

And What About the Declarants? Professional and Relational Background of the Declarants in the Death Certificates of the Netherlands, 1812–1939

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And What About the Declarants?

Professional and Relational Background of the Declarants in the Death Certificates of the Netherlands, 1812–1939

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ABSTRACT

The Historical Sample of the population of the Netherlands (HSN) is a database containing life histories from the 19th and 20th centuries. In total, around 85,600 individuals have been included, starting with the birth certificate. A distinctive feature of the civil registry is the role of declarants and witnesses in official records. In this article, I aim to provide greater insight into the nature and status of declarants in death certificates.

Keywords: Death certificates, Declarants death certificates, Civil registry, Historical Sample of the Netherlands

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Historical Sample of the population of the Netherlands (HSN) is a database containing life histories from the 19th and 20th centuries. The sample is based on birth certificates from the period 1812–1922, during which approximately 14.5 million births were recorded. The sampling fraction is 0.75% for the period 1812–1872 and 0.5% for 1873–1922. In total, around 85,600 individuals have been included, nearly all of whom ($n = 85,568$) have now been entered into the database (Mandemakers, 2000; Mandemakers & Mourits, 2025).

At the time of the start of the HSN, there was an ongoing debate about whether data input should be process-oriented or source-oriented. A process-oriented approach involves entering only the data deemed necessary to test a specific hypothesis or answer a particular research question. In contrast, a source-oriented approach fully incorporates an entire source (Boonstra et al., 2006). Given the infrastructural nature of the HSN, the source-oriented method was chosen as the preferred approach (Mandemakers & Dillon, 2004). This implies that from the certificates all data about witnesses and declarants were entered as well.

The HSN began in 1991 with a pilot project in the province of Utrecht, initially focusing solely on entering civil certificates. The results of this pilot were published in *De levensloop van de Utrechtse bevolking in de 19e eeuw* [The life course of the Utrecht population in the 19th century] (Mandemakers & Boonstra, 1995). Many of the research directions later pursued by the HSN (Mandemakers & Kok, 2020) were already present in this volume. A distinctive feature of the civil registry is the role of declarants and witnesses in official records. While these have been extensively studied in marriage certificates (Bras, 2011) and birth certificates (Mandemakers, 2017), they have not yet been examined in detail for death certificates. In this article, I aim to provide greater insight into the nature and status of declarants in death certificates. A distinction will be made between professional and non-professional declarants, and the rise of the professionals will be described within the context of the modernization processes in the 19th- and early 20th-century Netherlands.

2 THE DEATH CERTIFICATE

Figure 1 provides an example of a death certificate. In addition to the name of the civil registrar, this includes the names, professions, ages, and places of residence of the declarants as well as whether or not they have signed the certificate. Until 1 January 1935, the relationship between the informants and the deceased was also recorded. The certificate also lists the names of the deceased's parents, along with their occupations, ages, and places of residence — if they were still alive. As for the deceased, the certificate includes their name, profession, age, sex, date and place of birth, date and place of death, and place of residence. Up to 1 January 1935, if the deceased was widowed, the name of their last spouse was mentioned; after that date, all spouses were recorded (Vulsma, 2002).

After death, death had to be determined. In the early 19th century, this was often done by a family member or an undertaker. When registering at the civil registry, one could also specify a cause of death. The municipality made overviews of this, but at the time, the usability was already considered questionable. With the introduction of the Burial Act of 1869, the matter was better regulated. Someone could only be buried with the permission of the civil registrar, who in turn had to receive a *doodsbriefje* (death note) from a doctor or another authorized person (until 1900, about 95% came from doctors). A cause of death was also stated on this form. Unfortunately, the cause of death was never included on Dutch death certificates, unlike in many other countries. In 1927, a distinction was made between two forms: A and B. Form A contained a concise description of the cause of death, while form B was more detailed and made a distinction between primary and secondary causes of death. This envelope remained closed and was used for the national statistics on causes of death. When the personal family card (PK) was introduced, the cause of death was recorded on the card according to form A. A practice that continued until 1 April 1956, after which a new burial law removed the cause of death from form A (van Drie, 2011; van Poppel & van Dijk, 1997).

