

The Willet-Holthuysen House as a Site of Resistance

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Abstract

This paper examines the Willet-Holthuysen House, a canal house museum in Amsterdam, in the context of World War II. Originally bequeathed to Amsterdam by its last owner, Louisa Willet-Holthuysen, in 1895, the house has a rich history of being home to various families and institutions. While some connections between the house and World War II have been previously established through oral sources, this essay introduces additional source material to shed further light on the house as a place of resistance. The research uncovers that the Willet-Holthuysen House served not only as a location within the Council of Resistance's network but also provided shelter for a person in hiding and accommodated a family actively involved in the resistance. This reveals that the house was more than just a place for art collection and opulence; it operated as a vital node in the resistance network, offering a hiding place and serving as a meeting spot for illegal resistance activities.



Figure 1: *The Willet-Holthuysen House in May 1943* (Amsterdam City Archive, photographer unknown).

Introduction

In Amsterdam, the history of the Second World War is omnipresent. When walking in the city, one might pass streets named after resistance fighters, monuments and *stolpersteine* dedicated to victims, and plaquettes indicating historical sites. But besides these visible traces, there are many stories still left untold. In this paper, one such case will be explored: that of The Willet-Holthuysen House, a museum located on Herengracht 605. The last owners of the building, Louisa and Abraham Willet-Holthuysen, lived there in the 19th century. Both were from wealthy families, and they spent their lives collecting art and curating the house to their liking, decorating it in

a neo-Louis XVI fashion that was popular at the time. Before her death in 1895, Louisa decided to bequeath her house and its collection to the city of Amsterdam. The municipality, unsure of what to do with the large building and its peculiar contents, accepted only because they recognized the exceptional value of the couple's book collection.

A curator, Frans Coenen, was installed and led the small museum until he retired in 1932. After that, the museum came under the aegis of the Stedelijk Museum, and in 1962, it was moved under the wing of the Amsterdam Museum, of which it is currently still part (Vreeken 316-318). The museum today is mostly focused on the lives of Louisa and Abraham. Its period rooms, most of which are reconstructions, aim to transport visitors back to the 19th century. However, the building also has an interesting war history, that until now has been significantly less investigated.

While working as a junior curator at the Amsterdam Museum, the war history of the building fascinated me. Over the centuries, the museum has been a home for people of diverse walks of life – from the 18th-century Burgomaster whose colonial investments were responsible for the immense amount of marble in the hallways, to the immigrant women who worked as household staff and slept on the kitchen floor.¹ Previous research has pointed out that there were indications that Willet-Holthuysen may have been a site of resistance, but these leads often led to dead ends, and stunted the knowledge of what actually happened in the museum between 1940 and 1945. This research traces back from what we know, and presents new source material that consolidates our previous assumptions: that the Willet-Holthuysen House during the second world war was a node in a resistance network, and an example of a building that is deeply connected to Amsterdam's war history, even if these traces today are not directly visible.

War Years in the Willet-Holthuysen House

On May 15, 1940, German forces marched over the Berlagebrug into Amsterdam, firmly establishing the city's occupation. Tensions soon were rising in Amsterdam: Jewish people were forced to register themselves, and their liberties are slowly taken away. Incidents between the city's Jewish population, members of the NSB, and the police were becoming more frequent, leading to the February Strike in Amsterdam in 1941.² From 3 May 1942 onwards, Jewish people were forced to wear yellow stars on their clothes, razzia's in which large groups of Jewish citizens are deported to concentration camps are happening more and more often.

In Amsterdam, it led to the formation of resistance movements, which were trying to help victims of the new regime by aiding them with fake pass-

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ports, food stamps and places where they could hide. The war threat also had an influence on the city's sites of heritage: in 1939, the municipality started the construction of a bomb-free shelter in the dunes of Castricum, to protect art from possible looting or bombings. Over the war years, many institutions including the Willet-Holthuysen House placed part of their collections here, and closed their doors to the public (Vreeken 235).³ While the museum was closed, the building was not entirely empty: at the time, it was also used by the University of Amsterdam, who rented some rooms on the second floor to house their art history department.



Figure 2: *The Willet-Holthuysen house as seen from the garden, May 1943. The lowest row of windows belong to the souterrain* (Amsterdam City Archive, photographer unknown).

