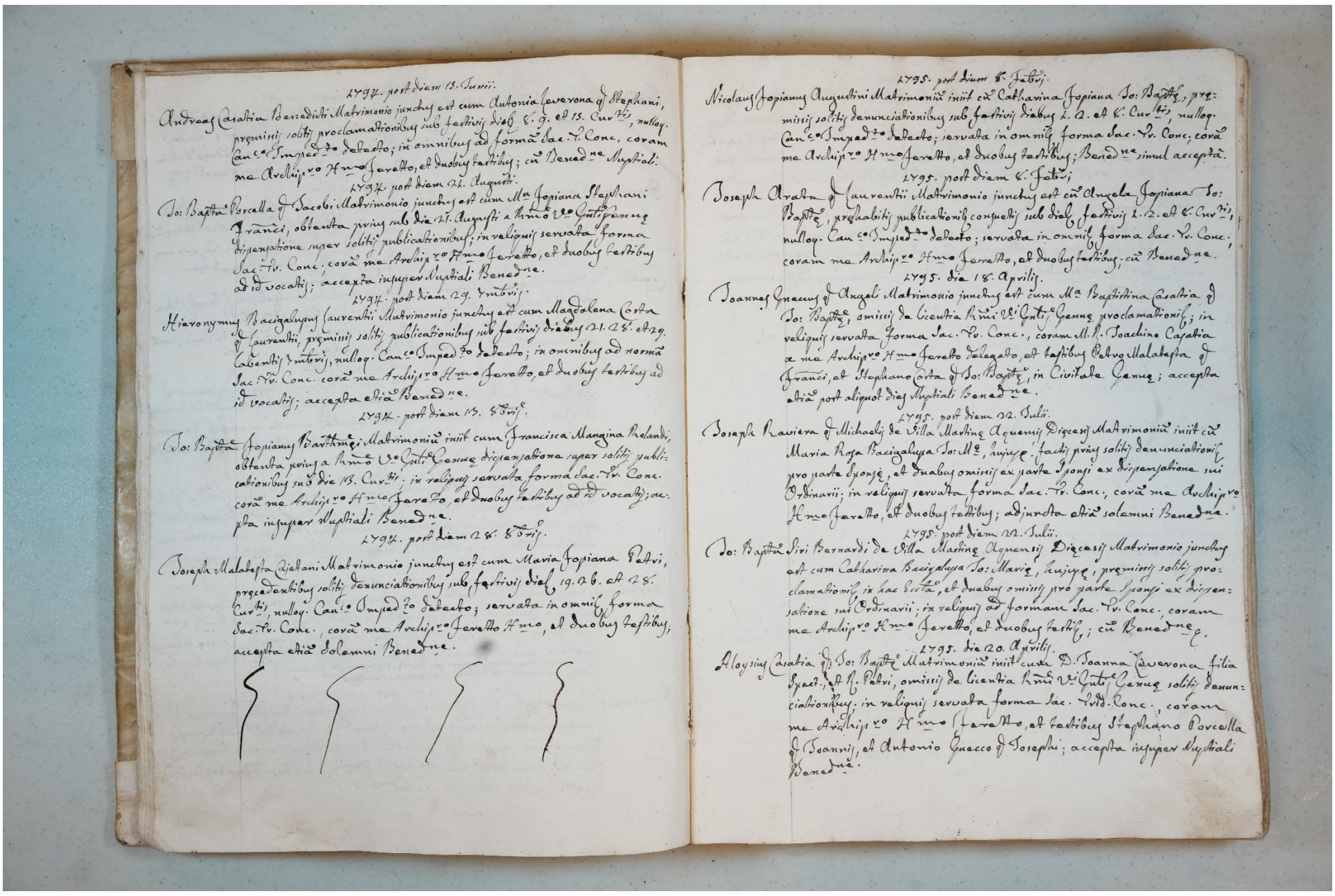
How to Read These Marriage Entries



The above two-page spread preserves a series of Catholic marriage records written in Latin according to the legal norms established after the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Although the handwriting and phrasing may appear formulaic or abbreviated, the entries follow a consistent structure. Understanding that structure allows the viewer to interpret not only these entries, but others throughout the volume. Note that in the entries the actual date of marriage is not recorded. Rather other dates that precede it are recorded and of the records available in the Parrocchia di San Giovanni Battista in Cicagna, these appear to be the only extant records of these marriages and thus provide the best possible known date nearest to the actual date of marriage.