Until 1 January 1935, the law required two declarants, after that only one. Until 1 January 1955, an extract of the death certificate was included in the death register of the place of residence if the resident died in another municipality. This extract is almost identical to the original certificate except that the declarants are missing (Elenbaas, 1936; Vulsma, 2002).

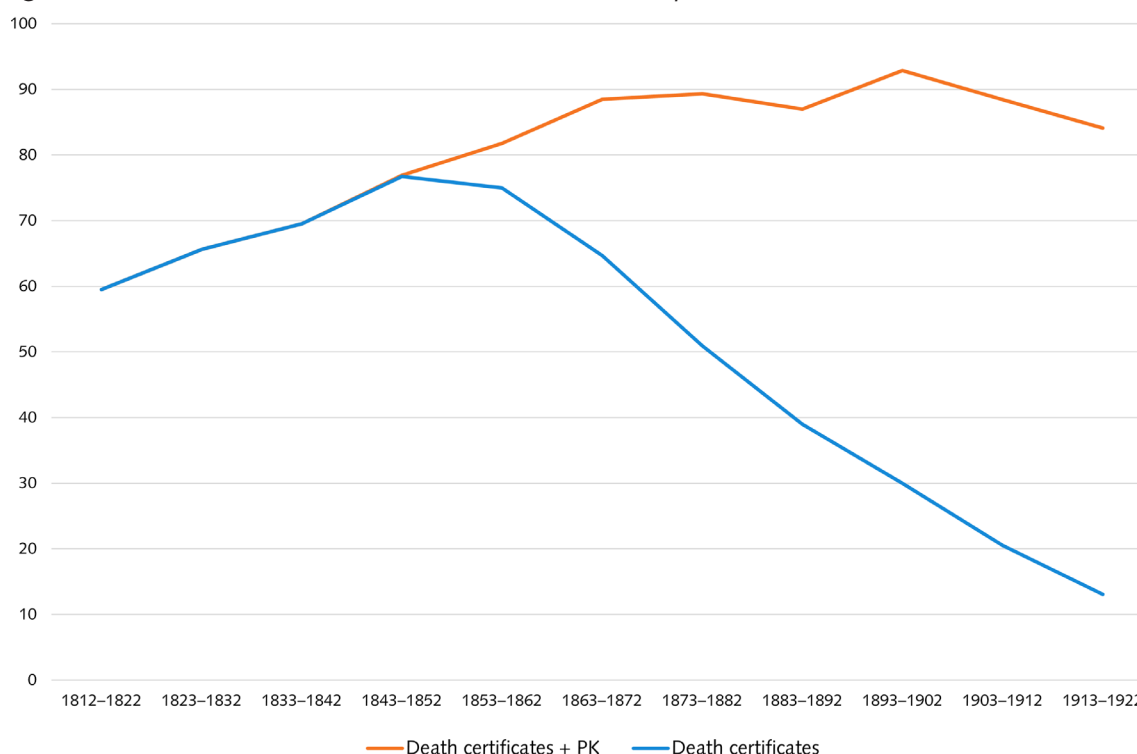
Figure 1 Example of a death certificate

In het jaar negentien honderd een, den 11^{de} April,
 No. 66. zijn voor ons Ambtenaar van den Burgerlijken Stand der gemeente LOONOPZAND,
 provincie Noord-Brabant, verschenen: Willelmus Mandemakers
 oud 72 jaren, van
 beroep landbouwer wonende te Loonopzand,
broeder van den overledene
 oud 71 jaren, van beroep geestel. ambt. v.
 wonende te Loonopzand,
 die ons verklaarden dat Willelmus Mandemakers
heer, echgenoot van Geertruida Hendriksdoorn
 geboren te Loonopzand oud 71
 van beroep landbouwer wonende te Loonopzand
broeder van den overledene
Willelmus Mandemakers
 is overleden den 11^{de} April negentien honderd een
 te Loonopzand, des 11^{de} middags ten 11^u ure.
 Waarvan door ons deze akte is opgemaakt, welke, na gedane voorlezing aan de aangevers, is geteekend door ons
Willelmus Mandemakers
 De Ambtenaar van den Burgerlijken Stand,
P. van der Meer