The students were able to access the building until 1943, when the ongoing war and gas shortages finally forced the university to close.⁴ The souterrain was also occupied, as this was the living space of the Boer family. Dirk Arie Boer (1895 – 1976) was the concierge of Herengracht 605 and lived with his wife Helena Sophia Hendrika Boer-Cornet (1905 – 1998) and their daughters Ewalda (Wally) (1928 – 2006) and Carla (1930 – 1996) in the dark and humid basement.⁵ Since the museum rooms were no longer used to welcome visitors, a sociographic institute under the name of ISO-NEVO rented the rooms on the bel-etage. For 100 guilders a month, they were free to use the opulent salons as their offices.⁶

This is where the current knowledge of the war history of the building starts. Hubert Vreeken, who was a curator of the museum between 1992 and 2014 published his extensive PhD Thesis *'Bij wijze van museum: oorsprong, geschiedenis en toekomst van Museum Willet-Holthuysen 1865 – 2010'* in 2010. While his thesis primarily focused on the lives of the building's last inhabitants, he covered part of the war history as well. Vreeken managed to track down two oral sources who told him more about the war history: Henk Heeren, a former employee of ISONEVO, and Hannie Tuinstra, a childhood friend of Wally Boer. Both were able to give an idea of the war efforts that may have happened there. Building upon this research, and using new digitized sources, I will explore in the following sections how both the Boer family and ISONEVO were related to the war efforts.



Figure 3: *The kitchen of the Willet-Holthuysen House*
(photograph by Monique Vermeulen).

Resistance from the basement:**the Boer family and Jozef Salomon van der Hal**

Today, the kitchen in the souterrain of the Willet-Holthuysen House has been furnished with a reconstruction of an 18th-century kitchen, almost seeming as if time has stood still (figure 1). In reality, from 1939 to 1950, these were the living quarters of the Boer family.⁷ Up to now, not much was known about them – despite the multiple newspaper advertisements the museum put out, no relatives of the family were found. What was known was that Arie, besides being a concierge, was also a photographer – the museum even paid for his camera, so he could ‘take pictures of paintings and objects’.⁸ There were indications that the Boer family may have been involved in resistance activities – Vreeken for instance notes in his research how ‘the concierge helped people find refuge’ and also mentions that the curators knew the name of one man who was in hiding in the Willet-Holthuysen House: Jozef Salomon van der Hal (235). Contemporary insights now allow us to piece together some of the gaps in information regarding these resistance activities. An interview with Van der Hal from the 1990s has emerged, shedding light on his concealed experiences. Interestingly, this account, omitted in previous studies, accentuates the substantial support provided by the Boer family throughout his clandestine stay.

In the 1990’s, there was increasing attention for the stories of holocaust survivors, as the people who lived through the war became older. One of the projects initiated at the time was Steven Spielberg’s interview project, which he did together with the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. By using the royalties from his film *Schindler’s List*, the project conducted interviews with survivors from 1995 to 1998 in 34 different countries, leading to an archive of almost 52.000 testimonies. The Jewish Cultural Quarter in Amsterdam selected 2000 interviews of this project that held a relationship with The Netherlands, which can today be viewed in the Jewish Cultural Quarter’s library. Van der Hal happened to be one of the people interviewed, which is how his story can be recounted today.⁹

Jozef (Jo) Salomon van der Hal was born on November 3, 1911 in Cuijk. He grew up in a Jewish middle-class family. When the children were in their late teens, the family decided to move to Weesp to be closer to the University of Amsterdam, where Van der Hal wanted to study medicine. He took the train daily with other students from his village, and once, they jumped off the train for fun, hoping to skip the walk to the station this way. The train warden scolded them for it, but as Van der Hal says, anyone feels invincible at that age, and they did not think about the risks.

Van der Hal went on to become a general practitioner in Amsterdam. When because of Nazi laws, non-Jewish people were no longer allowed to visit Jewish doctors, Van der Hal came to be without patients and made an impactful decision: via one of his patients, he got a job at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the Amsterdam theater where Jewish people were gathered as they awaited their deportation.¹⁰ By working in the theater as a doctor, Van der Hal was promised a durable ‘sperre’ – an exception document that would prevail him from being deported (De Jong 1044). Van der Hal worked alongside two other doctors, and was supposed to provide basic care to the imprisoned people. At that moment, there was also a resistance movement active in the Schouwburg. Resistance workers combined their efforts to save hundreds of children from deportation by smuggling them out to the daycare across the street in bags or under clothing, after which they would be placed in foster families.¹¹ Van der Hal himself was part of the resistance movement too – at times, he and his fellow medical practitioners would get the German guards drunk, so they could liberate prisoners through the infirmary. It was a risky endeavor, given that they were under strict control of supervisors and any visibility of their actions could get them arrested. Regrettably, the people Van der Hal freed often reappeared within the Schouwburg in mere days: in many cases, they lost their houses and their friends had dropped them, and they had nowhere to go. Van der Hal recalls this as being very frustrating.

Van der Hal worked at the Hollandsche Schouwburg for approximately 1,5-2 years before he eventually got arrested and ended up in the same theater to await his deportation.¹² As he knew the building well, he managed to access a tiny window in a secluded room. He jumped four meters down to the courtyard, snuck underneath the windows there, and made it over the walls of the property. “I’m not necessarily a very athletic person”, Van der Hal states in his interview, “But deadly terror makes your body able to do things it normally couldn’t”.

