A French Legacy: The Transition from Collegiate to Bureaucratic Record-keeping in a Dutch Town, 1800–1900

PETER J. HORSMAN

RÉSUMÉ La gestion de documents aux Pays-Bas se métamorphose à la suite de changements politiques et administratifs qui s'enclenchent en 1795. Les changements proviennent en bonne partie de l'influence des pratiques françaises, durant la période où le pays se trouve sous contrôle français. Toutefois, les pratiques traditionnelles en matière de gestion des documents survivent et se combinent aux pratiques françaises. Les administrations locales, comme celle de la ville de Dordrecht, semblent avoir échappé à l'influence française directe sur leur gestion de documents. Toutefois, l'importance croissante des écritures renforce la bureaucratie, qui impose ses règles aux élites politiques locales, comme le conseil de ville et le comité des bourgmestres et échevins. Le cas de Dordrecht montre comment la gestion de documents s'éloigne des processus de prise de décision pour devenir une spécialité bureaucratique, qui répond aux besoins de la bureaucratie plutôt qu'à ceux des décideurs politiques. Le début du XX^{e} siècle voit l'apparition d'un système formel de gestion de documents, contrôlé par un registre spécialisé.

ABSTRACT Initiated by political and administrative changes that started in 1795, record-keeping in the Netherlands underwent a metamorphosis. The alterations were greatly influenced by French practices during the period that the country was under French control and administration. However, many of the traditional record-keeping methods were preserved and mixed with the French practices. Local administrations, like those of the town of Dordrecht, seem largely to have escaped from French influence on their record-keeping. However, increasing paperwork enforced bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy imposed its administrative rules on the local political hierarchy, such as the city council and the committee of burgomaster and aldermen. The Dordrecht case study demonstrates how record-keeping moved from the primary process of decision making to become a bureaucratic specialty, which met the requirements of the bureaucracy itself rather than those of the political decision makers. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the birth of a formal record-keeping system, controlled by a specialized registry.

Introduction

Backgrounds

The invasion of the Dutch Republic by French troops and the ensuing Batavian Revolution in the winter of 1794–1795 initiated a series of political and

administrative changes that would have a dramatic impact on both the Netherlands state and society. The old federal republic of the seven united provinces, born in an eighty-year struggle with Spain (1568–1648), ceased to exist and was replaced by a unitary state, the Batavian Republic, formally still independent, but under a strong French political and military supervision.[1] The new, centralized government turned the former political structure upside down. In the past, representatives (delegates) of local magistrates constituted and controlled both provincial and federal administration. In 1795, and especially after 1798, The Hague became the centre from where local governments were supervised. The towns lost most of their former governmental autonomy. Changes in administrative relationships and government structure would eventually lead to a bureaucracy, and consequently to new record-keeping systems. The so called Batavian period gave birth to new institutions, regulations, and administrative systems which in broad lines still determine the Netherlands state and Dutch culture.[2]

The new developments came forward primarily at the national and provincial levels. At first glance, it might seem the new political situation did not affect the structure of local government. Though regents affiliated with the old regime were replaced and government bodies changed names, much of the structure remained fundamentally the same. At the national level, the administration gradually moved towards a French model; while at the local level it appears that municipalities adhered to the traditional structures and methods. Despite the political turn-about, local officials were often reluctant to introduce novelties imposed by national or provincial administrations.[3] The collegiate form survived as the dominant model for local government with an active role for the city council members in town administration. As the Dordrecht city council reported in 1808 – with due respect to their predecessors – the town was administered economically, with most of the offices occupied by magistrates without any salary or personal benefit.[4] Yet in the long term, the municipal administration would not escape from bureaucracy. When the French retreated in 1813, the Netherlands did not fall back on the previous federal political system, but remained a unitary state and kept much of the French administrative practice.

The development of bureaucracy in the early nineteenth century has recently been the object of research, but publications on related record-

1 The best account in English on this period is Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators. Revolution in the Netherlands 1780–1813* (London, 1977). For the preceding period: Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995).

2 F.C.J. Ketelaar, "Door eenheid tot orde en vastheid: vernieuwing van de overheidsorganisatie in de Bataafse tijd," *Nehalennia* 109 (1996), pp. 39–47.

3 Ibid., p. 40 referring to Schama, *Patriots and Liberators.*

4 Reports on local administrations, 1808. Fonds of the Departmental Administration of Maasland, 1807–1810.

keeping methods are scarce. Some research in this field has been done at the national level, but the local level is still an area to be discovered.[5] The main questions in this paper are: What traces might the French administration have left in municipal record-keeping? Can developments in record-keeping be discovered? What factors might have influenced these developments? I shall seek answers to these questions through a single case study, which may be a model for further comparative research – not necessarily confined to the Netherlands, but applicable to any country that has witnessed similar political changes.[6] The case study – primarily based on careful observation of the archive itself – outlines nineteenth-century record-keeping in Dordrecht, a town in the province of Holland, against the background of national developments.[7] Changes in record-keeping in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can only be understood within the broader framework of a rapidly growing administration and increasing documentation.[8] For the Dordrecht case study, this framework has not been the object of intensive research. Rather, the focal point has been the archive. More detailed research on methods and techniques for creating documents, the use of documents in work processes, and the impact of technology will certainly contribute to a deeper insight into the behaviour of the record-keeping system.