Source: Overlijdensregister 1901, archiefnummer 911, aktenummer 66, gemeente Loon op Zand.

At the HSN, the death certificates were systematically collected until the date of death 1 January 1940. From that moment on, every deceased person in the Netherlands has a PK, which includes much more information than the death certificate. But on the PK there are no declarants. So, in our analysis of the declarants, we limit ourselves to the period 1 January 1812–1 January 1940 (Mandemakers, 2000).

Figure 2 Relative number of death certificates and personal cards, HSN births, 1812–1922



Remark: The total figures are without overlap ($n = 1,128$); number of births = 85,568 (100%).

The HSN database consists of 85,568 birth certificates (Mandemakers & Mourits, 2025). In 43,232 cases the death certificates of these persons were found manually through indexes and entered. In 27,265 cases the date of death was found manually through the PK and entered. Figure 2 presents the percentage of death certificates and the total percentage of death dates per birth cohort. The latter is the percentage including the PKs, which is relevant from the birth cohort 1843–1852 onwards.

The percentage of death certificates entered for individuals starts to decline from the cohort 1853–1862. Due to their birth years, more and more persons passed away after 1939 and the death date was entered through the personal card (PK). In contrast, the 1903–1922 cohort with death certificates primarily consists of individuals who died before the age of five. The percentages of records found for the period before 1853 range between 60% and 75%. From the cohort 1853–1862 till the turn of the century the percentages rose from 75% to over 90%. It is expected that with further data entry 90% will be reached for all later cohorts as well. The primary reason for missing records will be emigration abroad.

For the period before 1850, however, the main reason for the lack of death certificates remains the lack of indexes for these certificates. Especially, Amsterdam represents a significant gap. Since in first instance the data entry concentrated on deaths before the 10th birth year (based on the local 10-yearly indexes; Mandemakers, 2000), young deaths will be quite complete and therefore overrepresented before 1850.

Based on the number of 42,203 death certificates (before 1940) and regulations a number of 82,629 declarants could be expected.¹ The actual number of declarants is 82,597, resulting in a discrepancy of 32. This shortfall may be due to some certificates listing only a single declarant, though minor errors during data entry cannot be ruled out entirely.

3 WHO WERE THE DECLARANTS?

3.1 RELATIONSHIP TO THE DECEASED

Although there was a legal obligation to record the declarant's relationship to the deceased, not all declarants had such a relationship. Perhaps this value was left out when the registrar considered that there did not exist a serious relationship. Table 1 gives a first impression of the relationship of the declarants to the deceased person.

Table 1 *Presence and validity of the relationship of the declarants to the deceased, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	N	%
Valid value	25,726	31.1
Valid value (father = declarant)	10,312	12.5
No valid value	381	0.5
No relationship in certificate	42,221	51.1
Relationship not entered	3,948	4.8
Total	82,588	100

In about half of the cases, no relationship is specified between the declarant and the deceased. The lack is so common that it was not noticed during the construction of the first versions of the HSN data entry program. This means that for 3,948 cases, no relationship has been entered at all. These are left out of the analysis.² Of the 82,588 declarants, 10,312 cases (12.5%) concerned the father of the deceased, mostly young. In cases with no relationship the surname of the declarants matched the surname of the father or mother of the deceased in 1.7% of the cases, suggesting that not all possible relationships were recorded. For the other (valid) values, this was 14.4%.

