

The Dutch in Australia, 1606–2006^[SEP]

In 2006 Australia and the Netherlands celebrated 400 years of Dutch contact. The mariners, merchants and passengers on ships belonging to the Dutch East Indies Company (*Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*) were the first recorded Europeans to set foot on Australian soil. There is a long list of landings produced by the *Australia On the Map Committee*, and displayed on their website. By 1644 the Dutch seafarers had mapped about 65% of the Australian Coast. These facts are fairly well known in West Australia, much less so on the East Coast.

The Dutch mariners' arrival in Australia initially happened mainly by chance at a time when the instruments used to determine longitude were still in their infancy. It was not uncommon for ships that left Cape Town in South Africa for the East Indies to travel too far east before turning north-east to Batavia (Jakarta, since 1949), the capital of the then Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia). Some of these ships came to grief on the Western Australian coast, e.g. the *Batavia* and the *Zuytdorp*. Some survivors were rescued but many were not. Indigenous oral history has it that the fortunate ones cohabited with Aborigines. Dutch East Indies Company ships stopped visiting Western Australian shores in 1796 after the collapse of the company. So the Dutch had links with Australia long before the British had. The mapping of the west coast of York Peninsula, by Willem Janszoon and the crew of the *Duyfken*, in 1606, was the beginning of the mapping process, 164 years before Captain James Cook sailed into Botany Bay. Abel Tasman added to that significantly with journeys around the South coast in 1642 and along the North Coast in 1644, resulting in the so-called Bonaparte

map, displayed in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

However, by the mid-19th century only an estimated 600 Dutch-born people were living in Australia. Some arrivals in the 19th century became quite well known though. We just mention two here:

E.g. William Henry Paling (musician, music teacher and founder of the well-known Paling Music Shops), and Guillaume Delprat, General Manager of Broken Hill Proprietary Mines (1899 – 1921), who also initiated the steel industry in Newcastle. The Dutch-Australian historian Edward Duyker (Sydney University), in his 1987 book *The Dutch in Australia*, provides several other remarkable examples.

It was not until 1942–45 that Dutch numbers increased significantly when Dutch military personnel arrived in Australia to help with the defence and evacuation of Dutch residents of the Netherlands East Indies. On 19th January 1942, the Netherlands East Indies and Australian governments reached an agreement that all financial responsibilities for Dutch women and children evacuated to Australia would fall on the Netherlands East Indies Administration. After this, evacuations started in earnest.

Many evacuees fled to Broome, on the north coast of Western Australia, because it was one of the closest points to Java on the Australian mainland and could take both land-based aircraft and flying boats. During this period as many as 57 aircraft arrived in Broome on any one day and 7 000 to 8 000 passengers passed through the base in a fortnight. Broome was not, however, a safe haven. On 3 March 1942, nine Japanese Zero fighter planes attacked a squadron of 15

flying boats waiting to refuel in Roebuck Bay. Fourteen of these boats were crammed with Dutch women and children who had fled Java the night before and were en route to other destinations. Many of these evacuees were injured or killed in the attack. Those who died are buried in Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth, Western Australia.

During WWII the Netherlands East Indies Government became the only foreign government-in-exile on Australian soil. The Netherlands was in fact the “Fourth Ally” of Australia (an excellent book with that title was published in 2004). The Merchant Navy, the Royal Netherlands Navy, RN Air Force and the KNIL made major contributions to the war effort against Japan.

Towards the end of the war, however, the relationship between the Australian and Netherlands East Indies governments shifted from amicable to antagonistic when, not surprisingly, Australian waterside workers’ unions and the Communist Party of Australia supported the Indonesian Nationalist Movement by boycotting Dutch shipping in 1944–45. The colonial period was ending.