5 A.E.M. Ribberink, "Verbaal van het verhandelde," *Nederlands Archievenblad* 68 (1964), pp. 64–70. J.H. de Vey Mestdagh, "Toegankelijkheid van archieven," *Nederlands Archievenblad* 68 (1964), pp. 12–21. T.H. Bosman, "De vroegere wijze van behandeling van post- en archiefzaken bij de ministeries," *Overheidsdocumentatie* 11, nos. 9 and 10 (1958) and 12, no. 1 (1959). H.M. Dinkgreve, "De ontwikkeling van de registratuur bij de gemeente Amsterdam," *Nederlands Archievenblad* 62 (1957/58), pp. 91–101.

6 See for a case study at the level of a department: Wolfgang Hans Stein, *Französisches Verwaltungsschriftgut in Deutsland. Die Departementalverwaltungen in der Zeit der Französischen Revolution und des Empire* (Marburg, 1996). Stein describes the administrative procedures and record-keeping during the French occupation of the Rheinland, but does not follow the developments in the nineteenth century.

7 I express my thanks to the staff of the city archive of Dordrecht for their help and patience.

8 Ketelaar, "Door eenheid tot orde en vastheid," speaks about an enormous production of records in the period 1795–1813. He provides figures, comparing the *ancien régime* (c. 1580–1795) with the Batavian-French period. I tried to collect figures about the extend of the Dordrecht fonds, and although these are less spectacular than those given by Ketelaar, they clearly demonstrate a continuous growing production of documents. However, the figures should be used with care, since much might have been destroyed, and in the *ancien régime* many tasks had been carried out by separate bodies, creating their own archive. Yet, they indicate the increasing production, from an average of 0.7 linear meter of records yearly over the period 1572–1795 to 1.2 meters yearly between 1795 and 1813; 2.2 meters from 1813–1851; 3.8 meters from 1851–1945; 6.8 meters yearly from 1945–1980; and 14.5 meters from 1980–1990. However, the difference between the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth does not seem significant. At least in Dordrecht, growing went gradually.

Case Study Design

This paper is based on a four-layer model that places an archive in a wider context: 1) the political and societal environment; 2) the administration and decision-making process; 3) the process of document making and document use; and finally 4) the record-keeping processes.

The method I have used is primarily an analysis or a reading of the archive as it is, limited for practical reasons to the records created in one particular business process: decision making; and putting that in one particular context, a municipal administration, in which decision making is a collegiate process. I shall analyse how decision making has been documented, how the execution of decisions was controlled by means of the records, and how the records were organized to fulfil their roles in the process. I will follow the developments over roughly one and a half centuries, from the late eighteenth century up to the early twentieth century. A few dramatic political and administrative changes occurred, and the main question was to what extent these changes affected the archive.

A municipal administration is characterized by collegiate political decision making, that is the administration through any kind of "college," including boards, councils, committees. It was the dominant form of decision making in the Dutch Republic before 1795, as it still is nowadays in municipalities. In those days also most of the executive work was carried out by the council members, with a very limited operational space for civil servants. In a modern bureaucracy, however, the major part of the work is done by civil servants, including – within well-defined competencies – making decisions. Boards and councils still exist, but devote themselves to politics or to making high level decisions. They are rarely involved in operational matters. The municipal council is just one example.

Rather than providing a full explanation of the developments in administration and record-keeping based on a contextual analysis, this paper aims to let the archive speak for itself – not so much through the contents of the records, but through the very structure of the archive. In the terminology of Robert Yin, the case study is in the first place an exploratory case study.[9] Of course, I cannot fully escape from interpretation, for my own reading of the archive adds meaning and new context to the archive. Nevertheless I think that this case study may contribute to the development of models for comparative research in record-keeping systems.

Hypothesis

The original hypothesis was that a strong French influence could be identified

9 Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research. Design and Methods* (London/New Delhi, 1994), p. 2.

in the local administration, just as had happened at both the national and provincial levels. Amsterdam, for example, adopted in 1811 a French style of work organization and record-keeping, which in the main survived well into the twentieth century. By that year the Amsterdam town clerk's office was already a considerable size and was restructured into a few bureaus. Would, then, a smaller town like Dordrecht, that at that time had hardly twenty thousand inhabitants, a tenth of the population of Amsterdam, have done the same? I even expected that higher level government, increasingly hungry to exercise power and control, might have imposed its own procedures and systems on local administrations. In particular, I thought of the *Indicateur,* the register of incoming and outgoing letters, as the "symbol" of French bureaucracy and how it might be prescribed for local administrations as well. This seemed plausible since this particular register dominated nineteenth-century national and provincial record-keeping systems, and eventually survived also at the local level until today, albeit in a modified form. The French seem to have introduced the indicateur in other occupied countries too. Italy is just one example; Elio Lodolini attributes the current *protocollo* to the Napoleonic, and partially predecessor revolutionary administrations.[10]

The *indicateur* is more than merely a register of incoming and outgoing letters, a tool recently critized by modern authors on records management as being cumbersome and outdated.[11] In its most elaborated form it supported management to control administrative activities – one may call it document flow, or rather workflow *avant la lettre.* Before French bureaucrats introduced it into their newly acquired territories, the Prussian administration had applied a similar instrument for over at least one century.[12] (Indeed, one interesting research question is whether the Prussians might have influenced the French – or had it been a French invention as well?)

However, at least for Dordrecht, this hypothesis did not work out. The archive still includes a rudimentory *indicateur* dating back from 1811; but it contains no more than two entries, with an interval of some six months. A second one, from 1816, listed in the catalogue, could not be traced anymore. The extant series now starts with 1831, eighteen years since the French left the Low Countries. There is no evidence that earlier volumes existed, nor has the contrary been proved.

