Archival Training in the Land of Muller, Feith, and Fruin: The Dutch National Archives School

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I spent the academic year 1985–86 as an auditor in the training program of the Dutch National Archives School, one of six senior and forty-two middle-grade candidates participating in the year-long training program which included one day of class a week and a four-day-a-week internship in an archives. The class was rather evenly divided between men and women. A few of the middle-grade candidates had recently completed secondary school, but most had had previous occupations, some in archives or as records managers. The senior candidates were required to have a university degree. The age of the candidates was between nineteen and the late forties.

History of the Dutch Archival Profession

The history of the development of Dutch archives and archival profession is, of course, similar to that of other European countries which share a common medieval history. With the influence of the French Revolution and the subsequent French administration of the Netherlands, new administrative structures and new archives were created in Holland.[1] In the 1790s the first census, the enlargement of the franchise, regulations governing military supplies, and the quartering of troops created more records. The state took over church property, became directly involved in education and military conscription, and took responsibility for the creation of citizen registers and other genealogical records. The recognition of archives as public records marks a watershed in Dutch archival history. The changes in the creation and use of archives during this period are still observed by the division of the General State Archives into pre- and post-1795 records. This corresponds to the 1790 division *Séries anciennes* and *Séries modernes* in the French Archives Nationales.

The democratic impulses of the French Revolution changed the reason for creating and keeping archives. Earlier archives had been assembled by the record creators as evidence of their rights and privileges, of ownership or of payment, and as evidence of administrative decisions and legal judgments which might be of future use to the administrator. The revolutionary winds swept all inherited rights and privileges from the Netherlands, and the evidence of such rights and privileges was in part destroyed. Archives were to be regarded as the property of the citizens and were to be used to ensure administrative accountability and for the study of national history.

With the French Revolution, the profession of archivist began in the Netherlands. In 1800 a member of the upper house of parliament of the Dutch Batavian Republic—as the government was then called—lamented the lack of a national history and requested that archives be assembled for the use of the public in general, and for historians in particular. In 1802 Hendrik van Wijn was named archivist of the Batavian Republic. Van Wijn had been at work for ten years—assembling documents from administrative departments—when in 1812 Napoleon decided that the archives of annexed countries should be moved to Paris.

[1]The material on Dutch archival history is taken from a popular Dutch paperback, *Guide to Dutch Archives*, written in 1967 and now in its fourth printing; W. J. Formsma and F. C. J. Ketelaar, *Gids voor de Nederlandse Archieven* (Weesp: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 4th ed., 1985), 17–44.

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Shortly after the annexation of the Netherlands, fifty-two chests of archives from defunct government departments and from the previous legislative body, the States-General, were moved to Paris. The collection which van Wijn had assembled was also transported to Paris and van Wijn was retired as archivist. After the fall of Napoleon, the documents were returned to The Hague, and in 1814 van Wijn was restored to his position by the new Dutch king, William I.

Throughout the early years of the nineteenth century, the search for and collection of important documents continued. Gaps existed in the documentation, caused by destruction, sale, and an occasional fire. In 1829 all archives were opened to researchers of trust, the beginning of open records in the Netherlands. A special archives building was opened in 1854, and in the same year the first overview or guide of archival holdings was published. The national archives in The Hague became the center for historical research.

During his term as general state archivist (1854–1865), R. C. Bakhuizen van den Brink drafted an archives law. The draft never became law, and subsequent general state archivists did not pursue it. With the founding of the Society of Dutch Archivists (Vereniging van Archivarissen in Nederland [VAN]) in 1891, pressure increased for the passage of an archives law. The VAN formed a committee to draft a law in 1900 and with the strong support of Robert Fruin (1857–1935), who was general state archivist from 1912 to 1932, the archives law was passed in 1918.[2] This law and subsequent revisions created a unified archival universe in the Netherlands. Public access to archives was written into the law. The law also created uniform rules regulating reference requests and the loaning of records, guidelines for the distribution of records among the various archives, rules for the security and destruction of records, and standards regulating archival training.

The Dutch National Archives School

The Dutch National Archives School (Rijksarchief School) was founded in 1919 to provide lectures for candidates preparing for the national examinations. The archives law calls for two levels of professional archivists, senior and middle grade. A university diploma, the state examination, and one year of practical training are required to be appointed a senior archivist. For middle-grade archivists, the requirements are a high school diploma, six months of practical training, and the state examination.[3] The state examinations continued unbroken from their beginning in 1919, but the school was closed in 1924, due to decreasing enrollments, and not reopened until 1955. During the twenty years following the reopening of the school—a time of growth for archives in the Netherlands—115 senior and 372 middle-grade archivists attended the school.[4]

The school occupies a small building adjacent to the National Archives in The Hague. Since 1971 the school has been independent of the National Archives Service; it has its own budget, sets its own policies, and reports directly to the Minister of Welfare, Health, and Cultural Affairs. The school serves as a focus for the archival community; its lecturers are working archivists from all categories of archives, and its students are placed in internships in archives throughout the country.

