

*This is the speech held by chairperson Mona Arfs at the Svensk-Nederländska Föreningens 75th anniversary reception at the Royal Bachelors' Club in Gothenburg on the 3rd of June 2010.*

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Swedish-Dutch Association in Gothenburg was founded 75 years ago. That's why we are here today. I am happy to see so many members and friends here and I am especially happy to see so many former chairpersons here: Rob Zeijlemaker, Jan Fokkens and also the former vice chairpersons Gun de Zeeuw and Ingmar Hasselgréen are here. The first female chairperson Kitty Molander and Bastiaan de Zeeuw send their regards and regret they could not come.

I would also like to introduce the rest of the present board to you: Natasja van Kalmthout, Laura Nieuwenhuis and Erik Siebrands. Secretary Job van Eldijk and cashier Anna-Maria Leijen, are absent.

So what happened in 1935 when it all started? Why was this association founded? What was the purpose of it and who were the first members?

This is how it started:

In 1935 The Netherlands was represented in Sweden by a Minister of the Netherlands and by a Consul-Generaal for the Netherlands. They were both seated in Stockholm of course. In 1935 however, consul Uggla wrote a letter in which he expressed that he wanted a Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging to be founded in Gothenburg like the one that already existed in Stockholm. I couldn't find that letter in the archives, but according to other letters about this letter there must have been an association in Stockholm before the present Hollandse Club in Stockholm that was founded in 1940.

According to his plans consul Uggla met a certain Dr Walter Kaudern in Gothenburg in April 1935 to discuss the possible foundation of a Swedish-Dutch Association in Gothenburg. And soon after that, on the 24th of May, Dr Kaudern gathered a foundation committee in the famous old Restaurant Gamle Port. So Mr Kaudern is the founder of the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging in Göteborg. He was the Head of the Department of Ethnology at Göteborgs museum and before that he was a young Swedish researcher who became interested in the Netherlands during an ethnological excursion to Nederlands-Indië (Indonesia).

Five days after the meeting in Gamle Port Dr Kaudern wrote a letter to consul Uggla to inform him about the result of the meeting and I quote:

”De närvarande beslöto att bilda förening med namn Svenska-Nederländska Föreningen i Göteborg med ändamål att i västra Sverige arbeta för samma syften som motsvarande förening i Stockholm.”

In his letter to the consul he also writes that an interim board was appointed until an official annual meeting could be held and that he himself, the notarius publicus Jan Appelbom and the wholesaler Jules Cohen had been asked to form the very first board. In the regulations which were not printed until 1937 we can read that the purpose of the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging in Göteborg is - and I quote again:

“att i västra Sverige verka för sammanslutning av där bosatta nederländare och för Nederländerna intresserade svenskar samt därigenom och på annat sätt främja kännedom om och förståelse för Nederländerna”.

According to the minutes from the annual meeting in 1936 the association had already gathered 73 members. Most of them seem to have been connected to Dutch or Dutch-related companies in the region and all these companies very generously sponsored the new association. Also the Embassy and the Consulate generously promoted the activities of the association. Consul Eldering was even part of the board as a secretary for many years.

Dr Walter Kaudern was the first chairperson until 1942 when he passed away. He was succeeded by dr Ingvar Bergström and professor Lennart Rönmark. Lennart Rönmark was chairperson for 15 years, 1958-1973. In 1965 he was appointed “Commandeur in de Orde van Oranje Nassau.” He received this excellent royal distinction because of his achievements as a chairperson of the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging.

So what did the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging do in the earlier days and what do we do today? What has happened during these 75 years?

In the Archives of the Region of West Sweden you can find the minutes and a lot of other association documents from 1935 up till now. I spent some hours in the files there the other day. When looking into all these documents in the archives I realized that many things are exactly the same as they used to be and that the traditions within our association are very strong. I also realized that many things are quite different because the world around us is quite different nowadays compared to 75 or 60 years ago. But above all I realized that there are lots of reasons to be very, very proud of our association.

I will give you some examples from the history of activities of Svensk-Nederländska Föreningen:

In 1936 a Sinterklaasfeest was celebrated at Palace Hotel on the 5th of December. But this wasn't a party for the children. The evening started with a board meeting and then there was a dinner and dance afterwards. In 1944 the first Sinterklaasfeest for children was organised and after that it became a tradition. A certain miss Köster is constantly mentioned. This miss Köster seems to have been an untiring and everlasting leader of the singing and playing during the Sinterklaasparties and I wonder if any of you older members can remember her. Nowadays the Sinterklaasfeest has become the most popular activity for the member families and we have new untiring song leaders.

In 1937 the board decided to build up a small library of Dutch books to make it easier for members of the association to read books in Dutch. Board member Jan Appelbom was responsible for the books and the loans.

In 1940 the Dutch speaking ladies started to meet regularly at Gillblad's Tesalong to keep practicing conversation in Dutch. Mevrouw Van Ginhoven was coordinator and hostess for this.

In the spring term of 1940 Svensk-Nederländska Föreningen started a language course in Dutch in cooperation with Handelshögsskolan. The teacher was reverend Frans Krijn and 24 students took part in his language course.