Nevertheless, in my quest for the *indicateur* as a visible, direct French legacy, I discovered phenomena in the record-keeping system that seemed to be

10 Elio Lodolini, *Archivistica. Principi e problemi* (Milano, 1995), p. 76; for an explanation of the *protocollo,* see p. 90.

11 Ira A. Penn, Gail Pennix, and Jim Coulson, *Records Management Handbook* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 2.

12 Thea Miller, "The German Registry: The Evolution of a Record-keeping Model," *Archival Science* 3, no. 1 (2003), pp. 43–63.

significant, if not typical for the local administrations. In my eyes, the archive of Dordrecht reveals the development from a collegiate administration, with its associated characteristic record-keeping system, towards a bureaucracy, with what I would call a bureaucratic record-keeping system. This evolution was a result of a specialization within the bureacracy itself: records management. In some municipalities this happened in the first decade of the last century; other local administrations introduced these new systems in or even after the Second World War. In Dordrecht, this specialization began in 1918, the year when this paper ends.

The Batavian Revolution

National and Provincial Developments

Before 1795 the prevailing form in public administration throughout the Dutch republic was the college (board): provincial states, the States-General, the Council of State, Admiralty Colleges, etc. These various colleges were usually supported by a small secretarial staff. Typically a college consisted of magistrates who primarily defended local interests. Decisions made in the regular meetings were recorded in a register of resolutions (*Resolutieboek*). The series of these registers form the backbone of the respective archives.[13] Incoming and outgoing letters, requests, reports, and other documents were accumulated into series parallel to the main series or even included into the volumes of the main series. The primary criterion for arrangement was the chronology. Various kinds of systematic and alphabetical indices made the series accessible for the initiated secretary, or *griffier.* Particularly the extensive archive of the States-General, the supreme body of government, had an excellent reputation and might have been set as an example to other collegial archives.[14]

In 1795, almost all existing councils and boards were discontinued and replaced by new ones. Initially the procedures of decision making, recording, and archiving did not change much. Yet, in the following years, step by step, the collegial form of government was replaced by monocratic, centralized forms of administration, culminating in the creation of the Kingdom of Holland (1806–1810) under Napoleon's brother Louis, and finally the full incorporation of the former united provinces as *départements* into the Empire. The changing form of government was accompanied by an increasing bureaucracy, both at a national and at the departmental (provincial) level, modelled on the

13 See: S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York, 1940), section 20.

14 See for the record-keeping system of the States-General, Th. Van Riemsdijk, *De griffie van Hare Hoog Mogenden* (s-Gravenhage, 1885).

French style. At the top of a *département* stood the Prefect, who passed down imperial orders and directives to municipalities. The recording of decisions was altered accordingly. In the Batavian Republic, ministers and provincial authorities made up minutes (*Verbaal)* of their administrative actions on a daily basis, comparable with the former *Resolutieboek*, previously in use by the provincial states or States-General. Their French successors, however, kept a register for all incoming and outgoing letters, the *Indicateur,* in which date of receipt, sender or addressee, subject, and decision were recorded, as well as the *bureau* (department) which dealt with the subject and prepared decision-making.[15] The *Indicateur* indicated also where the documents were finally stored in the archive. In many administrations the formal and chronological series, once so characteristic of Dutch administrations, were replaced by subject oriented filing, according to a pre-set classification schema.[16] The *resolutieboek,* the main instrument of the college, gave way to the agenda, a typical administrative tool for the bureaucracy.

Dordrecht Before 1795

What was the situation at the local level and to what extent did the Batavian revolution change things? I chose Dordrecht as a case study. Comparable developments might be found in other cities, although probably different in a number of aspects depending on the local political system and size of administration. Comparative research is needed for a clear view. This case study may contribute to such a comparative research by offering the outline of a methodology. I will follow for each of the stages in development the same schema: political and administrative context, decision making and records creation, and record-keeping, particularly capture, access, and storage.

Dordrecht was (and still is) a mid-sized town in the province of Holland, about 20 kilometres southeast of Rotterdam, situated at the junction of the country's main rivers. Although by the end of the eighteenth century the town had lost much of its original glory, and was outstripped by Rotterdam as a trade centre, the town still had a strong political position, being formally the first in rank among the other towns in the provincial states of Holland.[17]

15 Various (European) countries that use or used a form of registration of specific data on correspondance may have different terms for the register. In the Netherlands "agenda" (diary), in Germany (Prussia) "Geschäftstagebuch" or Journal, in Italy "protocollo."

16 This sketch is generic. Much comparative research is needed for a more complete picture. Even if many departmental archives has been arranged and described, such a research has not been undertaken. One reason might be that most of these archives were recovered in complete disorder, and the original order was often impossible to reconstruct.

17 Each of the seven provinces of the Dutch Republic had its own form of government. The states of the province of Holland consisted in the Nobility (1 vote, representing the country side), and 17 voting towns. Israel, *The Dutch Republic,* footnote 277.