[2]The current archives law, also initiated by the VAN, was drafted in 1950, passed in 1962, and went into effect in 1968.

[3]Most professional training in the Netherlands, including medical and legal, begins directly after completion of secondary school.

[4]Eric Ketelaar, "The Dutch School for Archivists," *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique/Archief-en Bibliotheekwezen in Belgie* 46, no. 1–2 (1975): 195–208, esp. 197.

The Curriculum

The curriculum of the archives school is designed to train archivists to process and conduct reference service for records spanning nearly one thousand years. It is based on the principle that archivists must know the history of the Netherlands and of the institutions that created the records under their care, and that they must know modern archival methods theoretically and practically.

The course in Dutch history is of primary importance. Students receive sixty hours of lectures in general Dutch history in preparation for the twenty minutes given over to history in the one-hour oral state examination. In addition, several of the twenty-two courses which make up the curriculum are designed to introduce students to the history and structure of particular record-creating institutions: "Dutch Administrations before 1700," "History of Dutch Legal Institutions," "Outline of Dutch Governmental Organization," "History of Religious Institutions," and "Records Management in 19th Century National Government Departments."

The other major focus of the curriculum—modern archival theory–is addressed by courses on processing and the preparation of inventories, research methods, management of archives, records management codes, conservation methods, methods of caring for visual materials, the use of computers in archives, and the development of archival law. These subjects are grouped under the term *archiefvistique.* One-third of the national examination covers *archiefvistique.* The final one-third of the examination is devoted to paleography, the reading of old manuscripts. The above describes the examination for middle-grade archivist; that for senior archivist is structured differently and is longer.

The most important of the courses relating to *archiefvistique* is "Arrangement and Description." It is based on the theoretical foundation of modern archival methods as outlined in the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives (Handleiding voor het Ordenen en Beschrijven van Archiven),* written by Dutch archivists/historians S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin in 1898.[5] The *Manual* was commissioned by the VAN to provide a practical interpretation to the archival principles then current in Europe, the French *respect des fonds* and the German *provenienzprinzip.* Although not translated into English until 1940, its principles had been applied to American archives, principally by Arnold J. F. Van Laer, a Dutch archivist appointed in 1899 as archivist of the manuscripts section of the state archives of New York. Ernst Posner mentions the *Manual* in his 1940 *American Archivist* article, "Some Aspects of Archival Development Since the French Revolution."[6] The *Manual* has been modified by revisions in teaching materials and by the preparation of working aids such as the lexicon of archives terms (*Lexicon van Nederlandse archieftermen)* prepared by the VAN.[7]

The preparation of an inventory traditionally has focused on the description of individual manuscripts, which the Dutch refer to as "pieces" (*stukken*). Several short courses introduce the knowledge necessary to identify records and series, to describe them using the terms permitted by the *Lexicon,* to date them, and to order them following the principle of original order

[5]S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Handleiding voor het Ordenen en Beschrijven van Archieven* (Groningen: Erven B. Van der Kamp, 2d ed., 1920). Translation of the second Dutch edition by Arthur H. Leavitt published as *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1940; 2d ed., 1968).

[6]Ernst Posner, "Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution," *American Archivist* 3 (1940): 159–72. Theodore C. Pease reviewed the *Manual* in the same issue, pp. 116–17.

[7]Vereniging van Archivarissen, Nederland Stichting Archief Publikaties, *Lexicon van Nederlandse Archieftermen* ('s-Gravenhage, 1983).

(*herkomstbeginsel*). A course in chronology introduces students to the multiple calendars used to date older records. Study materials have also been developed to explain the coinages in use in various administrative areas over hundreds of years.

Dutch archivists are taught to apply modern archival methods to both medieval and modern records. Old records exist in great numbers in Dutch archives. Some old collections have never been inventoried; many have been inventoried with methods which predate Muller, Feith, and Fruin. Dutch archivists must also be prepared to offer reference service to records written over almost a thousand-year period in Dutch, Eastern Dutch (dost-Nederlands, a melange of Dutch and German written in a singular script), French, and, if they are trained as senior archivists, in Latin.