1. What Each Entry Is Designed to Record

Each record is not simply a narrative of a wedding day. Instead, it is a **legal certification of canonical compliance**. Every entry documents three essential elements:

(a) The prerequisites for marriage

These appear in one of two forms:

- **Publication of banns** (*solitae publicationes*)
  The banns—public announcements of the intended marriage—are listed with **three specific dates** (for example, 8, 9, and 15 June; or 21, 28, and 29 of a month).
- **Dispensation from banns**
  When banns were waived, the entry instead records:
  dispensatione super solitis publicationibus
  ("a dispensation having been granted concerning the customary publications"), along with **a single date**—the date the dispensation was issued.

(b) Confirmation of proper legal form

Nearly every entry includes a clause such as:

in religione servata forma Sacri Concilii Tridentini

This affirms that the marriage was conducted according to the requirements of the **Council of Trent**, meaning:

- before a priest,
- in the presence of witnesses,
- and in proper ecclesiastical form.

(c) The marriage itself

The act of marriage is recorded, but not always with a precise calendar date. Instead, a distinctive formula is used.

2. The Meaning of "post diem …"

At the beginning of each entry appears a phrase such as:

post diem 15 Junii
post diem 21 Augusti
post diem 29

This means:

“after the day of …”

This phrase is crucial. It indicates that the marriage took place **after a specific prior date**, rather than on that exact date.

3. How the Dates Function

The date referenced in *post diem* ... corresponds to the **last legally required step before the marriage could validly occur**:

- If banns were published, it refers to the **final bann date**.
- If banns were dispensed, it refers to the **date the dispensation was granted**.

Thus:

- When banns are listed as 8, 9, and 15 June, the entry reads *post diem 15 Junii* → the marriage occurred **after June 15**.
- When a dispensation is recorded “under the date of 21 August,” the entry reads *post diem 21 Augusti* → the marriage occurred **after August 21**.
- When banns are listed as 21, 28, and 29, the entry reads *post diem 29* → the marriage occurred **after the 29th**.

4. Why the Exact Wedding Date Is Not Given

Modern readers often expect a specific wedding date, but these records serve a different purpose.

Their primary goal is to document that:

1. The required banns were properly published **or** a dispensation was granted.
2. The marriage followed those requirements.
3. The ceremony was performed according to Church law.

Once these conditions are satisfied, the exact day of the wedding becomes **legally secondary**. The phrase *post diem* ... establishes that the marriage occurred **after all prerequisites were fulfilled**, which is sufficient for canonical validity.

5. A Consistent Pattern Across the Volume

This same structure appears repeatedly throughout the register:

- Entries with banns list **three dates**, followed by *post diem* referencing the last.
- Entries with dispensations record **one date**, followed by *post diem* referencing that date.
- Each entry concludes with confirmation of Tridentine form and the presence of priest and witnesses.

This consistency shows that the register functions less as a chronological diary and more as a **formal record of lawful marriages**.

6. How to Interpret Dates in These Records

Because of this system, each entry provides:

- A **definite earliest possible date** for the marriage
  (the date named after *post diem*)
- But **not the exact day** the ceremony occurred

For example:

- “after 15 June 1794”
- “after 21 August 1794”
- “after the 29th (of the given month)”

The actual wedding took place sometime **after** that date, but the exact day is not specified.

7. What These Entries Reveal

Taken together, the entries demonstrate a careful concern for:

- proper public notice (through banns),
- lawful exemption when necessary (through dispensation),
- and strict adherence to ecclesiastical procedure.

They provide a clear window into how marriages were **regulated, documented, and validated** in late 18th-century Catholic communities.

8. Summary

These records should be read not as simple event listings, but as **legal attestations**. Each entry confirms that all required steps were completed and that the marriage followed them in proper order. The phrase *post diem* ... marks the threshold after which the marriage could occur—and assures the reader that it did.