History of Dordrecht

Dordrecht was founded on the banks of a little river called Thure in the middle of bogs and swamps. The river Thure was a branch of the river Dubbel and ran approximately where the current Begijnhof is situated. Originally the town was called Thuredrech and the name has, in the passing of time, changed into Dordrecht.

The year 1049 holds the first reporting of Dordrecht. Allegedly Count Dirk IV was murdered in that year “near Dordrecht’ (apud Thuredrech).

In the year 1220 the Dutch count Willem I gave Dordrecht city rights. Dordrecht is the oldest city of the County Holland. Some people say it’s the oldest city of “Holland” (not the Netherlands), because the tiny bit older city of Geertruidenberg is situated in the province Noord-Brabant. This is why people tended to say, and still do, that Dordrecht is “the first city”.

In the year 1253 a Latin school was founded in Dordrecht (the current Johan de Witt-gymnasium) which is the oldest gymnasium in Holland.

In the year 1421, due to the Saint Elisabeth Flood during which large parts of the hinterland (Groote or Hollandsche Waard) drowned for eternity, Dordrecht became an island. Through her strategic location the city developed into an important depot (depot rights from 1299 on). Dordrecht traded mainly wine, wood en grain.

The year 1572 was the gathering of the First Free State Assembly. Representatives of all of the cities in Holland acknowledged Willem I, prince of Orange as stadtholder (mayor), and supported the uprising against the Spaniards. This started a free and independent Republiek der Nederlanden (Republic of the Nether Lands). In 1618-1619 the Synode of Dordrecht took place in Dordrecht, stronghold of the Reformation and the place where the remonstrants stood opposite to the contraremonstrants and where the decision to translate the Bible was made which would produce the State’s Bible in 1637, the first official translation from the original languages into the Dutch language.

1650-1672: Eerste Stadhouderloze Tijdperk (First Era Without Stadtholder), also known as "Ware Vrijheid" (True Freedom). After Stadtholder Willem II died, an opportunity arose for people to rid themselves of the stadtholders. In 1653 a mr. Johan de Witt, son of mr. Jacob de Witt, was presented as leader. Under his supervision, as pensionary counselor, the peace with England was made in 1654 and with it the Akte van Seclusie (Act of Seclusion) was adopted. This was meant to prevent the son of Willem II becoming stadtholder. On 20th august 1672 however Johan and his brother Cornelis de Witt were lynched in The Hague. Willem III, suspected to be involved in the conspiracy, became stadtholder the same year.

1702-1747: Tweede Stadhouderloze Tijdperk (Second Era Without Stadtholder). Willem III died childless and no other stadtholder was proclaimed. However in 1747 Willem IV, son of his distant cousin Johan Willem Friso of Nassau-Dietz, became inherited stadtholder of all counties. In 1766 his son Willem V was appointed.

From the 18th century on, within Holland Dordrecht became outflanked by Rotterdam. Through the centuries Dordrecht held a key position in the defence of Holland, until the late 20th century Dordrecht was also garrison city. Pontooners were stationed in the barracks on Buiten Walenest alongside the Old Maas. During the mobilisation of august 1939 infantry and artillery were sent to Dordrecht to defend the island.

The windmill next to Energiehuis is called “Kyck over den dyck” (translation: See over the Dike). Of the many mills there used to be in Dordrecht, this mill is the only one left standing and is still operational. It was built in 1713 and was used to grind grain and seeds. It has been restored and is still grinding grain. On Saturdays the blades are spinning and you can enjoy the view from up top. In the store inside they sell mill-products like biscuits and flour.