Documentation: Ward Register Paramaribo Dataset

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Link to dataset: https://hdl.handle.net/10622/VLN8FD

Contents

Introduction

Since 1828, the colonial government of Paramaribo, Suriname, kept a detailed register of the inhabitants of the city. The registers have been partly preserved for the period 1828-1847. Over the years, these sources have been transcribed by citizen scientists. These transcriptions were published

in dozens of separate pdf documents and have now been made available in one harmonized, structured dataset, to facilitate research by scholars and the wider public.

The ward registers ('Wijkregisters') contain rich information, with names, age, occupation, ethnicity and religion of free inhabitants, as well more incidental information on enslaved people living on an address. Therefore, such a database will function as a metaphorical time machine of a mid-nineteenth colonial city, showing residential patterns changing through time, how people moved through the city. Moreover, the database will provide a powerful tool for researching family history and genealogy. Societal and heritage project partners Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy (SSG) and National Archives Suriname and the Netherlands guarantee that the project results will be findable and available for the general public.

The ward register database fits in a wider context of the Historical Database of Suriname & the Caribbean (HDSC). Its purpose is the construction of a data system that contains information on the historical populations of the Dutch Caribbean in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. It is a collaboration between the National Archives of Suriname, Curaçao and the Netherlands, Anton de Kom University and many other partners, and with the support of hundreds of citizen scientists, coordinated at Radboud University, Nijmegen.

The primary sources

In 1828, the colonial government decided to instigate the ward registers, 'in order to precisely determine the population of Paramaribo.'[1] The ward registers are rich sources, but with obvious limitations, being a registration that served the needs of a colonial bureaucracy and therefore providing a biased representation of Paramaribo society. This bias is most obvious in the different way free and enslaved people are registered. For each free person, the register contains: address, name, age, occupation, religious affiliation and skin color (either 'white', designating European descent, 'colored', for mixed descent, or 'black', for African descent) and, since 1837, the register also keeps track of the number of people in slavery that were housed on the plot, their skin color ('black' or 'colored'), the sex of the enslaved persons and whether they were adult or child.

The register leaves out several important characteristics of free persons: the relation to the head of the household is not documented which makes it difficult to make claims about family relations within households. Moreover, the sex of free persons was not registered.

For each district, an annual register was created by the so-called ward masters (wijkmeesters). They were citizens appointed by the Governor, usually living in the district under their charge. They had a sworn duty to keep record of all free inhabitants per address/plot and keep track of mutations. Inhabitants who failed to register were eligible for a fine. The head of household was the first person registered on the card. This could be the owner of the house and/or land, but it could also be a renter. In some periods, the registers document the owner of the property. Sometimes also the owner(s) of enslaved persons is registered and it can be ambiguous whether registered ownership is in regards to the house, land or enslaved persons. After 1836, the number of enslaved persons is registered and the amount of enslaved persons is usually registered on the same line as a free

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[1] Gouvernementsblad 1828, No. 4 (5 March 1828), in: *Gouvernements-bladen van de kolonie Suriname 1816-1855* (Rotterdam 1856), 67. Original Dutch text: 'ten einde den staat der bevolking van de stad Paramaribo naauwkeurig te constateren.'

person, but it is not certain if that person is (always) the legal owner. For a better understanding of these legal relationships, linkage to the Slave registers is crucial and more research is needed for a better comprehension of how the ownership of enslaved persons functions in the Ward registers.[2] Usually, enslaved persons were not named in the register, but there are quite some exceptions, where enslaved persons are listed among the free persons, but usually only with a first name, as they were not allowed to carry surnames. Also, sometimes information on enslaved persons (including names) is noted in the remarks.

In the earliest years the ward master went door to door to register all inhabitants. Later, the head of each household was obliged to report all inhabitants in his or her household and any mutations, to the ward master. The register was kept in duplo: one copy was kept by the ward master and one copy was deposed at the municipal office. After a redistricting in 1837, Paramaribo went from 4 city districts to eight: A to F plus two 'outer districts'.