From the Hollandsche Schouwburg, Jozef flees to the Willet-Holthuysen House. He describes this as follows:

“That was at Keizersgracht 605, which was the Willet-Holthuysen Museum, and the porter of the Willet-Holthuysen Museum was a patient of mine, the whole family was. They offered me that I could come to them for help in case of emergency. That was the Boer family. They lived downstairs in the basement. The house was an immense building, with a magnificent library, there was an institute for social sciences, and upstairs there was an art academy from a professor, and lots of things happened there, I could go unnoticed. The institute, the Willet-Holthuysen Museum, was located at the Keizersgracht 605 and next to the building there was the Italian Consulate, and that man kind of befriended the Boer family, their kids played together. The kids told the boy from the Italians that they had someone in hiding at home, and so, I was betrayed. A raid came, but it was an immense building, I could easily hide. I saw these guys, the Grüne Polizei were storming in the building, and I was all the way up in the highest attic of the building, so I could easily disappear there. After this I could not stay any longer, so I searched with all my might for a new place to hide, but nobody wanted to take me in” (van der Hal).¹³

Van der Hal continues his story by explaining how Mr. Boer helped him find a new place. Months before, Van der Hal had sent other Jewish people looking for a hiding spot to a family in The Hague, and Mr. Boer went to see if he too could move there. This was possible, and thus Van der Hal made the move, but he was ill at ease as the host family already had several other people in hiding. Unlike cases such as Anne Frank’s, in the places where Van der Hal stayed the people in hiding did not remain inside, but roamed the neighborhood. He felt they would attract too much attention having that many new people walking around, and turned out to be right: the house was raided. Van der Hal, who did not look stereotypically Jewish, carried a fake ID under the name Jan de Wit, but the policemen knew this ID was registered as stolen. He was taken to a cell in the local police station, where he miraculously managed to escape during the moment the guards were switching shifts, but as soon as he was outside, he was immediately captured again by a group of marching NSB men. They put him back in his cell, but Van der Hal was not tortured – he was so hysterically mad that the NSB men seemed afraid of him. Van der Hal stated that this all happened on the day ‘Mussolini capitulated’, likely referring 25 July 1943 (De Jong 308).



Figure 4: *The highest attic of the Willet-Holthuysen House, where Jozef hid during the raid* (photograph by the author).

After the incident, Van der Hal was once again transferred to the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Out of pure chance, his parents were also at the Schouwburg this time, and they were placed on the same transport to Westerbork the next day.¹⁴ When they were boarding the train, Van der Hal stayed behind on the platform as long as he could. His dad urged him to come inside, something Van der Hal scoffs about looking back – as if the train wasn't bringing them straight to their deaths anyway. The guards forced him into the train at the last minute, and in the confusion, the doors were not properly sealed as they were with the other wagons. Between Amersfoort and Zwolle, Van der Hal once again takes a big risk by jumping

off the train, just as he once did in his teenage rascal years. He survived, and immediately started running. To his surprise, the train is stopped, and he is being chased. He ran up to a farm, asking for a bike. The farmer told him he could not give it right there, it would be too risky, but he could cycle to the next bit of forest where he could give the bike in the coverage of the trees. The farmer hopped on the cycle, Van der Hal ran after him, and the farmer kept his word: Van der Hal escaped on the bike. He rode the bike to Nunspeet, where he boarded a train to Amsterdam. He managed to make it to a hiding address in the Queilijnstraat, where he would stay with a communist family until the end of the war. He survived, unlike his fiancé and his entire family.

A Lasting Friendship

Besides Van der Hal's testimony, up to now there has been one other source who confirmed the indications that the Boer family may have been involved in the resistance: Hannie Winterwerp-Tuinstra, a childhood friend of Wally Boer who often visited the family in the stately house. Bert Vreeken interviewed her for his thesis in 2009, where she was able to recall how she and the Boer daughters played Ping-Pong in the marble hallways. The daughters at the time were sleeping on fold-out beds in the adjacent room to the kitchen. About the war years, she recalls how one time, she borrowed a book from the family, but when she opened it at home, she was shocked to find a falsified passport within – she returned the book hastily, never telling anyone what she had found (Vreeken 239). On multiple occasions, Vreeken has tried to find relatives of the Boer family that may have been alive.¹⁵ Bert Vreeken passed away suddenly in 2015, and his extensive research archive is now located within the Amsterdam Museum. His notes show that in 2014, he tried yet again to locate relatives of the Boer family – this time he placed an ad in a Dutch newspaper. A relative of Helena Sophia Hendrika reached out, informing Vreeken that Carla had had two children: Hendrik and Annemarie. The letter he sent them is still present in his archive.¹⁶ For this research, a last attempt to find the children was made, and it succeeded with the help of Facebook: Annemarie, Dirk Arie's granddaughter, had a profile on the site.

