Colonial control information available for Inuit family research Disko Bay church and census records

The following three papers were presented at the IASSIST '87 conference in a plenary session entitled <u>Research trends</u>. The object of the session was to focus on the effect of new trends in research and data collection and the advance of technology on the use of data and data management techniques.

by Per Nielsen²
Danish Data Archives

1. Historical Sources from Greenland

Indigenous people under colonial rule were not left in peace! This was not because of any sincere interest in the ethnic peculiarities of the people, but rather because bureaucratic registration also served the purpose of ensuring that the path of development was in accordance with the stipulations of the colonizing government.

In the case of the Eskimo population in Greenland, the Government was in Copenhagen, where different authorities requested very detailed information on personnel resources, production, buildings, etc. In most cases, the information was required in order to evaluate economic development; however, even health conditions, births and deaths, including reasons for death, were reported. And in realm of the church, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and burials were reported to Copenhagen.

Prior to 1774, the "colonial initiative" was mainly a private one, consisting of tradesmen on one hand, missionaries on the other. In 1774, the main administrative tasks were centralized within Royal Greenland Trade, leaving the church to take care of its own affairs. From 1782 to 1950. Greenland was administratively divided into two Inspectorate Regions North and South, each with its own Inspector; the division line was located between Egedesminde and Holsteinborg. Needless to say, there were modifications introduced to this system during the last decades of the 19th century; and many administrative changes took place during the first half of the 20th century. However, a detailed description of these is beyond the scope of this short introduction.3

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²I am indebted to Kirsten Elisabeth Caning for the articles she sent me, and to Jens Ludvig Wagner at the DDA for assistance and support when I tried to get an overview of the project.

³The above outline is based on Kirsten Elisabeth Caning, "Personalhistoriske kilder i grønlandske arkiver." <u>Personalhistorisk tidsskrift</u>, 1979.

During the period preceding 1951, all church matters as well as most issues concerning education were governed by the same administrative unit in Copenhagen. It is from this clerical administration that most of the information dealt with in this article originates.

2. The Church Records

Church records were maintained in the Greenland parishes during the first half of the 18th century; most of them have disappeared, and a couple of preserved manuscripts are incomplete in that they include information on the top strata of the Greenland population only. From the second half of the 18th century, there are preserved church records from Upernavik, Godhavn and Egedesminde. The lists of those baptized (Christening Lists) represent the majority of entries in the early years. The salvation of the souls of the heathens was one of the major preoccupations of missionaries; consequently, the number of baptisms performed was an indication of the efficiency of the missionaries.

The church records from the beginning of the 19th century, held in the Danish archives, are more complete, especially those from many of the parishes in the North Greenland Inspectorate. The records from the South Greenland Inspectorate are not so complete, in part due to the loss of a lot of these documents during their transportation to Denmark aboard the ship "Hans Hedtoft" (January 1959).4

The church records which have been preserved consist of four separate types of lists representing four different types of events:

Christening Lists, Confirmation Lists, Marriage Lists, and Burial Lists. Concommitantly, the data sets stored at the DDA (the "raw data") are separated, in their initial form, into 4 different files:

- DDA-0311: Population History of Greenland 1800-1930: Christening Lists
- DDA-0312: Population History of Greenland 1800-1930: Confirmation Lists
- DDA-0313: Population History of Greenland 1800-1930: Marriage Lists
- DDA-0314: Population History of Greenland 1800-1930: Burial Lists

3. The Census Records

The missionaries were also responsible for the registration of all people in their districts (including those who were not Christians, and who, consequently, never appeared in the Church Records). The censuses in Greenland contained the same information as those in Denmark: name, age, occupation, and position in household. In addition to these, the Greenland censuses contained information on race (Eskimo, mixed and European) as well as an indication of whether or not the person had been baptized.

At the National Archive in Copenhagen, there are census records from: 1834, 1840, 1845, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1901, and 1911. Those from the Umanak and Disko Bay Districts, for all censuses except the 1911 census (because of the 80-year access restriction to personal records at the National Archives), have been made computer-readable and are available as:

⁴In the "Danish Titanic" case, "Hans Hedtoft" collided with an iceberg on her maiden voyage to Greenland, January 30th, 1959. All 95 crew members and passengers died.

