

The Paramaribo Ward Register Database

A Fine-grained View of an Urban Slave Society (1828-1847)

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Abstract

This data paper details the transformation of the ward registers (*wijkregisters*) of Paramaribo (1828–1847) from transcription files into a structured research database. It provides the historical context of this source of population registration, outlines the processing and structuring of the data, and concludes with descriptive statistics from a single year (1846) to illustrate the dataset's potential and limitations for studying the social and urban history of a Dutch colonial city in the late slavery era. The resulting dataset is publicly accessible as a download and via a user-friendly interface on the website of the National Archives of Suriname.

Introduction

This data paper describes in detail the processing of the ward registers (*wijkregisters*) of Paramaribo for the period 1828-1847 from a set of transcription files into a structured dataset. The results are a detailed research database that opens up the history of a colonial city during the late slavery era which can also be explored by a wider audience through a user-friendly search interface on the website of the National Archives of Suriname.

The ward register was part of the governmental registration of the colonial population of Suriname's capital Paramaribo, ordered by address. On a yearly basis it registered the free and unfree persons who lived at each address in the city. Introduced in the same year of 1828 with the installation of a city administration, it functioned as a supplement

to the mandatory civil registrations of the birth, marriage, and death of free persons in the colony. This record was the only urban register of its kind kept in Suriname, for the simple reason that Paramaribo was the only city in the colony. The government did not find it necessary to register the locations of the (very small) free populations in the districts. People in slavery were documented in the so-called slave registers. Enslaved people made up the vast majority of the colony, in particular of the so-called divisions or districts, the plantation areas outside of Paramaribo where only a tiny minority of inhabitants was free.¹

Since the seventeenth 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 lumber. Until 1873, the labor for the plantation work was almost completely accomplished by people who had been taken by force from Africa to South America – and their descendants, since the transatlantic slave trade was officially abolished in 1808.

During the nineteenth century, Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname and the only urban settlement in the colony, grew in size and importance. In part, this growth was triggered by an increase of the free population of color through manumissions. As women were manumitted at a higher rate than men, the urban society that developed in Paramaribo had a skewed sex ratio.² There has been a recent uptick in interest in Paramaribo's social history, linked to a wider historiographical interest in Dutch colonial urban history.³ A structured dataset of the ward register of Paramaribo provides a systematic basis to further explore this rich history and provide new insights into the

1 Matthias Rosenbaum-Feldbrügge, Rick J. Mourits, Maartje A.B., Jasmijn Janssen, Björn Quanjer, Thunnis van Oort, Jan Kok, Coen van Galen, *Suriname slave and emancipation registers dataset Version 1.1*, IISH Data Collection, 2023, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/CSPBHO>; Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast. Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie 1750-1863* (Leiden 1993) 311.

2 Rosemary Brana-Shute, *The manumission of slaves in Suriname, 1750-1828* (dissertation, University of Florida 1985); W. Hoogbergen and O. ten Hove, 'De vrije gekleurde en zwarte bevolking van Paramaribo, 1762-1863', *OSO: Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse Taalkunde, Letterkunde en Geschiedenis* 20 (2001) 306-320; R. Hoefte and J.J. Vrij, 'Free black and colored women in early-nineteenth-century Paramaribo, Suriname', in: David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clarke Hine (eds), *Beyond bondage. Free women of color in the Americas* (Urbana (IL) 2004) 145-168.

3 E.g. E. Neslo, *Een ongekende elite. De opkomst van een gekleurde elite in koloniaal Suriname 1800-1863* (dissertation, Utrecht University 2016); K. Fatah-Black, *Eigendomsstrijd. De geschiedenis van slavernij en emancipatie in Suriname* (Amsterdam 2018); P. Dikland, *Planga habijesi. De volkshuisvesting in Suriname 1650-1950* (self-published e-book 2020) <http://www.suriname-heritage-guide.com/>; Andrea C. Mosterman, *Spaces of enslavement. A history of slavery and resistance in Dutch New York* (Ithaca (NY) 2021).

impact of ethnicity, gender, and urban slavery on the social landscape of the city.

In other colonial territories in the Caribbean, population records of a similar quality or fine grain are very scarce.⁴ The ward registers, in combination with other forms of population registration in nineteenth-century Suriname – such as the civil records, the slave registers, and, in the period after Abolition, as well as the migration records of indentured laborers from Asia – form a unique opportunity to reconstruct the lives of free and unfree inhabitants over multiple generations in a colonial society.⁵

The ward register project fits into a larger data ecosystem called the Historical Database of Suriname and the Caribbean (HDSC), a collaboration between Caribbean and Dutch knowledge and heritage institutions and hundreds of citizen-scholars aiming at making population datasets available to scholars and the wider public alike. At the moment of writing, HDSC has published several databases including slave, emancipation registers, and civil records of Suriname and the islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and St. Eustatius, all former Dutch colonial possessions.⁶ Linking the information on individuals in the ward registers to observations in the slave registers and the civil records (birth, death, and marriage) provides a much richer picture than was possible before, allowing cross-referencing of information about individuals, in addition to analyzing the various characteristics – occupations, ethnicity, age, sex, et cetera – and social connections of people that lived in Paramaribo in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

4 B.W. Higman, *Slave populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834* (Kingston 1995); C.W. van Galen and M.S. Hassankhan, 'A research note on the slave registers of Suriname, 1830-1865', *The History of the Family* 23:3 (2018) 503-520. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2018.1507917>; D. Ramos, 'Single and married women in Vila Rica, Brazil, 1754-1838', *Journal of Family History* 16:3 (1991) 261-282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/036319909101600304>; B.J. Barickman and Martha Few, 'Ana Paulinha de Queirós, Joaquina da Costa, and their neighbors. Free women of color as household heads in rural Bahia (Brazil), 1835', in: Gaspar and Clarke Hine (eds), *Beyond bondage*, 169-201.

5 C.W. van Galen et al., 'Endless digging and endless picking. Sex ratios and gendered labour in Surinamese plantations, 1830-1863', *Historical Life Course Studies* 10 (2021) 46-52. <https://doi.org/10.51964/hlcs9566>; C.W. Van Galen et al., 'Slavery in Suriname. A reconstruction of life courses, 1830-1863', *Historical Life Course Studies* 13 (2023) 191-211. <https://doi.org/10.51964/hlcs15619>.