The Internship

Paralleling the archival theory taught during the class day is the weekly four-day internship. The experience of the interns varies greatly. Some are placed in the General State Archives in The Hague or in the provincial branches of the State Archives. Others serve in municipal, regional, or water board archives, the only requirement being that the archives which host interns be directed by qualified archivists. Students already employed in archives as records managers or paraprofessionals may serve internships at their regular place of employment.

The purpose of the internship is to introduce students to every activity of an archives, from acquisition to reference-room service. A one-half-day tutorial in paleography is included each week, leaving one-half of a day for general archival duties and two full days a week for processing the intern's "own" collection and preparing an inventory.

Processing à la Muller, Feith, and Fruin

As mentioned above, the heart of the Dutch archival training program is the theory and practice of processing; creating an inventory is the focus of the internship. The inventory must be completed before the national examination can be taken.

I served my internship at the province of Utrecht branch of the State Archives. Part of the responsibility of accepting an intern is that of selecting a suitable collection for him or her to process. The director of the State Archives in Utrecht took only a few minutes to decide upon a twentieth-century church collection for me. The Gereformeered Kerk Londen—what we in the United States would call the Christian Reformed Church of London—proved to be a very good exercise indeed. At two and one-half meters, it was small compared to collections assigned to some interns. The church had existed from 1939 through 1979, which eliminated the need to read old handwriting or to deal with language and cultural differences from another century, and about 5 percent of the records were in English. Two other factors made my task easier: the arrangement was to follow guidelines developed by the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands, which owned the collection, and one of my mentors, Peter van Beek, assistant archivist at the Archives Service of the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands, had already prepared a shelf list for the collection.[8]

In the class on the theory of ordering and describing, the instructor outlined five phases to preparing an inventory: (1) listing all the material in the collection; (2) writing preliminary descriptions for each item or record series on *fiches*; (3) creating a preliminary new order; (4) writing the definitive descriptions; and (5) creating the definitive new order. I first had to figure

[8]Algemeen Secretariaat (archiefdienst) van de Gereformeerd Kerken in Nederland, *Aanwijzingen voor het Inventariseren van Gereformeerde Kerkelijke Archieven* (Leusden, 1982).

out what *fiches* were and how one created them. That had to be done before the instructor discussed *fiches* in the class; although the theory was coordinated with the practice, it was not always possible to wait for the theory class before the practice took place. *Fiches* are squares of paper, floppy or stiff, blank or printed with lines and spaces to fill in, of various sizes, on which an item or record is described. Our theory instructor, R. C. J. van Maanen, head of processing for the city archives of Leiden, described his own method, which was to create the *fiches* in duplicate, giving them a preliminary number to correspond to the current place of the record on the shelf. When the entire collection had been described, one set of *fiches* was reordered forming the definitive, or new order, while the other set was maintained as it was to represent the shelf list. *Fiche* making is very individualized, but the making of *fiches* as part of processing is *de rigueur.*

Each *fiche* carries the name of the collection, a description of the item or record series, and a preliminary number. The number is important; it may stand for a bound volume, one document, or a folder of documents. The number represents the smallest unit of a Dutch collection and inventory. Dutch archivists talk about numbers: "I have one-hundred and sixty numbers in my collection," and researchers request a record/series by number.

Only certain terms found in the *Lexicon of Dutch Archives Terms* mentioned above may be used to describe a document or record series. One of the ways Dutch archivists have modernized the classic method of processing as described in the Muller, Feith, and Fruin *Manual* is by modifying the terms archivists are allowed to use in descriptions.

The description must include the physical form of the item or record series: whether it is a bound volume (*deel*), one piece of paper (*stuk*), a small folder (*omslag*), or a thick folder (*pak*). A descriptive term designates the function of the item or record series and is followed by dates and important names connected with them. About the only fuzzy descriptive term allowed is "*stukken betreffende*," which means "documents about."

When the preliminary description was completed on *fiches*, I resorted to my favorite method of arranging—an outline on a big yellow sheet—and then ordered one set of *fiches* according to the outline. The State Archives Service is developing computer programs to aid in the preparation of inventories. The State Archives in Utrecht had just received its first IBM-PC the previous year, and the staff was supposed to test the new State Archives Service programs and also develop their own computer projects. I was asked to use a new program (Oracle/MAIS) to order the *fiches*, and a program still in the developmental stage to write descriptions. Both of these were merely exercises to test the programs—the ordering and describing had already been done on the big yellow sheet and a trusty Macintosh at home. The programs have some bugs, but show great promise for allowing archivists to create inventories directly from the records, bypassing *fiches*, big yellow sheets, and endless retypings.