 DDA-0645: Population History of Greenland 1800-1930; Census Lists

3. Geographic Coverage and Time Period Included in the Datasets

In the initial definitive stages of the "Demographic History of Greenland, 1800–1930" research project, both geography and time periods had to be taken into account. The above outlined existence of nearly complete archival series of church records and census records in Archives situated in or near Copenhagen, has some bearing on the geographic regions and time periods to be covered.

Geographically, the North Greenland Inspectorate had the most complete records. Consequently, the rather isolated regions in northwest Greenland, the Disko Bay District and the Umanak District (isolated in terms of inand out-migration from/to the surrounding regions, so that few individuals "disappear" via migration) were selected; from north to south (or rather, "around the bay") in the Umanak and Disko Bay Districts thus defined, Umanak, Godhavn, Ritenbenk, Jakobshavn, Christianshåb, and Egedesminde are the larger township areas included in the project.

With respect to time period covered, the availability of records suggests that the registration should begin around the turn of the 18th century, i.e. around the year 1800. For reasons of restricted access (and, of course, as a means of reducing the resources required for the data collection process), the registration was stopped at the beginning of the 20th century.

4. The Data Collection Process

Coding was done from the original sources, or copies thereof by the principal investigator, Kirsten Caning, together with a student aide (see figure 1). The coding sheets were then sent out to have the information transformed to a computer-readable medium. The machine-readable data were deposited with the DDA, where Jens Ludvig Wagner (who was experienced in demographic data and family reconstitution methods from his work with several other historical projects) took over the transformation tasks as they were requested by Ms. Caning. During this process, the following rectangular files were generated:

- DDA-0311:17,248 Baptism entries, each with up to 53 variables
- DDA-0312: 10,037 Confirmation entries, each with up to 62 variables
- DDA-0313: 4,720 Wedding entries, each with up to 90 variables
- DDA-0314: 13,217 Burial entries, each with up to 84 variables
- DDA-0645: 23,953 Census entries, each with up to 37 variables

These five files form the basic "raw data" of the project. However, after this initial collection of raw data, a tremendous effort was devoted to data correction and family reconstitution. Correction involved, for example, the deletion of double entries (e.g. the baptism of the same child in two parishes in the Church Records, or

 $^{^{5}}$ [figures and tables are collected together at the end of the article. Ed. note]

⁶See Jens Ludvig Wagner, "Datamaterialer med komplekse strukturer", in <u>DDA-Nvt</u> 25:64-70, 1983.

enumeration of the same person in two households in the Census Records). Those with experience in family reconstitution projects know the amount of preparatory work to be done before one can produce a centralized file. Therefore, I shall go into some detail concerning the methodology applied in this particular family reconstitution project. How did we derive, from the above listed five raw data files within which all the events were sequentially numbered, the so-called "centralized file" containg the best possible reconstitution of families?

5. Family Reconstitution: Manual and/or Automatic Procedures

Within the discipline of historical demography, there has been quite a long tradition of two "schools", one advocating automatic (i.e. computer based) family reconstitution procedures, the other maintaining that a lot of human thinking is necessary in order to get as close to the ideal of a complete reconstitution as possible. In the case of the data from Greenland, a mixed automatic and manual process was used.

With the raw data (or basic files) as the point of departure, two tasks had to be completed: that of identifying the events (e.g. a baptism, confirmation, wedding, burial, or membership in a certain household in a specified census enumeration) as attributes, or descriptors, characterizing the "central persons" (or "actors") when the event took place, and that of establishing "pointers" among all the central persons based on their family relationships.

Who are the Central Persons (CPs) in this project? - In the event of a baptism or a confirmation, the baptized/confirmed person and his/her parents are the CPs; in the event of a

wedding, bride and groom as well as parents of both of the married persons are CPs; when the event is a burial, the buried person and his/her parents as well as a spouse and children are CPs. Finally, in census enumerations, each person listed in each census is a CP. By machine generation, the Basic Files were thus expanded into a "Theoretical Centralized File" with more than 200,000 "central person in one event"-combinations. We shall call these Central Person-Event records (CPE). A sequential number was allocated to each CPE.

