

Erasmus Foundation 30 years celebrations

The Erasmus Foundation had organised an evening full of surprises, including background music by Harry Janssen, the Three Maria's with their Latin American beat, a mystery speaker, who happened to be St. Nicholas himself with his black Peter.

The venue of the Dinner Party was on Monday 27 November in The Danish Club, Middle Park.

Mr. Jan Stracke welcomed everybody and was proud that a Society in the Dutch Australian Community could survive 30 years alive and kicking with many members (170).

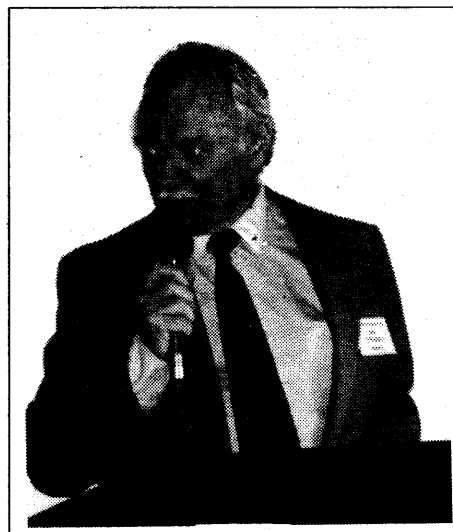
Afterwards Mr Stracke explained the history of Erasmus of which a small extract follows below. After the speech he showed some slides of Melbourne in 1965 and also in 1995. A remarkable difference, and it was very much appreciated by the guests, especially the people who knew Melbourne in the 60's.

A BRIEF STROLL THROUGH THE ERASMUS HISTORY

To get the flavour of the beginnings of the Foundation we quote from the pamphlet, prepared by our past Pre-sident for 25 years, the late Jonas Kreveld on the occasion of its 25th anni-

Several ambitious plans were hatched: a Dutch Food Fair and a van Gogh exhibition. None of these plans eventuated as they were too costly or expertise was missing.

In the early years the Foundation was supported in the Netherlands. In July 1970 a grant of fl. 5000 was received from the Prins Bernhard Fund.



Jan Stracke, President of Erasmus

In the early seventies clouds appeared on the horizon. Not all was well: a drop in membership and the need to find a more congenial venue. In 1985 the search ended when the Foundation moved to the

meetings have taken the convivial rendez-vous at Middle Park.

In honour of the late Professor Jacob Smit, a literary prize was named after him in November 1973. The prize was to be awarded annually to an outstanding student of the Dutch language and literature, nominated by the teaching staff at Melbourne University. The last time the Prize was handed out to Dutch author Harry Mulish in 1989. With the demise of the chair in Dutch in 1993 the prize had to be mothballed until a suitable institute in Dutch language teaching is resurrected.

In June 1980 Erasmus Foundation became the sponsor of a trust fund in memory of Willem Otterloo, the famous conductor, who died in a carcrash in 1978.

In 1990 Jonas Kreveld felt his task had been completed. The Foundation had about 100 members, the same number with which it started. Jan Stracke took over the reigns. A survey was conducted to find out what the members really wanted. They wanted Dutch subjects, precisely the area where it is difficult to find speakers. It was not a young Foundation: the average age exceeded the 60 mark. We had lost

the opportunity, through advertisements, through his articles in the Dutch Australian press and interviews on SBS Radio and 3ZZZ.

In 1993 the Foundation reached a high point with the "Second Landing" Exhibition, which was a huge success.

We are working on two new exhibitions: "Where Waters Meet" about the notorious Bonegilla Camp and an "Homage to Rembrandt".

Quite frankly, The Erasmus Foundation is the only society in Australia which attempts to link Australia and the Netherlands on a cultural level and has the vision and the attitude to do this in appropriate style, according to Mr Stracke.

What about the future? Mr Stracke said that more and specifically younger Australian members interested in Dutch culture should be approached. We should not be afraid if they will change the character of the Foundation, as long as its aims are not abandoned. It seems that a course in Dutch at Monash will be established and The Foundation will try to persuade them to join.

There is a close relationship between the Associated Netherlands Societies in Victoria, the Consulate-General of The Netherlands, and ANCOG

versary. In it he captures well the spirit of idealism and the winds of change, blowing at the time in which the Foundation was born.

The genesis of the Erasmus Foundation took place on a balmy afternoon in the year 1965. About 20 Dutchmen had their weekly social gathering in Ivanhoe at the home of one of their members. Sipping genever and enjoying the beautiful view from the house terrace, Dick van den Noorda, our senior member, broached a subject that gradually developed into a lively exchange.

We went home, pondered over it, discussed it with our wives, resumed the debates and concluded there was no society where Dutch and Australians did something together. After the proposers and the devil's advocates had done their jobs, an accord was reached: to form a Netherlands-Australian Cultural association, and a suitable name was found: Erasmus. He was the great Dutch philosopher and humanist, who had been an intimate friend of St. Thomas More. These two men represented, in their time, reason and tolerance based on broad cultural ideals as well as general justice.

The meeting place for lectures were in the theatrette of the National Mutual Life Assurance Company in Collins Street, Melbourne.

Danish Club.

A perennial problem of finding suitable speakers was also constantly a point of discussion, but there have been quite a few in the 30 years. To name a few: Prof. Howard Florey of penicillin fame, ex-world chess champion Dr. Max Euwe, Don Chipp, Barry Jones, even the redoubtable Al Grassby was there, but what tie?? Identities such as Phillip Adams, Ian Spicer and John Cargher spoke to us. These days their agents would probably charge us hefty speaker's fees.

At the end of 1973 the financial members dropped to 71 members with consequent poor attendance at meetings. In 1977 a more sociable format was adopted with the introduction of the dinner-and-guest-speaker-meetings at the Kelvin club. It was a step in the right direction but still not quite what one was looking for. The Dutch need for "gezelligheid" runs deep. The society moved several more times and in the mid-eighties the Foundation went through another bad spell with only about 40 financial members, but the move to the Danish Club brought solace and the

contact with the younger generation.

As Mr Stracke stuck out his feelers, he soon heard that Erasmus had the reputation of being elitist in Dutch Australian circles. He denies this in the strongest form.

The Dutch are unable to work with large government generated budgets and they don't use their culture to enhance their general image in Australia. Mr Stracke, who is proud of his background, finds this irksome and petty-minded.

Mr. Stracke has promoted the Erasmus Foundation wherever he had

The Erasmus Foundation will offer the Australian limb of the Dutch post war diaspora a window on their roots which many in their heart of hearts still long for and their offspring still feel. This needs sustaining and nurturing, also because it gives the Netherlands a more human and culturally visible face in Australia.

Meanwhile if you like to join the Erasmus Foundation, please contact the secretary, Monique van de Weert for an application. Telephone/fax 9596 3704 or PO Box 2014, North Brighton 3186.



St. Nicolaas and Pete with the Marias, the entertainers at the Danish Club