6 See <https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/HDSC> for various historical population databases published in open access. See also <https://www.ru.nl/onderzoek/onderzoeksprojecten/historische-database-van-suriname-en-de-cariben> for an overview of datasets available on the websites of various National Archives.

The ward registers database is available through a search interface at the website of the National Archives of Suriname and as a more detailed research database published under an CC BY-SA 4.0 license at the IISG Dataverse.⁷ Additionally, an Linked Open Data version (rdf) of the dataset is available.⁸

This data paper opens with a sketch of the historical background, followed by a description of how the dataset was created and an explanation of the fields. The paper concludes with descriptive statistics of one single year from the ward registers that showcase the potential and the limitations of the dataset for the social and urban historiography of a Dutch colonial city during the last decades of slavery.

Historical background and description of the source: Paramaribo and the ward registers

Suriname was claimed by the Dutch in 1667. Plantations along the fertile river banks produced tropical crops such as sugar, coffee, cocoa, and cotton at the expense of enslaved workers taken from Africa and, to a limited extent, taken from the Indigenous peoples in Suriname as well. The capital Paramaribo was the administrative and commercial center, the only harbor and urban hub in the colony, which increased in size and importance over the course of the nineteenth century. City dwellers took up a growing share of the colony's population: in 1787, only about a fifth of the population lived in the city, increasing to 27% in 1830 and 31% in 1850. In that last year, around 52,000 people lived in the colony, of which almost 40,000 were kept in bondage.⁹ In Paramaribo, the ratio between free and enslaved was less skewed than on the plantations, and the chances of manumission were much higher in the city than on the plantations.¹⁰

7 National Archives of Suriname website: <https://nationalearchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/wijkregister/persons>; download of dataset at IISG Dataverse: John Sang-Ajang, Nico Altink, Philip Dikland, Carla Jonkers, Kariomengolo, Cleo Valies, Thunnis van Oort, *Paramaribo ward registers 1828-1847* (2024), <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/VLN8FD>, IISH Data Collection.

8 See <https://druid.datalegend.net/RJM/Paramaribo-Ward-Registers-1828-1847>.

9 R. van Lie, *Samenleving in een grensgebied. Een sociaal-historische studie van de maatschappij in Suriname* (The Hague 1949) 31; see also: G.A. de Bruine, *Paramaribo, stadsgeografische studies van een ontwikkelingsland* (Bussum 1976).

10 Hoogbergen and ten Hove, 'De vrije gekleurde en zwarte bevolking', 311-313; Ellen Neslo, 'The formation of a free non-white elite in Paramaribo, 1800-1863', *Caribbean Studies* 43:2 (2015) 177-210;

The growth of the city demanded a dedicated urban administration, and in 1828 the municipality of Paramaribo was created, resorting under the direct authority of the Governor.¹¹ A reliable record of inhabitants facilitated the governing of the city, an impetus for the creation of the *wijkregister* (ward or district register). For each of the four (later expanded to eight) districts of the city, a set of two unsalaried *wijkmeesters* (ward masters) was appointed by the Governor, with a sworn duty to create and maintain a register of all inhabitants living in his district. In January of each year, the ward masters would require all the heads of households (owner or main lessee of the property) to supply information on everyone living in his or her household, including tenants living on the *erf* (premises).¹² Inhabitants who failed to register or who supplied incorrect information were subject to a fine. In the earliest years, the ward masters 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 changes to the ward master. The register was kept in duplicate: one copy was maintained by the ward masters and one copy was deposited at the municipal office.

For each plot, or city address, a card was created that contained the names, ages, occupation, and religious affiliation of the free persons living at that address. The head of the household was the first entry written on the card, but the relationship between the head of household and other residents was not made explicit, nor were other relationships between household members. More than one household could reside on a plot (at that address); especially the larger residences usually had large backyards containing dwellings for the enslaved population.¹³ Lastly, the card allowed room for general remarks, often about the ownership of the plot or enslaved persons domiciled there.

From 1837 onward, the registration became more detailed. It classified free inhabitants into three racial categories: 'white', 'colored' (denoting mixed or (partly) Indigenous descent) or 'free Black'. From 1837 onward, the register also systematically included counts of the number of enslaved people domiciled at this address, categorized by

See also: Wim Klooster, 'Comparative perspectives on the urban black Atlantic on the eve of abolition', *International Review of Social History* 65:28 (2020) 15-37, doi:10.1017/S002085902000097.

11 C.C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5-1942* (Assen/Maastricht 1990) 213.

12 *Gouvernementsbladen van de kolonie Suriname* (Rotterdam 1856) 1828, No. 4 (Law of 5 March, 1828) 67.

13 For more information on the housing conditions of free and enslaved in Paramaribo, see: Dikland, *Planga habijesi*.

sex, racial category (either Black or colored), and whether adult or child. Usually, no names of enslaved residents were listed.

The owner of enslaved persons was explicitly stated in most cases, but sometimes the relationship between free inhabitant and enslaved was not fully clear (see the example below in the section ‘individual information’). The number of enslaved persons was usually recorded on the same line as a free individual, who was often also the legal owner, but could also be a (legal) guardian in case the owner of the enslaved was not domiciled at the address in question. More detailed insights into the ownership of enslaved persons requires cross-referencing with the slave registers, a procedure that has become feasible since both registers are now available as a structured datasets.

To use the dataset, it is convenient to understand the spatial administration of Paramaribo in the period. In 1828, Paramaribo was divided into four wards (*wijken*): A, B, C, and D.¹⁴ Addresses were numbered per plot, a plot could contain several dwellings. For each district, the numbering started at 1, so unique addresses consisted of a combination of ward letter and plot number. Street names are usually mentioned in the address but are not essential in designating an address location. In 1837, a redistricting took place and wards E, F and the first and second outer district (‘buitenwijk’) were added. Muntjewerff has created a concordance that provides an indispensable key to connect the old and new addresses.¹⁵ (See illustrations 1 and 2)

The ward register is a rich source, albeit with obvious limitations. Most importantly, this document served the needs of a colonial bureaucracy and therefore forms a biased representation of Paramaribo society. A clear example is the registration of skin color as a proxy for racial category. We do not know whether skin color was self-reported or designated by the ward master.¹⁶ Either way, it is not a stable category in the source. Take, for instance, the example of Johannes Frederik Thielers, head of household of the dwelling at E 465 (after 1836: 245) in the Zwartenhovenbrugstraat. He was registered as ‘colored’ in most of the registers, but as ‘white’ in the years 1840 and 1842 (see illustration 3). Information on age, occupation, and religious affiliation can also vary, and it is difficult to ascertain why:

14 Ward D was divided into the neighborhoods Frimangron, Kauknie, Kwatta, and Wanica, each with a separate numbering per neighborhood; therefore the neighborhood name is needed in those cases, because in ward D house numbers were not unique. Henk Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo*, accessed January 27, 2025, <https://www.concordansparamaribo.info/historie>.

