

Lesser Used Records For Research in the Netherlands

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Introduction

Many people have ancestors from the Netherlands. They may descend from merchants who settled in New Netherland in the 1600s, employees of the Dutch East India Company that settled in South Africa, Dutch farmers struggling due to the potato blight in the 1800s who settled in the Midwest of the United States, or young women who went back with a Canadian soldier after World War II.

The Netherlands had colonial and trade relations all over the world. Former colonies and trade posts include the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), the Netherlands Antilles, Suriname, New Netherland (now part of New York and surrounding states), Cape of Good Hope (now Cape Town, South Africa), the slave outpost of El Mina in present-day Ghana, and parts of India and Brazil.

Genealogists researching ancestors from the Netherlands quickly become familiar with the most used records for Dutch genealogy:

- Civil registration records of births, marriages, and deaths since 1811
- Population registers showing who lived where since 1850
- Church records of baptisms, marriages, and burials before 1811.

Especially before 1811, these commonly used records may not be enough to reliably prove parentage. The Genealogical Proof Standard requires us to do reasonably exhaustive research to minimize the chance that new evidence will overturn our conclusions. This presentation focuses on lesser used sources that we can use to research our ancestors in more detail.

Record types

Voluntary legal records

Preuptial agreements, last wills, estate divisions, property deeds, work contracts, debts, powers of attorney, etc. Before 1811: in notarial records in regions that had notaries, otherwise in series of voluntary records of the courts. After 1811: in notarial records. Notarial and court records are kept at local or regional archives.

Criminal records

Criminal cases are recorded in special series of court records. They may include protocols of interrogations or confessions, witness statements, minutes of court sessions, and verdicts. Capital crimes were only tried by courts with high jurisdiction. The death penalty was abolished in 1870. Punishment before say 1800: corporal punishment, execution, fines, workhouse, banishment. After say 1800: fines, prison sentences. Vagrants and beggars sent to pauper colonies in Drenthe. Prison records show physical description, crime, sentence, behavior in prison. Criminal court and prison records are typically kept at the regional archives in the provincial capital.

Military records

Scarce before around 1811. After 1811: Use marriage supplements or enlistment records to find regiment. Enlistment records kept at local or regional archives. Original muster rolls by regiment kept at National Archives in The Hague, scanning project underway. Some scans at *FamilySearch*.

Cadastral records

The Kadaster (cadastre) was introduced in 1832 to record property ownership including quantity and value, for legal and tax purposes. The whole country was divided into cadastral municipalities, each consisting of several sections that consisted of the actual plots. The original 1832 plots were drawn on overview maps and section maps (multiple sheets) and recorded in original indicator tables to indicate property owners. From 1832 onward: article-based ledger per owner to record all plots. Boundary changes recorded in auxiliary maps, leads to new plot numbers. Changes in ownership can be followed up in notarial records (property deeds, estate divisions).

Government administration records

Town or municipal records have information the administration of the town, including taxes, local militia, town employees, epidemics, poor relief, police matters. Records kept at local or regional archives. Provincial government records about civil servants, escalated matters kept at regional archives in provincial capital. National government of departments kept at National Archives.

Water board records

Large parts of the Netherlands are around or below sea level and prone to flooding. Many areas were reclaimed from the sea, lakes, or swamp land. Water boards are responsible for water management in an area, including supply of fresh water and maintenance of the dikes, water pumps/mills, drainage ditches, etc. Water board records include information about taxes, property owners, and elected officials. They are kept at water board archives or regional archives.

Trade companies

The most famous trade companies in the 1600s and 1700s were the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and Dutch West India Company (WIC) and its predecessor (OWIC). Records of these companies are kept at the National Archives in The Hague. Few WIC records survive because the archives were sold as scrap paper in the 1800s. VOC records are a rich source of information about its employees and voyages, especially the muster rolls, which are scanned and indexed on the National Archives website. Local chambers of the WIC and VOC created their own records, which may be found at local or regional archives.

Feudal and manorial records

In the medieval period, some property was not owned outright but held in fief from an overlord. Feudal chambers record these properties and obligations. Typically, the eldest son was entitled to succeed to the fief. In some eastern parts of the Netherlands, farms were worked by serfs who belonged to a manor of a lord. Regulations limited options to move or marry. Manorial registers record attendance of serfs at annual roll calls, marriages outside the manor, fines, and heriots paid after death or taking over a farm. Feudal and manorial records can typically be found in local or regional archives.

