Researching Your Dutch Ancestors

an introduction

1. Civil Registration

Introduction

The Dutch Civil Registration ('Burgerlijke Stand') is an important source for genealogical research. The French emperor Napoleon introduced the system in the Netherlands, first in 1796 in the provinces Limburg and Zeeuws Vlaanderen, and from June 1811 onwards in the other provinces. All births, marriages and deaths were officially registered by the local authorities, using a standard form. There were always two copies: one for the municipality and one for the province.

Archives and internet

The registers of the Civil Registration are kept in provincial archives. Everyone has free access to the certificates, and can make copies for a small fee. Usually there are alphabetic indexes available for every ten years. But if you are not living in the Netherlands, there are other possibilities. With the help of many volunteers the Dutch archives have created an online index: WieWasWie (WhoWasWho, see below).

Privacy rules

Of course the Dutch government protects the privacy of their citizens. So births become public after 100 years, marriages after 75 years, and deaths after a 50 years. At the moment the birth certificates are generally available until 1916, the marriages until 1941, and the deaths until 1966.

Marriage Certificates

Introduction

From 1811 onwards, all Dutch marriages are registered officially by the local authorities. The marriage certificates of the period 1811-1941 are kept in provincial archives, and are freely accessible. It are very informative documents for genealogical purposes.

Standard form

The registrar used a standard form. Of course the names of bride and groom were listed, but also their birth and living places, their ages, and their occupations. The certificate mentions the names of the parents, as well as their place of residence. Witnesses were present, and their names, ages and occupations are mentioned in the last part of the document. At the bottom of the certificate you will

find the signatures of the couple, the witnesses and the registrar. Sometimes not all of them signed for a simple reason: not everyone was able to write.

Appendices
Usually there are also appendices of the marriage certificate available. The registrar only could marry a couple if they provide him with a few official documents. This are the appendices, or in Dutch the `huwelijksbijlagen'. He needed at least copies of the birth certificates of the bridegroom and the bride and a document of the National Army. But if one of the parents of the couple was already deceased, the registrar also asked for a copy of the death certificate. The amount of documents is sometimes more than 10, including for example copies of death certificates of grandparents, notarial deeds concerning approval of the marriage by parents living far away, or a statement about the poor financial situation of the couple.

2. Population Registration (bevolkingsregister)

Introduction
The Dutch population registration started in 1850. It is a kind of ongoing Census, based on the information of the Census of 1849. From 1850 on, every change was registered. The original volumes are listing the residents of every address. Movements, births, deaths, marriages .... everything was written down. Even if a child went to a boarding school for a few months, you can probably find it in the population registration.

Bad news
Although this sounds promising, thereare several difficulties:

The registers are often hard to read. Until 1920 the system was organized by address. If a family moved, then the original listing was crossed out. This may make the entry less legible.

Every ten or twenty years they started over, because the books became very mixed up, with a lot of references to additions in new volumes. Of course they also made a new index. So you have to check all the indexes, and if you are looking for a family with a frequent surname, that can be a tough job.

The population registration records are usually not kept in the provincial archives, but locally. Sometimes in the town hall, or in separate municipal archives. It is also possible that the population registration is kept in regional archives.

Good news
There is also good news. If you are able to find the address of the town hall of smaller places, they often send you copies for free or for a very small fee. Of course there are no guarantees, every municipality is different. The archives of big towns like Amsterdam have their own websites, where you can find their rules and fees. Increasingly these sites also publish searchable databases of the populations registers, in some cases with scans of the original documents.

After 1920
The records were no longer organized by address, but by family. Every family was registered on a card, and it became a lot easier to find all the different addresses. Especially poor people moved often every half year in the cities. In addition from 1938 until 1994 onwards every person got a card.

Nowadays there is a digital system. The records of the population registration from 1938 till now are not public, to protect the privacy of living people. However if someone is deceased, the personal

records (card or electronic file) are transferred to the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie. You can order a copy of a 'persoonskaart' via email (fees apply).

3. Online Resources in English

Introduction
Genealogy is popular in the Netherlands. The archives used to be crowded, but focus has shifted towards online research. There are a lot of genealogical sites, most of which will yield documents in Dutch, not an easy language for a foreigner. Below you will find a list of the major sites in English.

Digital resources
With the aid of volunteers, archives have created with the WieWasWie project ("WhoWasWho"). It will become an index to the civil records of birth, marriage, and death, and much more. The database is not finished yet, but you can use it already, at no cost. A very good starting point for your genealogical research in the Netherlands.

