Avant La Lettre: The Use of Dutch Immigrant Letters in Historical Research

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"Yesterday and the day before and today and last Monday, I went to get the mail myself, a few steps and one sees a half-score poles, one longer the other shorter and not all of them straight, but on top of it a container, it looks like a bread bin on a board on a pole. But, as I was saying, I went by myself, Jans or Ant usually take the mail from their trip back from school, they pass it by, but now we were so curious. Because! Because, we had received no news yet from Marie, Dirk, and Cor, so on Monday I went and till today the 29th and yes, the flag was up and then the mail has arrived and yes, I could not stop getting it out of the box. From Marie, Dirk, Cor, brother-in-law Pitters, Koba, Mrs. Hartman, brother-in-law Paap, the Van Kampen family. Already, we had received letters from cousin Marinus, Betje Bronder, the Spiegel sisters, from Aunt Louise and Loe, Jacob and Uncle Jacob and Aunt Riek, Adriana Bosman. All reported good news and that in times of war."(29 April 1915) This was the beginning of characteristically excited letter written by the sixty-one-year old Dirk Polder from Los Angeles to his daughter Cornelia in Roosendaal, Brabant, the Netherlands.

Of course, this is by no means a typical quote from a piece of an immigrant correspondence. More often, letters began with complaints about the absence of letters, the delay in delivery, etc. But the Polder collection is as exceptional as the family was. Looking back to the period in which the Polders wrote, 1910-1941, this family almost seems like a letter writing factory. I found the almost 500 letters of this collection too attractive to leave unexplored, but I am also concerned about their relevance for the academic discipline of history. I am using this opportunity to explore the possibilities for letter collections in historical research to add a few of my own findings and suggestions.

The use of immigrant correspondence in historical analysis has reached a new phase, and I venture to say it might turn into a new field of international immigration study. After periods in which letters were used mainly for their information about settlements, conditions, and assimilation, immigrant historians recently turned their attention to the form and structure of immigrant letters. They started to explore these letters as cultural institutions and focus on the context of the mode of communication.

I will give a short overview of this change and expand this trend into a proposal for a distinction in three levels, the micro, meso, and macro. I will conclude that before immigrant letters (*avant la lettre*) will reveal their rich contents to historians, a number of questions need to be resolved.

For more than a century immigrant letters have been objects for historical research, first, as elements to build group histories; secondly, to highlight the experiences of the common man and woman; and finally, as sources to analyze the dynamics of an emigrant culture. Each phase has posed the question how representative letters are, since often the correspondence is limited to one direction, the authenticity is uncertain, and much of the contents seems to be inconsequential.[1] The initial approach to search for a uniform immigration pattern has given way to a concentration on letter writing as a mode of communication. In the past five years new approaches promising a more structural comparison have emerged. This research concentrates less on the factual information in the letters and more on the process of the exchange. Instead of removing standard phrases as merely empty statements in published editions, these items are examined as revelations of creative power and expressions of religious or political persuasions.[2] The concentration on the conditions and possibilities of letter writing prove to be indispensable for understanding the contents. The partners in a correspondence were united in a pattern of communication, and often letters were the first forms of transcending a border by a mental effort. A significant effect of this approach is that it liberates the (European) immigrant from a too simple stereotyping as a person who overcomes his backwardness by resettling. The trend to a more global culture in which different experiences in time and distance fully interact with the daily life of common people encouraged them to trust impersonal agencies, such as banks, transport enterprises, mail carriers, which rationalize life. Therefore, one can assume that these developments modernized the immigrant even sooner than the established settler of earlier times and immigrant correspondence reveals this process.[3]

These efforts to arrive at a larger picture are attractive because they elevate the publication of often charming letter collections from the anecdotal level, which causes struggles about the question of relevance, to the level of comparative studies. I would like to suggest that researching immigrant correspondence will benefit from a distinction in three levels: the micro level, the meso, and the macro level. The historian working on a micro level asks detailed questions about the content and the form of a

unique series of letters in order to reach a comparison at the meso level of a number of letter series, while adding crucial information about the national and international conditions of communication at the macro level.

Before historians examine individual letters at the micro level they should ask first the seemingly easy, but in fact rather complex question of what an immigrant letter is. The urban historian J. Matthew Gallman discovered a wonderful source in the messages scribbled on pre-paid tickets sent from Philadelphia to Liverpool in the 1840s and 1850s. These notes offered advice, directions, and warnings and reveal the strength and variety of the communication bridging the oceans, but are these letters?[4] Some letters lack a clear addressee, others reach a circle of readers, some letters were written by multiple authors, other authors interrupted a letter to resume it much later. Though this concern about what constitutes a letter might seem trivial, it is a necessary step in order to make the move to a meso level and build a data base suited for making comparisons and counting frequencies. My suggestion is to count what is put into one envelope as one letter, as the definition employed by the post office, and to introduce types of correspondence (letters, postcards, notices). Subsequently, researchers can observe material conditions of the letters, enclosures, developing literacy, changes in spelling, length of letters, ritual sentences, the interaction between content and illustration, and strategies of contact. At the meso level the focus is on series of letters, representing a variety of social groups.