The interns work closely with mentors in their respective archives. Of my two mentors, W. B. Heins, head of the internal or inventory section in Utrecht, criticized the preliminary inventory because the correspondence had not been organized according to subject. The *Guidelines of the Archives Service of the Christian Reformed Church* suggested that that be done if possible.[9] To divide the correspondence according to subject meant that each piece must be read and understood; indeed, that was my task for the next several weeks.

The preliminary inventory went through

[9]This constituted a "disrespect" for original order in that I was imposing a subject order on the correspondence of the church secretary/treasurer.

two more retypings, each time incorporating suggestions from the two mentors. When the preliminary inventory was approved, an introduction was written in the classic Dutch manner: a history of the creating institution, a description of the collection and its provenance, a justification for the arrangement and description of the records—including a note about the removal of records—and appropriate indexes. Illustrations are often included in inventories, but I had none.

Traditionally, the next step is to meet with the person responsible for inventory publication at the archives, normally the director or associate director. This formal discussion and approval of the inventory is held even for inventories written by regular staff members. The series of published inventories is the showpiece of every state archives; their production is not taken lightly.

During the inventory approval conference, the description of a record/series received a very careful reading. The organization of the inventory and the placement and order of a record/series under appropriate subject headings were scrutinized to be sure that they fit within the classic organization, and that they did not violate the guidelines of the Archives Service of the Christian Reformed Church. When I inquired if the word-for-word reading of the descriptions was always so time consuming—or unusually so because the descriptions had been written by someone for whom Dutch was a foreign language—I was assured that this was the usual process and pace. If there was a question about the order or description of a record/series, I returned to the record itself to check that it had been correctly described and was in its proper place in the inventory. My Dutch colleagues seemed to enjoy the game of perfecting inventories and never indicated that it was a waste of time, or that they had more important duties.

After the inventory was approved, the collection was reordered. The definitive numbers indicating the new order were written on strips of paper inserted in each folder, and then the folders were arranged on the shelves to correspond to the new order. Finally, the documents stood in the order of their numbers in the typed inventory. Eventually, a member of the restoration lab would refolder the numbers, place labels on the folders, and tie them in heavy cardboard *portefeuilles*, open at top and bottom to allow air circulation. The inventory would be published in an edition of about two hundred copies and distributed to archives throughout the Netherlands. At that point, the collection would be ready for research use.

Reflections on Dutch Archival Training

During interviews in 1985–86 with General State Archivist A. E. M. Ribberink; Peter Sigmond, director of the National Archives School; and Eric Ketelaar, former director of the school, former president of the Society of Dutch Archivists (VAN), and director of the provincial branch of the State Archives in Groningen, I had the opportunity to ask questions which had arisen as I reflected on my observations and experiences.

Dutch archival theory is based on the *Manual* of Muller, Feith, and Fruin, and current theoretical writing and practical aids are either based on the *Manual* or are modifications of it. Yet the *Manual* itself was not discussed in class. What exactly is the place of the *Manual* in Dutch *archiefvistique?*

For Ribberink, the most important principle in the *Manual* was that the "natural order" be maintained. Ribberink pointed out the difficulty of maintaining natural order when working with modern records. Often 95 percent of a department's records are destroyed, and the remaining 5 percent must reflect the important activities of the record-forming group. Sigmond characterized the *Manual* as a dated piece—a solu-

tion for the time in which it was written—which has been modified rather than discarded.

Just as the *Manual* had been modified by new terminology and interpretation, the training curriculum was continually being changed. The changes mostly had been additions to prepare archivists to handle modern records and new technology. The philosophy behind the curriculum, according to Sigmond, was that it should be a combination of theory and practice. The courses emphasized theory—they were as theoretical as possible to balance the practical experience of the internship. He believed that one year was enough time to give students a good basis in archival theory. Rather than extend the basic training program beyond one year—as some of my fellow students who were weighed down with work suggested—Sigmond preferred to develop specialized continuing education courses—such as in the legal and medical professions. These courses could be more individualized and more experimental.

Ketelaar described archival training in the Netherlands as the "Y" model—common training and then specialization. He thought that in the future, senior archivists' training would be split further, with an emphasis on either older or modern records. While director of the school (1969–1976), Ketelaar introduced a new course, an introduction to machine-readable records. He opposed adding more specific training in the use of computers to the archives school curriculum because he thought computer training should be project oriented.