Mass Immigration after WWII

In the years following World War II, the Australian Government began to actively recruit European-born migrants to reverse population stagnation, overcome crucial labour shortages and maintain the war-boasted economy. Between 1951 and 1970, about 160 000 Dutch nationals migrated to Australia. Many ships, including the *Groote Beer*, *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, *Nelly*, *Sibajak*, *Skaubryn* and *Waterman*, and several KLM Airlines flights, were specially chartered to carry migrants from the Netherlands. My own family and I

arrived here indirectly. It was our third migration (1) South Africa, 1959; (2) Northern Rhodesia, 1962; (3) Australia, 1964.

Most prospective migrants were enticed by passage assistance and images of wealth unheard of in post-war Netherlands – booming industry, boundless opportunity, full employment, good working conditions, a home of one's own, white goods and a motor vehicle. All that was required of them was that they meet health, security and age criteria, and remain in the employment for which they were selected for a period of two years or agree to repay their fare. Unlike arrangements made with other governments, where migrants paid a flat rate of £10 each, the amount a Dutch migrant paid depended on their earning capacity at the time. Many Dutch migrants had to pay a significant amount of money and suffered economic hardship in the early years. Information provided in The Netherlands by the Australian Embassy and Dutch authorities was, initially at least, fairly sketchy. One could say that most came on a "blind date". The Dutch officials had very little or no experience of Australia in the early period. Many larger families would start their new life at one of the Department of Immigration accommodation centres, the quality of which varied considerably (e. g. Bathurst, Scheyville, Nelson Bay).

Many Dutch women felt overwhelmed by the transition from a well-appointed cabin aboard the *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt* or the *Himalaya* to a bare cubicle in one of the accommodation centres scattered around the country. From 1945, Commonwealth-run hostels and camps were used to house newly arrived migrants. Many Dutch migrants spent time in these camps. Housing was particularly problematic for larger families.

Anglo-Australian conformity became the early hallmark of Dutch identity in Australia. These assimilation patterns made the Dutch somewhat 'invisible' and saw them even labeled 'model migrants'. Although "invisible" they formed many Clubs. About 10% of Dutch migrants are of the former Dutch East Indies origin. These Dutchies represent a different sociological group as compared to the average migrant coming directly from the Netherlands. What is not known much is that by 1970 about 33% had returned to the Netherlands – for mainly four reasons: trade qualifications were not recognised in Australia and by the mid-1960s the level of prosperity in Holland had improved significantly; the threat of WWII, present in 1948/9, had gradually receded; many wives were homesick and found the Australian way of life "ongezellig" (socially not to their liking).

Peters claims that "today there are close to 95 000 residents in Australia who were born in the Netherlands and a further 240 000 Australians who claim Dutch ancestry, amongst them 40,000 third generation" (about 1.35% of population, in 2006). Over the last 50 years, the Dutch have had a huge impact on the building and construction industry in Australia, and have contributed significantly to the scientific, artistic and economic development of the country they now call home. The DIMEX research shows that the Dutch migrants have found work in a very wide variety of jobs. Many have had two or three careers, in different branches of industry, showing great adaptability to changing circumstances.

How to find additional records about Dutch settlement and participation in Australia.

The collection of the National Archives of Australia contains

many records about Dutch settlement and participation in Australia and Australia's relationship with the Netherlands during the twentieth century. Records in the National Archives collection are available for public access once they are 30 years old. To help those seeking their family's migration records, the Archives have recently introduced the *Making Australia Home* service, providing documents in a keepsake folder for \$25.00. A brochure written in Dutch explaining this service and including an application form is available in the 'Family History' section on the Archives' website (www.naa.gov.au).

National Archives' reference service: PO Box 7425, Canberra Business Centre, ACT, Australia 2610.

Ph.: 1300 886 881 (overseas callers: 61 2 6212 3900)

Fax: 1300 886 882 (overseas callers: 61 2 6212 3999)

Email: ref@naa.gov.au

The DACC also has a reference Library and a small Archive. Our website is a lively one www.dacc.net.au.