15 Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo; Gouvernementsbladen van de kolonie Suriname*, 1837, No. 3 (Law of 24 April 1837) 207.

16 Hoeft and Vrij, ‘Free black and colored women’.



Illustration 1 A.H. Hiemcke and J.G. Visser, Platte grond van de stad Paramaribo (1804), shows the four 'old districts'; the classification in use until 1837

(Source: Allard Pierson / University Library Amsterdam, <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/3.1212>, cited by Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo*).



Illustration 2 A.J. Meyer, *Figuratieve plattegrond der stad Paramaribo* (1885) shows the new district classification in use since 1837.

(Source: Collection KITLV, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:2033995>, cited by Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo*).

WIJK SUB LA. *E* *Zwartenhovengbrug Straat of Gracht.*
Opneming van den Staat der Bevolking der Stad Paramaribo,
gedaan in 1840

NIEUW NUMMER.	HOOFD- EN ANDERE VRIJE BEWONERS.							KLEURLINGEN.						AANMERKINGEN.				
	N A A M.	V O O R N A A M.	BIJZEN.	LEEFTIJD.	VRIJGE- BOREN.	BEROEP.	GODSDIENST.	N E G E R S.			KLEURLINGEN.							
								Mans.	Vr.	Jonge.	Misj.	Mans.	Vr.		Jonge.	Misj.		
245	Thieler	Johannes Pieter	1			39	Libys											<i>Wed. Thieler van deelen van Wijden</i>
		Christina van				50												
		Kerwe	Louisa				30	Romf										
			George				26	Armat										
	OLD NUMMER.	Brandon	Jacoba				53											
1840		Anna Geboerts	1			24	Latwa											
		Verwa	Louise Jacobina				30	Armat										
			Jan Simon				30	Armat										
		Wierika	Louise Jacobina				10											
		Verwa	Anna Elisabeth				42											
	Wierman	John				26												

WIJK SUB LA. *E* *Zwartenhovengbrug Straat of Gracht.*
Opneming van den Staat der Bevolking der Stad Paramaribo,
gedaan in 1841

NIEUW NUMMER.	HOOFD- EN ANDERE VRIJE BEWONERS.							KLEURLINGEN.						AANMERKINGEN.				
	N A A M.	V O O R N A A M.	BIJZEN.	LEEFTIJD.	VRIJGE- BOREN.	BEROEP.	GODSDIENST.	N E G E R S.			KLEURLINGEN.							
								Mans.	Vr.	Jonge.	Misj.	Mans.	Vr.		Jonge.	Misj.		
1841	Thieler	Johannes Pieter	1			60	Libys											
		Christina van				66												
		Kerwe	Louisa				37	Romf										
		Older	Louise				10	Romf										
	OLD NUMMER.	Brandon	Jacoba				56											
1841		Anna Geboerts	1			30	Latwa											
		Verwa	Louise van				31	Armat										
		Wierman	Louise van				19	Armat										
		Verwa	Anna Elisabeth				12											
		Wierman	John				0											

Illustration 3 Ward register cards of the Thieler household. In 1840, Thieler is classified as 'white', in 1841 as 'colored'. We can also note other remarkable discrepancies, such as the age of Christina van Thieler, that jumps from 58 in 1840 to 66 in 1841.

(Source: National Archives Suriname, Ward register card E 245 (1840) <https://nationaalarchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/wijkregister/deeds/84ce82d7-84b7-b6f9-0991-9c2ed974b3c1?person=1ee3f488-3932-7e62-e7ab-c5d0a0c8fd93>; Ward register card E 245 (1841) <https://nationaalarchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/wijkregister/deeds/3dc83341-f4d3-c22e-0863-b5570b2adc76?person=557dd321-c466-0eeb-67a5-a37a0f08b941>)

Table 1 Overview of the number of records in the dataset per year and ward.
Blank cells represent missing registers for that year/ward.

Year/ Ward	A	B	C	D	E	F	1st	2nd	Total
1828		739		4538					5277
1829				2446					2446
1830	866	727	618	0					2211
1831	986	753	653	2069					4461
1832	895	749	638	2070					4352
1833	926		649	4606					6181
1834	992		688	4899					6579
1835	978	807	666	2639					5090
1836	1030	799							1829
1837		1631	1147	1053	2084	489	477		6881
1838	1457	1372		1043	2117	504	513	101	7107
1839		1375		988	2249	533		126	5271
1840		1359		1056	2284	550	510		5759
1841	1436	1518	1180	1133	2524	544	839	182	9356
1842	1233	1030	1214	1063	2448	498		157	7643
1843	1108				2307			157	3572
1845	1256	1332	1215	1054	2405	542		183	7987
1846	1268	1245	1133	936	2236	474	438		7730
1847						528			528
Total	14431	15436	9801	31593	20654	4662	2777	906	100260

did the ward master make a mistake, did the head of household misreport, or – for example, in cases of shifting to and fro of religious affiliations – did the person in question indeed regularly change denominations?

Not all inhabitants were registered. The most glaring omission, of course, was the enslaved population that formed a large share of the city's residents. Also, government buildings and soldiers stationed at the fortress were not included in the register. Moreover, the registers left 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, and the sex of free persons was not listed.