The macro level explores the infrastructural circumstances, such as the postal systems in and between the two poles of communication, the quantity of correspondence, the fluctuation, and the variety of correspondence. People used different forms of mail, depending on the message in stamped or unstamped letters, a post card, or a postcard with prepaid response, a registered letter, or a package. Too often those covers were not preserved, but the few collections which survived can teach us the relation between form and contents.

The best example of the value of this distinction in three levels provides is in the 1994 volume *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* by Irish historian David Fitzpatrick, although the author does not make this three-level distinction explicitly.[5] This rich collection of 111 Irish immigrant letters offers a successful model to overcome both an "academic obsession with aggregate statistics"(4) in which the individual is lost, and "the family chronicle" which lacks any claim for representativeness.

Fitzpatrick's book reconstructs the life stories of Irish immigrant authors (the micro-level) and subsequently reaches for structural patterns by thematically exploring the ceremonies of correspondence, the reciprocity, the migration process, images of the home country and the destination, and immigrant reflections at the meso level. His choice for Australia in the period 1840-1914, a minor destination compared to the massive exodus from Ireland to the United States, and counting 'only' 335,000 people, numerically makes it a likely candidate for comparison to the Dutch in America, who left in roughly the same numbers. Australia offered the Irish an alternative to America in times of war or depression, where the Dutch had South Africa, the Indies, and South America as other options.

Fitzpatrick derives from his series of family histories an inventory of epistolary conventions. After the first affectionate salutation, the common order was to start with an introductory phrase, to refer to the letter exchange, followed by a statement about the author's health, a confirmation of religious faith, and a biblical quotation or saying. Many authors maintained an illusion of oral communication, by entertaining immediacy: writing in dialect, projecting imaginary meetings, and retelling dreams. Letters had a public side (treated with ceremonial phrases) and a private one (informal parts). They all used standards of letter composition, especially after the British school system introduced writing letters in the curriculum in 1872.

Fitzpatrick convincingly proves that the primary function of letters was to maintain social—and sometimes economic—bonds among family members, as part of a mutual responsibility. A major difference in the functioning of letters at home and abroad was that the recipients in Australia had a fairly good idea about the situation in their homeland, while the Irish had little knowledge about conditions in Australia. Perhaps this explains the fact that letters from Australia were about 50 percent longer than those sent from Ireland, though less than half of the letters sent from the United Kingdom received a response from Australia.(561)

On the third level Fitzpatrick excavates the macro level structures allowing the exchange of mailing letters. Before 1875 a letter arrived after three months and its postage took more than the daily wage of a farm laborer. As rates dropped, the time became shorter, and more emigrants departed, the volume of correspondence increased. By 1894, ten million pieces of mail crossed the ocean from the UK to Australia, while four million pieces made the return trip and in the following decades these numbers

would continue to grow. An estimated one-third of these letters came from and to Ireland.

So far the Irish, what about the Dutch? The historiography of the Dutch-American immigrant experience has employed letters widely. The earliest history of this movement was documented by the published correspondence of its leaders, such as Albertus Van Raalte, Henry Scholte and Cornelius Vander Meulen. They wanted to widely distribute reliable information. After the Dutch settlements had reached maturity, the last of the pioneers collected historical information for filial pietistic accounts of their successful enterprise.

In the twentieth century the letters served as a basis for the historical information to the first serious immigrant scholars, Jacob Van Hinte and Henry Lucas. Pieter Stokvis used the early settlers' correspondence extensively in his reconstruction of first wave of mass migration to the United States. Herbert Brinks mined the growing collection of immigrant letters to formulate the classic attitude of the Dutch immigrant who easily adopted the economic and material culture of the new country, but used the church to protect himself or herself from or carefully select the advances into mainstream America.[6] Later he contrasted the hopeful perspective of the Europe-bound letters with the gloomy atmosphere in the answers from home. Suzanne Sinke sieved the passages relating to women and family life in her dissertation on Dutch immigrant women.

The publication of letter collections on the Dutch in America is a recent phenomenon. With the exception of Stellingwerff's, *Amsterdam Emigrants. Unknown Letters from the Prairie of Iowa 1846-1873* containing one hundred letters, and the privately printed *Brieven uit het verleden/Letters from the Past*, edited by Frank Verbrugge, the publication dates are in the 1990s.[7] Of course the landmark study came in 1995, when H.J. Brinks published his *Dutch-American Voices: Letters from the United States* which holds twenty-two series of letters.[8] Brian W. Beltman, *Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950* followed the next year, presenting a richly annotated collection of 40 letters.[9] In the same year Walter Lagerwey edited *Letters Written in Good Faith: The Early Years of the Dutch Norbertines in Wisconsin* adding a valuable Catholic and institutional perspective which awaits a second volume for the remaining 200 of the 400 letters.[10] A private, but no less valuable, initiative was undertaken by Ulbe B. Bakker, who published the 185 letters of his family in *Sister, please come over. Experiences of an immigrant-family from Friesland/The Netherlands. Letters from America in the period 1894-1933.*[11] The place of origin of the letters in these volumes provide an accurate map of the Dutch in the Midwest. However, no reciprocal letter collections, nor letter collections from the Netherlands, came in print. These books as well as a number of articles and pamphlets continue to function on the micro level.[12] Only Kathleen De Haan in her 1998 dissertation analyzes three letter collections from a rhetorical perspective, which makes a good, though limited, start.[13]