The CPE-file was sorted on names; some auxilliary lists sorted on districts and other criteria were produced by Jens Wagner whenever Kirsten Caning needed and requested such lists during the work. The sorted CPE-file(s), written out as long paper listings, formed the basis for the next major state: the process of manually inserting Personal Identification Numbers (PIN), (see figure 2).

Even though the sorting based on names did help a lot, the task of numbering more than 20,000 individual persons (as it turned out later) on more than 200,000 CPE-records was a heavy consumer of both time and human memory! And now we may return to the question whether the machine or the manual reconstitution is "better". It goes without saying that the choice of method depends heavily on the nature and quality of the raw data; so we shall talk about advantages and disadvantages, (see figure 3).

Automatic family reconstitution has the advantage of being relatively quick and being well documented. However, in many cases a lot of persons are left "split" in two or more persons. For example, figures 1 and 2 (1901-census) compared to the extensive figure 3 (an excerpt from the CPE-file after all CPs have been numbered) clearly demonstrates a number of problems with machine reconstitution: Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange was found under many different names, partly due

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to the fact that the first names may be written in any order (some of them may be missing), partly because of different spellings (some of which are not caught in the normalization process, e.g. Nik(olaj) vs. Nic(olaj)). Figures 2 and 3 show that Kirsten Caning preferred to work with "normalized names" in order to minimize the spelling problem. But even with that precaution, the decision was made to perform the reconstitution manually.

The reconstitution process was carried out by entering PIN-numbers on all relevant locations in the CPE-file. During that process, a number of errors were detected and corrected – this is probably one of the main advantages of manual reconstitution. After some iterations of PIN-numbering, the theoretical CPE-file was reduced from more than 200,000 records to approximately 131,000 CPE-records.

6. The Documentation Problem in Manual Family Reconstitution

Who "disappeared" from the theoretical CPE-file? Approximately 70,000 entries vanished from the "theoretical" to the "reduced" version of the CPE-file. The records of type "own baptism" were reduced from 17248 to 16312; "own confirmations" were reduced from 10037 to 9169; "own marriage" from 9442 to 8388; and "own burial" from 13217 to 11678. Because some census registrations had been erroneously omitted from the first data entry process, the number of census registrations increased from the original 23953 to 24076. (The first number is the size of file given in section 4 for Raw Data Files).

Theoretically, one might expect that every person involved in a baptism, confirmation, marriage, or burial would have two parents. However, these CPs have, in many instances,

not been identified in the source records. Therefore the number of CPE-records in which parents were registered in each of the four events was reduced from the "theoretical" numbers 34496, 20074, 18884 and 26434, to 31338, 13538, 4902 and 9181 respectively. Predictably, it was in the events in which the "main actors" were adults (marriages and burials) that the information on parents was most commonly missing.

There is a major difference between the theoretical expectation that there was a spouse for each person buried (i.e. 13217 spouses) to the actual 2328 cases in which a spouse was actually identified. This is due, to a great extent, to the fact that many burials were of children (high infant mortality rate), and also in part to the death of unmarried adults; also some of the missing spouses were due to lack of registration. Finally, theoretically, it was expected that there would be information on at least one child for each buried person (i.e. an expectancy of 13217 persons); however, it turned out that this information was available in the source records only in 56 cases.

Does this mean, now, that we have lost the information in those of the CPE-records that were not merely theoretical, but in which the information was not given in the source records? It does not!

If a person was buried who was married at the time s/he died without an indication thereof in the burial record, we have data about the marriage from a different source. Similarly, if one or both parents of a baptized person were not mentioned in the Baptism File, we still may know of them from other sources, e.g. from a relevant census. This leads us on to the "record linkage", which in this project was done in an ad hoc data system.

7. Finalization of the Family Reconstruction in a Data Base Environment

During 1984 and 1985, several MLD/ASTRID⁷ data bases were designed and tested on subsets of the data from the Greenland Project. Even though a number of these designs were acceptable from the substantive point of view, they had to be rejected because they would consume too much computer power when loaded with the full data base. ⁸

With further computations and tests, a data base design was finalized by the end of 19849 and implemented with all the data from the project. The basic design of the data base is that one part contains all PERSONs and another part contains all the EVENTs. Each person is identified by the PIN-number preceded by M (males) or K (females). There is no need for a lot of pointers because the searching is based on key fields in PERSONs and EVENTs respectively.