The importance of keeping your language alive when you live abroad for a long time is obvious. Even if it is very easy to get Dutch books and films today the need to come together for conversation in Dutch is still the same and these kinds of activities are still going on.

A very special period in our activity history was of course the very difficult years during and after the war. The Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging was very active when it came to support to the Dutch refugees and other people from the Netherlands who needed help. The Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging organized all kinds of activities to help people who came to Sweden after having spent time in a concentration camp in Germany and also to help the children who came to stay in Swedish families for a while.

In 1943 the Dutch speaking ladies' conversation tea parties at Gillblad's Tesalong had changed into big sewing parties in cooperation with the help association Hollands Barn, which resulted in 20 big boxes with children's clothes, shoes and blankets which were sent to the Netherlands. In the archives you can find long lists of the contents of the boxes.

In 1945 the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging decided to organized a soir e at Liseberg to entertain the unhappy young Dutch women who stayed in the refugee camps at Skat s and Robertsh jd. The girls were also invited to a daytrip to Saltholmen where they could enjoy sunshine, icecream, softdrinks and Swedish cookies.

In May 1945 the liberation day was celebrated but also the 10th anniversary of our association. The anniversary party took place in the restaurant of Tr dg rdsf reningen and some young members showed the clogdance wearing traditional Dutch costumes. For many years the celebrating of the liberation day in May was the most important activity of our association and most years some famous entertainer was invited from the Netherlands. According to the minutes from the board meetings the board also bought more and more costumes for the clog dancers whose performance also became a tradition. This tradition of celebrating the liberation day however has been brought to an end many years ago. Nowadays we organize a Family party every year in August instead.

In 1947 the annual meeting decided that the contributions f r membership should be: for men 10 kronor, ladies 5 kronor and children 2 kronor. 10 kronor is equivalent to 182 kr today. So dear members I have found out that the contribution was actually higher in those days. 1948 was a year with a lot of activities. At the annual meeting in 1948 the chiefpilot Mr A Viruly from the KLM was invited to talk about "People I have met". One of the important people that he had met and talked about was the famous Swede Count Bernadotte. On the 28th of August Queen Wilhelminas 50th year at the throne was celebrated at a wonderful boat trip in the archipelago along the coast outside Gothenburg.

Every now and then there is a Dutch marine ship visiting the harbour of Gothenburg and usually our members are invited on board. The first visit that I could find in the old minutes in the Archives was in 1949 when the submarine Tijgerhaai visited the harbour of Gothenburg and there was a great reception for the officers and the crew.

The second period when the members of the Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereniging made a very special effort and contribution for Dutch people in great need was after the flood catastrophe in the province of Zeeland in February 1953, when almost the whole province was flooded and 1800 people drowned. The members of the association managed to collect a great sum of money to help out. The Zweeds-Nederlandse Vereining sent more than 630.000 Swedish

kronor to the Nationaal Rampenfonds in the Hague and that would be about 8.5 million kronor today. The money came from both private and company sponsors but also from a lot of voluntary paper collecting. The county governor of Zeeland (Commissaris van de Koningin) came especially to Gothenburg in 1954 to thank the members of our association personally for their effort and contribution. At visited the annual meeting and gave a speech about the recovery building projects that had just started in Zeeland.

Lectures, films and guided tours have always been very popular activities in the association. When looking through the documents in the archives I realized that the members always have been very interested in cultural things. There have been so many famous lecturers at the member meetings through the years that I really regret that haven't been along since the very beginning.

The world around us is quite different today compared to 75 years ago, the communication and transport is quick and easy, but still the purpose of the association is just as relevant today as when they wrote the regulations in 1935. We want to bring people together and help create networks between those who for one reason or other are interested in the Netherlands. It may be because of the beautiful and interesting language, the history and culture, because they want to give their Dutch children an idea of Dutch traditions even if they grow up in Sweden, or because they have started a new business career in Sweden. The board is doing its best to adjust the activities to suit all the different categories of members and make everyone feel that Svensk-Nederländska Föreningen still has a very relevant purpose. At the moment we have 216 members, which is a very nice number.

Finally I would like to say a few words about some activities in the nearest future. Next week on the 9th of June you can all come to Restaurant 't Amsterdammertje to wait for the election results together while you are enjoying a nice meal or a good beer.

On the 20th of June there is a guided tour at Nääs Slott. Our guide is a Dutch speaking conservator working at the castle for a period, so this is an unique opportunity just for us.

And then of course: this year our traditional Family party in August will be quite outstanding since we celebrate our 75th anniversary this year. The party is on the 22nd of August at Tjolöholmns Slott in Kungsbacka.

On the 15th of September Ingmar Hasselgréen will take us on a Dutch tour through the Göteborgs Museum which used to be the building of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie.

I also have another very nice announcement to make. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of our association our patron Consul Håkan Friberg has declared that he will start and contribute to a fund for Svensk-Nederländska Föreningen to be used for special and cultural activities in the future. This is a very nice birthday present. I suggest we give him a very warm applause.

And finally I would like propose a toast to Svensk-Nederländska Föreningen i Göteborg!