- 1 Death certificates registered in the form of extracts (n=214) were excluded because declarants were not extracted.
- 2 It concerns the input programs up to and including version 3.31. Nevertheless, in about 300 cases a relationship has been entered (taken afterwards from the comments that an importer could make). Proportionally, about 600 records (out of 3,948) with a statement of a relationship will still be missing.

Table 2 *Nature of the relationships of declarants to deceased, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	N	N	%
Neighbor	6,390		17.7
Family	15,927		44.2
Father		10,312	
First degree		1,903	
Second degree		1,903	
Third degree or higher		1,809	
Witness	282		0.8
Acquaintance or friend	7,978		22.1
Not related	5,461		15.2
Total	36,038		100.0

The number of declarants with a valid value on the relationship field is 36,038. In Table 2 this group is divided according to the nature of the relationship. Neighbors mainly appear as *Nabuur*, *Gebuur*, *Buur* and *Buurman*. Apart from the father, family relationships are divided according to the distance from the deceased. The first degree mainly concerns a son or husband. For the second degree we can think of grandfathers, grandchildren, brothers, sisters (including in-laws, for example, brothers-in-law). The third degree includes all cases that are not first or second degree. The category 'Witness' includes persons who are explicitly referred to by terms such as relation 'Unknown', or 'Strange', or literally as witnesses such as *Getuige van de dood* (Witness of death). The category 'Acquaintance or friend' is in 90% of all cases 'Acquaintance' or 'Good acquaintance'. The category 'Not related' stands for values which explicitly state that there is no blood relationship; the most common values are *Geen bloedverwant* (No blood relation), *Niet verwant* (Not related) and *Geen nabestaande* (No surviving relative), plus a large number of variations on these terms. Female declarants were not common but not ruled out by law (Elenbaas, 1936). Judging by the relationship (sister, wife, maid, etc.), female declarants occur only 84 times.

3.2 FATHER AS DECLARANT

In about 24% of cases, the father is one of the declarants on the death certificate. Due to the nature of the relationship, we can expect that this will mainly involve deceased children. Table 3 shows a breakdown by age and by period. For the deceased up to four years old the percentage is above 40%, after which it drops to almost 2% for the 20-year-olds and older. This is of course partly a result of the extinction of the fathers (the oldest deceased with a father as declarant is 47 years old). Looking at the percentages per period it shows that the percentages in the period 1812–1849 are considerably higher than those in the 20th century.

Table 3 *Relative share of fathers acting as declarants, according to age of the deceased and period, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	1812–1849	1850–1899	1900–1939	Total %	Total N
0	53.2	45.7	36.8	46.4	13,137
1	54.2	40.3	30.0	43.0	3,404
2	49.4	40.7	26.5	41.8	1,621
3	49.8	37.6	28.4	40.5	968
4	45.2	33.9	33.0	37.0	689
5–9	39.8	33.2	18.0	33.1	1,814
10–19	30.2	25.8	16.7	24.3	1,969
>19	10.9	3.6	0.8	1.9	18,601
Total %	48.9	29.1	7.8	24.4	
Total N	6,939	19,524	15,740	42,203	42,203

Table 4 *Relative share of fathers of 0-3 years deceased, acting as declarants, according to period and region and urbanization, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	1812–1849	1850–1899	1900–1939	Total %	Total N
North-West	34,2	31,2	26,9	31.7	2,840
East	25,3	21,7	11,0	20.6	2,629
West	63,7	47,2	29,4	50.1	9,480
Middle & South	56,6	60,2	57,6	58.7	4,142
Large towns	52,5	32,4	18,2	35.7	7,753
Other	53,1	51,9	47,2	51.6	11,338
Total	52,8	43,9	34,6	45.1	19,091