The original registers are kept in the National Archives of Suriname (NAS). The ward registers were part of a batch of archival material that was returned from the National Archives of the Netherlands (NAN) to Suriname in 2009.¹⁷ The content of the archives had been scanned before the transfer and the images have been 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 batch contains an incomplete set of 11 registers from the years 1828-1832. In 1833, the municipal government was dissolved, and the ward registers came under the direct responsibility of the governor. The archives of the governor of the Dutch West Indies (1828-1845) contains an incomplete set of 64 volumes of ward registers, ranging from 1828 to 1845. Finally, the registers of 1846 and 1847 were part of a separate archival collection that apparently had never left the archives in Suriname.¹⁸

Creation of the dataset

Transcriptions

The registers have been transcribed by a number of citizen-scholars. The lion's share of the work has been completed by John Sang-Ajang. 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 there.¹⁹ Later, Sang-Ajang started copying his handwritten transcriptions into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (.xls): each register in a separate file. After inputting the transcriptions into the spreadsheets, there was an extra check using the digital images of the registers that had become available in the meantime. However, no link to the scan was included in the spreadsheets. In some cases, no scans were available: it is not clear whether the originals have disappeared or if no scan was made for other reasons. In those cases, however, only the handwritten transcriptions

17 Overview of archives transferred from the National Archives of the Netherlands to Suriname in 2009: <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/suriname/overgebracht-naar-suriname-en-digitaal-beschikbaar> [accessed 27 January, 2025]

18 The archival descriptions of the registers contain some mistakes when a faulty year or district is mentioned in the register title, see: John Sang-Ajang, Henk van der Mast and Pieter Bol, 'Nadere toelichting op de wijkregisters', website Stichting Surinaamse Genealogie, <https://www.allesurinamers.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Nadere-toelichting-wijkregisters.pdf> [accessed January 27, 2025].

19 At the time, Sang-Ajang was assisted by a mr. Kariomengolo, who could not be reached during the implementation of the current project.

have been used by Sang-Ajang. He was aided by Cleo Valies and Carla Jonkers, like Sang-Ajang members of the Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy (Stichting Surinaamse Genealogie, SSG). The Excel files have been published in pdf format on the SSG website, with support from Henk van der Mast and Pieter Bol.²⁰ In 2023-2024, history students at Radboud University Damian Pikulić, Elian Brethouwer, and Daan Nillesen assisted in transcribing a number of registers. Finally, the surviving registers from 1846-1847 were transcribed in 2009 by Philip Dikland.

Merging, restructuring, and cleaning up the transcribed information

The purpose of Sang-Ajang's 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. Yet because more complex analyses were not possible with this data format, it was decided to create a single, integrated dataset, merging 86 separate spreadsheet files into a single structured dataset where information was split into more distinct fields. The purpose of creating this integrated dataset was not only to make genealogical research easier by offering one single search prompt in a user-friendly interface (instead of having to search a multitude of documents), but also to provide scholars the opportunity for social/historical research of this nineteenth-century colonial city. Therefore, information on occupation, ownership, gender, and so forth, which had been fitted into a wide-ranging 'comments' field in the original transcriptions, has been divided into separate fields, followed by the harmonization and standardization of parts of the restructured data.²¹

In a first step, all the separate transcription files were merged into one single spreadsheet. In the next phase, the data have been restructured, cleaned up, and standardized. This was an iterative process, starting with splitting information into columns, followed by a round of cleaning up, followed by splitting into more columns, followed by more cleaning up, and so on.

20 'Wijkregisters', website Stichting Surinaamse Genealogie, <https://www.allesurinamers.org/wijkregisters/> [accessed January 27, 2025]

21 For a detailed description of the process of merging and restructuring the data, please consult the data documentation: John Sang-Ajang, Nico Altink, Philip Dikland, Carla Jonkers, Kariomengolo, Cleo Valies, Thunnis Van Oort, *Paramaribo ward registers 1828-1847 (2024)*, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/VLNSFD>, IISH Data Collection.

Description of the data²²

The published dataset contains 100,260 records. Each record, a row in the spreadsheet, is an observation of a free individual or describes an address (in the case of a plot not inhabited by a free person; see table 1 for the number of records per year/ward). Enslaved persons are randomly listed in the period 1828-1836, and from 1837 they are usually included, crudely, as statistics in a table.

Individual names have not (yet) been standardized, so many persons occur more than once, their names sometimes written with different spelling variations. 150,000 observations of persons are included in the database, in many cases there are multiple observations of a single unique individual (see table 2).

In the original transcriptions, no unique identifiers were available. Therefore, the data from these original transcriptions has been preserved in the dataset to provide provenance information. In the new dataset, unique identifiers have been assigned to each card ('Kart ID') and to each individual record ('ID').

The transcription files contained no page reference to the (online scans of the) original sources. For users, such a link presents a genuine improvement because it prevents a time consuming manual search through the scans to find a specific record. Adding links to the scans required extensive computer-assisted manual work, which has been completed by Nico Altink. For 99,338 out of 100,260 records, links to the scan could be added.

Table 2 Number of observations of free and enslaved persons in the database, per year.

Year	Enslaved	Free	Total
1828	1	5276	5277
1829		2446	2446
1830		2211	2211
1831	2059	4453	6512
1832	5	4347	4352
1833	8	6173	6181
1834	11	6568	6579

²² The following section provides a general overview of the full dataset; a more detailed description can be found in the accompanying documentation with the data repository.

Year	Enslaved	Free	Total
1835	11	5079	5090
1836		1829	1829
1837	6792	6872	13664
1838	6797	7059	13856
1839	4040	5258	9298
1840	3890	5735	9625
1841	5906	8598	14504
1842	5006	7486	12492
1843	2770	3514	6284
1845	5471	7878	13349
1846	5174	7717	12891
1847	166	528	694
Total	48107	99027	147134

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 concordance of Paramaribo street addresses that has been created by Henk Muntjewerff.²³ The street names have been standardized.²⁴ Addresses in nineteenth-century Paramaribo were a combination of a district code and a number; the name of the street was not essential to describe the address. In 1837 a redistricting took place, therefore ‘old’ and ‘new’ addresses are mentioned. In an earlier pilot project on the 1846 ward register, location points for each address were created, allowing spatial visualizations in a Geographical Information System (GIS).²⁵

Individual information

The names of individuals have been differentiated into fine-grained categories, distinguishing between first name, prefix, surname, alternative spellings, maiden name of a married woman, a field that

²³ Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo*.

²⁴ For the standardization file, see the data repository.

²⁵ See Thunnis van Oort and Philip Dikland, *Paramaribo ward register of 1846 (2023)* <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/J95OCC>, IISH Data Collection, UNF:6:A77gxUoelG8FPnyoD+XnKA== [locpnts.tab] – the location points are still a work in progress and a full data publication plus documentation of the GIS is forthcoming.