The original registers are kept in the National Archives of Suriname (NAS). It is not known which one of the two copies is preserved. The ward registers were part of archival material that had been returned from the National Archives of the Netherlands (NAN) to Suriname in 2009.[3] The content of the archives had been scanned before the transfer and the images were made available on the website of the NAN.

The registers are kept in three distinct archives. The earliest registers form part of the archives of the municipal government of Paramaribo (1828-1832). This contains an incomplete set of 11 registers from the years 1828 and 1830-1832. In 1833, the municipal government was dissolved and the ward registers came under the responsibility of the Governor. The archives of the Governor of the Dutch West Indies (1828-1845) contains an also incomplete set of 64 volumes of ward registers, ranging from 1828 to 1845. The registers of 1846 and 1847 are part of a separate archival collection (that apparently has never left Suriname). The descriptions of the registers contain some mistakes: the wrong year and/or district are mentioned in the register title.[4]

Transcription

The registers have been transcribed by a number of citizen scientists. The lion's share of the work has been done by John Sang-Ajang, a Dutch resident with Surinamese ancestry. In the early 2000s, he started transcribing the registers by hand in the reading room of the NAN in The Hague, when the physical registers were still kept here. Later, he started copying his handwritten transcriptions into Microsoft Excel 1997-2003 spreadsheets (.xls): each register in a separate file. While inputting the transcriptions into the spreadsheets there was an extra check using the scans that had become available in the meantime. However, some cards that had been transcribed manually, have not been made available as scans – the originals may have been lost, this is not clear. In case the scans were

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[2] Galen et al, 2019 ; Galen et al 2023; Galen & Hassankhan, 2018.

[3] Overview of archives transferred from national archives in Netherlands to Suriname in 2009: https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/suriname/overgebracht-naar-suriname-en-digitaal-beschikbaar [consulted 31-3-2024]

[4] See the 'note' on the website of the SSG: https://www.allesurinamers.org/databestanden-met-zoekfunctie/#wijkregisters [last consulted 7-6-2024]

missing, only the handwritten transcriptions have been used (less than 500 records). Entering the data into the Excel spreadsheets was also done by Cleo Valies en Carla Jonkers. They are all members of the Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy (Stichting Surinaamse Genealogie, SSG). The SSG has supported the project and the Excel files were all published in pdf format on the SSG website, with support from Henk van der Mast en Pieter Bol.[5] In 2023-2024, history students at Radboud University Damian Pikulić, Elian Brethouwer and Daan Nillesen have assisted in transcribing a number of registers. Finally, the surviving registers from 1846-1847 have been transcribed in 2009 by Philip Dikland, architect in Suriname.

In combining the transcriptions, there has been no systematic check against the scans. Therefore, errors that might have been made, remain in the dataset. Also, because the transcriptions have been realized by various persons, some inconsistencies can remain in the dataset.

Merging, restructuring and cleaning the transcription data

Main goal of the current project was to merge all the separate transcription files into a single database and structure the information into distinct fields in order to facilitate data analysis. The purpose of the original Excel transcriptions had been first and foremost to provide genealogical information for users interested in researching family history. This usually entails queries into individuals or specific (family) groups. Purpose of the integrated database was not only to make this type of genealogical research easier by offering one single search prompt instead of having to search a multitude of documents, but also to engender historical research into wider socio-historical patterns of this nineteenth century colonial city. Therefore, varied information on occupation, ownership, gender, et cetera that was fitted into a single broad 'comments' field in the transcriptions, needed to be restructured into separate fields. The next step was to harmonize and standardize parts of the restructured data. The following section describes this process step by step.

Merging

Merging the data into a single spreadsheet required first to identify the different formats. After 1836 a slightly more extensive form was used, that included the ethnicity of (free) inhabitants and also a registration of the persons in slavery housed on the address. The figure below shows how the original fields in the transcription files were merged into a new format. Some metadata was added: unique record identifiers (those were not present in the transcription files), and an identifier per card. In the original files an empty yellow row indicated the partition between cards. Normally, each card would contain a single address, although there are exceptions: cards with more than one address and (crowded) addresses that took more than one card. In a later stage of the project, these card ids were used to link the information to the scans (see below). When the data of a specific register was added to the central spreadsheet, a unique identifier (mergeid) was assigned to each record.

