Contributions to a Dutch Atlas

By Professor Henk Aay and Researcher Matt Raybaud

Since the early seventeenth century, there have been records of the Dutch immigrating to the United States, and other places around the world. These records include census data, ship manifest logs, and Dutch Churches located in the American colonies and states that suggest a presence of immigrants. All of this data exists, but to this day it has yet to be used to map out the path of immigration that Dutch used during these past four centuries. My summer research project was to create series of maps that projected the numbers of Dutch immigrants in a variety of different ways. These maps will be used for future research projects, presentations, and maybe one day be published in an official atlas for Dutch immigration.

My work started off by tracking Dutch Immigration through churches and church membership. Back in the earlier days, churches acted as a cultural center point for immigrants in North America. Using a database that contained every Reformed Christian church in the United States from 1628 up until today, I was able to map out geographical locations of where the Dutch immigrants resided, as well as tracking the growth and decline in the different areas by each decade. While there was much spread through the United States, a majority of the Dutch immigrants travelled to New York and New Jersey in the earlier centuries, then moved to the Midwest, settling in Michigan and Iowa mostly.

My second task was to work with emigrants from the Netherlands and where they were headed. For this project I used data gathered by a researcher named Bob Swieringa, who had the names of families and individuals who left The Netherlands, as well as information on their occupations, social class, religious background, destination and reason for travelling. I mapped the municipalities in the Netherlands, mapping out the number of emigrants from different parts of the country, to find any similarities in religion, social class, and other categories. There were not many connections that were very clear, however there was clear locations in the country where emigrants of certain religions were located.

The final project I worked on was mapping the location of foreign born Dutch immigrants and people of Dutch ancestry in the United States, using census data to get the recorded numbers by each county from 1790 to 2010. The data from this series of maps matched up with all previous research, such as the research I had done on the Dutch churches earlier in the summer.

From this summer’s research I have learned a lot about my field of study. I have become much more experienced in mapping data on the computer, using programs such as ArcGIS. Also, I have learned a lot more about data management, and working with databases of varying sizes on Excel. This includes working with massive, premade databases and creating data tables of my own from extracted data. The experience that I have gotten from this summer’s research will be very beneficial to me for any future employment in this field.