Herbert Brinks' landmark collection is the first move towards the meso level. He used the following criteria to publish his selection: an equal distribution for each of five types of immigrant communities and a spread in time, each decade showing a different stage in the acculturation process. This is a wise choice for understanding the immigration process and could also be used to analyze the mode of communication. *Dutch American Voices* shared the intention of the editors of a similar collection of German immigrant letters. They selected series of previously unpublished and authentic letters, which contained detailed and extensive information about the acculturation process, provided vivid descriptions, and represented a wide economic and social distribution. Though these editors connected the series, they did not analyze the process of communication, probably because they intended to reach a general audience.[14]

In my efforts to apply this three-level approach to Dutch immigrant correspondence, I will concentrate on the macro and micro levels, and give a few suggestions about the meso level.

The macro level in dealing with Dutch immigrant correspondence has received surprisingly little attention. Apart from an occasional remark about the routes of communication, little is known about the infrastructure: the postal system, the speed and costs of transatlantic mailings, and the volume of letters. These developments should be taken in the context of the political and commercial relations between the United States and the Netherlands, including agreements, treaties, and mutual images.

The first Dutch postal regulations creating a national mail delivery were a result of the French occupation of the Low Countries. The first Dutch postal act passed in 1850, when the regulations dating back from the French occupation which primarily meant to bring in revenues for the state, were replaced by a set of regulations and actions to advance the service.[15] This Act reduced rates, introduced stamps, created a national network of post offices, and stimulated the use of rail transportation. After 1870, the postal department expanded the number of services, such as the introduction of a standard domestic rate (five Dutch cents for a letter

under 15 grams), the postal card, and special rates for printed matter. Not long after these innovations, an international union of postal services was founded in 1874 and received its definitive name four years later: the Union Postale Universelle. This organization arranged one uniform rate and a reciprocal delivery of letters in foreign countries. The agreement assumed that incoming and departing mail between two countries more or less evened out. After 1875 the efficiency of the mail connection between the Netherlands and the United States greatly improved and rates dropped sharply.

In 1852 a letter to the United States cost one guilder via England, France, or Germany, and in 1875 the rate dropped to 12½ cents. A direct connection between the Netherlands and the United States functioned since 1868.[16] After 1875 postal cards and money orders became available, adding new modes of communication: financial and visual interactions and short notices. Also the return rates were reduced from 15 cents in 1853 to 5 cents in 1875. Since 1866, a cable connected the United States and Britain, while a direct cable connected the Netherlands and the United States only in 1927.

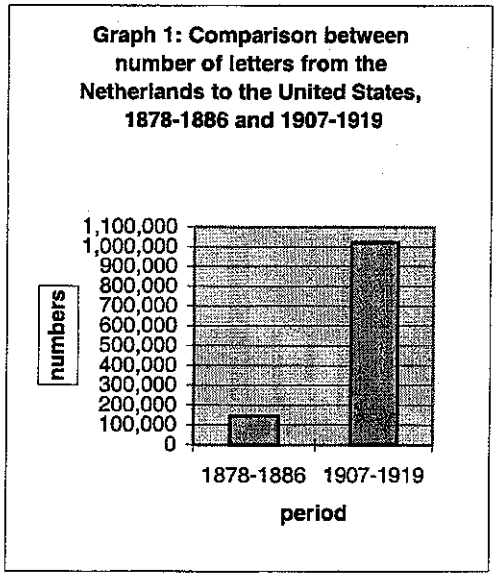
A bilateral post treaty in 1867 provided regular mail exchange between the railroad post office at Moerdijk, south of Rotterdam, and the ports of New York and Boston. In 1881 an average of thirteen departures of mail boats a month left Rotterdam to reach New York via England, and a direct connection left three times each month.[17]

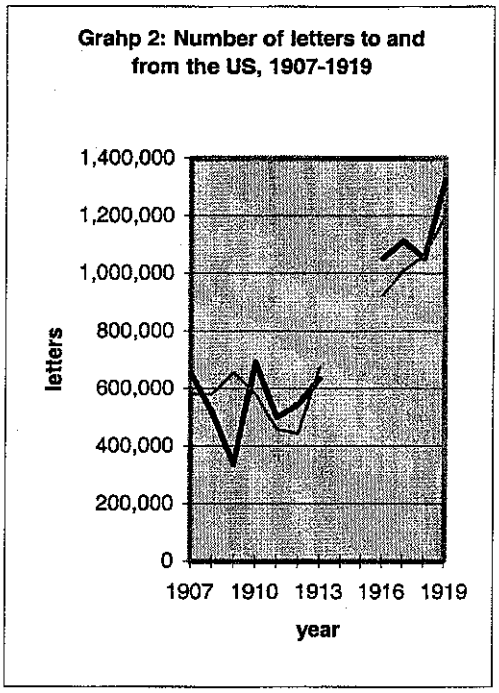
These improvements greatly advanced the exchange of letters, especially after 1875. The volume of correspondence and the ratio of incoming and outgoing mail provide indications of the intensifying relations between the Netherlands and the United States and parallel the wave of immigrants of the 1880s.