One may ask if the relative disappearance of the fathers as declarants is in line with the modernization process as it developed in the Netherlands during the 19th and early 20th century. There is no room here to delve deeply into the concept of modernization, but in short, it comes down to the change in a society from more traditional patterns of life to modern ones belonging to the industrial society. Occupational differentiation and professionalization is one of the characteristics of modernization. The 'replacement' of traditional declarants such as fathers and other family members and neighbors by undertakers and official witnesses such as constables, is an example of this. In the Netherlands, modernization (as expressed in demographic developments, among other things) took place broadly from the northwestern to the southeastern part of the country (Boonstra & van der Woude, 1884; Engelen & Hillebrand, 1990; Hofstee, 1972). In this article, this has been operationalized by dividing the Netherlands into four areas: North-West, East, West, and Middle & South.³

For the group with the largest share of fathers, the 0 to 3-year-old deaths, this has been investigated in more detail per region and for the division in urban and rural municipalities (see Table 4 for this breakdown). In the first half of the century, the West and the Middle & South accounted for the largest share of fathers acting as declarants of their young children's deaths. While the Middle & South maintained a share of on average 59%, the West declined from 63% to 29% by the 20th century. It is the East that showed by far the lowest level in the first half of the 19th century and the relatively fastest drop to the 20th century. But the North-West also has a relatively low percentage of father-declarants. Regarding urbanization levels, the decline was most pronounced in large cities, whereas the countryside remained relatively stable at around 50% throughout the entire period. Overall, we can conclude that the disappearance of the father is a phenomenon that fits in the modernization pattern. But it is also especially something of the North-East. When we take the North-West without Noord-Holland the percentages for the North drop to levels that are even lower (13.2% for the whole period) than those of the East.⁴

3.3 OCCUPATIONS

Table 5 provides an overview of the occupations of declarants, excluding fathers. The standardization of occupations follows Mandemakers et al. (2020). Based on these standardized classifications, the occupations were further categorized according to their nature. The first distinction was whether declarants could be classified as "professional declarants" in any capacity. This group was then subdivided into occupations related to burials, such as undertakers; those employed in municipal services; and those associated with medical professions or institutions. One-third of the declarants' occupations can be classified as professional, while 61% cannot, with farmers and laborers making up by far the largest occupational groups. Values for occupational titles that are not valid primarily consist of entries such as 'no occupation'.

3 The North-West includes the provinces of Groningen, Friesland and Noord-Holland above the river IJ; the East Drenthe, Overijssel and the northern and eastern part of Gelderland; the West the provinces of Zuid-Holland and Zeeland and the western part of Utrecht; the Middle & South the eastern part of Utrecht, the western and southern part (river area) of Gelderland and the provinces Noord-Brabant and Limburg, according to Map 1 of Boonstra and Van der Woude (1984) which was based on the work of Hofstee (1981).

4 This is in line with Boonstra and Van der Woude (1984) who argue that there are reasons to split the North-West in two areas.

Table 5 *Occupational titles of declarants, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	N	N	%	%
Professionals	24,095		33.3	
Funeral services		12,396		51.4
Municipal services		10,957		45.5
Medical services		742		3.1
Non professionals	43,938		60.9	
Workers		8,953		20.3
Farmers		8,747		19.9
Others		26,238		59.8
Value not valid	4,243		5.8	
Total	72,276		100	

Table 6 presents the frequency of the main professional occupations. Among those working in funeral services, the most prominent are undertakers and their assistants. The municipal service group can be divided into three main categories: constables, municipal messengers, and civil servants working in or alongside the municipal secretariat. This classification is similar to the group of ‘municipal witnesses’ identified as professional witnesses in birth certificates (Mandemakers, 2017). Compared to these witnesses, constables and municipal messengers played a significantly more prominent role as declarants. In the case of constables, this may suggest that they personally visited the home of the deceased. The third and smallest group of professional declarants mainly includes janitors, overseers, and occasionally a doctor or nurse.