Before 1795 the most important body in the town administration of Dordrecht was the city council, the *Oud-Raad,* consisting of forty men from the elite class. Its members were not elected, but the council nominated its new members by co-optation.[18] The *Oud-Raad* made all important political decisions, including those concerning provincial and federal matters. The council met as often as needed, usually depending on provincial, federal, or even international politics. "The Hague" was always the first item on the agenda; the Dordrecht delegates to the Provincial States reported frequently from those meetings, from the States-General or the State Council. Daily local business was mandated to the four burgomasters or to other boards of regents, such as the local court of law, the orphan masters, or the supervisors of church matters. The regents did not receive a salary for their work. In some occasions they received a small amount of money for being present, but there were no direct benefits of their office.[19]

The meetings of the *Oud-Raad* were carried out in a strict order: the presiding burgomaster tabled the issues and drew the conclusions. The secretary recorded the decisions into registers: *resolutieboeken.* (To a large extent, the meetings followed the example of the provincial states and the States-General.) Probably the secretary even made drafts partly before the meeting, eventually making corrections and having them copied by clerks into a fair copy. This formal recording started in the middle of the seventeenth century, but reached its most elaborate form in the eighteenth century, with one volume of minutes a year. By then, incoming letters were bound directly at the back of the minutes. Incoming documents such as circulars on which a decision was not required, were separately bound or kept in portfolios. Drafts of outgoing letters, in the form of extracts of decisions, were inserted into the text of the minutes. Alphabetic indexes provided access to the contents of the minutes for those who understood the choice of keywords. Most likely the town secretaries relied on their personal memory as well. The fair copies of the minutes of the *Oud-Raad,* well written and uniformly bound in parchment, were kept in the burgomasters' room; the drafts were directly at the hands of both secretaries.[20]

Most bodies within the town administration followed a similar process, albeit one often carried out with less care and professionalism. Typically, the information was either directly recorded in bound registers or written on loose

18 In other towns the council could have a different name, such as *Vroedschap.* Actually, the procedure of nomination was more complex, depending of the political situation. The *stadhouder* – as the formal representative of the count, even if since 1581 Holland did not have a count anymore – had the right to appoint local magistrates.

19 What induced regents to accept an office is beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly it was more than mere service to the community; at the long term political power paid back.

20 Based on an analysis of the archive itself, in particular the fonds Stadsarchief 1572–1795. All inventories of the municipal archives of Dordrecht are available on its Web site, accessible through <www.archieven.nl>.

sheets of paper and bound afterwards. Like most (if not all) local administrations, Dordrecht's record-keeping system before 1795 was what German archival terminology calls an *Amtsbuchregistratur,* a record system based on bound registers. The advantage is evident: a lower risk of disorganization and less chance of missing loose papers.[21]

The town civil service – insofar as it is the appropriate terminology for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century city clerks – was fairly small. The regents carried out much of the executive work by themselves. The most important civil servant was the pensionary, originally a legal advisor, but in this period the permanent representative in the provincial states in The Hague, and the most prominent rapporteur on policies at the provincial, federal, and international political levels.[22] Next to the pensionary were the two secretaries responsible for most of the paperwork of the town administration. A few clerks assisted them.[23]

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century archive not only reflected the structure of the town administration, but also the strict discipline of the meetings, following closely the procedure of preparation, investigation, decision-making, and executing.[24] In modern wordings one might say that record-keeping was fully integrated into the business process. The series of resolutions of the various councils and colleges formed the framework of the town administration, and consequently of the archive as a whole.[25]

Dordrecht 1795–1813

The surrender of the city of Dordrecht to the French troops on 18 January 1795 was the last political act of the *Oud Raad;* it ceased to exist almost immediately. Soon elections were organized for a new council: the *Raad der Municipaliteit.* Out of the members of the city council, four new burgomasters were appointed, who constituted an executive committee. The next eighteen years would bring a series of political and administrative changes both at the national and local levels. Locally, the centre of power shifted gradually from

21 The registry system of Leiden had been designed in the late sixteenth century by its town secretary Jan van Hout. As to whether other town secretaries might be influenced by Van Hout is uncertain. F.C.J.Ketelaar, "Jan van Hout," *Nederlands Archievenblad* 84, no. 3 (1980), pp. 400–412.

22 The town archive contains an eighteenth-century register recording meetings of the burgomasters and the pensionary, apparently to prepare the meetings of the Oud-Raad.

23 I constrain to what now would be called the white-collar workers. The total number of people dependent of the town administration was much bigger, including workmen.

24 Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics. New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, MD, 1998), Chapter 4. An analysis carried out by students of the archival science program of the University of Amsterdam demonstrated that indeed the procedure of the meetings followed the generic model of a business process discussed by Duranti.

25 See note 3.

the council to the executive committee (under different names). After 1811 the executive power almost exclusively was assigned to the *maire* (mayor). The emperor appointed the members of the city council, a body of twenty-four representatives with limited political power.

Despite these political and administrative changes, the way of recording decisions did not alter fundamentally, and this is true for record-keeping as well. The minutes (*Resoluties*) were now termed *Verbaal* (in full: *Verbaal van het verhandelde,* meaning "account of the acts"), following national and provincial terminology. Incoming letters were still bound in the same volume with the proceedings. Also, when in 1811 the *maire* alone took charge of local government, the secretary recorded daily the account of the decisions, just as if it were a council making them. This was exactly how the ministers had been obliged to do before and during the Kingdom of Holland (1806–1810). Even the name *Verbaal* was maintained. In Dordrecht, traditional methods of records creation and record-keeping continued, apparently untouchable from changes in administrative structure or composition of the various political bodies.