Range	Original headings (level 1)	Or. head. (level 2)	Or. head. (level 3)	New headings	Description

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[5] https://www.allesurinamers.org/wijkregisters/ [last consulted 31-3-2024]

1828-1847	(Vrije) bewoners	(familie)naam		surname	Surname of free inhabitant
1828-1847	(Vrije) bewoners	(Voor)namen en voorvoegsels		firstnames	First name or initials of free inhabitant (sometimes of enslaved person, who was not allowed to carry a surname)
1828-1847	Leeftijd			age	Age of inhabitant
1828-1847	Religie			rel	Religious affiliation of inhabitant
1828-1847	Wijk, straatnaam, wijknummer van het perceel			address	Address
1828-1847	jaar			year	Year (edition of register)
1828-1847	Opmerkingen van de wijkmeester en van de auteur			remarks	Remarks of ward master and/or of the transcriber (the latter usually between [square brackets])
1837-1847	Etniciteit			ethn	Ethnicity of inhabitant, usually either 'black', 'mixed' or 'white'
1837-1847	slaven	kleurling	m	xma	Number of enslaved male adults of mixed origin
1837-1847	slaven	kleurling	v	xfa	Number of enslaved female adults of mixed origin
1837-1847	slaven	kleurling	j	xmc	Number of enslaved male children of mixed origin
1837-1847	slaven	kleurling	ms	xfc	Number of enslaved female children of mixed origin
1837-1847	slaven	neger	m	bma	Number of enslaved male adults of African origin
1837-1847	slaven	neger	v	bfa	Number of enslaved female adults of African origin
1837-1847	slaven	neger	j	bmc	Number of enslaved male children of African origin
1837-1847	slaven	neger	ms	bfc	Number of enslaved female children of African origin
n/a	n/a			district	added metadata: the name of the district (A-F, first or second outer district)
n/a	n/a			s_order	sort order, to keep the order of records in the original transcriptions
n/a	n/a			id	unique record id
n/a	n/a			cardid	id for each distinct card
n/a	n/a			mergeid	unique id after adding the records to the spreadsheet with all merged data

Restructuring and cleaning: Overview of all fields in the table

After merging all transcriptions into a single MS Excel spreadsheet, the next phase was restructuring and 'cleaning' the data. This was an iterative process, starting with splitting information into columns, followed by a round of cleaning, followed by splitting into more columns, followed by more cleaning, et cetera. This process can be divided into several topics. Below, the various fields are described per topic. Only a selection of the fields has been used in the publication on the NAS website, the full dataset is available as a download at IISG Dataverse, https://hdl.handle.net/10622/VLN8FD.

Metadata

A number of metadata fields has been added during and after merging the transcription files into a single dataset: a unique identifier per record and per card, a reference to the archival source, both the paper record and the scan, and the year of the edition.

<ID>	Unique record identifier
<arch> <inv>	The register is divided among different archives; <arch> contains the code of the archive, <inv> contains the inventory number.
<Kaart ID>	A unique card id, consisting of the year of the register, the district and an arbitrary number.
<Scan>	This column contains a link to the scan, if available.
<Jaar>	Year of the edition of the register.