I shall not go into the technical details of the data base in this paper. However, I shall demonstrate the output from the data base using the two heads of household that we have followed in figures 1-3 above, (refer to figure 4).

As can be seen from figure 4, not much has been done to present the output in an easily understandable way; thus far, only people actively involved in the project have used the system, and they know what the encryptions mean. If the data base system were to be used by others outside the project, more text would have to clarify the output.

Using this data base, the principal investigator is presently finalizing the family reconstitution task. Also, special purpose functions have been designed for demonstration purposes; for example, it is quite easy to establish pointers to allows a user to move up and down along genealogical lines, drawing the complete pedigree of the person under analysis.

It should be noted here that several features that are specific to the Inuit culture are reflected in the data. People may be referred to their biological family, to an extended family or household, or to the particular house in which they lived. It was quite usual for the Eskimo to live in so called longhouses. Several households lived in the same longhouse during the winter (when censuses were taken); during the summer, they might move away from the house, living in tents or similar dwellings. The following year, the family might move to a different longhouse at the same or at a different location: the houses were not owned by anyone - or, rather, they were owned by whoever happened to be occupying them. This tradition of living together in longhouses included a social security aspect; the data show that this tradition was slowly abandoned in favour of nuclear family houses during the 19th century,10

With the huge number of cross-identifications in the data, it is possible to follow individuals or families (biological or extended) for generations. Alternately, it is possible to examine a single location, and to describe how life changed in that particular location over the

MLD/ASTRID is a data base language and system, defined by Jørgen Grosbøl at DDA, described in his manual: MLD Data Bases and the ASTRID Language. Odense: DDA 1981.
The basic design was described in Karsten Boye Rasmussen, "MLD/ASTRID database for Grønlands befolkningshistorie", Working Paper A460–KB. DDA 1984-07-31.

⁹Jens Wagner, "MLD/ASTRID database for Gmnlands befolkningshihistorie – design uden referencer", Working Paper A460–JW, DDA, 10. December 1984.

¹ºDescribed in Kirsten Caning, "Fra bofællesskaber til kærnefamilie", <u>Beretning fra</u> <u>Carlsberfondet</u>, København 1986.

years. The latter strategy was applied by the principal investigator in an article on Sermermiut – a small place with only two houses with 20 and 12 inhabitants respectively (3 households per house).¹¹

8. Access to the Datasets for Secondary Analysis

Despite the fact that the primary investigator has not yet finalized the troublesome reconstituition process, it will be possible for secondary analysts to have access to the data, with the consent of Kirsten Caning. All requests should be directed to the DDA.

Needless to say, it is not quite as simple to address a user requesting this type of data as it is to send out a survey file. The user must define a priori the subsets or the formats s/he can handle. Further, it is the nature of historical-demographic data of the type we have been discussing that their quality improves over the years; during analysis, new findings concerning data relationships can be added. Such changes are now reflected in the data base version of the data, but not in the Raw Data Files mentioned in section 4.

Consequently, disseminable versions of the data should be extracted from the data base according to the specifications of the individual user. With the data stored in a data base management system, it is possible to generate rectangular files that can be analyzed with standard statistical software. However, to get the full personal history description capabilities, a data base management system environment would be needed by the user.

¹¹Tinna Møbjerg and Kirsten Caning, "Sermermiut in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century", <u>Arctic Anthropology</u> vol. 23(1-2):177-198, 1986.

figure 1

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Figure 1: Xerox copy of one of the source materials, viz. the Census List from October 1901, with information from Saraqaq in Ritenbek. The upper household is that of Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange, living with his wife and 4 unmarried children aged between 21 and 30. The lower household is an older son, Lars Jonas Lange, with his wife and 4 children.