Table 1: Rates for pieces of mail between the Netherlands and the United States, 1852-1946 (in Dfl)

	Letters (15 gm. after 1907, 20 gm)	Printed matter/ newspapers (50 gm)	postal cards
1852 British ship-100			
American ship-60			
1853 British-80			
American-40			
1875	12.5	2.5	5
1879*	7.5	7.5	
1892	2.5	5	
1921	20	5	12.5
1925	15	3	10
1928	12.5	2.5	7.5
1946	20	4	12.5

* sea surcharge included, abolished in 1892.



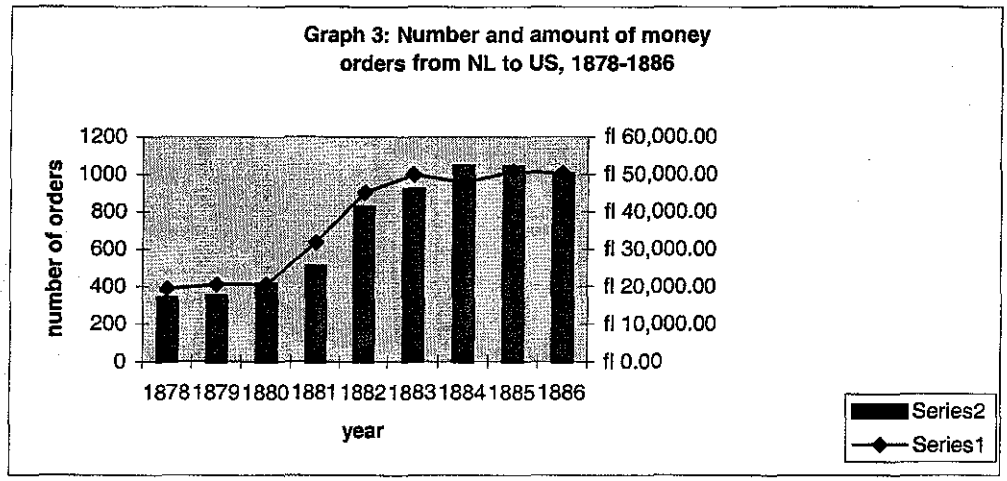


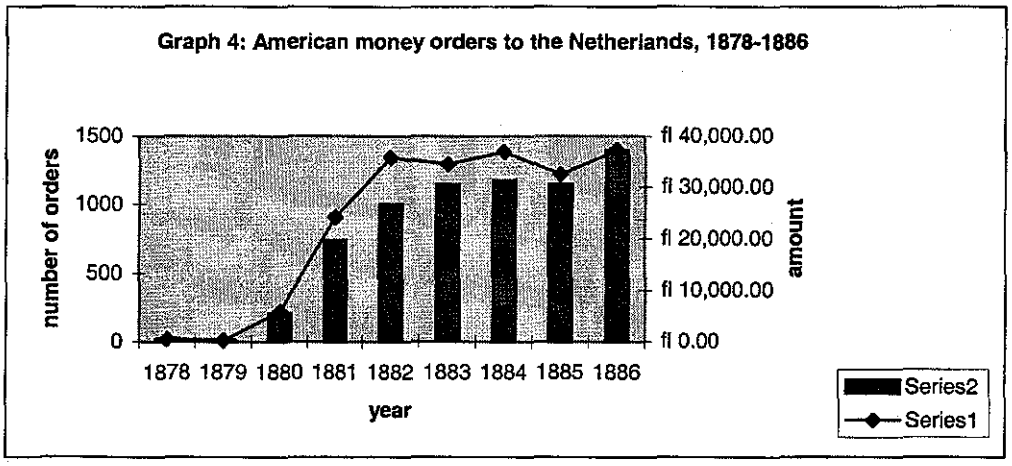
thick line: to the US
thin line: from the US

Table 2: Estimate of letter exchange between the Netherlands and the United States, 1850-1920 (in millions)