Person names

The columns with surnames and first names was differentiated into more fine-grained categories:

<Voornaam> <Firstnames_orig>	First names ('voornamen'): the first name(s) (sometimes initials). The <firstnames_orig> column contains the original entries from the transcription files.
<Tussenvoegsel>	In Dutch naming conventions, prefixes are often part of the surname, but are also viewed as separate entities that are not used for alphabetization. Therefore, these have been set apart a separate column. This is even more important in the Surinamese context, because when people in slavery were manumitted they could receive a surname that referred to the previous owner, with the (literally) possessive preposition 'van' or 'de'.
<Achternaam> <surname_orig>	Surname ('achternaam' or 'familienaam'): the surname without prefix. Some manumission names are very literal references to previous owners, for example: "Rebecca van De Weduwe J. M. De Vries", meaning that Rebecca was formerly owned by the widow J.M de Vries. The <Surname_orig> column contains the original entries from the transcription files.
<name_alt>	Alternative spellings. Transcribers added alternative spellings for first and last names. These are annotations that are external to the original source, and have therefore been moved to a separate column.
<prefix>	Prefixes: elements that are not part of the actual name, such as titles (Mr.), indication of manumission ('the free' ('de vrije'), et cetera.

\<weduwe\> \<fn_dec_spouse\>	\<Weduwe\> is an indication that a person was widow. The surname of the former husband is treated as the surname of the widow. In some cases, the first name(s) or initials of the former husband were included, these are stored in \<Fn_dec_spouse\>
\<Meisjesnaam\>	Maiden name ('meisjesnaam'): the register would often mention the maiden name of married or widowed women, often with the term 'geboren' ('born as').
\<suffix\>	Suffixes such as 'junior', or patronymic.

Person attributes

The dataset contains a variety of attributes of (usually free) inhabitants (although sometimes also people in slavery are recorded along with free inhabitants). Some of these attributes were already separate categories in the transcription data, others were extracted from the general 'comments' field.
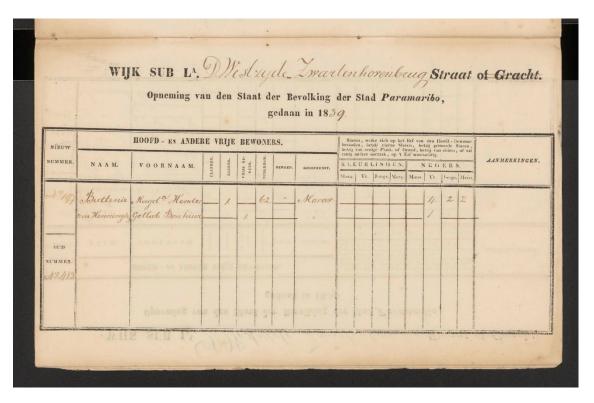
\<Religie\> \<Rel_orig\>	Religion ('godsdienst'): this was a separate columns in the transcriptions, usually registered as an abbreviation \<Rel_orig\>. The abbreviations were standardized according to the 'WR religion standardization 20240606.csv' table. The standardization in \<Religie\> is closest to the original transcription files, the version in \<Rel_stand2\> is more generalized.
\<Leeftijd\> \<Age_orig\>	Age (term used in the source: 'ouderdom') was a separate column in the transcription files. The original values are preserved in \<Age_orig\> . In order to allow for calculations, values have been standardized to natural numbers indicating years of age. If age was expressed in months, weeks or days, this has been calculated respectively as m/12, w/52 and d/365. In the case of enslaved persons, sometime only the attribute 'volwassen' (adult) or 'kind' (child) was known.
\<Sex\>	Sex ('geslacht') was not systematically documented. It has been added only in a few cases: 1) for the register of 1846, in a previous project, the sex variable was added by matching on first names and widow status[6]; M = male, V = Female, and when a match could not be made, the 'unknown' value was entered; 2) if a person in slavery was 'counted' in the columns indicating the number of enslaved persons, and a name was given for that person, a record was created and from the table the sex could be inferred.
\< Etniciteit\> \<Ethn_or\>	Racial category. After 1837, the original source divides the (free) population into three categories: white ('blank'), mixed ('kleurling') and 'free negro' ('vrije negers'). In the transcriptions the corresponding abbreviations B, K and N were used (see \<Ethn_or\>) and these have been translated into the terms Blanke (white), Kleurling (colored) en Zwarte (black). In the last case we chose to use a less offensive term, deviating from the original term in the source. In a few cases, the specific term 'Indiaan' (indigenous) was used.
\<Beroep\>	Occupation ('beroep'). In the original source, occupation was recorded in a separate column. But in the transcriptions, occupation was included in the general remarks field; this information was retrieved and assigned into this single column.
\<Herkomst\>	Origin ('herkomst'). In some registers, the place of birth of a free person was explicitly mentioned; often the place of birth was Suriname, often formulated as 'inboorling', or 'native'.