Another important site is Digital resources Netherlands and Belgium, which contains a near complete list of links to digital resources freely available for the Netherlands and Belgium, sorted by province. New entries are described in English on the page 'Nieuw'.

Other sites
Not all the archives have a proper English site, but you will at least find their URL and online inventories on the Dutch Archives Web. If you are looking for living relatives, try the online phone directory.

Finally, the newspaper database Delpher includes various papers (partly in English) published in the U.S.A. between 1849 and 1958. These were targeted at Dutch immigrants, such as 'De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode', 'Onze toekomst' (Our future), The Illinois observer, and The weekly observer. You can search and view scans of the articles for free.

4. Dutch Surnames

Introduction
In 1811 the French emperor Napoleon made surnames in the Netherlands obligatory. Family names were widespread at the time though. With few exceptions, the surname of a family did not alter anymore after 1811, although minor spelling alterations may have been introduced since.

Top ten family names
These were the most frequent surnames in the Netherlands in 1947 (source):

De Jong	the young
De Vries	the Frisian
Jansen (Janssen)	son of John
van den Berg (van der Berg)	from the mountain
Bakker	baker
van Dijk	from the dike
Visser	fisherman
Smid	smith
Meijer (Meyer)	land agent

Origins

The origins of the above listed surnames are self evident. Some surnames refer to qualities of people, such as De Jong but also De Groot (the big one) or Dik (overweight). There are a lot of geographic related names like De Vries and Van den Berg. By the way, there are no mountains at all in Holland! A third group is formed by the occupations. And last but not least: there are quite a number of surnames derived from first names, the so called patronymics.

Prior to 1811 everyone who had no surname was called by his or her first name, followed by the name of the father. If there was e.g. a father Klaas with a son Jan, the son was named Jan Klaassen or Klaasz. Even if the family had a surname, for example Bakker, the name of the father was often included. So the son was Jan Klaasz Bakker.

Changing the name of a family (before 1811)

As stated previously, surnames were not required before 1811. There was no central registration system, so changing your name was simple. If a certain shoemaker signed with his first name and his occupation ('Schoenmaker'), maybe his children also signed with the same surname. But if his son became a carpenter, it is possible that the last name of the son was Timmerman. In other cases nicknames became real names.

Do not despair! Not all names were changed. There are families with a fixed name that goes back until the sixteenth century or earlier. If you are interested in more details, try to find a genealogist with experience in a certain region.

Dutch First Names

Introduction

Dutch first names are confusing for foreigners. Nevertheless some knowledge of the naming patterns can be helpful during your genealogical research.

Naming patterns

Knowledge of the naming patterns is important. Until the 1960's children were often named after their relatives, especially their grandparents. For example, my official first names are Maria Wilhelmina. My maternal grandmother was Maria, my maternal great grandmother was called Wilhelmina. But my parents chose another name for the everyday life: Miriam.

The above mentioned example is not exactly following the classic Dutch naming pattern. In the old days it was very usual to name the first born son after the paternal grandfather, and the first born daughter to the maternal grandmother. The second son got the name of the other grandfather, and so on. You will notice that the classic model provides two names for sons and two for daughters. Often that was enough. If a child died at an early age, the next baby of the same sex got the first name of his deceased sibling. A family with only daughters maybe gave the third girl the female version of her grandfather's first name.

Male or female

Female names are often easy recognizable by the suffix -je or -a. Maartje, Trijntje, Neeltje, Cornelia, Maria and Anna are all women names. Several names have a male and a female version:

Cornelis or Kees	-	*Cornelia, Cornelisje or Neeltje*
Johannes or Jan	-	*Johanna or Jantje*
Nicolaas or Klaas	-	*Klaasje or Klasina*
Hendrik	-	*Hendrika or Hendrikje*
Wilhelmus or Willem	-	*Wilhelmina or Willempje*

By the way, large local differences occur. In Frisia the names were not the same as in Limburg. There is enough literature available, but of course in Dutch. Feel free to mail me your questions or contact another Dutch genealogist.

How Trijntje became Kate

Dutch emigrants sometimes changed their first names. Of course the male name Thijs was not very practical in the USA, because nobody can pronounce the Dutch vowel ij properly. So Thijs became probably Matthew. This may not sound logical to you, but Thijs is an abbreviation of Matthijs, and that is Matthew in English. But other people just chose an English name, with no relation at all to their original name.