Serendipitously, Annemarie had been reconnecting to her family history too at the time we came into contact. She had just visited her grandfather's place of birth and was delighted to hear her family had come up in the research. She noted:

“In my family, the time in the museum was often a topic of conversation. My grandfather and grandmother were true resistance fighters indeed, and even my mother Carla contributed, by distributing illegal newspapers on her bike with wooden wheels”.¹⁷

The Boer family remained in contact with Jo van der Hal throughout their lives. As Annemarie states:

“I’ve talked to him on multiple occasions, and one time he stayed over at my house, to attend my grandmother’s 80th birthday party. He has always continued to show gratitude towards them”.¹⁸

Dirk Arie Boer, notes Annemarie, was arrested once during the war years, because a radio was found during a raid of the building. Fortunately, his resistance activities were not found out, he was freed shortly after. As it turns out, Annemarie had never received the letter Bert Vreeken had sent her, as she said she surely would have replied. Her statement that her mother was involved in the resistance activities juxtaposes with the statement Van der Hal made in his interview, as he assumed the children of the Boer family may have been the reason the house was raided. Both, however, could exist simultaneously: at the start of the war, Ewalda and Carla were just twelve and ten years old – in these five years it’s highly likely they matured fast, and may have helped the efforts especially in the last years of the war.¹⁹

ISONEVO and the Council of Resistance

As previously stated, there was another connection to the house and resistance movements, through ISONEVO, the sociographic institute that moved into the building in 1943. The name was an abbreviation for ‘the Institute for Research into the Dutch Population’, and officially, the organization was supposedly active with the ‘collation of rural monographs’. In reality, it was a cover for resistance activities hosted by the Council of Resistance, as Henk Heeren, former employee of ISONEVO recalled in 2010 (Vreeken 238). The Council of Resistance, or ‘Raad van Verzet’ in Dutch, was established in 1943 by Jan Thijssen (1908 – 1945), head of the Radio service of the ‘Ordedienst’ (another important illegal anti-German organization) and six other members of the resistance (De Jong 832). At the time, many different resistance organizations had been formed, and the

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Council was aimed at coordinating all these efforts on a national scale. The management of the council was in the hands of prominent members of the resistance, such as Gerrit van der Veen (1902 – 1944), and the council had access to a private radio server.²⁰ According to Heeren, while ISONEVO rented the rooms on the bel-etage, these were from time to time used for illegal resistance meetings of the council. Heeren also noted that some of the resistance activities were ‘double clandestine’, meaning that the workers of ISONEVO did not always inform their superiors of the resistance activities that were going on (Vreeken 238). While Heeren’s testimony has been one of the most important sources connecting the Willet-Holthuysen House to the resistance movement up to now, it’s also vital to acknowledge that Heeren started working in the building in 1947, thus it would be interesting to see if there were further indications for the Council’s presence within their Archive.

The minutes of the Council of Resistance’s meetings are understandably cryptic – resistance workers wrote down as little information as possible, referring to locations with house numbers, and to people with fake names or abbreviations. The minutes of the meetings between March and April 1945 were especially interesting. This was the time when the western part of the Netherlands was still struggling with intense food shortages after the so-called ‘Hunger Winter’, a period during which 22.000 people died because of starvation.²¹ Supplying people in hiding with enough food became a critical task of the resistance, which was why the Council of Resistance appointed a ‘voedselcommissaris’, or food manager, who oversaw

hiding and distributing food in the network. On 20 March, the notes state the following:

“Report of the Food Manager. M. gives overview of the events that led to the storage of supplies. In the previous meeting it had been decided to transfer these stocks from 605 to 422 (...) the distribution has, however, been delayed by some misunderstandings, as well as by a lack of bags”²²

The minutes further explain the dire situation, noting that ‘everywhere around us, cases of hunger are reported, which should be aided individually’ and ‘to illustrate the situation: in the Hague alone 274 starvation deaths were reported in the last week’. That week, ‘500 pounds of oats’ had arrived, along with ‘100 kilograms carbid’. It continues on:

“Since there is a very high level of traffic in 605, it must be considered desirable to make a certain spread in stocks”²³

In these notes, for the first time the street number 605 comes up, which might be related to the Willet-Holthuysen House. Though the document does not name Herengracht as a street name, the mentioning of both the name ‘Boer’ in one of the later meetings and the right address number does make it likely that it is the Willet-Holthuysen House that the council is referring to. The notes explain how the supplies stocked in ‘605’ should be spread to other addresses because there was too much traffic going on. The Willet-Holthuysen House, at that time no longer open as a museum or university but still the residence of the Boer family and the office location of ISON-EVO, must have had people walking in and out frequently. In a meeting a few days later, the notes continue:

“The food supplies are now weighed thanks to the cooperation of 605. Distribution can also now be arranged with the help of 605. However, M. must first have the lists in hand. It appears that the supplies are not enough for 14 days of distribution (...). M. would like to have a special courier at his disposal. However, this one may not know all addresses (...) 605 must have a bicycle at its disposal, for which, however, a tire must be purchased. Permission is given for this”²⁴

If we assume the notes are indeed talking about the Willet-Holthuysen House, this means that at the end of March, the house was used for supplies with the intention of spreading these over multiple locations. It also states that the house was in need of a courier – would it be possible that the Boer daughters may have been involved at this point, and the bike that needed tires was the wooden-wheeled one Annemarie recalled in her mother's stories?