It seemed to me that the practice of training two levels of archivists, with some positions reserved for senior archivists, limited archival careers. Currently, without a university degree, a middle-grade archivist cannot assume a position reserved for a senior archivist no matter what her capabilities or experience. Sigmond agreed that the practice of training two levels of archivists could be seen as a limitation, but said that it was difficult to change because historically, and by law, certain positions are reserved for senior archivists. The demand for two levels of archivists will continue, in Sigmond's opinion; in fact, he said he could see the need for adding a third, paraprofessional archival position. In general, the curriculum presented the same information at both levels—this would be even more true when the knowledge of Latin is dropped as a requirement for senior candidates and Latin paleography is dropped from their curriculum. Sigmond hoped that in the future, middle-grade archivists without a university degree would be able to apply for those positions currently reserved for senior archivists.

According to Ribberink, senior archivists were expected to exert leadership and to be organizers; they were expected to be able to manage an archives and to build and preserve relationships with the ministry, the academic/scientific community, and the general public. He expected senior archivists to have the ability to synthesize and think abstractly.

The National Archives School has upgraded the caliber of students through advertising. No longer do students appear mostly as a last resort; no longer does the nephew of the city alderman get in without the necessary qualifications. The application process has also been improved. One important component is the personal interview with the director, during which what it means to be an archivist is clearly explained. About one hundred applicants vie for the forty-two internships; being placed in an internship is the last step in being accepted into the archives school. The better grade of archival students reflected the improvement in the image of archives, according to Sigmond. The whole profession had worked to improve its public relations—and new buildings, exhibits, and school programs had paid off.

Ribberink, Sigmond, and Ketelaar em-

phasized that because Dutch archival training is standardized, it serves as a basis on which to build a profession. The profession can plan continuing education—seminars and study days—built upon the basic training. The standards of the training program are regulated by the profession through an advisory committee, and the archives school is represented in the highest professional committee, the Convent, which oversees archival planning nationally. The advantages of standardized basic archival training are many. Dutch archivists have a common vocabulary and a shared training experience. Although the training program had its origins in a national archives act, it is now the profession which oversees its continuation and development.

I was impressed with the emphasis on history in the Dutch archival curriculum—national history and the history of record-creating institutions. The theory is that an archivist cannot properly process or interpret a collection without knowing the history and structure of the creating organ, and without knowing how the record-creating institutions fit into the society as a whole.

I was also impressed with the linguistic ability of Dutch archivists. The Dutch facility with languages grows out of a high school program which in the past included at least three foreign languages—English, French, and German—and also Latin and Greek for the university-preparatory students. English has taken over as the most important foreign language and is also the language used by most Europeans and Asians as their second language. Dutch archivists who are used to working with researchers speaking English—and other languages—are seldom nonplussed to find articles in English, French, and German in their archival journals. They can "keep up" with international archival developments, an incalculable advantage for Dutch archivists.

The Dutch archival community has a long history of involvement with archives legislation. It is justly proud of this involvement and continually works to see that legislation which has an impact on archives is drawn up *with* the advice of archivists.

Sigmond, Ketelaar, and Ribberink were optimistic about providing a training program to meet the challenge of servicing old and modern records. According to Ribberink and Sigmond, the emphasis on older records is weakening, as is the emphasis on medieval institutions in the training. But some classic courses such as paleography must remain because of the necessity to interpret old records to researchers. The problem for Dutch archives of the future is to continue to provide high quality service for medieval records while meeting the challenges of modern record keeping. For Ribberink, one of the challenges of modern records was providing accountability for government departments, of providing insight into the workings of government even as government reorganizes. In the Netherlands this reorganization might occur because of participation in the European Economic Community, or because of changes in documentation brought about by computerization. Sigmond expected that, along with the modernization of the training program, the mentality of archivists, which now finds work with older records to be more interesting and prestigious, would change.

There is no question that spending a year in a foreign archival milieu as observer and participant is a rewarding experience. It is always enlightening to observe from outside, to learn something about another archival system, to ask: Do we do it that way? If not, why not? Is our method better or just better suited to us? Could they benefit from our practice? We from theirs? There were a few moments in which I had the "gift to see ourselves as others see us"—as Robert Burns put it—when the few Dutch archivists who were knowledgeable or curious about American archival practice

would describe their impressions of it; but unfortunately, most Dutch archivists are no more knowledgeable or curious about American archives than most Americans are about Dutch. We are all too limited by our own worlds, and because of this self-imposed limitation, we miss much of interest and profit in other archival communities.