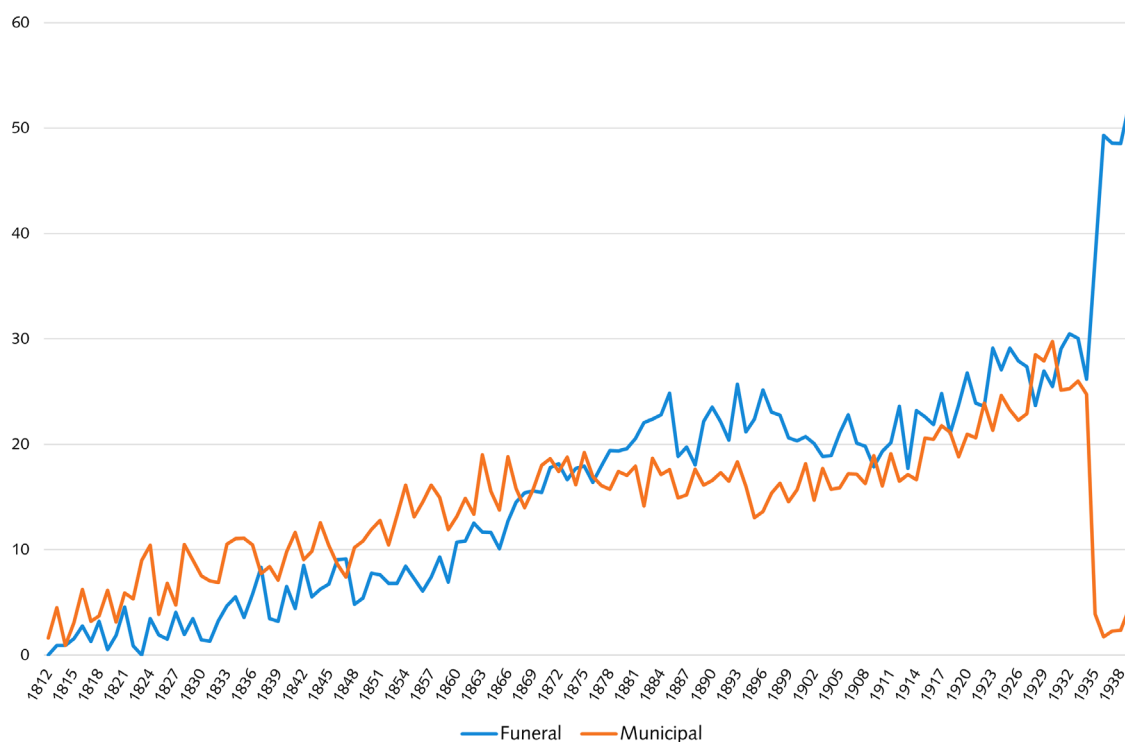
Looking at the professional titles of the declarants and their relationship to the deceased, we see that within the professional witness subgroup of funeral services, 1,499 were still recorded as acquaintances or friends, 67 as family members, and 20 as neighbors. Among municipal witnesses, the numbers were 1,332, 107, and 234, respectively. In total, this amounts to 3,231 related individuals, representing 13.6% of all professional declarants.

Table 6 *Frequency distribution of the most common occupational groups within the main categories of professional declarants, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

Funeral services	12,396
Aanspreker [undertaker's man]	7,289
Bedienaar [undertaker]	1,692
Lijkbezorger [funeral attendant]	1,677
Begrafenisondernemer [undertaker]	554
Lijkbidder [funeral prayer]	539
Koster [sexton]	430
Bode begrafenisfonds [collector funeral fund]	215
Municipal services	10,957
Gemeentebode [municipal messenger]	4,268
Ambtenaar secretarie [secretarial civil servant]	3,593
Veldwachter, politieagent [constable, police officer]	3,096

Figure 3 illustrates a steady increase in the proportion of professional declarants, rising from 10% in 1820 to around 40% between 1880 and 1920, and further to approximately 60% by the late 1930s. A particularly striking — if not dramatic — shift occurred following the enactment of the 1935 law, which appears to have led funeral professionals to almost entirely replace municipal witnesses. The main reason for this change was the reduction in the number of required declarants to just one, making a single individual carrying the obituary sufficient. This development, till 1935, parallels the relative rise of municipal witnesses in birth certificates, which increased from below 10% to around 40% between 1812 and 1922 (Mandemakers, 2017).