To conclude a short list with the Dutch forms, followed by the corresponding English names:

Jan	-	*John*
Petrus, Pieter, Piet	-	*Peter, Pete*
Thijs, Matthijs	-	*Matthew Dirk - Richard*
Klaas, Niek	-	*Nicholas, Nick*
Teunis	-	*Anthony*
Hendrik	-	*Henry*
Catharina, Trijntje, Kaat	-	*Catherine, Kathryn, Kate*
Elisabeth, Bets, Bep, Lijsbet	-	*Elisabeth, Liz*
Maartje, Marie, Rie, Maria	-	*Mary*

5. Dutch Peculiarities

Introduction
In my contact with American genealogists I discovered that the genealogical basics are not completely the same all over the world. So if you are starting with your research in the Netherlands, there are a few traps you need to be warned about!

Married women
The first difference is very simple: in the United States, married women no longer use their maiden name. Here in the Netherlands, the maiden name of a married woman is always used in official documents, for example in death certificates. But also as the birth of a child is registered, the maiden name of the mother is always listed. For genealogical research this is very handy, as you can well imagine.

Dates
Maybe you have already noticed: in the Netherlands dates use the format dd-mm-yy. So 7-11-1822 means November the seventh 1822.

Alphabetical ordering
There are a lot of Dutch surnames with prefixes, for example Van Ophem. You will find this surname in an index under the O! And Peter den Ouden is also listed under the O.

Kwartierstaat
Excuse me? Sorry, a little bit of Dutch slipped in. The English equivalent is pedigree or Ahnentafel. The kwartierstaat is a very frequent method of organizing genealogical dates in the Netherlands. This kind of genealogical table usually begins with the genealogist. He or she is number one. The parents

receive the numbers 2 (father) and 3 (mother). The grandparents have the numbers 4 (paternal grandfather), 5 (paternal grandmother), 6 (maternal grandfather) and 7 (maternal grandmother). Are you still following me?

This system includes all of the ancestors in maternal and paternal lines. Females always have an odd number, males an even number. To find the parents, you only have to double the number of a person. For example: the parents of my great great grandfather #24 Jan van Ophem are #48 Jan van Ophem and #49 Trijntje Appelman. If you are good with arithmetic you will notice that the fifth generation of ancestors is starting with the fifth power of 2, and so on.

Symbols
The last topic regards a small list of genealogical symbols:

*	indicates a birth
~	indicates a baptism
x	indicates a marriage
†	indicates a death

6. The Dutch Language - Genealogical Basics

Introduction
Dutch belongs to the family of Germanic languages, like English and German. Many of the Dutch words resemble English or German words but, of course, it is still a different language. The pronunciation is difficult for foreigners. On paper the language is easier to understand than in oral communication. Fortunately genealogical records are in writing!

Spelling
The first official spelling rules are from 1804. Later the spelling changed a few times, most recently in August 1996. Before 1804 the spelling was not fixed. It is important to look up all kind of variations, especially in names.

geboren, geboorte	born, birth
gedoopt, doop	baptized, baptism
ondertrouw	(publication of the) banns
getrouwd, huwelijk	married, marriage
overleden, dood	deceased, death
begraven, graf	buried, grave
wonend	living
zoon	son
dochter	daughter
vader	father
moeder	mother
ouders	parents
grootouders	grandparents
dag	day

maand	month
jaar	year

Occupations

boer	farmer
bakker	baker
timmerman	carpenter
arbeider, werkman	laborer

Days and months

The days of the week are not very difficult to recognize: zondag, maandag, dinsdag, woensdag, donderdag, vrijdag, zaterdag. These are the months: januari, februari, maart, april, mei, juni, juli, augustus, september, oktober, november, december. In church registers of the eighteenth century and earlier, you will sometimes find the notation 7ber, 8ber and 9ber. That means September, October and November.

Numbers

In birth, marriage and death certificates the date is usually written in letters. For example vierentwintig januari achttienhonderdvijfentachtig means January, 24, 1885.

een	1		dertien	13
twee	2		veertien	14
drie	3			
vier	4		twintig	20
vijf	5		dertig	30
zes	6		veertig	40
zeven	7		vijftig	50
acht	8		zestig	60
negen	9		zeventig	70
tien	10		tachtig	80
elf	11		negentig	90
twaalf	12		honderd	100

Hints

We could only list the really basic terms in this article. More extensive information is available from the Dutch Genealogical Word List at the FamilySearch Web site.

7. Church Registers

Introduction

The parish registers are the primary resources for genealogical research before 1811. Churches usually kept records of baptisms and marriages. Sometimes there are burial registers and member lists

as well. The majority of the church books are available in the provincial archives. Bigger places sometimes have their own local archives.