The municipal civil service at the town hall was still too small for any kind of professional specialization. As late as 1814, the secretariat counted no more than six clerks – apart from the two town secretaries and the treasurer – notwithstanding an incessant flood of requests for information from the central government in The Hague, and despite new registrations imposed by an increasingly controlling central government. With the lack of a permanent presence of town representatives in The Hague, the government tried to cope with its uncertainty by collecting as much written information as possible. Copying and keeping registers were the main activities of the municipal clerks, who produced in 1813 no less than 1,300 neatly written pages of text.[26]

Moreover, the registration of incoming and outgoing letters through the *Indicateur* – a typical phenomenon of the French administration – did not penetrate into the administration in Dordrecht.[27] Following the practice of the *département,* a few other towns introduced it in their record-keeping, including Rotterdam and Amsterdam, or smaller towns like Gouda. In Amsterdam, on the one hand, the *indicateur* developed quickly as the backbone for its recordkeeping system. On the other hand, the rudimentary *indicateur* that Dordrecht started in August 1811 contained only two entries. The secretary stuck to the traditional method of inserting incoming letters in the minutes, a method that had survived the centuries and met the requirements of the administration.[28] No kind of subject arrangement, which became the rule in various

26 Stadsarchief Dordrecht 5 (1813–1851), nr 308.

27 Napoleontic administration. As noted before, in the Netherlands the French introduced the system as early as 1795, thus several years before Napoleon. A similar system was in use by the Prussian administration for more than a century. E. Lodolini, *Archivistica. Principi e problemi* 7th ed. (Milano, 1995), footnote 75.

28 Dinkgreve, Registratuur. The rudimentary indicateur in Dordrecht is in Stadsarchief 4 (1795–1813), nr 90.

provincial administrations (*départements*), took hold. The loose documents, currently a component part of the fonds of the town administration over the period 1795–1813 (and rearranged by subject by later archivists, thereby blurring the original order), refer mainly to cases upon which no decision was taken, or for which decision making took more time than the periodical binding of the minutes.

Recordkeeping in the Nineteenth Century

National Developments in the Public Administration since 1813

After the final defeat of Napoleon, the European great powers restored the Netherlands, not as a federal republic as it had been before 1795, but as a monarchy with a central government, initially unified with the former Austrian Netherlands, currently Belgium. Government consisted of the king and his ministers. Both king and ministers were supported by a growing civil service: the state secretary and the ministries. At the provincial level, new councils were established: the provincial states and a council of delegates as an executive committee presided over by a governor appointed by the king.

In the first years after 1813, the methods of administration and record-keeping were a mixture of those of French public administration and original Dutch and Belgian practice. In order to improve the efficiency of the civil service, in 1818 a State Committee investigated these various practices and finally recommended standards for administration. As a result, the public administration act of 1823 prescribed centralized record-keeping for all ministries – partly in order to limit the power of the arising bureaucracy. Incoming mail was to be registered in the general *indicateur* before being distributed across the various bureaus of the ministry. The *indicateur* supported the secretary-general to control workflow. Outgoing mail had to be signed by the proper authority (e.g., the king, minister, or secretary-general) and registered in the *indicateur* before expedition. As a rule the documents were filed and stored in chronological order by the date of decision. They were no longer bound, but put in portfolios or boxes. Arrangement by subject was explicitly prohibited in order to avoid specialism within the civil service. The series of minutes of decisions taken by the minister and related documents (*Verbaal*) in conjunction with the *indicateur* replaced the original *Resolutieboek* definitively. A system of *répertoires*, indexes, and lists of keywords provided for access points on subjects and names.[29]

Notwithstanding the rules, uniformity among the bodies of the public administration was never achieved. Sooner or later, each government adminis-

29 This section is primarily based on "Ribberink, Verbaal." Original administrative terms do not always coincide with modern archival language. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a glossary.

tration organized its record-keeping according to its own specific requirements. The Act of 1823 was formally in force until 1950, but by then many government agencies already used alternative systems for filing and classification – notably those developed for municipal administrations.

Dordrecht, 1813–1898

Municipal administrations also changed with the retreat of the French in 1813. While the political power of the then elected municipal council would gradually increase, daily business was firmly in the hands of the burgomasters, nominated by the king. In 1824 a new act on local government established a council of twenty-eight members for Dordrecht. The council was to meet at least four times a year. The former three burgomasters were replaced by an executive committee of burgomaster and two aldermen.[30] The *Local Government Act* (*Gemeentewet*) of 1851 increased the number of aldermen, and put the political supremacy in the municipal council. Nevertheless, burgomaster and aldermen stayed (and still stay today) at the very heart of all local decision making. The act did not dictate any kind of record-keeping for the municipalities. In Dordrecht, the traditional style of recording proceedings, as in the past for the *Oudraad,* continued unchanged for the new administration. Even the name of the minutes remained the same: *Verbaal van het verhandelde* (proceedings). As in the eighteenth century and during the Batavian-French period, drafts of outgoing letters immutably were part of the written text of the minutes, and the incoming documents requiring action were periodically bound in the volumes with the minutes of decisions. Binding loose documents (as a highly safe form of storage, after all) outlived the political changes, and would survive for almost another century. Yearly subject indices to the minutes were supposed to make them accessible.[31] The capture of the records of the administration into the record-keeping system continued to coincide with the primary process of decision-making.[32]

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, secretarial staff at the town hall was still limited. Except for the town secretary and the treasurer, no more than six clerks populated the secretariat in 1816, and two more dealt with the administration of births, marriages, and deaths, the civil state.[33] These clerks were mere scribes with no particular mandate. Basically, all decisions were made by the burgomaster and aldermen, and except for a few registrations, all

30 Stadsarchief Dordrecht 5 (1813–1851), nr 4.

31 At the national level, the repertoria and indexes referred directly to the files or to the agenda; at the local level, however, to the minutes.

32 Financial records form a record system of its own, under control of the tresurer. I have kept them out of this paper, like the registers of the civil state office.