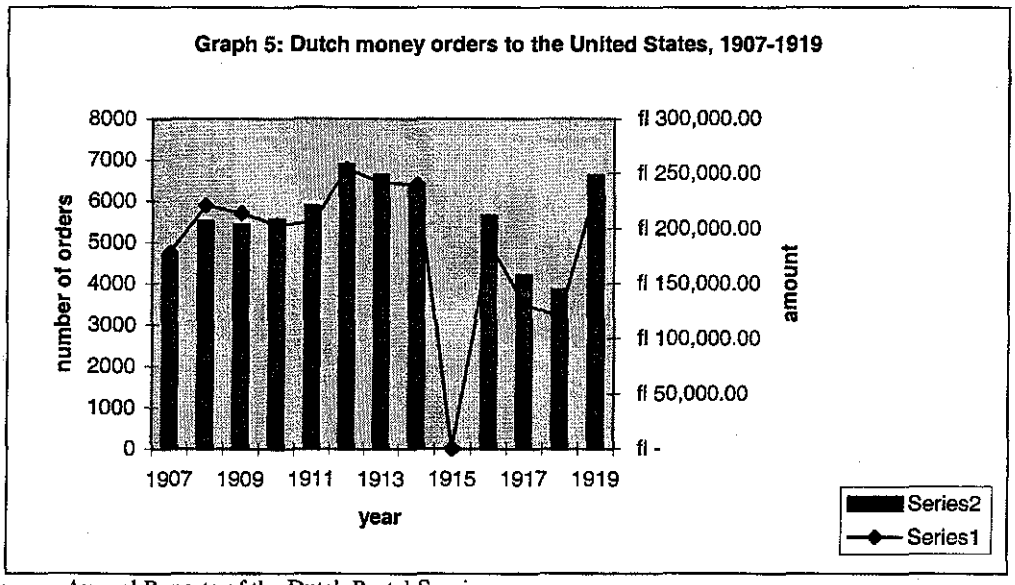
	to USA	from USA
1850s*	0.25	0.2
1860s*	0.5	0.4
1870s	1.	0.8
1880s	1.5	1.25
1890s*	3.	2.5
1900s	7.	6.
1910s	8.	7.
total	20.	18.

* rough estimates





Source: Annual Reports of the Dutch Postal Services.
Bars show the number of money orders, the line the total amount in Dutch guilders.



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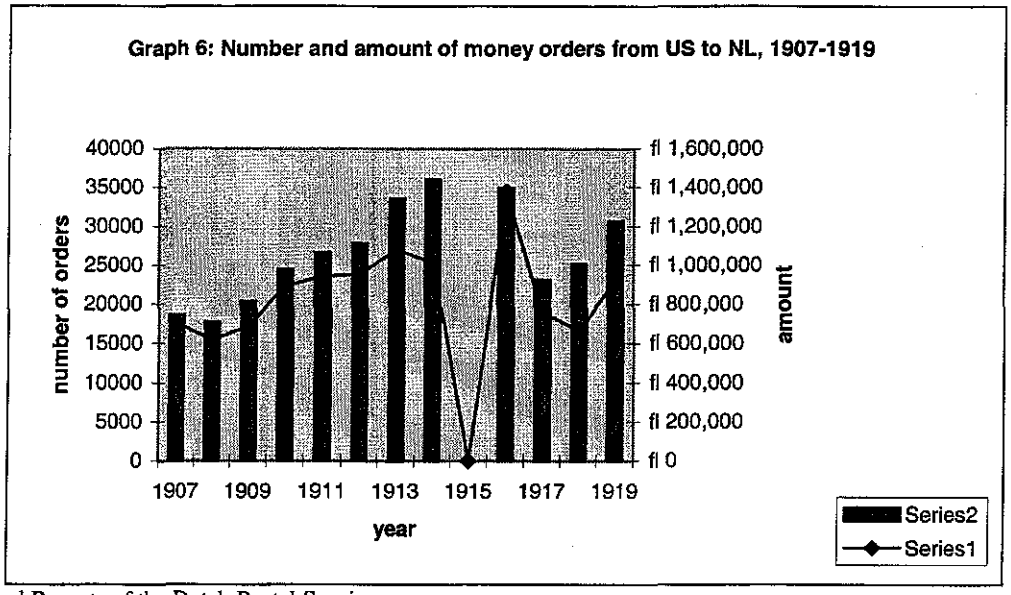

Source: Annual Reports of the Dutch Postal Services.
Bars show the number of money orders, the line the total amount in Dutch guilders

I am not sure whether Herb Brinks still maintains his estimation of the number of letters written to the Netherlands. His calculation is based on the assumptions that heads of household wrote an average of seven letters home, leading to an aggregate 889,000 letters in the century between 1830-1930.[18]

This educated guess is based on the senders, about whom a number of assumptions are made, such as that letter writing was predominantly a task of the head of the household, and therefore a male affair. While questions about the proportion of women and children involved in the transatlantic communication, the continuity of the correspondence, and the impact of the business cycle on the volume of letters sent, do not immediately concern us here, these questions need to be addressed in the future to get a complete overview of the nature of immigrant correspondence. Since the start of international postal organization in 1875, post offices kept statistics, mainly for business administration. I found two series of annual reports for the Netherlands with details about the Dutch-American communications. The annual reports of the Dutch post office department recorded that in the period 1878-1886 an average of 145,808 letters of all kinds were mailed to the United States each year, while an average of 121,612 letters were returned. This already gives us a useful piece of information. Each year about 25,000 more letters were sent to the United States than received. This figure suggests that those left behind were more eager to maintain the link with the immigrants than vice versa. This attitude is confirmed by the fact that a third more newspapers and periodicals were sent to the United States than received from that country (an average of 51,953 to 35,321 respectively).[19]

In the period between 1907 and 1919, the volume had increased to close to one million letters per year, an increase of 800 percent compared to 30 years earlier (graphs 1 and 2). The surplus of letters mailed from the Netherlands to the United States each year rose to 104,875 a year, or ten percent. In that respect the exchange was better balanced than the British-Australian mail; out of every ten pieces of mail from the UK to Australia, only four were answered.