[6] Oort & Dikland, 2023.

From 1837 onwards, the registers contain a table that counts the number of enslaved persons in an address. These amounts are usually related to a free person registered on the card. Sometimes, several amounts of enslaved individuals are related to various free persons registered on the card. It is likely, but not guaranteed, that the free person in question is the legal owner or guardian of the enslaved person or persons. Sometimes, numbers of enslaved persons are not related to a free person registered on the card. Often, a note would be added with the name of the owner, who was not residing at the address where the enslaved were housed.

In the example below, nine enslaved persons are registered in the table. In the first row, a total of 8 enslaved persons is related to the first free person, Magdalena Buttenie. One enslaved person is linked to the second free inhabitant of this address, Gotlieb van Henningsen. The register remains inconclusive whether this is an ownership relation.

<Xma> <Xfa> <Xmc> <Xfc> <Bma> <Bfa> <Bmc> <Bfc> <Unk>	The registers from 1837 onwards contain a table with the amounts of enslaved persons housed on a certain address, divided into 8 categories: 'colored' (x) or 'black' (b), male (m) or female (f) and adult (a) or child (c). <Unk> refers to a few cases where no further information is known about the enslaved except their number.
<Aantal slaafgemaakten>	This column adds the total number of enslaved per record.
<Enslaved>	A value of '1' in this field signifies that the person information in this record (row) refers to an enslaved person. If person information about an individual enslaved person could be inferred from the source, a value '1' is entered in

	this field (counting towards the total amount of enslaved in the <Aantal slaafgemaakten>field). Information on ethnicity, sex and age (adult or child) was then transferred from the table respectively to the < Etniciteit>, <Sex> and <x¾Ěȑk> columns.

Person remarks

The register contains many remarks about persons that do not fit any of the specified fields described above. They have been sorted into various columns. Moreover, the transcribers have also added information about persons retrieved from other sources that is also preserved in the dataset.

<Diversen> <Enslaved_remarks> <Freeperson_remarks>	<Diversen> contains all remarks about persons from the source. These have been divided into <Enslaved_remarks> and <Freeperson_remarks> indicating information specifically about enslaved and free persons respectively.
<Eigenaar>	Information on the owner of the plot and/or house, if mentioned explicitly in the register.
<Annotaties>	Annotations added by transcribers, usually by John Sang-Ajang. These are enrichments from external sources and the validity of these claims has not been checked. The field also includes spelling variations from the column <Name_alt>.

Location and address

The address and location information has been differentiated quite extensively, in order to facilitate the linking of the information to other location-based data, in particular the Concordans of Paramaribo street addresses that has been created by Henk Muntjewerff[7]. The street names have been standardized according to the list 'street standardization 20240328.csv'. Addresses in 19th century Paramaribo were a combination of a district code and a number; the name of the street was not essential to the address. In 1837 a redistricting took place, therefore 'old' and 'new' addresses are mentioned.

<Wijk> <Wijkletter>	Designation of the district written in full: <Wijk>, including the division in 'D, first part' and 'D second part'. For use by general public on NAS website. Designation of the district without the distinction between D1 and D2, in simple code: A, B, C, D, E, F, OF, OS, the latter two meaning first and second outer district respectively, for more specialist use to link location data: <Wijkletter>.
<Straatnaam> <Street_unq> <Address_orig>	Standardized street name ('street standardization 20240328.csv') based on the original street notation in <Street_unq>. The <Address_orig> column contains the full original address indication from the transcription files.
<nr>	Address number <nr>.
<Adres_richting_aanv> <Adres_aanvulling>	If the address contained additional information on the exact directions (left, right, north, south), it was added to this column. Any other addition information on the address was added here. For instance: on the corner of this or that street,