WIJK SUB L^a. Westzijde Zwarthovenbrug Straat of Gracht.

Opneming van den Staat der Bevolking der Stad Paramaribo,
gedaan in 1839

STREEK NUMMER.	HOOFD - EN ANDERE VRIJE BEWOONERS.								Mannen, welke zich op het Erf van den Hoofd- Bewoner bevinden, hetzij vreesd Slaven, hetzij gemaakte Slaven, hetzij van eenige Partij of Grond, hetzij van elken, of uit enkele andere overzigt, op 't Erf aanwezige.						AANMERKINGEN.
	NAAM.	VOORNAAM.	CLASSE.	AARDE.	AARDE van HET ERF.	HUIZEN.	BEROEP.	GROUWENT.	W. L. E. U. R. L. I. N. G. E. N.			N. E. G. E. R. S.			
									Mans.	Vr.	Mans.	Mans.	Vr.	Mans.	
177	Dietrich	Mogel	Nicola		1	62	Korver					1	2	2	
	van Koning	Gottlieb	Bauck		1							1			
178															

Illustration 4 Ward register card for Ward D, no. 197, Westzijde Zwarthovenbrugstraat.

(Source: National Archives Suriname, Ward register card D 197 (1839), <https://nationalearchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/wijkregister/deeds/d7ba6f02-414c-d052-6913-1aeb62eb04c0?person=29a22375-c9f3-8785-6ee3-bc9659724821>)

indicates widowhood and, if available, the first names or initials of the deceased husband. Breaking down the individual names into separate fields facilitates searching and linking to other databases for individuals.

Information about the attributes of individuals, such as age, occupation, or religion, has been distributed over various columns.²⁶ When relevant, values have been standardized to allow for systematic analysis of the data. In some cases, the transcribers have used codes to signify the religious affiliation of free persons in the source; in other instances the abbreviations used by the ward masters were literally recorded in the transcriptions. The religious affiliations have been standardized, and the table used to create the standardization is available in the data repository. The notation of the age of free persons was also standardized. The ages of children were often measured by the ward masters in units of days, weeks, or months. All values have been converted to numbers of years, where days were calculated as 1/365th

²⁶ The register contains ample remarks about persons who do not fit any of the specified fields. This information was split into columns on free and enslaved individual remarks. Moreover, the transcribers have added information about persons retrieved from other sources (e.g., information about manumissions), which has also been preserved in the published dataset as 'annotations'.

year, weeks as 1/52th year, and months 1/12th year. Regarding the age of enslaved persons, the registers only supply information whether someone was viewed as adult or child: this designation is registered as such in the data. The skin color that was used as a proxy for ethnicity has also been standardized into a limited number of terms: *Blanke* (white), *Zwarte* (Black), or *Kleurling* (colored, of mixed descent). For this specific field, it was decided not to reproduce the offensive contemporary term that was used in the original source, replacing it with the more neutral term 'Black'. Sometimes the place of birth of free persons was recorded, and this information is stored in a separate column.

From 1837 onward, the registers contained a table that counted the number of enslaved persons living at a certain address. These numbers were usually matched to the enslaving free person registered on the card on the same row. Sometimes, several numbers of enslaved individuals are related to various enslavers listed on the card. It is most 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 linked to a free person registered on the card. In such cases, often an annotation would be added in the register with the name of an owner who was not residing at the address where the enslaved were housed.

An example can further explain how the registration of enslaved persons worked and additionally can serve to illustrate the complexity of matching enslaved persons who occur in the ward registers to the slave registers. On the ward register card for address D 197 from 1839, nine enslaved persons were registered (see illustration 4). On the first row, a total of eight enslaved persons is related to the free person named Magdalena Buttenie. One enslaved person is linked to a second free inhabitant listed on this address, Gotlieb van Henningsen.

The relation between free and enslaved remains implicit; we cannot be certain whether there is an ownership relation. Since 1826, the ownership of enslaved persons was recorded in the so-called slave registers.²⁷ Magdalena Buttenie is listed in the slave registers as the owner of enslaved persons (see illustration 5), but we cannot match the number of eight enslaved inhabitants linked to her in the ward register because

27 Slave registers, Particulieren 6 1838-1848, inv. 6, fol. 268. <https://nationaalarchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/genealogie-slavenregister/deeds/67f9cd05-dce5-5135-8703-b480df586699?person=84ccdf56-9bbc-11ec-8847-ac1f6ba5b082>. For more about the slave registers of Suriname, see Van Galen and Hassankhan, "A research note" and Van Galen et al., "Slavery in Suriname".

only six enslaved persons were in her possession in 1838. Five of them, named Martha, Klaas, Winst, Saraatje, and Hermina Johanna, had been donated by Buttenie to her church congregation, the Moravian Brethren, on 17 January 1839, only days before the annual round of the ward masters had started on 28 January.²⁸ It seems likely, though, that these five persons were still living at this address. A sixth enslaved person remained in her possession, Josina. We cannot be certain that the 'donated' enslaved persons were those listed in the ward register, and we do not know who else was registered to her name. Enslaved persons owned by another individual or legal entity (such as a plantation) were apparently living on this plot. For the other free person, Gotlieb van Henningsen, we cannot establish a straightforward correspondence to the slave registers.²⁹

Enriching by linking

Connecting to other datasets provides opportunities for further enrichment. The previous section about linking to the slave registers of Suriname demonstrates some of the opportunities and challenges that such an enrichment can entail.³⁰ With the increasing emergence of historical datasets on individuals for Suriname becoming available in recent times, the opportunities for enriching through linking are expanding.³¹

One further example worth mentioning here in more detail is the addition of information on sex in the ward registers, because this is an attribute of free persons that is not listed in the source. Only in specific cases can sex be inferred from the married status of a free woman, when her maiden name (4,049 records) or widowed status (1,951 records) is recorded. It is, however, often possible to infer the sex from the first name of most of the free persons. In a pilot project run in 2022, the first names of the 1846 ward registers were linked to the NAMES 1.1 dataset

28 Announcement in *Surinaamsche Courant*, 24-1-1839, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=d-dd:010939090:mpeg21:a0004>.

29 There is one owner named Hennings who owned one enslaved adult woman named Louisa, it is possible that this is the same person as the 'Van Henningsen' mentioned on the ward register, see slave register Particulieren 43 1830-1838, inv. 43, fol. 5243, <https://nationaalarchief.sr/onderzoeken/alle-genealogie/genealogie-slavenregister/deeds/13725643-ed67-57fd-a4a8-f47aaeaf980?person=857c9de2-9bbc-11ec-8847-ac1f6ba5b082>.