Data for 1914 and 1915 are not available The statistics allow us to make a rough estimate the volume of letters between the United States and the Netherlands. Between 1850 and 1920 about twenty million letters were sent to America, and eighteen returned.

In comparison, the volume of correspondence sent from the United States to Germany between 1820 and 1914 is estimated at 250-300 million. Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer suspected that the increase in correspondence was not a result of the cuts in postage rates, but of increased business transactions. They found a 100 million pieces of private correspondence a safe guess.[20] German immigration was twenty-fold that of the Dutch, therefore 6 million private American letters to the Netherlands seems a fair number. Future research in the annual reports for the Dutch and the American post offices and analysis of the proportion of business correspondence should fine tune this rough estimates. Between 1895 and 1913 Dutch exports to the United

States doubled from $15 to $38 million, while American exports to the Netherlands in the same period, quadrupled from $31 to $125 million.[21]

In 1850, the Netherlands exported $2 million to the United States.[22] In the subsequent decades especially, financial investments in the United States plummeted from about $72 million in 1871 to an estimated $350 million at the close of the century. Also trade increased. Till the 1880s, Dutch merchants sold spirits, tin and coffee to the United States. From the mid 1880s onward tobacco, nutmeg, herring, and diamonds. In 1901 Dutch export to the United States amounted to $20 million. American raw materials and animal fats, petroleum, cotton seed, and tallow found their way to the Netherlands and accounted for an export of $90 million in 1900. The 1920 the Dutch export to the United States met its pre-World War II apex at $87 million.

It will be possible to find clues to the rise in correspondence when we draft a complete overview of the correspondence, and correlating these figures with the waves of immigration and the fluctuation of export and import figures, though I realize that the attraction of the United States as an emigration destination, was exactly a result of the business cycle.

A second structural condition is the growth of additional ties between the senders and receivers of mail. The ties were strengthened by the possibility of sending post cards, registered letters, packages, and transferring money across the Atlantic, all immediate results of the internationalization of the mail in 1874.

In the 1878-1886 period 6,464 money orders were mailed to the United States worth Dfl. 335,892 (about $130,000), while even more money orders reached the Netherlands, but with less value, Dfl. 207,842 (about $80,000)in 6,855 transactions. Per money order an average amount of 52 guilders (or 21 dollars) was sent to the United States, while only an average of 30 guilders (12 dollars) was received. The contrast with thirty years later was large: not only were the amounts much higher, but also the net direction was reversed: between 1907 and 1919 an average of Dfl. 221,000 ($100,000) was sent to America, but more than four times as much was received back. Each year a net of Dfl. 742,761 ($300,000) was collected in the Netherlands. Since money orders could not exceed a maximum of two-hundred dollars per piece, and the average for each order was between ten and twenty dollars, this stream must have been largely for private exchanges. Business transactions were made via banks. About six thousand money orders were sent to the United States during this period, while almost thirty thousand money orders were received. Clearly the immigrants had done well (graphs 3-6). The transition from a receiving to a sending country must have been during the 1890s. Further research will have to show what the exact transition years were.

Table 3: Periodization of immigrant letters, 1600-200

17th-18th centuries:
private mail carriers, irregular correspondence, mainly institutional
(by churches, companies, and government agencies).

1800-1875:
national network, increased service, more frequent correspondence

1875-1940:
international network, variety of letters, rise of alternative communication reliable, continuous and intense correspondence.[23]

1945-1990:
continuous correspondence, but larger share to other modes of communication personal visits, telephone

1990-present
decline of letter writing, digital communication;

American sources confirm this trend. In the first decade of the twentieth century almost half a billion dollars was sent from the United States to other countries. In this period the Netherlands collected 1.44 million dollars (or 3.6 million guilders). Though this amount gradually increased from $60,000 in 1900 to $280,000 in 1908, it was a relatively small sum. Even a much smaller country such as Belgium collected three times as many American dollars.[24] The average value of the 17,000 money orders was Dfl 34.19 ($13), lower than any other nationality.[25]

The staff of the post office department calculated that in a period of two decades three times as much money left America as entered America by mail checks. The proportion for money transferred to the Netherlands was even four times as much.[26] The transfer of money was a part of the process of communication which included also the mailing of photographs, the sending of cables, personal visits, and radio broadcasts.

