

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

THE HISTORY OF DUTCH CLUBS IN PERTH – WA 1950s-2016

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INTRODUCTION – MIGRANTS CLUB TOGETHER

The first official Dutch Club premises was established in October 1945 by the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA)¹ in the Cloisters building, St Georges Terrace - to rehabilitate evacuees from Japanese internment camps in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI); [see Summers and Peters chapters]. The Cloisters finally closed its doors as a Dutch Club at the end of 1946.

The Dutch who were left in Western Australia subsequently returned to meeting in each other's homes and at specially organised Consular events,



Figure 1
Celebrating New Year's Eve in the Claremont Showgrounds in 1969 when 1500 people turned up. Courtesy: P. Leeftang.



Een herinnering aan de eerste reisgroep van de
Dutch Society Neerlandia Inc. (1969)

Wij vertrokken met Air India naar Singapore en moesten daar 24 uur wachten voor de aansluiting met de K.L.M.
De tijd in Singapore werd goed benut. We maakten een bustrip door de stad en besloten het met een bezoek aan de Tiger Balm Gardens. 's Avonds vertrokken wij naar Nederland en kwamen daar Maandagochtend om 7 uur aan.
Onze groep maakte een afspraak om op 11 Augustus bijeen te komen voor een dineetje en een rondvaart door Amsterdam als besluit van onze vakantie, waarna we op 18 Augustus weer terug keerden naar Australië.

M.O.

The Good Old Times

I recently looked up some old Neerlandia Magazines and found this photo. My thoughts went back to that wonderful time at the Perth Airport in 1976. Lots of people were saying "Have a nice Trip" On the right is the Group Travel Organiser, Mr. Piet Leeftang.

President

Figure 2
First Group Travel Neerlandia 1969.
Courtesy: P. Leeftang.

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as they had always done. Anecdotal evidence also indicates that there was a newsletter circulating among the Dutch from as early as 1890, although a copy has not yet been located.

This standard practice of congregating in each others' homes, continued well into the post-war period, until the first Dutch Clubs were established. For example in the late 1940s, the *Klaverjas* club [a card game], met in the evenings at the home of Mr and Mrs Clarke of Claremont - which they referred to as the 'Dutch Club'. Migrants needed each other in the initial phases of resettlement because only another migrant really understood the upheaval of migration, such as the difficulties encountered in the new setting and the specificities of the culture and families left behind. Sharing struggles often helped reduce a migrant's level of distress. Migrants felt more secure amongst their own people, until they had picked up enough information about both the new environment and its language to be able to then navigate on their own, and with some confidence, new socio-cultural and economic spheres.

In the first years of mass migration, the urge to find comfort with people from the same country and who spoke the same language drove the Dutch, (as it did other migrant groups), to establish many social, sporting and cultural clubs in both the city and countryside. The short-lived *Dirck Hartogh* Society, established by NEI Dutch, was among the most acclaimed. Principally because it had strict social class-based entry criteria but also because it was unable to afford the labour costs required to maintain such an establishment - the calibre more suited to a gentlemen's club in the Colonies than to Perth in the 1950s.² Labour costs in WA were exorbitant, compared to the NEI at that time and soon the Society folded. However not before upsetting many newly - arrived Dutch from NL, who had been excluded from its membership due to the specificities of entry requirements.

In 1950, Henk Beumer with the help of Klaas van Eck, founded the 'Morley Windmills Soccer Club'. Here Dutch migrants would come to participate in or watch the soccer game or just enjoy the friendship. However, for most of the 1950s, the most prominent and popular Dutch rendezvous was Monash House in King Street, Perth. Every Sunday you could find 'Dutchies', young and old, dancing the night away to the strains of the European-style music provided by Kees Hermans on the accordion, and Neil Boon on the clarinet.

By early 1952, it was also becoming obvious that newly arrived Dutch migrants needed help and support with various aspects of their resettlement activities. A group of educated Dutch migrants led by Mr Arriens, (the Consul of the Netherlands) and honorary Chairman, made such information available to the community by establishing the Australian Dutch League (ADL). It aimed to gather relevant information to be made available to the Dutch community [See Peters' chapters].

In 1959 a few '*Klaverjas*' enthusiasts, namely Nico Feddema, Bart Bos and Toon van Brussel formed the 'Windmills *Klaverjas* Club'. After a few years, this club split into two, with the largest group forming the *Neerlandia*

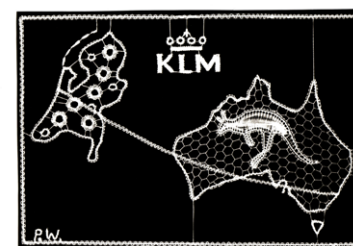


Figure 3
KLM Lace. Courtesy: Petronella Wensing.