30 Linking the ward registers and the slave registers was also the subject of the pilot project 'Relinking identities' developed during the Hackalod 2024 by a team consisting of Erik Tjong Kim Sang, Iris van Vlimmeren, Rick Mourits, Shannon van Muijden and Thunnis van Oort. See also J. Janssen, *Rapport bevindingen matchen wijkregister en slavenregister* (unpublished report 2022) <https://edu.nl/jht47>.

31 See note 6 on the HDSC.

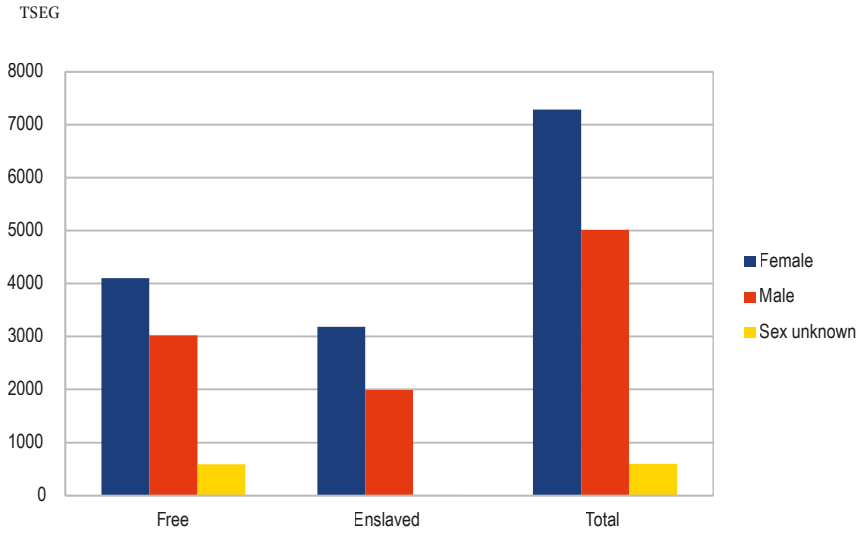


Figure 1 Paramaribo inhabitants by sex and freedom status in 1846



Figure 2 Map of households in Paramaribo depicting the surplus of female residents in 1846. Each dot represents a household, the bluer the color, the larger the female surplus; red signifies a male surplus. Both free and enslaved persons are included.

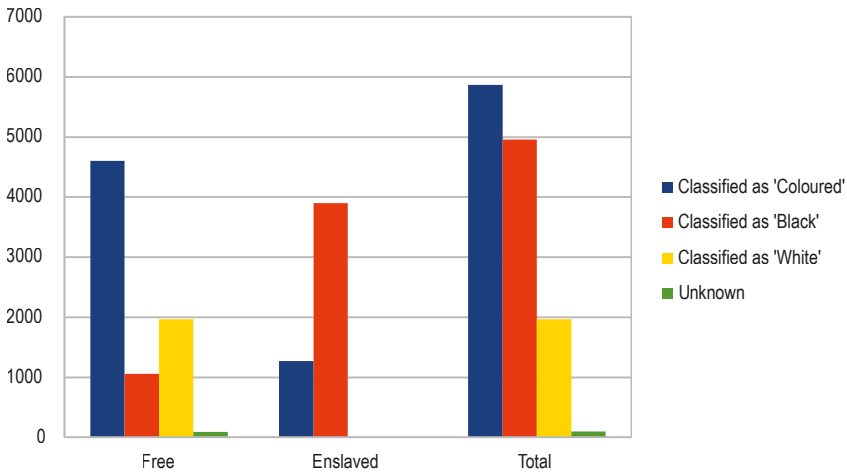


Figure 3 Composition of Paramaribo free and enslaved inhabitants according to the racial classification in the ward registers in 1846.

that contains 189,707 Dutch first names from nineteenth-century Dutch civil records, and information about the sex of the persons carrying that name. These data allowed for a majority of the first names in the ward registers (edition 1846) to be labelled with high probability as either used for female or male persons.³² The results of the pilot have been included in the dataset, in the 'sex' column. For the other years, this variable is not (yet) available.

Use case: Sex and ethnicity in Paramaribo in 1846

The ward register as a structured dataset opens up new opportunities to learn more about the colonial society of nineteenth century Paramaribo, and similar urban counterparts in the plantation societies in the Americas.³³ The following section will demonstrate the research potential of the ward register dataset by providing a description of some of the characteristics of the population of Paramaribo for just a single year, 1846. The addition of information about the sex of free persons

32 G. Gerrit Bloothoof et al. (2019), *Manual v1 of the NAMES 1.1 corpus, Clariah Core project CC 17-012*, <https://www.gerritbloothoof.nl/Publications/NAMES%20corpus%201.1%20manual.pdf>; Van Oort and Dikland, *Paramaribo ward register of 1846*.

33 Rivke Jaffe (ed.), *The Caribbean city* (Kingston/Leiden 2008); K.J. Fatah-Black, 'Introduction: urban slavery in the age of abolition', *International Review of Social History* 65:28 (2020) 1-14.

(see above) allows us to explore the social make-up of this nineteenth century colonial city in unprecedented detail.

First of all, the data show to what extent Paramaribo was a female-majority city, with an approximate ratio of 60-40 female to male, when the enslaved population is taken into account. Males are slightly undercounted because soldiers from the garrison were excluded from the ward register, but these numbers do not significantly alter the balance. The skewedness toward female inhabitants can be explained by the fact that women were much more likely to be manumitted than men, as stated in the introduction, and a large proportion of Paramaribo's inhabitants in 1846 consisted of (free) people of color. Also, when viewed per household, we can note that in a majority of households more women than men resided (see figures 1 and 2).

Paramaribo was a mixed city in terms of the ethnic background of its inhabitants, if we follow the racial categorization of the ward registers (see figure 3). Of the total population, about 15% was of European descent (classified as 'white'). The majority of inhabitants was of mixed European and African descent (this grouping includes people with Indigenous origins), most of whom were free, meaning they were either manumitted during their lifetime or born of an ancestor that had been freed from slavery. People of African descent were predominantly living in slavery, although a growing minority of 'free Blacks' populated the city.