An exploration at the macro level reminds us that other modes of printed communication should not be ignored in assessing the importance of mailing letters in the whole process of maintaining the relations with the old country. This overview of modes of communication enables me to draft five phases by period for the position of immigrant letters.

At the micro level, the focus is on the people writing and discussed in the letters, and of the process of writing, which contributed to a mutually shared

culture of immigration with exchanges about the issues of family life, economics, emotions, gender relations, and assimilation. Such an approach will reveal how the emigrants were pioneers in the cross-cultural incorporation of modernizing forces.

In order to achieve a fruitful analysis of these processes one needs a large, coherent and continuous collection of letters. The 500 letters in the correspondence of the Polder family provides a unique opportunity to analyze the shaping of an emigrant culture.[27]

The first members of the Polder family (three single brothers) emigrated from The Hague to Los Angeles in 1907. In August 1914, on the brink of the outbreak of the Great War in Europe, their elderly parents, Dirk and Cornelia, and their two younger sisters, age 11 and 15 joined them, followed by another brother in 1916. They belonged to a middle-class family of gardeners and founded a nursery in Montebello, just east of Los Angeles. Two sisters and one brother stayed behind in the Netherlands. The recipient of almost all letters was a married daughter also named Cornelia.

In order to map out the framework in which the correspondence should be read, I drafted answers to six sets of questions about the nature of the correspondence, while building a database:

1. Authorship. This collection shows that all family members contributed to the correspondence, often jointly. However, the father took the initiative, and was succeeded by the mother after his death in 1922, while the second generation of Polders wrote occasionally and the third generation only once or twice.

2. Locality. Many letters recreated an atmosphere of safety, because they were written in the explicitly mentioned stable and peaceful home, where a close and cozy family created a safe haven.

3. Motives. It was clear that the authors wanted to maintain the family bonds, partly out of feelings of guilt, because they felt they had abandoned one daughter and could not assist her in raising a (large) family.

4. Timing. The pen was taken up usually in the weekends and at night, with an average of two letters a month before and one letter a month after the mother's visit to the homeland in 1924.

5. Enclosures. The correspondence was part of larger exchange of photographs and news about the Netherlands, carried both by newspapers and magazines, and by personal visits. The first generation continued to look at the United States through Dutch lenses.

6. Content. A large part of the letters deals with the common network of family and friends.

A selection of seven subject areas helps us to better understand the working of a culture of immigration:

6.1 Reflection on the emigration decision and experience: although the Polders missed their relatives, they felt contentment about their decision to settle in California.

6.2 Work and family: the occupation of the Polder boys was a continuation of their jobs in the Netherlands. An internal family dispute about the desire to distance the family farm a bit from family life, alienated the brothers, but rarely did they (or their parents) write about this conflict.

6.3 Language: The younger siblings were fluent in English. The parents needed the Dutch sub-culture.

6.4 The Church: provided continuity in their religious experience. The various Dutch-American churches struggled with the combined language and assimilation issue and followed a similar pattern of moving the Dutch services to the margin of church life, surrounding them with "American" innovations and eventually abandoning them.

6.5 Relationships: the church was the major source for marriage partners. Apart from the primary relations with the other Dutch, they had a great variety of relationships with other ethnic groups, among others, with Japanese, Germans, Mexicans, and African-Americans.

6.6 Living and dwelling conditions: Los Angeles was a booming city, with a big real estate market and a true "mobility culture". The Polders participated in this materialistic environment, but were aware of the risks.

6.7 Identification: the children were increasingly critical of the Netherlands, while the mother criticized odd events in American culture. She observed many phenomena through Dutch lenses (nervousness), but simultaneously projected her California perspective on her Dutch children (anxiety about traffic accidents and overcrowded streets).

My short explorations about the flow of correspondence on both the micro and macro levels confirm that World War I did not interrupt the continuity of immigrant letters. At the meso level a database of letters can help to distinguish trends in language, topics, authors, and frequency. This database is still in progress.

Immigration studies are entering a new and exiting phase in the use of letter collections. By looking at three different levels the value of these collections is greatly enhanced. This new stage is still in its infancy. Much work needs to be done to prepare

the way for international comparisons.

At the macro level, historians should map out the structural conditions affecting the mailing of letters in the United States and the Netherlands. The flow of letters should be correlated to trends in the waves of immigrants and the business cycle. At the meso level data bases of serial letters should make comparative research in the coding of phrases, categories of information, and the dealing with emotions. This collective information will also help researchers to understand why some letters survived while most disappeared.

At the micro level of individual letters and especially the authors a more systematic classification of who wrote where, why, when, in which context and about what (and what not) should be undertaken, while also making connections with the other modes of communication. The groundwork laid by the explorations at the macro and meso levels will enable historians to decide how representative the letters are for a certain period. The Polder letters showed that correspondence is more than a series of announcements. They are one of the means of communication functioning in a broader flow of information. They exposed the mutuality of the "conversation" and the shape of a culture of immigration with shared experiences. The circumstances of the Polder family in California were perfect to monitor the process of and response to modernization. The highly emotional contents of the letters was possible owing to the frequency of the exchange, the level of education, and the involvement of a wide circle of relatives and friends.