Figure 4
 First Honorary Memberships handed out.
 Left to right: Recipient Secretary Pieter Leeflang; President Ben Schrandt; Recipient Social Convenor & Committee Member Bob Hoogeveen; Hon Dutch Consul for WA Thom Dercksen; Frank van der Worm on behalf of his late father Henk van der Worm, Magazine Editor and Committee Member c1969.
 Courtesy: P. Leeflang.

Klaverjas Club - a very powerful club that had well over 150 members. This particular club also began to organise cheaper 'Group Travel' to the Netherlands, of which any Dutch community group or individual could take advantage. It also planned other events such as local picnics. The largest event, which they organised annually, was the very popular Christmas event –the St Nicholas Procession. This began at the Barrack Street Jetty, where St Nicholas (*Sinterklaas*) would alight from a ferry and mount his white steed, attended by a number of *Zwarte Pieten* (Black Peters). He would then move through the centre of Perth to finish at Supreme Court Gardens, where he would talk with the children, hand them *pepermoten* and other sweets, before returning to the ferry.

Many other small clubs emerged at the same time. These included the *Klaverjas* Clubs of Medina and Midland, two ladies choirs, a male voice choir, the Repertory Club *Elckerlijc*, the *Hollandia Biljard* Club, the Dam Club, the King *Damas* and several Church Organisations. Even a Credit Union materialised! However, despite discussions on several occasions about the benefits of joining forces, attempts in the mid-1960s to pull together existing small clubs under the one banner, continued to fail. The main reason given for the failure was the strong-willed nature of the Dutch character.

It was not until early in 1969, that a change in attitude to mergers was becoming apparent. A series of meetings that took place at that time managed to attract enough support to publish a combined newsletter. This was in part due to the calibre of the people, which the meetings had attracted. They included the Dutch Consul van Oordt, Kanselier Leo Kwakkenbos, Emigratie Ambtenaar (emigration agent) Jan Maassen, Pater van Os, Dominee (Rector) Zuiderduin plus delegates from almost every WA Dutch club. Among the delegates to attend were Nico Feddema, Pieter Leeflang, Karel Nissen, Karel Mijnsbergen, Henk van der Worm, Gerard Spanjers, Joop Klashorst, Leo van Noort Sr, Jan van Dijk and Henk Heesemans.

At the initial meeting, all the clubs agreed to support the publication of a single newsletter under the banner of the *Contact* - an existing Church magazine. This was accepted with great enthusiasm. The only drawback, which they could foresee was the lack of income being generated to cover the printing cost of the magazine.

At a follow-up meeting held on 20 May 1969, it was disclosed that the 'Contact' magazine had accumulated a debt of over \$800. A proposal was raised on the spot to establish a Federation of Dutch Clubs in WA. The advantages of the Federation would be many. Firstly because it would be combined, they could organise large functions to raise more funds and thus clear the accumulated debt. Secondly, it could establish a large membership and thirdly, only by merging could they hope to eventually obtain a clubhouse.

In the meantime, Nico Feddema and Pieter Leeflang of the powerful *Klaverjasclub Neerlandia*, had decided that the *Klaverjasclub* should go it alone to obtain a clubhouse, never believing that the Dutch Community would ever get their act together. In order to do this, by October 1968 they had drawn

up and adopted a Constitution, changed the name of the *Klaverjasclub* to the *Dutch Society Neerlandia of WA* and applied for Incorporation. This was granted on 4 March 1969.

At the aforementioned meeting, they heard the good news that a Federation of Dutch Clubs and Associations would be formed. They also offered to hand over their Constitution, the Incorporated name '*Dutch Society Neerlandia of WA Inc.*' and the Travel Scheme which they had established to the yet unnamed Federation.

The proposal was accepted by all the delegates with open arms, as it would save the Federation a great deal of time and money, both of which were in short supply. Particularly, as the Federation had also proposed to take over the existing debt of £800, which the church had incurred producing the magazine *Contact*. However, before they could proceed, this proposal had also to be accepted by the membership of all the individual clubs. This was achieved with great enthusiasm, with the exception of the 'Windmills Sports Club'. They only wanted to participate if they were given full control of the 'Group Travel' and its proceeds.

At the next meeting held on 24 June 1969, the proposal to proceed was officially accepted and a steering committee elected comprised of: President-Nico Feddema; Secretary-Pieter Leeftang and Treasurer - Karel Nissen. Nico Feddema and Pieter Leeftang were at the time the President and Secretary of the *Klaverjas Club Neerlandia* and Karel Nissen was the President of the Checkers Club 'King Damas'. Nominations were soon also held for independent executive and non-independent committee members. The first official Executive Committee of the Dutch Society *Neerlandia* included President - Teun Verboon; Secretary - Iet van Lunteren, and Treasurer - Karel Nissen. The Committee Members, comprised Karel Mijnsbergen, Taets van Amerongen, Henk Heesemans and Pieter Leeftang.