Residential segregation

To what extent can we observe residential segregation by ethnicity in Paramaribo? It is generally assumed that the level of racial segregation was limited and that people of various ethnic origins would live throughout the city.³⁴ This can be confirmed when we plot the 1846 ward register data on a map (see figure 4). For each household, a circle represents the amount of free residents classified by the register as 'Black' (blue), 'White' (red), or 'Colored' (green) in a certain household. If more than one racial category occurred in a household – which was often the case – multiple circles are superimposed.

Even if all ethnicities defined as such can be found living throughout the city, ethnic concentrations are clearly visible. The oldest and most affluent part of the city, located in the east near Fort Zeelandia, housed most of the white Europeans living in Paramaribo. The new expansion to the southwest of the city, called 'Frimangron', 'land of the free', was

34 Ad de Bruijne and Aart Schalkwijk, 'Ethnic residential patterns in Paramaribo. Spatial segregation or blending?', in: Jaffe (ed.), *The Caribbean city*, 85; Neslo, *Een ongekende elite*.

predominantly inhabited by people of African descent (located in district F, see illustration 2). In this part of the city, during the second half of the eighteenth century, land was rewarded to former enslaved men who had served in the colonial army. It was also the area where many people settled who were manumitted in the nineteenth century.³⁵ We can also observe that the household size is smaller in Frimangon, and, more generally, in the more peripherious areas of the city. This can be interpreted as an indication of first-generation manumitted people, more specifically retired colonial soldiers that might have had less extensive families.

This map (figure 4) provides a highly distorted image of the ethnic composition of the city, because it only depicts free people. If inhabitants in slavery are included in the visualization, the picture changes quite dramatically (figure 5). In the city center, the wealthiest households often housed large numbers of enslaved people, as domestic staff and also for prestige.³⁶

A further complication to these maps is the fact that households in the ward register could (and often would) contain several family units. Plots in Paramaribo often consisted of a main building on the street side and a back lot with (much) more humble dwellings.³⁷ Because the ward registers do not indicate the relations between household members, the source can mask forms of micro-segregation where the affluent (white) families lived in the streetside mansions and the less well-off people (of color) were housed in the yards at the back.³⁸

Even if the ward registers fall short as a source to indicate such patterns, it is worth noting that the register of 1846 does contain at least ten households members classified as 'white' which were headed by a head of household described as 'Black'; those were headed by both males and females. This classification shows the complexity of ethnic and racial relations, recalling that a spatial visualization such as included here should serve merely as a starting point for further analysis.

35 Hoogbergen and Ten Hove, 'De vrije gekleurde en zwarte bevolking'; Fatah-Black, *Eigendomsstrijd*; H. Muntjewerff, 'Het Beloofde Land. De lotgevallen van de vrije mannen van Frimangron', *Wi-Rutu* 21:2 (2021) 27-39.

36 Van Lier, *Samenleving in een grensgebied*, 79-80.

37 Dikland, *Planga habijesi*, 30.

38 Daphne Spain, 'Race relations and residential segregation in New Orleans. Two centuries of paradox', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 441:1 (1979) 82-96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627944100107>; A. Grigoryeva and M. Ruef, 'The historical demography of racial segregation', *American Sociological Review* 80:4 (2015) 814-842. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122415589170>.

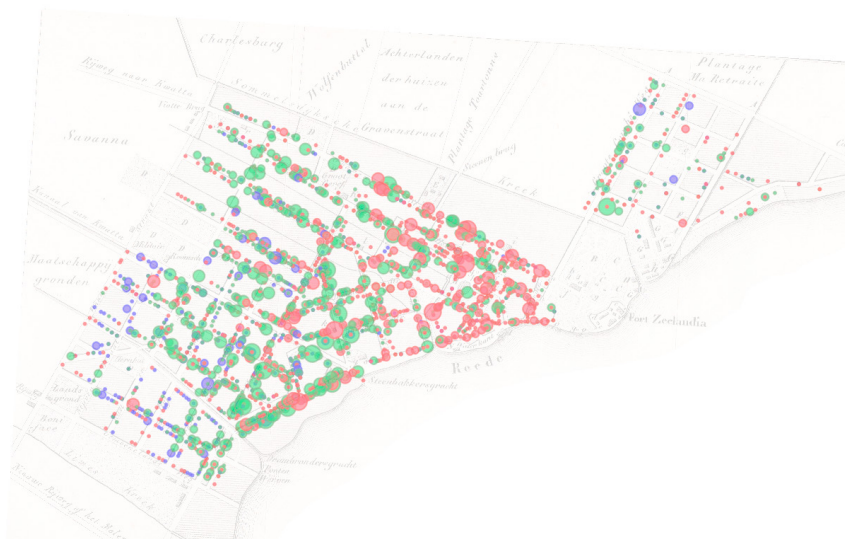


Figure 4 Map of Paramaribo that depicts the racial classification of free inhabitants in the ward register of 1846. The color of the circle refers to the the racial categorization: blue = 'Black', green = 'colored' and red = 'white'. The circle's size depicts the number of persons of a given racial categorization registered in a household.



Figure 5 Map of Paramaribo that depicts the racial classification of all inhabitants, both free and enslaved, in the ward register of 1846. The color of the circle refers to the the racial categorization: blue = 'Black', green = 'colored' and red = 'white'. The circle's size depicts the number of persons of a given racial categorization registered in a household.

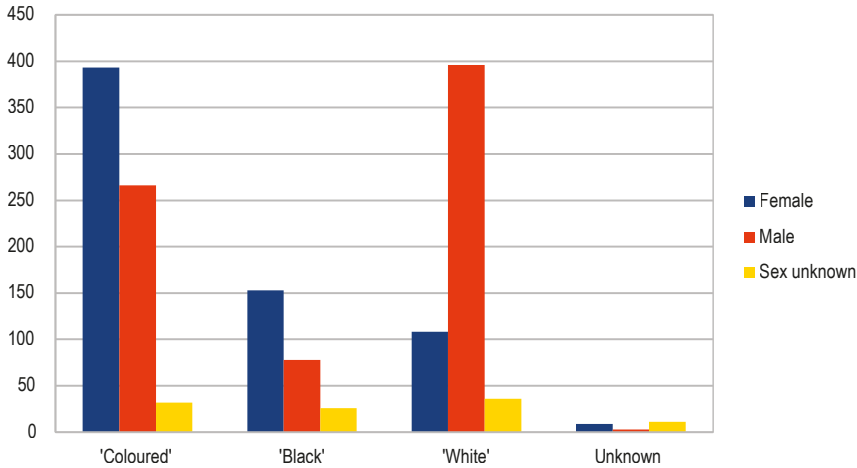


Figure 6 Heads of household in Paramaribo in 1846, classified by racial category and sex.