Figure 3 *Relative share of the professional declarants, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*
(*n* = 24,095)



The next question is whether this trend toward professionalization followed the broader pattern of modernization in the Netherlands. Table 7 presents the percentages for funeral service professionals alone, revealing that this development was mostly characteristic of urban areas, where their share grew from 11% to nearly 50% over the course of the period 1812–1939. From a regional perspective, the western part of the country — with its concentration of major cities — took the lead, while the southern region lagged behind. We conclude that funeral services only partially followed the expected modernization pattern, with the northern and eastern regions falling short of expectations.

Table 7 *Relative share funeral services as declarant, per region and cohort, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

	1812–1849	1850–1899	1900–1939	Total %	Total N
North-West	2.3	6.7	18.2	10.2	12,942
East	4.4	11.1	18.4	13.3	12,919
West	6.2	30.8	42.0	30.9	27,021
Middle & South	2.6	5.3	8.9	6.5	15,042
Large towns	10.8	40.3	47.1	39.3	26,765
Other	0.8	3.0	8.1	4.5	41,159
Total	4.4	17.0	24.8	18.2	67,924

Rising professional groups replaced more traditional ones: acquaintances and neighbors. These groups were typical of the 19th century. After 1900, they accounted for no more than 1% of all declarants, whereas between 1812 and 1850, neighbors made up 30% and acquaintances 19%. Neighbors were especially concentrated in the Middle & South (49%), as well as in the North-West and East, with 38% and 40% respectively. If there ever was a typical *naoerplicht* (neighborly duty), it was not particularly characteristic of the eastern part of the country. Acquaintances, by contrast, were more often found in urban areas.

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS NON-PROFESSIONAL DECLARANT

One might expect that a person who comes forward as a declarant would also be able to sign the document. However, this was not the case for 3,603 non-professional declarants (8.1%), including 55 individuals who abstained from signing due to Sabbath observance (Orthodox Jews were permitted

to declare but not to sign), and 90 others for reasons unrelated to illiteracy. Failure to sign was most common among neighbors and family members in the first half of the 19th century. Among fathers acting as declarants, 20.8% did not sign. This aligns with the pattern seen in the birth registrations, where only 2.5% of the same fathers displayed incongruent signing behavior.

Declarants had to be at least 21 years old and before 1901 even 23 years old (Vulsma, 2002). The average age of all declarants was 45.4 years. The professional group of the funeral services was clearly older than the average at 48.6 years, the secretarial part was close to the average at 44.4 years. If the relationships with the deceased are considered, the first and third degree family is the youngest (40.6 years) and the second degree is the oldest (48.4 years). The neighbors (43.3) and acquaintances and friends (44.7) are below the average age. Given the uneven distribution of the age at death (relatively many young and older deceased), it makes little sense to compare the average age of the father-declarant and deceased.

Finally, we compare the social background of the non-professional declarants and deceased where the deceased was 18 years or older at the time of death. For the social background, we use the HISCLASS classification of social groups (van Leeuwen & Maas, 2011). HISCLASS is based on the HISCO coding (van Leeuwen et al., 2002). In practice, the standardizations and codes of Mandemakers et al. (2020) were used. Of the 42,417 deceased, 19,185 were at least 18 years old. Because of the large number of older deceased, the professional title 'without profession' predominates. In addition, 'without profession' was usually recorded for married women as well. All told, 7,212 cases remained with a corresponding number of 8,682 non-professional declarants with valid occupations.

