

Dutch Handwriting and Fonts

Transcription of old Dutch records is challenging, not only because the handwriting is often difficult to decipher but some of the letters are either unique to Dutch or difficult to typeset in printed material.

For example, the 'long s' is used in Dutch (and in other old Latin languages, being derived from the Roman cursive medial *s*¹). The letter is often, mistakenly, rendered in typewritten matter as an 'f' but there are some typefaces that use an f with only a left nub:

f Cambrio computer font enlarged

Other typefaces, more rarely, use no nub:

f Calibri computer font enlarged

In other cases, the font follows closely the appearance of the letter in cursive writing, with a descender²:

House

In any of its forms the long 's' is transcribed and pronounced in modern English as an 's'.

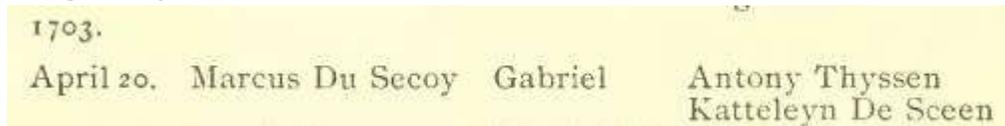
Consider how the 'long s' has actually been transcribed from original records. The same original record using the long 's' has been transcribed by two authors; the first is a reasonably accurate transcript using both the font with the half-nub on the 'f', and the second a rather poor transcript substituting the 's'.

Stillwell – published in 1903³

Marcus Du fecoÿ zÿne Gedoopte Kinderen
zÿn loon
Gabriel Du fecoÿ hÿeft zÿnen Christelÿc
ken Doop ontfangen Anno 1703 [?]
den 20 Apri—
De Getuigen bennen
Antoÿ Thÿfsen Katteleÿn De sceen

[edge of page worn and missing]

Wright – published in 1909⁴



Stillwell made an effort, as he described in his book, to make an accurate transcription of the way the original record was written. And that brings up a second consideration in transcribing old Dutch records.

'ij' is a digraph of the letters 'i' and 'j', not a sequence of 'i' then 'j'. See the Wikipedia article for an excellent discussion of the ij digraph⁵.

Few fonts actually have the ij digraph. However, it can be created in most fonts by compressing the space between an 'i' and a 'j':

i followed by j using Verdana 28-point font uncompressed

ij

i followed by j using Verdana 28-point font compressed by 3 points

ij

With this spacing it's easy to see how handwriting can be interpreted as the letter 'y' with a dieresis, \ddot{y} . In fact, ij is often printed as \ddot{y} . In cursive Old Dutch handwriting ij and \ddot{y} look identical.

'ij' is pronounced somewhere between 'eye' and 'ay'. An excellent website to hear the Dutch pronunciation of this digraph, as well as most everything Dutch, is that of Marco Schuffelen⁶.

For example, Marijtje (where ij is the digraph) has been transcribed as Mar \ddot{y} tje and written by others as Marytje. The given name is pronounced Mar-eye-chuh in spoken Dutch, where the -tje is the diminutive. In English, some would say Mary but Marie may also be an English approximation. A better approach is to use the original Dutch spelling Marijtje with the digraph.

Another challenging outcome of old Dutch records is the multiple spellings of both first and last names. In New Amsterdam at least three cultures were intertwined: Dutch, English and French (the Huguenots). Depending on the ancestry of the clerk doing the writing, names would

take multiple forms and, in addition, the same person might use several renditions of their names during their lifetimes.

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Long s," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_s " accessed 17 March 2014).

² "Stone House Day: Long 's' Character," *Hurley Stone House Day Committee* (<http://www.stonehouseday.org/Long-s.html> : accessed 17 March 2014).

³ John E Stillwell, *Historical and Genealogical Miscellany: Data Relating to the Settlement and Settlers of New York and New Jersey* 5 vols. (New York: n.pub., 1903-1932)<, [CD]>; digital images, *Internet Archive, Text Library, American Libraries* (<https://archive.org/details/historicalgeneal01stil> : accessed Feb 2014).

⁴ Tobias Alexander Wright, editor, *Records of the Dutch Reformed Church of Port Richmond, S. I. (Baptisms from 1696 to 1772), United Brethren Congregation Commonly Called Moravian Church, S. I. (Births and Baptisms 1749 to 1853; Marriages 1764 to 1863; Deaths and Burials 1758 to 1828), St. Andrews Church, Richmond, S. I. (Births and Baptisms from 1752 to 1795; Marriages from 1754 to 1808)* (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1909)<, [CD]>; digital images, *Internet Archive, Text Library, American Libraries* (<https://archive.org/details/recordsofdutchre00wrig> : accessed Feb 2014).

⁵ Wikipedia contributors, "IJ (digraph)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IJ_\(digraph\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IJ_(digraph)) " accessed 17 March 2014).

⁶ "Lesson 2 (Dutch)," *Hear Dutch Here* ([http://www.heardutchhere.net/lesson2.html - diphthongs](http://www.heardutchhere.net/lesson2.html-diphthongs) : accessed 17 March 2014).