Cheat sheet for records before 1811

| If you're looking for... | ...first look at... | ...then look at... | ...and if that fails... |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Birth information | – baptismal records | – marriage records – baptismal records of children | – orphan chamber records – court records |
| Marriage information | – church marriage records | – court marriage records – marriage duties records | – orphan chamber records – court records |
| Death information | – church burial records | – orphan chamber records – court records – burial duties records | – voluntary court records / notarial records – church council minutes |
| Divorce information (rare) | – subsequent marriage record | – court records | |
| Emigration/immigration | – passenger lists (rare) | – voluntary court records or notarial records of family members | – collateral succession tax records |
| Parents | – church marriage records – baptismal records | – orphan chamber records – voluntary court records / notarial records | – court records |
| Children | – baptismal records | – marriage records of children | – orphan chamber records / court records – voluntary court records / notarial records |
| Property | – voluntary court records / notarial records | – town records – tax records | – orphan chamber records / court records |
| Address | – marriage records (rare to find an address but easy to check) | – voluntary court records / notarial records – census records | – tax records |
| Neighbors | – tax records – census records | – voluntary court records / notarial records | – town records |
| Occupation | – voluntary court records / notarial records | – census records | – court records – guild records – town records |
| Religion | – baptismal records – church membership records | – church marriage records – burial records | – church council minutes |
| Military career | – marriage records | – muster rolls (rare) | – court records |
| Poor ancestors | – church poor administration – orphan records | – tax records | – town records |
| Criminal ancestors | – criminal court records | – church council minutes | |
| Graves | – lists of graves in churches (only richer people) | | |

Cheat sheet for records after 1811

| If you're looking for... | ...first look at... | ...then look at... | ...and if that fails... |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Birth information | – birth records | – population registers – personal record cards | – newspaper announcements |
| Marriage information | – marriage records | – population registers – personal record cards | – newspaper announcements – notarial records |
| Death information | – death records | – population registers – personal record cards | – newspaper announcements – graves |
| Divorce information | – marriage records | – court records – population registers – personal record cards | – newspaper announcements – notarial records |
| Emigration/immigration | – population registers – personal record cards | – passenger lists – emigrant lists | – police registers of aliens |
| Parents | – marriage records – death records | – birth records – population registers | – newspaper announcements |
| Children | – population registers – personal record cards | – birth records of children | – marriage records of children – death records of children – death duties files – guardianship records |
| Property | – cadastral property registration | – notarial records – death duties files | – newspaper articles |
| Address | – population registers – personal record cards | – death records – birth records | – newspaper articles |
| Neighbors | – population registers | – tax records – address books | – voting records – property registration |
| Occupation | – population registers – personal record cards | – marriage record – death records – birth records of children | – newspaper articles – property registration – notarial records |
| Religion | – population registers | – church membership records – baptismal records | – newspaper articles |
| Military service | – marriage supplements | – enlistment records – muster rolls – military records | – population registers – notarial records |
| Poor ancestors | – church poor administration – city poor administration | – pauper colony records | – prostitution registers |
| Criminal ancestors | – criminal court records | – prison records | – police records – correspondence of the municipality |
| Graves | – cemeteries | – newspaper announcements | |

Finding records

1. **Search national databases** like *Open Archives*, *WieWasWie*, *Archieven.nl*. See “Important websites” below.
2. **Check Digital Resources Netherlands and Belgium.** Go to <https://www.geneaknowhow.net/digi/resources.html> and search by province and town.
3. **Check the FamilySearch catalog.** FamilySearch has a range of scanned records that are not indexed yet. See <http://familysearch.org> > Search > Catalog.
4. **Find the archives.** Typically, larger cities have a city archive, smaller municipalities work together in a regional archive. Each province has a regional archive in the provincial capital. See map of archives: <https://archiefwiki.org/wiki/Categorie:Archieven> or do a Google search for name of municipality plus word “archieff.” Archives often publish indexes and scans of a wide range of records.
5. **Check the finding aids/catalogs.** This will tell you the types of records they have. These can typically be found at the website of the archives. Many archives use *Archieven.nl* (<http://www.archieven.nl>) and/or *Archives Portal Europe* (<http://www.archivesportaleurope.net>) as an extra channel for their finding aids. Some archives offer scanning-on-demand via their catalogs, for free or for a fee.