A few weeks later, on 24 April 1945, '605' comes up in the meetings again. This time, the notes seem to indicate a quarrel over supplies:

"The chairman returns to the Peters case. He is convinced that we are being deceived by Boer and perhaps also by Heerland. B. reports that he has spoken to Hld. and that the latter has told him, that the Army conducted a search at 605, during which a box of cigarettes belonging to F., was taken. Furthermore, a small quantity of bread, about 10 pieces, was said to have been brought, 6 of which were taken by Nel van Luyn. Initially it was feared that the rest of the bread had disappeared (...) However, last Sunday it turned out that part of the bread had been delivered to 64 (...). However, there was not enough. It made an unpleasant impression on the council that Hld. did not warn P's wife, and likewise that Br. refused to admit anyone in at 605".²⁵

The notes, as cryptic as they are, state that Council feels deceived by Boer and a certain Heerland. Perhaps they doubted whether it was really the army who took the cigarettes, or that Heerland was involved with it himself. The council also was afraid that loaves of bread had disappeared – some of them were delivered at '64', but there was still not enough. It is also interesting that it is noted that 'Br.' refused people entry – as concierge and porter of the house, he would have been able to deny people access, though why this would give the council an 'unpleasant impression' was unknown. Boer's vigilance would be perfectly understandable, given the illegal resistance activities going on in his place of residence. The quarrel leads to another movement of supplies, as the notes continue with 'Mrs. Van der Heyden has alerted Mr. Hendriks. The latter will have the supplies removed by municipal car. 473 is designated as the new storage place'.²⁶

As stated earlier, the notes by the Council are intentionally vague, and it is hard to determine what actually happened in the situations described above. If the Boer in the document was the same Boer that lived in Herengracht 605, did he deserve the distrust of the Council in April



Figure 5: *Forging of passports* (photograph by Cas Oorthuys).

1945? Could the extreme hunger have left him to meddle with supplies out of desperation, or did the ongoing war efforts lead to misplaced paranoia?

Until this point, the discussion has primarily focused on oral and archival sources, yet there also exists compelling visual material pertaining to Willem Holthuysen's wartime history. This imagery encompasses the activities of the Council of Resistance, captured in a series of photographs by Cas Oorthuys (1908 – 1975), a Dutch photographer who, along with a courageous cohort, risked his life to document the harrowing circumstances in the Netherlands during the waning years of the war. Until November 1944, photography within the Netherlands remained officially permissible, but subsequently, it became strictly prohibited. At this juncture, Cas Oorthuys aligned himself with the clandestine resistance group known as 'The Hidden Camera,' and through his lens, he offers us valuable insights into the bleak realities endured during the hunger winter.²⁷ As Hekking and Bool state in their publication on the group, 'De illegale camera 1940-1945', using photos



Figure 6: *Printing of Illegal Newspapers*
(photograph by Cas Oorthuys).

as historic sources is not without difficulties: a single picture taken out of its context usually does not give a lot of information (20). Luckily, in the case of Oorthuys, there is a bit more information at hand.

In Willet-Holthuysen, Cas Oorthuys shot a series of 20 photographs, that showcase the resistance activities that were happening in the building. One series shows a man sitting at a desk in front of a window on the Herengracht side of the Willet-Holthuysen House (figure 5). The view on the lamppost outside verifies the location. He is surrounded by papers, pens, ink and glue, and working on the falsification of passports, confirming what Heeren stated about ISONEVO's clandestine activities. Upon initial observation, it might seem strange for someone to perform such illegal work in plain view of a window, however, it's crucial to consider that the bel-etage, positioned one floor above street level, makes it challenging for outsiders to peer inside from the street. While the man working on the passports is likely posing, and not caught in the act, there's a good chance this may have been his regular workstation. As Hekking and Bool found in their research,



Figure 7: *A courier picks up illegal newspapers to spread around the city* (photograph by Cas Oorthuys).

almost all close-up images of illegal or high-risk activities are authentic: these were usually taken inside, where people tended to feel relatively safe (25). The other series shows the printing of illegal newspapers in the right front room, where the interior can be recognized when compared to photos of the room in the archive of the Amsterdam Museum. The photos show the printing of the illegal newspaper ‘De Koerier’, with the date of printing visible in a closeup: April 3, 1945. Especially when looking at the young courier in figures 6 and 7, the story of Carla Boer feels close: like many other young women, she risked her life to spread vital information around, and that at such a young age.

Until now, whether the pictures were taken before Amsterdam’s liberation or staged afterwards was unknown – it was however certain that Oorthuys was active in De Ondergedoken Camera since 1944, when he started documenting the horrors of the war. In 1970, he published a selection of his work in the publication ‘Het laatste jaar: 1944-1945’, in which two photos made in Willet-Holthuysen are published as well (33, 35). A possible



Figure 9: *Council of Resistance having dinner in Willet-Holthuysen after the war* (photograph by Wim Loopuit).

pictures are taken in the same period, and dates them between 1 December 1944 and 4 May 1945, indicating that they think the photos are authentic images made before Amsterdam's liberation.

A final interesting source is a series of photos that once again connect the Willet-Holthuysen House to the Council of Resistance. These images were unknown up to this research: in the NIOD Archive, their location was documented as 'Ede', a small town in the East of the Netherlands, which may be why they have escaped previous studies. However, at first glance, it is clear that we are looking at the salon of the Willet-Holthuysen house - Louisa and Abraham's uncanny wall furnishings and art objects leave no question there. According to the NIOD, the pictures were part of a series made on the day Prince Bernhard came to visit the Council of Resistance to show his respects, by photographer Wim Loopuit (1900 – 1991). Loopuit at the time had just joined Particam, an abbreviation for 'Partizanen Camera', a photo collective that aimed to document the country post-war. The exact date of the pictures is unknown but seeing as Prince Bernhard did most of his celebratory visits in the summer after the war, it is likely anywhere between May and September 1945.

In the pictures, we see members of the Council of Resistance having drinks and dinner. The tables are full of flowers and bottles of gin, and in



Figure 8: Sheet from the Contact Album, with both the photo's made in the Willet-Holthuysen House as the ones made in Oorthuys' own house (by Cas Oorthuys).

source for dating them comes from Oorthuys' own archive. During his career, he and his wife Lydia kept his photos documented in 'Contact Albums' – photobooks in which small square prints of Oorthuys' pictures were collected, so they could easily find the negatives in case they wanted a larger print of the photo. The series made in the Willet-Holthuysen house is archived on the same page as images Cas Oorthuys took of his Jewish friend Nathan Notowicz (figure 8), who was in hiding in his own house from 1944 until the end of the war (Bool and Hekking 26). The Nationaal Fotomuseum, where Oorthuys' archive is kept, therefore assumes the

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Figure 10: *Members of the Council of Resistance in the Hallway*
(photograph by Wim Loopuit).



Figure 11: *Members of the Council of Resistance opening a bottle*
(photograph by Wim Loopuit).



Figure 12: *The clock of Louisa and Abraham Willet-Holthuysen clearly stands out on the mantle (photograph by Wim Loopuit).*

figure 9, the man on the left has a cigarette casually tucked behind his ear. The smoking and drinking surely form a stark contrast with the meticulous conservation policies that are upheld in the same rooms today. But taking into account the collective hardships endured by these individuals, coupled with the significant loss of numerous of their friends and relatives, witnessing their embrace of the freedom for which they fought so intensely can fill one with a sense of joy. The photos, though indicating yet another link to between Willet-Holthuysen and the Council of Resistance, do remain somewhat mysterious – it is not unthinkable that the rooms were solely rented for the event, and further research should be conducted here to find out more.

Conclusion

This research set out to dive deeper into the war history of the Willet-Holthuysen house, and specifically to explore whether the house could be seen as a site of resistance. To answer this question, firstly the Boer family history was explored. While it was already expected by Vreeken that Dirk Arie Boer may have helped people to go into hiding in the building, the interview with Jozef Salomon van der Hal now confirms this. Together with the additions made by Dirk Arie's granddaughter Annemarie, it can be concluded that the Boer family indeed spent the war years reaching out

to people to help them, risking their own lives in the process. Next to that, the research also set out to find out more about the connection between ISONEVO and the Council of Resistance. The archives, though intentionally vague, do seem to mention Herengracht 605 as a site of their activities, and also connect the Council to Mr. Boer. Although Boer is mentioned in the context of a supply quarrel too, the notes also indicate that the situation in Amsterdam was extremely dire, and that the food supply chain was chaotic at times— whether Boer may have touched supplies remains unknown, but it is certain that the family kept in lifelong contact with the people they helped. Finally, two series of photos strengthen the connections between the Willet-Holthuysen House and the resistance movement: those by Cas Oorthuys, showing resistance activities, and those by Wim Loopuit, showing the Council of Resistance celebrating the end of the war within Willet-Holthuysen's ballrooms. To conclude, the research thus has shown that Willet-Holthuysen certainly was a place where people risked their lives to care for others.

Naturally, the scope of this study leaves room for further research. For instance: what was the role of Willem Sandberg, curator of the Stedelijk Museum, the then care-taker of the Willet-Holthuysen House? His role in the early construction of the art shelter in the dunes near Castricum and his later involvement in the resistance might be an interesting connection to explore. Moreover, one would like to know more about the photographs of the Council of Resistance: much information remains unknown on when exactly the photographs were taken, and can we see them as further proof of the fact that the Council used Willet-Holthuysen as a hub, or did they only rent the location out for the occasion of the event? The archive of the NIOD too could be further investigated, to see if any other sources relating the Council of Resistance to the Willet-Holthuysen House could come up. If anything, this paper has shown that even topics that may have been deeply studied in the past are worth revisiting. Especially in this day and age, where tracing both information and people can in some cases be easier than it ever was before, paths that led to dead ends in the past may bring surprising new insights, and histories that were long hidden may be brought back to the surface.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Currently, interesting history into the buildings inhabitants over the centuries is done by Thijs Boers, who is curator at the Amsterdam Museum. The house has been a home for multiple Burgomaster families, amongst who Willem Deutz, see Vreeken 263.
- ² For more information on the February Strikes, see: Beliën et al. 1995.
- ³ For more information on the Castricum Bunker, see Schavemaker et al. 2015.
- ⁴ The art historical institute, as the department was called, took residence in the building in 1929. See: Vreeken, 207.
- ⁵ Whilst the basement is noted as the primary residence of the Boer family, Vreeken states that in 1944 the family moves into some of the rooms on the first floor, as the Art Historical Institute is no longer open. Professor Van Regteren Altena, head of the Art Historical Institute, reclaims the rooms after the war, which led to a discussion with the Boer family (Vreeken 239).
- ⁶ Amsterdam Museum Archive, Facturen.
- ⁷ Dirk Arie's pension registration can still be found in the city archive in Amsterdam, indicating he started working in Willet-Holthuysen in 1929. Amsterdam City Archive, 5175 Archief van het Gemeentelijk Pensioenbureau, 1962 Bloc-Bogt, 526. archieff.amsterdam/inventarissen/scans/5175/1.2.5.1.6/start/520/limit/10/highlight/6
- ⁸ Amsterdam Museum Archive, Facturen.
- ⁹ The interview with Jozef Salomon van der Hal can be viewed in the Information Centre in the Jewish Cultural Quarter. See for more information: jck.nl/nl/longread/tweeduizend-getuigen-vertellen
- ¹⁰ For more information on the Hollandsche Schouwburg: see Van Vree et al. 2018.
- ¹¹ The saving of the children was a collaborative effort. One of the main figures in the operation was Walter Süskind, see Roegholt 1990.
- ¹² Unfortunately, Van der Hal does not mention exact dates of when he was imprisoned.
- ¹³ Original quote: 'Dat was op Keizersgracht 605, dat was het Willet-Holthuysen Museum, en de portier van het Willet-Holthuysen Museum was een patiënt van mij, die hele familie. En die hadden mij aangeboden dat als de nood aan de man kwam, dat ik daar terecht kon. Dat was de familie Boer, en die woonden beneden in het souterrain. En dat huis, dat was een immens gebouw, met een schitterende bibliotheek, er was een instituut voor sociale wetenschappen, en boven was er een kunstacademie van een professor, er was heel wat te doen, en dat liep niet in de gaten dat ik daar zo langs liep. Het instituut, het Willet-Holthuysen Museum, was op

de Keizersgracht 605 en naast het gebouw was het consulaat van de Italianen, en die man raakte een soort van bevriend met mijn onderduikadres, en die kinderen speelden met elkaar. De kinderen hebben tegen het jongetje van de Italianen gezegd dat ze een onderduiker hadden, nou, toen was ik dus verraden. Toen werd er een inval gedaan. Maar het was een immens gebouw, ik kon me makkelijk verstoppert. Ik zag die kerels van de Grüne Polizei naar binnen stormen, en ik zat helemaal boven in de nok van het gebouw, dus daar kon ik makkelijk verdwijnen. Nou, toen kon ik daar niet blijven, dus ik zocht door weer en wind om een onderduikadres te krijgen, maar niemand wou me nemen'. Jozef Salomon Van der Hal, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 1995. Seen in Joods Cultureel Kwartier, August 2023.

- ¹⁴ Lists with the names of the people transported to Westerbork are available in the Dutch National Archives, but classified until 2046 due to privacy laws in the Netherlands. The exact date that Jozef Salomon van der Hal and his father Samuel van der Hal (1881 – 1943) and mother Rieka van der Hal-Denneboom (1872 – 1943) were transported to Westerbork therefore remains unknown. Rieka and Samuel died on 3 september 1943 in Auschwitz, see for more information: joodsmonument.nl/nl/page/120607/rieka-van-der-hal-denneboom and joodsmonument.nl/nl/page/120608/samuel-van-der-hal
- ¹⁵ As Vreeken states in his notes: “The daughters are named Carla and Wally Boer. Attempts to find the now elderly women, or any of their relatives, through the city archive or messages on the museum website up to now have remained without results” (239).
- ¹⁶ Amsterdam Museum Archive, Archive of Bert Vreeken, map: ‘Correspondentie’.
- ¹⁷ Email conversation with Annemarie, last name known by the author, on 26-07-2023.
- ¹⁸ Ibidem.
- ¹⁹ There are certainly other cases known of teenagers working in the resistance. Such as the ones of Freddie Oversteegen, who joined the resistance at only 14 years old, and her sister Truus Oversteegen, who joined at 16. Truus published a memoir after the war on her experiences: Menger-Oversteegen, 1982.
- ²⁰ NIOD, 185, 1. Raad van Verzet, ‘Doelstellingen en

Verklaring van den Raad van Verzet’.

- ²¹ Dr. L. de Jong estimated the amount of people that died of the hunger winter at 22.000 (L. De Jong. *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog Dl. 10b* (The Hague 1981). pp 219). This number is confirmed by recent research by Ingrid de Zwarte (De Zwarte, Ingrid. *De Hongerwinter*. Prometheus, 2019, pp. 75) See for more information: ‘Slachtoffers Hongerwinter (Cijfers)’ NIOD, via: niod.nl/nl/veelgestelde-vragen/slachtoffers-hongerwinter-cijfers
- ²² Original quote: ‘*Verslag van den Voedselcommissaris. M. geeft overzicht van de gebeurtenissen die, geleid hebben tot het opbergen van de voorraden. In de vorige vergadering was besloten deze voorraden van 605 over te brengen naar 422 (...) de distributie is echter vertraagd door eenige misverstanden, alsmede door een gebrek aan zakken*’. Niod, 185, 1. Raad van Verzet, 2: Map bevattende verslagen van vergaderingen, 20 maart 1945.
- ²³ Original quote: ‘*Daar er in 605 zeer veel aanloop is, moet het wenschelijk geacht worden een zekere spreading in de voorraden aan te brengen*’. Niod, 185, 1. Raad van Verzet, 2: Map bevattende verslagen van vergaderingen, 20 maart 1945.
- ²⁴ Original quote: ‘*De levensmiddelen zijn nu afgewogen dank zij de medewerking van 605. Ook de distributie kan nu geregeld worden met de hulp van 605. M. moet echter eerst de lijsten in handen hebben. De voorraden blijken niet genoeg voor 14 dagen distributie (...). M. zou graag een speciale koerierster ter beschikking hebben. Deze mag echter niet alle adressen weten (...) 605 moet een fiets ter beschikking hebben, waarvoor echter een band moet worden gekocht. Hiervoor wordt toestemming gegeven*’. Niod, 185, 1. Raad van Verzet, 2: Map bevattende verslagen van vergaderingen, 27 maart 1945
- ²⁵ Original quote: ‘*De voorzitter komt terug op het geval Peters. Hij is ervan overtuigd, dat wij door Boer en wellicht ook door Heerland bedrogen worden. B. deelt mede dat hij Hld. gesproken heeft en dat deze hem heeft verteld, dat de Landwacht op 605 een huiszoeking heeft gedaan, waarbij een aan F. toebehorende doos sigaretten, werd meegenomen. Verder zou er een kleine hoeveelheid brood, ca. 10 stuks, zijn gebracht, waarvan er 6 zijn meegenomen door Nel van Luyn. Aanvankelijk werd gevreesd dat de rest van het brood verdwenen was (...) Zondag j.l. bleek echter dat een deel van het brood bezorgd was op 64 (...). Er was evenwel niet voldoende. Het heeft op den raad een*

onaangenamen indruk gemaakt dat Hld. De vrouw van P. niet gewaarschuwd heeft, en eveneens dat Br. weigert om iemand op 605 toe te laten. Niod, 185, 1. Raad van Verzet, 2: Map bevattende verslagen van vergaderingen, 24 april 1945.

- ²⁶ Original quote: *Mevr. Van der Heyden heeft hr. Hendriks gewaarschuwd. Deze zal met de gemeente-auto de boel laten weghalen. Tot nieuwe opslagplaats wordt 473 bestemd*. Ibidem.
- ²⁷ See Oorthuys, *Het Laatste Jaar* 2009.
- ²⁸ Nederlands fotomuseum CAS-5840: 1 - 8, CAS-5838 1 - 12, see: collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/collectie/detail/966d71b5-3f4c-3168-6d8d-aa1f96022c0b/media/a84798a0-0010-d06a-6ac5-5de89e7d1c31 and collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/collectie/detail/59aecf82-b0fd-241f-5a40-d5f9b3a08f7c/media/3c85ef89-c3ce-6340-21c8-be3d3b684ad5
- ²⁹ Couriers were often young women – as stated by Wichert ten Have in the introduction of Oorthuys *Het Laatste Jaar*, this was both because there were thought to be capable of diverting the occupier's attention, and because it played into traditional gender roles (10).
- ³⁰ Information supplied by Harco Gijsbers, researcher at NIOD, in an email conversation with the author on 24 April 2023. Unfortunately, NIOD does not have further information on the images – a Delpher search did also not yield any results. Further research could focus on the Archive of Prince Bergnhard in the Royal Archives in The Hague - perhaps itineraries of his visits are logged here.