The figure is reproduced from an illustration in Kirsten Elisabeth Caning, "Om den grønlandske belolknings historie", printed in Forskning i Grønland 1/82, p. 5.

figure 2

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Figure 2: The same persons as those listed in figure 1, now listed from the computer. To the left of the "normalized" names field, lots of numbers of identification appear, i.a. the PIN-number appearing in columns 7-12. Our head of household Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange has PIN-code no. 12914 - in the Ritenbenk District (code 4 in col. 19), the 1901-census (code 28 in cols. 16-17) from which the information was taken. He has that number in all other datasets as well, which we shall see later.

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39699991905282LANGE	999 399999919070121ANGE CEC DORT ANT MAR	42954 1264212 JOHN 1914 THOUGHS TO STILMEE LARS JOH STOGODSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS	C 2557 17946235 7103585 B 11401210109301LANGE LARS JON EJ 289550043003258AUGLSEN A BIONNET GTR ELEN CARL FR HANS		
LARS 101	LARS JOI 28D78 082 CLASEN	LARS JOI 14DTS D22JENSEN	LARS JOI 2305 1725AMUELSI	LARS JON	LARS JON
39211LANGE NS MARI MRTA 9999999999999	89 221 LANGE RI LOU JHN 999 9999 690 7	29271LANGE BACH JHS 9999995092907	D9 301 LANGE RTA BERL CATR 99999901 92 908	62961 1294023527 714 322 43 12 99 301LANGE	62962 1294023528 411 228 14 6 99 101LANGE
7 6 2 7 0 A B H A 9 9 9	57 2 2 D	83220 R R 05	12101 BIG M	12 99	9
2000	8060	0909	1140 N A	4.3	14
3ER 61	26 N 2	SEN 71	35 8 UELSE	322	228
28 8 01	1009 201A	1 JEN	1033 25A M	714	411
3500	35.7 0701	35 7 0703	35.7 0803 8 HA	3527	3 528
59402	29.40.2 5.39.4.2 1.V P.E	29602 99919	29 40 2 509 4 3	29402	20 4 0 2
35.50	39699	56 15 0009	1257 J	190	62 15
808	9128 6128	\$109 EN	9.128 EL SE	629	629

excerpt covers the two heads of household that were listed in figures 1 and 2, i.e. PIN-nos. 12914, Figure 3 (pp. 10-14 lncl.): Excerpt from the CPE-file after the PIN-codes have been entered. The Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange, and 12940, Lars Jonas Lange. Here is a short introduction to the two persons: 12914 Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange: The first block of 3 lines of this figure concerns his confirmation code 2 in col. 17 of the first line); strangely enough, he seems never to have been baptized. The Dort(c) Lundblad, Mar(ia) Sara Bronlund, and Birt(e) Pern(ille) Bronluns - to whom he has earlier following 3 blocks (code 3 in col. 17) concern his 3 consecutive marriages, with Soffie) Hedv(ig) been shown to have been married in 1901.

his children (code 8 in col. 17), and burial of one spouse (code 9 in col. 17). Finally, Nikolaj Jens Andreas Lange is present in every one of the 8 census enumerations, reflected in blocks with codes confirmation records on 11 of the children (code 6 in col. 17). There have been burials of two of After the three marriage records follows his burial registration (4 in col. 17 of the first line). following blocks (code 5 in col. 17) contain information on the baptisms of 16 children, and 21-28 in cols. 16-17. 12940 Lars Jonas Lange: Following the same coding patterns, Lars Jonas Lauge is seen to have been baptized, confirmed and married (codes 1, 2, and 3 in col. 17). 5 children have been baptized and 5 children (code 7 in col. 17), and Lars Jonas Lange has appeared in 2 censuses (codes 27-28 in cols. confirmed (codes 5 and 6 in col. 17); as many as 7 events are registered with marriages of his

figure 4

Figure 4: The information in the PERSON archive on the same two heads of household as reflected in earlier figures. The person is identified by the PIN-code preceded by M (males) or K (females); the second line gives the parents, third (and forth if necessary) the children. Under the heading GIFT (= married) the spouses are identified. Finally, under the heading TRANSDATA there are references to all events in which the individual was considered a CP. The initial letters identifying events are: B for burials, D for baptisms, K for confirmations, S for censuses with the extended family as the unit, T for censuses with a biological family as the unit, and V for the weddings.