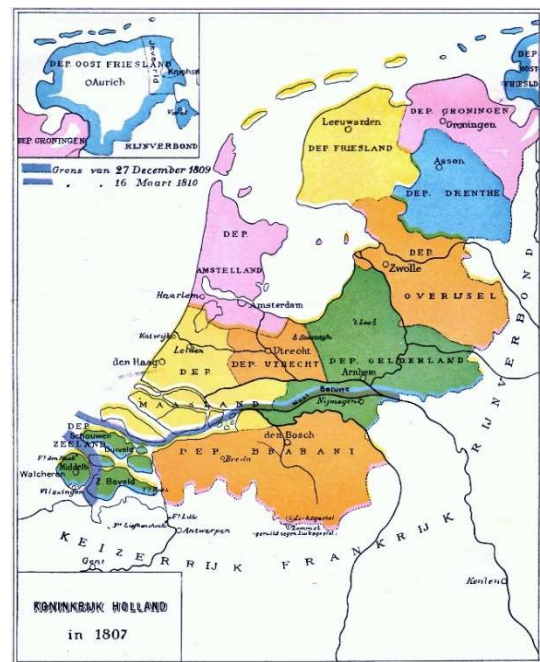
Provinces of the Netherlands

Many Dutch records are kept at the provincial level. These maps show the location of the different provinces and their capitals.



Current map of the Netherlands showing provinces and capitals

Credits: Scipius, [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Netherlands) (CC-BY-SA)



Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1807 (public domain)

Important websites

- Archieven.nl*. <https://www.archieven.nl>. Portal used by many archives in the Netherlands. Search “Persons” for indexed genealogical records and “Archives” for catalogs and finding aids (some have scanning-on-demand button).
- Beeldbank Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed*. <http://beeldbank.cultureelerfgoed.nl>. Image bank of the Cultural Heritage Service. Includes scans of 1832 cadastral records. Search by name of town and then filter for OAT (original indicator tables), minuutplannen (minute maps), verzamelplassen (overview maps). Also has photos of monuments.
- Cyndi's List – Netherlands*. <https://www.cyndislist.com/netherlands/>. Links to websites related to genealogy in the Netherlands.
- Digital Resources Netherlands and Belgium*. <http://www.geneaknowhow.net/digi/resources.html>. Links to online sources for research in the Netherlands and Belgium.
- FamilySearch*. <http://www.familysearch.org>. Indexed records via Search > Records. Imaged and unindexed records via Search > Catalog > search for name of town. See Search > Catalog > Netherlands > Military for muster rolls.
- HisGis*. <http://www.hisgis.nl>. Geographic information system with cadastral and land records.
- Militieregisters*. <http://www.militieregisters.nl>. Military enlistment registers for some parts of the country, including Amsterdam (free account required).
- Nationaal Archief*. <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl>. National Archives of the Netherlands. Keeps records of national government, departments, royal decrees, Zuid-Holland, military, Dutch East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC).
- Open Archives*. <https://www.openarch.nl>. Genealogical data provided by various archives.
- WieWasWie*. <https://www.wiewaswie.nl>. Genealogical indexes and scans of several archives in the country. Advanced search options require a subscription.

For further study

- Bals, Gerda. “Reading Dutch Handwritten Records.” *FamilySearch*. <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/93>. Video.
- Boeren, John. *Legacy Quick Guide: Dutch Genealogy*. PDF. [Legacy Family Tree](#), 2017 (\$).
- Hoitink, Yvette. *Dutch Genealogy*. <http://www.dutchgenealogy.nl>. Research in the Netherlands.
- _____. *Dutch Genealogy 101*. <https://www.playbackngs.com/7780-w143>. Audio recording of lecture at the National Genealogical Society Family History Conference in Michigan in 2018 (\$).
- _____. “Griete Smit’s Parentage: Proof in the Absence of Vital Records.” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 104 (December 2016): 245–256. Case study using church, court, and town records. PDF via <https://bcgcertification.org/learning/skills/genealogical-work-samples/>.
- Legacy Family Tree Webinars – Netherlands*. <https://familytreewebinars.com/netherlands>. Webinars about research in the Netherlands (\$).
- Van Drie, Rob. *Dutch Roots*. The Hague: Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, 2012. Book about researching Dutch ancestors. Kindle version available via [Amazon](#) (\$).

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