33 The civil state has been a French novelty in local administration, introduced in 1811–1812.

paperwork passed the meeting table of this college. The increasing interference of the town administration in local society is reflected in the impressive volumes of the minutes of the meetings. However, the *Local Administration Act* of 1851 again assigned new tasks to municipalities, and the burgomaster and aldermen could not deal with every individual case anymore, even in smaller towns like Dordrecht. Specialization of the civil service, and consequently a growth in bureaucracy, appeared to be inevitable. The town clerk's department (*gemeentesecretarie*) grew faster than the town's population, from four bureaus with a dozen civil servants in 1858 to nine bureaus and seventy-six staff in 1921.[34]

The Indicateur in Dordrecht

As said before unlike Amsterdam and a few other towns, the first decades of record-keeping in Dordrecht after 1813 did not include structured registration of incoming and outgoing letters in a separate register, the *indicateur.* It looks as if the French administration hardly left any trace. As late as 1831, the town clerks seemed to have introduced the registration of outgoing letters, at least the oldest register (*indicateur*) extant dates from that year.[35] These registers were bound before use, but the columns and column headings were handwritten and not pre-printed. One single volume includes two or more years of registration. Entries for outgoing letters include: sequence number (every year starting with number 1), addressee, date, subject matter, date of the minutes of burgomaster and aldermen in which the case eventually was discussed (and consequently where the full text of the draft could be found). However, apparently not all outgoing letters were discussed in the board meetings, as before. Apart from preparing the formal decision-making process, the clerks seemed to deal autonomously with some routine business. That might have been the very reason to start with the registration of correspondence, but unfortunately no written decision on the subject could be traced in the archive; record-keeping does not always document its own changes.

Consistent registration of both incoming and outgoing letters began twenty years later in 1851, under the new *Local Government Act*. The instruction for the Dordrecht town clerk worded it clearly: he must keep a register of all incoming and outgoing mail. As discussed before, in the second half of the century a bureaucracy gradually developed inside the town administration. The new *indicateur* from 1851 is a pre-printed, pre-bound volume. The form

34 Figures based on the annual reports of the town administration. The population increased from 19,000 in 1813, to 26,000 in 1875, and to 50,000 in 1915.

35 Stadsarchief 5 (1813–1851), nrs 245–50, abusively described as registers of incoming letters. The inventory (dating from 1900) lists one isolated register of incoming letters from 1816 (nr 244), but the document could not be found.

(table) covers two entire pages of the folio register. Each entry is one two-page line, and includes registration number, date of registration, original document code, sender, subject matter, reference to the minutes, and addressee. The register served both the meetings of burgomaster and aldermen as well as those of the municipal council, which after 1851 increased in importance. For each year a new register was made up.

In the next decades, the burgomaster and aldermen started to have separate meetings on time consuming subjects, such as relief of the poor and public works. These separate meetings created separate series of minutes. More and more routine cases were left to the civil service, which, indeed, was structured in 1858 into departments or bureaus for each of the main business matters.[36] Separate subject matter registrations for incoming and outgoing mail were set up as well. The mail registration by means of the *indicateur* functioned as an instrument for the town clerk to control work in progress of the emerging bureaucracy.

Abolishment of Binding

Specialization of functions then created new series. The main series of proceedings of burgomaster and aldermen was divided into parallel series according to subject matter, following the organizational structure of the bureaucracy. The series of minutes lost its central position as the backbone of the archive. The tradition of binding minutes and appendices into volumes did not comply with the workflow of the newly structured town clerk's department and the continuous increase of paperwork. For example, before being divided, the proceedings of 1851 consisted of four volumes, with a total extent of almost one linear meter, mostly due to the appendices. Nevertheless, it was not before 1898 that the administration decided to give up the practice of binding, probably not only because of the costs, but rather owing to the inconvenience for the growing civil service. As of 1898, the proceedings and related documents for each meeting of burgomaster and aldermen were put in a folder. The appendices (incoming letters and reports) were numbered according to the agenda of the meeting, but also kept the preceding registration number of the *indicateur.* The minutes themselves were reduced to hardly more than an agenda with a brief recording of the decisions taken on each item. Obviously draft decisions were prepared and written by the town clerk and his staff before the actual meeting, a practice which was not so new after all, as indicated before.

36 Of course, this process is not unique for Dordrecht but typical for any municipality, large administrations (Amsterdam for instance) preceding smaller ones. Raadschelders (*Handbook of Administrative History*), terms this process "departmentalization" (p. 123).

The new system supported arrangement of the proceedings according to the bureaus of the town secretariat. The centre of control over work progress and execution moved definitively from the meeting table towards the desks of the civil service. And the record-keeping adapted accordingly.

Towards a Formal Recordkeeping System

Numeric Filing System

As long as the majority of documents on which formal decisions were required were acted upon either in the meetings of burgomaster and aldermen or in the full municipal council, the arrangement of these documents as appendices to the proceedings had been the most logical order. Physical binding of incoming letters and inserting texts of decisions into the minutes fixed the relationship between minutes and appendices once and for all. However, the specialization and professionalization of the secretariat and the increasing time required for decision making because of growing complexity, created a path toward alternative methods of filing and arrangement. Such a new step in record-keeping – still close to the practice from 1898 – was taken in 1910. All documents related to one subject were put in one folder. What happened was basically taking the appendices out of the proceedings, and filing them separately.[37] The folder cover contained information about the contents of the file and a reference to the meeting in which the document was discussed. The folder cover replaced in a certain sense the *indicateur.* Indeed, this instrument to control work and bureaucracy disappeared in 1910 from the secretariat. The minutes of the meetings referred to the file, the file folder to the single documents within the file. The minutes themselves were no more than a pre-structured list of decisions with references to the files. Additionally an index, or *répertoire,* lists the files and documents in a subject matter order for retrieval purposes. The files themselves received a sequence number at the moment of creation and were stored in this numerical (and thus chronological) order. Every year the series of files was closed and a new one opened. A classification schema did not exist. Numbers were assigned to folders, not to subjects. The current organization chart of the secretariat structured the whole archive into a few series: one for general affairs, one for public works, one for files related to the public nuisance act, one for the municipal power plants, and one for education.