The distribution by social background is shown in Table 8. In half of the cases (49.6%), the declarant and the deceased come from the same social background. This is especially true for farmers where 66.7% share the background. Also striking is the broad distribution by social background of the declarants among the deceased skilled workers; a distribution that also corresponds quite well with the total distribution.

The HISCLASS classification is a classification by social class. Another way to classify people is by social position. An increasingly used classification for this is the HISCAM classification, in which each profession is scaled to a continuum from 1 to 100 (Lambert et al., 2013). The advantage of such a scale is, among other things, that professions can be compared across the different classes. The question then becomes to what extent the average HISCAM score of the declarants differs from that of the deceased. Table 9 shows the average social status on the HISCAM ladder per HISCLASS category. Even though we see relatively large differences among the deceased (except between the skilled workers and the farmers), among the declarants the averages are close to each other, although there is still a social gradient.

Table 8 *Social background deaths 18 years and older and non-professional declarants, HSN death certificates, 1812–1939*

Social background deceased	Social background declarants					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
1 Elite (higher managers and professionals)	12.6	27.4	37.7	13.5	8.8	215
2 Lower middle class	4.1	31.7	33.7	8.8	21.7	978
3 Skilled workers	2.8	16.7	44.0	14.0	22.5	1,954
4 Self-employed farmers and fishermen	1.5	6.2	13.6	66.7	11.9	2,451
5 Unskilled workers and farm workers	2.2	13.2	21.4	15.3	47.8	3,084
Total (N)	225	1,257	2,266	2,497	2,437	8,682
Total (%)	2.6	14.5	26.1	28.8	28.1	100.0

Remark: In 1,470 cases there were two (non-professional) declarants for one deceased person (these cases are included twice in the table). The distribution of the 12 HISCLASS categories over five new assembled ones was done according to Mandemakers et al. (2020).

Table 9 *Social background in terms of social status (HISCAM), deceased and declarants, HSN birth and death certificates, 1812–1939 (n = 8.682)*

Social background deceased	Average HISCAM	
	Deceased	Declarants
1 Elite (higher managers and professionals)	80.2	59.9
2 Lower middle class	66.1	56.9
3 Skilled workers	52.1	54.4
4 Self-employed farmers and fishermen	54.1	54.0
5 Unskilled workers and farm workers	48.0	52.8

Remark: In 1,470 cases there were two (non-professional) declarants for one deceased person (these cases are counted twice in the average). The distribution of the twelve HISCLASS categories over five new assembled ones and the attribution of the HISCAM levels was done according to Mandemakers et al. (2020).

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Until 1 January 1935, every death in the Netherlands had to be reported to the municipality by two declarants. From 1869 onward, one of these declarants was required to present a notification of death issued by a doctor.

In analyzing the declarants of death certificates, their relationship to the deceased was a key focus. A total of 42,417 individuals from the HSN sample had a death certificate dating from before 1940. Among the declarants, a distinction was made between professional declarants — such as those involved in funeral services, municipal employees, or individuals working in the medical or healthcare sector — and non-professional declarants. The share of professional declarants steadily increased from 22% in the first half of the 19th century to 50% by around 1930. When the requirement was reduced to just one declarant, the proportion of professional declarants rose to 60%.

Fathers often acted as declarants, particularly for the deaths of young children. This practice was most common in rural areas and remained prevalent in the Middle & South well into the 20th century, where more than 60% of declarants were fathers. Among non-professional declarants, there was strong social homogeneity between the deceased and the declarant among the skilled workers and the farmers.

Overall, the professionalization of declarants aligned with the broader modernization trends in the Netherlands. Notably, the eastern region played a prominent role in this development, taking the lead in the professionalization of funeral services. This pattern mirrors the growing involvement of municipal services as witnesses in birth certificates. These trends contrast with those observed in marriage certificates. Hilde Bras (2011) identified a reverse trend after 1880, attributing it to the growing ceremonial and cultural importance of marriage. This shift increasingly assigned the role of witness to family members, at the expense of friends and unrelated individuals.

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