Dutch Reformed Church

In the Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden (between approx. 1580-1795) the Dutch Reformed Church was privileged. Only marriages in this church were considered legal. Members of other churches had to marry for the local authorities, or in the Dutch Reformed Church. Public functions were in generally only open for members of this church.

Roman Catholic Church

The mother church, following the Reformation, was still the biggest church in some regions, especially in the south of the country. The registration of baptisms and marriages was obliged by the Council of Trent (1564-1563). Of course not all the old registers are preserved. Often the text is in Latin, or in a mix of Latin and Dutch.

Mennonite Church

One of the characteristics of the Mennonite religion is that they do believe that only adults should be baptized. Their baptism registers are referring to persons approximately between the 18 and the 25 years old. If you are lucky there are child birth registers preserved. In general there are not so much records kept.

Other religions

There were also Jews, Lutherans, Huguenots, Presbyterians and so on in the Netherlands.

Information in church registers

The information recorded in church registers varied. It is good practice to write down the entire text, especially if you do not understand the language. The witnesses of baptisms and marriages were often relatives.

Abbreviations

Introduction

In Dutch genealogical records a wide variety of abbreviations are used. It is important to know what to look for and to know what Dutch words these abbreviations are representing. Here is a list of the most common shortened forms, along with the full word in Dutch and its English translation.

Genealogical Abbreviation List

j.m.	jongeman	single man
j.d.	jongedochter	single woman
wed.	weduwe	widow
wedn.	weduwnaar	widower
zn. (v.)	zoon (van)	son (of)
dr. (v.)	dochter (van)	daughter (of)
w.	wonend	living
alh.	alhier	here, in this place

meerderj.	meerderjarig	of age
minderj.	minderjarig	minor
r.k.	rooms katholiek	Roman Catholic
n.h.	nederlands hervormd	Dutch Reformed
dg.	doopsgezind	Mennonite
ev. luth.	evangelisch luthers	Evangelical Lutheran
prot.	protestant	Protestant
knd.	kind	child
kndn.	kinderen	children
ged.	gedoopt	baptized
geb.	geboren	born
tr.	trouwde	married
overl.	overleden	died
begr.	begraven	buried
D	dopen	baptism
T	trouwen	marriage
B	begraven	burial
L	lidmaten	members (of a church)
gem.	gemeente	Municipality

Place of Origin

Introduction
Before you can do research in Dutch resources, you need to find the place of origin of your immigrant ancestors. It is a very important piece of information, because the records in the archives are organized by place.

Step One
Always start in your own home. Do you have a family bible? Is not there a place included? Look first carefully at all the family papers you own: obituaries, birth, marriage and death certificates, letters, and so on. Do not forget to check the reverse side of old photographs. If you are not able to find a clue, ask relatives to do the same. Hopefully you already found the place of origin of your immigrant ancestors. Otherwise continue with step two.

Step two
There are a few things you can subsequently do at home. Have a look in the Netherlands Emigration and Immigration Genealogy section of the Familysearch site (you may have to create a –free-account to view the actual resources). Of course you can also try to find your ancestors in the main nationwide database for the Netherlands WhoWasWho. Please note that a search with a frequent surname without a location may be a challenge.

Other possibilities
Are you still looking for the place of origin of your ancestors? Try these resources:

- passenger arrival records
- immigration and naturalization papers
- church records

Passenger lists prior to 1900 for the Netherlands are far from complete, but from 1900 onwards there is specific information available regarding the Holland-America Line.

8. Research Without Travel to the Netherlands, online assistance

Introduction
Frequently we are contacted by people living outside the Netherlands, who are planning a 'genealogical visit'. Of course it is nice to see the home town of your ancestors, hear the language, and see the original documents. But it is certainly possible to do a lot of research in your own country.

Family History Centers
The majority of the Dutch records are filmed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They have family history centers all over the world, where everyone is welcome. You can find the addresses of the centers and the available resources on their website. Sources available online for a specific location can be searched via this link, to view the data you'll have to register for a free account.

Mailing lists, newsgroups and message boards
Mailing lists for the Netherlands include gen-benelux and soc.genealogy.benelux newsgroup. There are many social media groups dedicated to genealogy in the Netherlands (Facebook, etc.).

You can also try the Netherlands Genealogy Forum of Gen Forum.

Volunteers
The language can be a major problem, online translation services (such as Google Translate) may be of help. Look up volunteers for the Netherlands are listed on a few sites, try for example the Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness. Finally, you could contact us via email and we will try to forward you query to one of our contacts.