<Kamer> <Buurt> <Address_full>	et cetera. Information on the specific room ('kamer') or apartment can be found in this field. If the source mentioned the specific neighborhood ('buurt'), it is placed in this field. <Address_full> contains the complete address combined.
<Brt>	For the 'old' addresses until 1836, for some districts it is necessary to know the neighborhood to pinpoint the address. For example in district D, there were four neighborhoods that each had their own numbering. So address D, number 1, could point to 5 different addresses. Because the neighborhood <buurt> was not systematically mentioned in the source, the code for the specific neighborhood has been added, in order to make linking to other location data possible.
<OW> <NW>	The 'old' and 'new' address code ('OW', Oude Wijk or old district), as written in the source.
<Locatie>	Remarks about the location, from the source. For instance: (public) buildings, or the fact that a plot is uninhabited.
<Adress_remarks>	Remarks from the transcribers about the address, e.g. when an address is incorrect or hard to read.
<Concordans_Muntjw>	Remarks from the transcribers that specifically refer to Muntjewerff's concordans [https://www.concordansparamaribo.info/]

Provenance: further original transcription information

The original transcription has been preserved in several columns, in order to trace back the provenance of information. This was important because no identifiers exist in the original transcription files, making it complicated to refer to the source. In the previous descriptions, several of these original columns have been mentioned (<firstnames_orig>, <surname_orig>, et cetera). Below are the remaining categories:

<Remarks_orig>	This column contains the original 'remarks' column from the transcription files. This encompassed a very broad category of information, including occupation, information about free and enslaved persons and the location.
<Invoer_remarks>	Column with remarks from the transcribers from the original transcription file.
<S_order>	The original sort order of records in the original transcription files.

Enrichment

In the transcriptions files there was no reference to the link to a scan of the source. For use by the general public, such a link presents a valuable enrichment, it does no longer require a time a manual search through the scans to find the record. Thanks to the work of Nico Altink, for most records – almost 100.000 – a link has been added. In some cases, no scans are available (e.g. for the first outer district in 1846), or the originals appear to have been lost. In the latter case, the information in the

dataset was based on handwritten transcriptions that had been made by John Sang-Ajang in the 2000s.

In the database, there was already a 'Kaart ID. But the series of card ids did not always match the series of scans. In some cases, the order was reversed. And often, there would be gaps, for instance when a card was missing, when an empty card was scanned but not registered in the transcription database. So, it required extensive manual work to create these links.

Results: Data publications

The data is published in several ways. The base version of the data is a csv file published at IISG Dataverse [https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/HDSC] under the license CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. This is the most elaborate version of the data. Based on this version, a version is created for publication at the website of the National Archives of Suriname: https://nationaalarchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/wijkregister/persons This version does not contain all the fields of the dataset. The website offers a search interface that makes the data much more accessible to a general public. A third version of the data in rdf format is planned and will be available as download at the IISG Dataverse as well.

Corrections

The database may contain errors. If the error is in the original source, we leave it unchanged in the database. Errors created in the process of transcription or the merging of transcriptions, will be corrected. If you come across (unambiguous) errors, please report it in this web form: https://forms.gle/a5r4Qo66ba3ND5JWA.

License

The data is available under the license CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Colophon & Acknowledgements

The Ward Registers of Paramaribo 1828-1845 were transcribed between 2002 and 2024 by John Sang-Ajang, with assistance from Mr Kariomengolo, Cleo Valies and Carla Jonkers and student assistants Elian Brethouwer, Damian Pikulic and Daan Nillesen. The District Registers of 1846-1847 have been transcribed by Philip Dikland. Links to the scans have been added by Nico Altink. The individual files of the transcriptions were merged, structured and standardized by Thunnis van Oort, with financial support from CLARIAH-PLUS (184.034.023) and in cooperation with the Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy, the Historical Database Suriname & the Caribbean, Radboud University and

the National Archives Suriname. A download of the dataset is available at
https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/HDSC.

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