

## **Of citizens and scientists. From transcriptions to a database of the Paramaribo ward registers (1828-1847)**

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This paper reports on how the transcriptions by citizen scientists of a 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial source (the Paramaribo ward registers) have been transformed into a structured database. The original purpose of the transcriptions, created between ~2000 and 2023, was to facilitate genealogical research into ancestors from Suriname, a Dutch colony in South America. In the presented project, the data was restructured in a way that enhanced its useability both for the original purpose of genealogical research and also for broader insights into the history of a nineteenth-century tropical society in times of slavery. The goal of the project was that the increase of FAIRness of the data would go hand in hand with an increase in usefulness for the community of genealogists that originally created the transcriptions. Also, it aims to strengthen the ties between cultural heritage institutions and academic and non-academic user groups. The paper addresses the advantages and challenges of the collaboration between academic and non-academic stakeholders. It describes the creation and characteristics of the dataset and offers a sneak preview of its great potential for research into colonial urban history.

Since the 17th century, Suriname was a part of the Guianas that was colonized by the Netherlands. It was fully geared towards producing tropical agricultural products such as sugar, coffee, cotton, cocoa and wood. Until 1873, the labor for the plantation work was almost completely supplied by people who had been taken by force from Africa to South America and their descendants.

During the 19th century, Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname and the only urban settlement in the colony, grew in size and importance. Since 1828, the Paramaribo municipal administration kept a register of all inhabitants, called the 'wijkregister' (ward or district register). For each district, a 'wijkmeester' (ward master) was appointed who created and maintained a register of all inhabitants living in his district. For each free person, the register would contain: address, name, age, occupation, religious affiliation, skin color. Since 1837 it would also register the number of people in slavery that housed on the plot, their skin color ('black' or 'colored'), sex and whether they were adult or child. In sum, the registers contain very rich information over a period of almost two decades, allowing a researcher to track shifts in the socio-spatial make-up of the city.

The original ward registers are kept in the National Archives of Suriname and are available as scans via the National Archives of the Netherlands. The transcriptions for the years 1828-1845 have been made by John Sang-Ajang, Cleo Valies and Carla Jonkers, in collaboration with the Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy (Stichting Surinaamse Genealogie, SSG). The editions from 1846-1847 have been transcribed by Philip Dikland. The transcriptions are online available as separate pdf files: <https://www.allesurinamers.org/wijkregisters/>. Goal of the current project is to have the dataset published on the website of the National Archives Suriname before the start of the DH Benelux conference. Consecutively, an rdf version of the data will be hosted by the National Archives of the Netherlands.

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