The strong advantage of the new filing system was that it supported the daily work of the secretariat. The civil service became less dependent on the rhythm of the meetings of the college of burgomaster and aldermen. More-

37 Also for this change in record-keeping no formal decision could be found. The paragraph is mainly based on analysis of the series in Stadsarchief 6 (1851–), and the series of case files (Stadsarchief 7 and 8).

over, thanks to "atomizing" the former series of proceedings, the civil servant dealing with a particular case had all relevant documents at hand, without hampering his colleagues by having a whole bound volume on his desk that might contain documents simultaneously needed by others. Disadvantages, or rather imperfections, were discovered as well. The most conspicuous was the numerical sequence of the files and the lack of relationship between number and subject matter. For retrieval, the clerk had to count on his personal memory or that of his colleagues, as well as use a cumbersome index. For every year a separate index existed, with headings possibly differing from those of the year before. In case the clerk didn't know the year in which the case acted, he had to browse through different indexes that were not very consistent in the use of keywords over the years.

The solution for these inconveniences was thought to be a systematic arrangement of files, according to a preset classification schema. By the end of the second decade, such a solution appeared to be available in the market place, promoted by a man named Johan Zaalberg. In principle, his system would make indices superfluous: the archive would be accessible through its physical order, based on a logical classification.

Systematic Filing

Around 1900 the town clerk of Zaandam, J.A. Zaalberg, made acquaintance with a type of file folder produced and put on the market by the German firm Stolzenberg. The folder contained a small binding mechanism, through which the documents belonging to a file could not easily loose their physical order – a disadvantage of storing loose documents in folders or portfolios versus the traditional method of binding into volumes. Zaalberg, who strongly believed in a subject matter organization of an archive, decided, after having made inquiries in a few German municipalities that used the folder, to introduce these folders for the records of Zaandam.[38]

Additionally, he designed a generic system of arrangement based on the Universal Decimal Classification. He contacted Paul Otlet, the founding father of the *Institut international de bibliographie* in Brussels, who worked on expanding Dewey's classification system.[39] With the help of Otlet, Zaalberg designed a system for municipal archives, elaborating group 35 (public administration)

38 C. van den Berg, "Johan Zaalberg," *Overheidsdocumentatie* 17, no. 6 (1963), pp. 159–62. The folder and its mechanism inspired Zaalberg to look at German record-keeping; in particular he has been influenced by F. Michalski, *Leitfaden für das Registraturwesen* (Leipzig, 1904). See for the German registry systems, Thea Miller, "The German Registry: The Evolution of a Record-keeping Model," *Archival Science* 3, no. 1 (2003), pp. 43–63.

39 See for Zaalberg and Otlet, the conference paper of Eric Ketelaar: "Control through Communication in a Comparative Perspective," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005), pp. 71–90.

of the original classification. Zaalberg did not keep his "invention" for himself or the administration of Zaandam, but propagated wider use. Initially, the leading members of the Netherlands Society of Archivists were strongly against the system, because of lack of trust in the binding mechanism, the roots of the classification system in bibliography, and its violation of the rules and principles of the *Handleiding,* the *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives,* in particular section 16, which prescribes that the arrangement of an archive should reflect the organization of the record creating administration. Zaalberg, who thought it useful to have support from archivists, made some changes, and finally received chairman Samuel Muller's blessing – at least about the use of case files rather than chronological series. Muller was less enthusiastic for the second component of Zaalberg's concept, the decimal classification. He considered, however, the classification not the essence of the system; it could eventually be replaced by an organic arrangement.[40] Five years later, the registry commission of the Society corroborated Muller's opinion.

As early as 1907, that is seven years before Muller's approval, Zaalberg founded a consultancy firm, *het Nederlandsche Registratuur Bureau,* which supported local administration in the implementation of the new system. The business was not a commercial success, but despite obvious errors in Zaalberg's system, in the first decade at least fifty municipalities adopted the new method of record-keeping. In 1921, the Society of Netherlands Municipalities continued the advisory work and the further development of the classification code, that today is in use in virtually all local and provincial administrations, and still in many national government agencies.[41]

A Personal Initiative: The Introduction of Systematic Filing in Dordrecht

In April 1916, a regional section of the Association of Municipal Officials (*Bond van gemeenteambtenaren*) held its yearly meeting in Dordrecht. Zaalberg gave a lecture, illustrated with slides, on his filing systems. M.D. Snoek, a staff member of the secretariat of Dordrecht, who attended the conference, was caught by Zaalberg's ideas, in which he saw possible improvements for the daily work in the office.[42] Probably, a few (undocumented) oral discussions took place within the secretariat, which pushed the town clerk to ask advice from the municipal archivist J.L. van Dalen. The archivist in turn decided to

40 S. Muller Fz, "Het zoogenaamde Decimale stelsel van archiefordening," *Nederlandsch Archievenblad* 19 (1914/15), pp. 171–90. "Rapport der Registratuur-commissie," *Nederlandsch Archievenblad* 28 (1919/20), pp. 50–56.

41 The PIVOT project suggested an alternative for the code, proposing an arrangement on high level work processes (*handelingen*). The reasons why the code started to fail for national government record-keeping is beyond the scope of this paper.