My intention was not to draw rigid lines between the three levels. They overlap quite often, but should enable researchers to better mine the immigrant correspondence and connect the unique expressions of people on the move to general insights in the immigrant experience and a comparative perspective. So, let's get started: Heritage Hall opens Monday at eight.

NOTES

[1] David A. Gerber, "Epistolary Ethics: Personal Correspondence and the Culture of Emigration in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19 (Summer 2000), 3-23.

[2] Wolfgang Helbich and Ulrike Sommer, "Immigrant Letters as Sources," in Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America 1880s-1930s* (Bremen, 1985), 39-59. There is a similar trend in current research projects about magazines, reading them not only as sources of historical information, but also as historical objects functioning as instruments molding (American) culture, as institutions.

[3] Migration is not always a sign of modernization, but in the transatlantic migration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this is the most plausible form. Leslie Page Moch, "Introduction," in Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch, eds., *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives* (Boston, 1996), 6-8.

[4] *Receiving Erin's Children: Philadelphia, Liverpool, and the Irish Famine Migration, 1845-1855.* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[5] David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[6] H.J. Brinks, "Immigrant Letters: the Religious Context of Dutch American Ethnicity," in Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman, eds., *Dutch Immigration to North America* (Toronto, 1983) 131-146.

[7] J. Stellingwerff, *Amsterdamse emigranten. Onbekende brieven uit de prairie van Iowa 1846-1873* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheyn, 1975). Verbrugge's family collection was printed by the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts of the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis in 1981. This collection contains a few letters written from Wilnis, the Netherlands to the United States. Collections from Dutch immigrants in Canada also contain almost exclusively letters to the Netherlands and hardly any from the old country. Herman Ganzevoort, comp. and ed., *The Last Illusion: Letters from Dutch Immigrants in the "Land of Opportunity"* (Calgary: University of Galgary Press, 1999).

[8] (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[9] (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

[10] (Green Bay: Alt Publishing, 1996).

[11] (Kollum: Trion G.A.C., 1999).

[12] Annemieke Galema, "A Frisian in the American City: Pieter Ypes Groustra Family in Chicago 1881-1946," in Hans Krabbendam and Larry Wagenaar, eds., *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga.* VU-Studies in Protestant History 5 (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), 263-272.

[13] Kathleen Anne DeHaan, "'He Looks like a Yankee in his new suit.' Immigrant Rhetoric: Dutch Immigrant Letters As Forums For Shifting Immigrant Identities." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1998).

[14] Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, eds., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 45-46.

[15] G. Hogesteeger, *Van lopende bode tot telematica* (Groningen: Koninklijke PTT Nederland NV, 1989), 36-58.

[16] W.S. da Costa, *Binnenlandse en Internationale Posttarieven van Nederland 1850-1990* (Assen: Nederlandse Vereniging van Poststukken en poststempelverzamelaars, 1990), 140.

[17] *Verslagen aan de Koning betrekkelijk de diensten der posterijen ...* 1881, 3.

[18] H.J. Brinks, *Dutch-American Voices: Letters from the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), xiii-xiv.

[19] In this period two-thirds of all printed matter were newspapers and periodicals (regardless of destination United States or the Netherlands). This figure might prove important for making estimates of the volume of newspapers and periodicals in later years, when the annual reports did not discriminate between regular printed materials and periodicals. Thirty percent of all mail from the United States to the Netherlands between 1878-1886 consisted of printed materials, the reverse rate was 35 percent.

[20] Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, eds., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 27, 28. They found that the average of two million letters per year for the 1870s doubled to four million in the 1880s and 1890s, and rose to seven million in the early 1900s.

[21] Ibid., 77.

[22] Walter H. Salzmann, *A Market to Explore: A History of Public-Private Partnership in the Promotion of Trade and Investment*

between the Netherlands and the United States (The Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in the United States, Inc., 1994), 55-63.

[23] The large letter collections that have been preserved are mainly from the 1890s till the 1930s: The publications of Beltman, Lagerwey, Bakker, and the unpublished (and perhaps record holding) collection of the Polders are all from this period and their quantity is difficult to surpass.

[24] *Reports of the Immigration Commission*. Vol 37 (Washington 1911), 275. Only countries with very few immigrants, such as Portugal and Luxemburg received less money than the Netherlands.

[25] Ibid, p 280. Calculated for the fiscal years 1906-1909. Belgian money orders were double the amount of the Greek and Dutch ones, Italians and Hungarians even sent three times as much money per money order.

[26] Ibid, p 276: the outgoing stream was estimated at 640 million dollars, incoming 210 million.

[27] This information is a summary of an unpublished paper "Praten op papier. De Polder-correspondentie uit Californië, 1910-1941," [Talking on Paper: The Polder Correspondence from California, 1910-1941] delivered at the conference "California Dreams" on 5 October 2000 at the Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands.