

Preface

The presence (1890-1943) of a Jewish orphanage in Leiden, an old city in the western part of Holland, raises many questions. *What kind of institution was this? Why was it established, given the fact that there were already many Jewish childcare institutions in the Netherlands, and why in Leiden, which had only a small Jewish community? What made this institution different from the others? Who were the children, and why were they brought to an orphanage in the first place since most of them still had one or even two parents? What kind of life did they have before the war, and what happened to the children and the staff after the German invasion of Holland in May 1940? Who survived the war and how did they survive? What happened when the war was over?*

This book is chronologically structured. Following the shortest possible introduction (Chapter 1), the first period from establishment in 1890 to the inauguration of a new building in 1929 (shown on the front cover) is covered in Chapters 2 and 3. Information about that period is relatively sparse. But from 1929 the surviving stories and photographs are so abundant that this book only contains a selection. The period from 1929 to 1940 (Chapters 4 and 5) was by all accounts the happiest period in the history of this institution. It is broken into two parts, because events in Germany began to cast a shadow when Hitler took power in 1933, even as life in Holland continued much as before.

The focus of this study was strongly on the people and life in the orphanage from 1929 onwards, *before* the war. But the German invasion in May 1940, the ensuing occupation (Chapter 6), and the liquidation of the orphanage (the *ontruiming*¹) in March 1943 (Chapter 7), inevitably constitute an important and dominating part of this book. Chapter 8 is dedicated to those who left the orphanage before the liquidation in March 1943 and shows how terribly effective the final stages of the Holocaust were in the Netherlands. Chapter 9 includes survivor stories and Chapter 10 covers the period after liberation in 1945.

Because of the lack of data from before the inauguration of the new building, the book concentrates on the (some 168) children who lived in the orphanage for at least two to three months from 1929, including those 25 who lived in the old building and moved to the new one. Establishing the identity of these 168 children

1 For Dutch or German words used in the text, see list and explanation at the back.

and retrieving information about their lives in the orphanage, building on the work done by my predecessors² and trying to add *“a face to each name”* was a primary objective of this study. The list at the end of the book is as accurate and complete as could be achieved with the available data. Retrieving and preserving testimonial and documentary evidence became an important secondary objective of this study, particularly with respect to the period of the German occupation.

Including all the names is a fundamental aspect of this book. I believe it is also in accordance with the spirit of Yad Vashem³ as explained in the Epilogue. But it presented me with two problems: 1) the reader may be overwhelmed by the large number of names mentioned in the text, and 2) it proved difficult to reconcile individual stories with the chronology. For example, the story of Sally Montezinos (Ch. 2.3) who arrived in 1926 and never really left the orphanage, unfolds gradually over Chapters 2 to 8.

I have tried to circumvent both problems by introducing a limited number of children who carry the story of the orphanage through time (see Table of Contents). Once they are introduced in a first paragraph, like Sally in Chapter 2.3, they will “return” in subsequent chapters to continue the story. In a similar way the stories of Lotte Adler, Betsy Wolff, Piet de Vries, Hans Kloosterman and a few others unfold over several chapters. Other, younger children will be mentioned “on the way” and they can be found in the text through the Persons Index. This should significantly reduce the number of names which must be remembered to follow the story of the orphanage. It should also be possible to read individual stories without reading the book from cover to cover. The compromise between following the chronology and the individual stories may lead to some duplication.

Many children and staff could be identified in at least one photograph in this book, which may therefore also serve as a monument to its inhabitants. Naturally, a lot more is known about some of the older children compared to the very young ones, those who perished in the Holocaust. The youngest of all was Louis Bobbe, who entered the orphanage in November 1942 when he was just one year and eight months old, and who was killed half a year later in Sobibor in German-occupied Poland together with his four-year-old brother, Benjamin.

Wherever possible, the facts and stories that are presented in this book have been checked for accuracy. The tremendous proliferation of data available on the internet, and the increasing occurrence of incorrect statements, often copied from one website to another without verification, made this more important than expected. All corroborative evidence, particularly documents retrieved from public

2 See Acknowledgements.

3 Yad vaShem means “a Hand [a ‘monument’] and a Name”.

and private archives during this study, has been preserved. Documentary evidence which could not be included in the book, has been placed in individual dossiers.

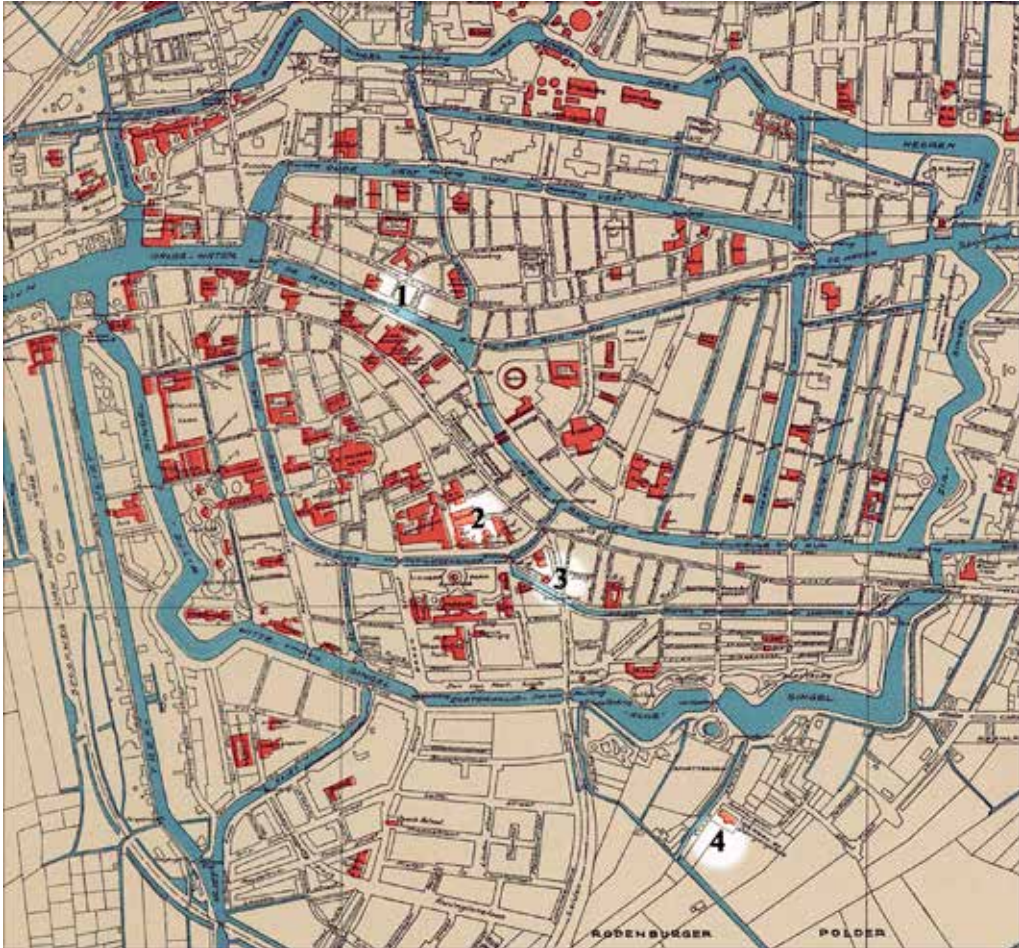
Foreign readers may not be familiar with the history of the Netherlands before or during the war. For their benefit, some “historical context” is included, so that the events may be better understood. Many wartime events raise difficult and controversial questions which are still hotly debated in the Netherlands today. Some of these issues are mentioned in the text or in the notes, but only very briefly, in order not to hinder the primary objectives of this book. References are listed at the end of each chapter in line with current practice. An extended bibliography (English texts where possible) is provided at the end of the book to suggest further reading on these subjects.

Many survivors or their descendants have been of invaluable assistance in making this book. The survivors are almost always excluded from genealogical sites and Holocaust websites and monuments, which is unfortunate. Indeed, both USHMM in Washington, DC, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem have begun to make (more) survivor information available to family members and researchers or the general public. All known survivors are included in the list at the end of the book. Nine individual survivor stories are included in Chapter 9. They can be read as stand-alone stories, but the different ways in which they survived may provide valuable context to the other chapters in this book. For many people, the war did not end in May 1945, as discussed in Chapter 10.

When I first became involved in these investigations, a long time ago, I may not have been fully aware of what the Holocaust had done to those who had survived. I may have confronted them with direct questions without realizing which doors inside their memory I was trying to open, and the devastating effect that could have. I have done my best to be much more sensitive in later stages of the investigation and while preparing this book, and I hope that the stories in the following chapters, and the way they are told, will be taken in that spirit.

I welcome comments, corrections, or complementary information.

Jaap W. Focke
Leiden, 28th February 2021



Map of Leiden (1929) showing the medieval city centre with many canals, surrounded by the zigzagging canals called *singels*. Until the twelfth century, the Rhine River flowed through Leiden (from right to left on the map) to Katwijk on the coast. Courtesy Erfgoed Leiden (ELO LEI001019900, detail). Width of the map is approximately 2 km.

- 1: The old Jewish orphanage (1891-1929)
- 2: Langebrug elementary schools
- 3: The synagogue
- 4: The new Jewish orphanage (1929-1943)

The Rodenburger Polder (bottom right) was still under development at this time, but the new orphanage (4), inaugurated in the same year the map was issued (1929), is already shown on this map. This area would become known as the *Professoren- en Burgemeesterswijk* (van Duin & van Ommen, 2000).