For example, in the large household of Johanna Jonas, a 46-year-old Dutch Reformed teacher who lived at the Steenbakkerijstraat C 109, all members were registered as 'colored', except for Johanna, along with a 6-year-old 'white' girl Wilhelmina MacDonald.³⁹ We can also note, however, the two-person household headed by 'Black' Seba van Linck (69) and 'white' Jewish Joseph Eliazer, living together at the Rust en Vredestraat F 165.⁴⁰ These ethnically, and often also religiously, mixed households invite further research, both on the micro-level of individual households and with quantitative approaches.

Finally, if we take a closer look at the combination of sex and racial category, a high incidence of female heads of households of color stands out. Most heads of households of European descent were male – and if they were female, without exception they were widows (figure 6). As was the case in other (urban) Caribbean societies in this period, heads of households of color were more often female than male.⁴¹ The most obvious explanation is the skewed sex ratio among manumission: more women than men were freed from slavery, but the dataset invites

39 Ward register 1846, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.10.77/invnr/4/file/NL-HaNA_2.10.77_4_0065.

40 Ward register 1846, https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/2.10.77/invnr/7/file/NL-HaNA_2.10.77_7_0068.

41 M. Morrissey, 'Female headed households in Latin America and the Caribbean', *Sociological Spectrum* 9:2 (1989) 197-210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732173.1989.9981883>; B.J. Barickman and Martha Few, 'Ana Paulinha de Queirós, Joaquina Da Costa, and their neighbors. Free women of color as household heads in Bahia (Brazil), 1835', in: Gaspar and Clarke Hine (eds), *Beyond bondage*, 169-201.

a deeper inquiry into this phenomenon, which falls beyond the scope of this data study. A further analysis of the Paramaribo case could contribute to long-standing debates on the so-called Caribbean family system.⁴²

The small descriptive case study of 1846 above is meant as a sneak peek at the possibilities that the dataset offers for tracing social developments in Paramaribo for almost two decades.

Conclusion

The immense manual transcription work that John Sang-Ajang has achieved over many years – aided by members of the Foundation for Surinamese Genealogy (SSG) and others, such as Philip Dikland – has provided a wealth of highly detailed information on people that lived in Suriname roughly during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a time when Paramaribo was growing and evolving. The paper has described in detail how the original source has been transformed into a structured dataset that can be used for historical research, both on a micro-scale for in-depth investigations of individuals, families, households and neighborhoods, as well as for analyses on a larger scale by applying calculative methods.

The primary function of a data paper is to clarify the potential and the pitfalls of the dataset as an instrument for research. Some of the limitations and promises have been outlined, but there is still a lot to uncover on how the ward registers functioned and how reliably they reflected contemporary realities, knowledge that would even further increase the usefulness of the source. To raise some suggestions: how stable were categories such as skin color and religion, and were these most likely self-reported or assigned by the ward masters? Can we find patterns in the accuracy or level of detail by individual ward master teams? What was the internal logic of the cards, for instance, in the way household members were ranked on it, and can we infer anything about household relations from these rankings?

Another way to learn more about the registers and simultaneously increase their use value is by linking to other data sources, such as

42 E.g. R.T. Smith, 'The family and the modern world system. Some observations from the Caribbean', *Journal of Family History* 3:4 (1978) 337-360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/036319907800300403>; S. Stuart, 'Female-headed families. A comparative perspective of the Caribbean and the developed world', *Gender and Development* 4:2 (1996) 28-34.

the slave registers, the civil records, the various plantation datasets, real estate rental values, and the increasing number of datasets that is becoming available, including partially structured datasets and textual corpora.⁴³

A historical administration such as the ward registers not only reflects an ugly past but it embodies an agent active in creating and maintaining the control necessary to sustain a social system based on slavery and other deep-seated inequalities. These records should therefore be used with caution and, as goes for all historical sources, always with the intention in mind for which they were originally created. The ward registers are sensitive artefacts that can elicit emotional responses, especially from descendants of the people that lived in Suriname in this period. Hopefully, some vindication can result from reusing a digitally reassembled version of this source of colonial power to uncover and help explain some of the characteristics that underpinned this fundamentally unjust society. To that end, the wealth of this dataset clearly allows for a wide range of research avenues, in the historiography of urban slavery, religion, occupations, gender, ethnicity, family, and the spatial dimensions of these topics. Moreover, its promise as a historical source increases if we can connect it to other datasets. As part of the wider initiative of the Historical Database of Suriname and the Caribbean, the online availability of the ward registers will hopefully stimulate further research into a painful shared past, both by academics and by a larger public.

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43 Thunnis van Oort, Nico Altink, Doortje Swaters, Evi Smits, Damian Pikulić, Matthias Rosenbaum-Feldbrügge, Björn Quanjer, Coen van Galen, *Plantations Surinaamse Almanakken*, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/4VOJYS>, IISH Data Collection 2025; Matthias Rosenbaum-Feldbrügge, Coen van Galen, Doortje Swaters, *Suriname Plantation dataset Version 1.0*, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/VTL43W>, IISH Data Collection 2023. For the rental values of real estate in Paramaribo, see: Muntjewerff, *Concordans Paramaribo*; an interesting example of a semi-structured textual corpus, unfortunately covering an earlier period, is K.J. Fatah-Black, I.R. Canfijn, R. Negrón, *Index van criminele zaken en uitspraken in Suriname, 1722, 1750-1759, 1775 en 1799*, <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-z89-e3d3>, DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities 2019.

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Thunnis Van Oort is a historian interested in digital methods and techniques, citizen scholarship, cultural heritage, colonial history, and media history. He has researched and/or taught at Radboud University, University of Amsterdam, Oxford Brookes University, Antwerp University, University College Roosevelt, and Utrecht University and currently works at the Huygens Institute on the development of the Suriname Time Machine, a Linked Open Data hub of nineteenth-century Suriname.

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