42 Obviously he saw opportunities for his personal carreer as well, and indeed he would be promoted to chief of the registry, the town's first formal records manager.

visit Zaandam to see *in situ* how the system worked in Zaalberg's own administration. Like Muller, whose article on the subject in the *Nederlandsch Archievenblad* he certainly had read before, van Dalen had his doubts, mainly about the decimal classification schema. The organization of an archive, he wrote to the town clerk, should be based on the organization of the administration (in accordance with section 16 of the Manual), and not on an artificial classification. The decimal code, as proposed by Zaalberg, was, according to van Dalen, just an American invention and alien to the Dutch situation. Furthermore, again following Muller, he stressed the need for proper binding of the documents.[43] van Dalen acknowledged the system's advantages, but feared that a staff of at least three or four persons would be required to make the system work properly – an argument previously brought forward by Muller.

Decision making on the issue took some time. One year later, in November 1917, in an extensive memorandum to the town clerk, Snoek expounded the advantages of the new system, adding his ideas for further improvement in record creation, record-keeping, and document flow. He pleaded for the establishment of a central registry to control all correspondence and secretarial work. Many of the mechanisms Snoek proposed, including card trays, fulfilled the same function as the former *Indicateur:* controlling both workflow and document tracking.

In 1918 the new system was implemented, and Snoek was awarded for his initiatives by being appointed chief of the registry bureau. As had been foreseen by van Dalen and predicted by Muller, within a few years the bureau needed a staff of three. What is more essential, however, was the fact that record-keeping was withdrawn from the primary work process and became a separate, specialized activity within the administration. Nine years before, the files themselves had already lost their direct connection with the decision-making process. Both the physical format of the file folder, and the flexibility and expansibility of the classification system served the increasing independency of the secretarial bureaucracy. The system made the secretarial work process less dependent on the time schedule of the meetings of the burgomaster and aldermen. It created an almost independent time-space for the bureaucracy. Moreover, in many cases files became gatherings of documents related to the same subject matter, as once happened in the French administration, rather than documents related to one specific case that required a formal decision.[44]

43 Memorandum from the municipal archivist to the town clerk, 20 October 1916. Stadsarchief 8A, nr 2743.

44 The distinction between case files and subject/object files was essential for the system. Up to now, teaching public record-keeping stressed the creation of sound case files. A case must be understood as the whole of activities carried out within a limited time span, to achieve a specified goal. However, filing clerks tended to gather documents about smaller cases into a subject file. The files I consulted in the archive of Dordrecht relating to record-keeping in the 20th century were all subject files – and as a user I was not too unhappy with it.

Conclusion

To what extent did the French leave an administrative heritage to Dordrecht, and to what extent did Dordrecht accept this legacy? As far as one may speak of such a legacy, Dordrecht did not share directly in it. Possibly the time of active French occupation had been too short to penetrate deeply into the local administration. The *indicateur*, with its related system of storage, for instance, was never implemented in Dordrecht. The town administration preserved the traditional methods of record-keeping it had used for centuries, methods that would survive another century. These methods of record-keeping were interwoven with the process of decision making – a process that did not change and could function for centuries without a bureaucratic apparatus.

Indirectly, however, the French administrative influence is undeniable. Immediately in 1795 and the years to follow, the local regents were excluded from national government. On the other hand, the national government was devoid of first-hand information from local communities. The newly established government and its supporting bureaucracy tried to fill the gaps in their information by continuous requests for information that local clerks had to provide. This process continued after 1813. For many years, the administration in Dordrecht could meet these requirements without expansion of the secretariat; the few clerks served as the writing machine of local government, without much of a will and objective in itself. The report quoted in the introduction of this paper praised one of the younger clerks, not because he was so smart or full of initiatives, but because he wrote so neatly and was so skilled in copying letters.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the national government imposed rules and assigned new tasks to local government, and much of what was done before by private initiative was taken over by public bodies. These changes led to a bureaucracy, since the workload for the board of burgomaster and aldermen became too large. The civil service took over the control of work. This process has in Dutch history strong roots in the Batavian-French period.

Influences on record-keeping systems are rarely exclusively direct. Even in the years of incorporation in the French empire, Dutch record-keeping methods continued to be applied, and some of these were still visible at the end of the nineteenth century. Also, one administration is not like the other. On advice of the prefect, Amsterdam introduced the *indicateur* and would maintain it successfully long after the French had retired. But even when it applied a French instrument, it was combined with local traditions – the chronological filing of the registered documents, rather than a subject matter method, the same system the national government would prescribe in 1823.

How external influence affects record-keeping systems and why one situation differs from the other are fruitful fields for research. As the Dordrecht case study demonstrates, the role of individuals should not be undervalued.

Case studies may help to elucidate observations and to explain what happened, provided that the case studies are designed in such a way that they can be compared. This paper may contribute to the development of such a case study design.[45]

Finally, to return to the subject of this paper, let me pose one research question to be answered through similar case studies: How did the French occupation influence record-keeping in various administrations in those European states that were under the French sphere of influence (Germany, Switzerland, Italy, or Sweden for example)? Or more generally: How do administrative methods once used by occupying powers affect the record-keeping systems of the countries that they, for a shorter or longer period, occupied, for example, British record-keeping in Africa and Asia, Dutch systems in Indonesia and Surinam, or German in Papua-New-Guinea or Namibia?

45 As it stands, the paper is first of all the result of an observation and analysis of the Dordrecht archive. A simple four-layer model served as a conceptual framework: political and organizational context, work processes, documenting, and record-keeping. Existing theories on bureaucracies and administrative history have hardly been used. The case study is merely a description, followed by an archival analysis; the conclusions have to be checked against theories.