At the same meeting, the Dutch Society *Neerlandia* Inc. was officially instituted and the arduous task of acquiring members and raising funds began. Attracting members proved the easier task, as all the supporting groups had insisted that their membership should join the newly founded Dutch Society *Neerlandia*. An additional publicity campaign for members soon raised the membership to 800 people.

In this spirit, it was not long before the *Contact* magazine was renamed the '*Neerlandia* magazine'. This much larger, and greatly improved, publication was edited for many years by Henk van der Worm.

The *Neerlandia* Committee also began to organise regular Balls, held mainly at the Claremont Showgrounds. Often up to 1500 people would attend such functions as the *Koninginne Ball* (Queen's Birthday Ball) and New Year's Eve Ball. Even *Klaverjas* 'Drives' attracted up to 250 people. Income from these events and the ongoing Group Travel meant that the £800 debt was soon paid off. Now the Society could start saving in earnest for its ultimate aim – to purchase its own clubhouse.



Figure 5
Neerlandia Clubhouse - Cambridge Street - July 2016. Courtesy: Lianna Parker.

Three years later in early 1972, the *Neerlandia* Committee decided that a clubhouse could now be realised. They began discussions with several local Councils but when this proved unproductive, started to look for possible building sites. It was Nico Feddema, working at the time as a hairdresser in Cambridge Street, Wembley, who changed the course of events. He alerted the Committee to the fact that the four-year-old ‘Kiama Wedding Lodge’ in Cambridge Street was now empty and up for sale. The Committee viewed it and was greatly impressed by its possibilities. They subsequently invited their membership to also view the building and suggested that if they also liked what they saw, the project could be supported by the purchase of one or more \$100 Debentures at 6.5 percent interest. They also made \$1 Building Stones (Bricks) available for the members who could not afford the \$100 Debentures, but still wished to contribute.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. *Neerlandia* members subscribed to 126 Debentures and quite a few \$1 Building Stones (Bricks). Close to \$13,000 was raised. The Treasurer Gerard Neervoort and Secretary Pieter Leeftang then paid a visit to the R & I bank, offered the bank a \$15,000 deposit and were successful in acquiring a loan of \$80,000 over eight years. An offer was made on the building and the rest is history. It needs to be noted that a few members even went so far as to generously deposit their House Title Deeds in the bank for security. The bank loan was serviced within the eight years, which had been agreed upon. However, it took a further two years to buy back the Debentures. Even so, by 1982, *Neerlandia* was debt free.

Once the building was acquired, *Neerlandia* gained the support from its membership of an army of volunteers, who were prepared to make a plethora of alterations to the building. The committee subsequently applied for and were successful in gaining, a Liquor License. Today the *Neerlandia* Club is still going strong and continues to be operated only by volunteers – and that is a remarkable achievement!

Peter Leeftang (Editor *Neerlandia* Magazine)

NEERLANDIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY



Figure 6
King's Day - Cambridge Street -30 April 2013. Courtesy: Lianna Parker.

As times were changing and *Neerlandia* moved into the 21st century, it became apparent that society and the expectations of an influx of new Dutch migrants, was changing. *Neerlandia* started to suffer from loyal but aging volunteers, who were not replaced by younger members. Therefore less functions could be organized and the club's income decreased by the year. This combined with rising costs for the maintenance of the building, forced the committee to look for a change in direction. It was obvious that WA needed a Dutch Club in Perth, a place where those with a Dutch background are able to celebrate their culture. However, the club would have to be run in a different way – a way adjusted to the change in capability, mentality and expectation of club members.

Neerlandia needed to be less dependent on volunteers to secure a healthy future for its members. While *Neerlandia* was still in a position where it could take its destiny in its own hands, the committee started to look for alternative options.

Initial negotiations to work together with ‘The Morley Windmills’ did not result in the desired outcome, and in May 2015 *Neerlandia*’s President had her first meeting with the President of the *Rhein-Donau* Club, the German speaking club in WA. It was a logical and sensible move for the two Northern European cultures to join forces, thereby creating a ‘win-win’ situation for both clubs that were both recognizing problems with a declining and aging membership.

The negotiations soon resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being signed by both parties in November of that same year. Consequently, in January 2016, *Neerlandia* moved from its original club house in Wembley to that of the *Rhein-Donau* Club in Myaree. After a period of emotional uncertainty, *Neerlandia* club members settled into the new club house and as younger members joined, a new era for *Neerlandia* began.

Lianna Parker (President, Dutch Society *Neerlandia* WA Inc. May 2016)

ENDNOTES

- 1 NICA were located in a second floor office in the Colonial Mutual Building, St Georges Terrace, Perth.
- 2 Pers.com D. Bekker, 1992.



Figure 7
New Premises - Lake Street 2016.
Courtesy: Lianna Parker.

Figure 8
Young Dutch New Premises 2016
Courtesy: Lianna Parker.

