

Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum

Abstract

The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum) opened in Tilburg in 1936, bringing together several collections sent back to the Netherlands by missionaries. The museum closed in 1987, after which the collection was loaned to the Nijmeegs Volkenkundig Museum (Nijmegen Ethnographic Museum). The latter closed in 2005.

History of the museum

The Stichting Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum Foundation) was established in the city of Tilburg (province of Noord-Brabant) in 1932, partly thanks to alderman [Hendrik Moller](#) throwing his weight behind the idea. The foundation's aim was to establish a museum by bringing together various collections of objects sent back to the Netherlands by missionaries. At that time several congregations were active in Tilburg, each of which maintained its own collection. The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum had two objectives: to promote the Catholic mission and to introduce people to the religious beliefs, art, customs and traditions of the people of the missionary countries. The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missie Museum opened on Paleisstraat in Tilburg in 1936 along with the Natuurhistorisch Museum Tilburg (now the Natuurmuseum Brabant). Both museums relocated several times until the closure of the ethnographic museum in 1987 due to budget cuts.

The Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum exhibited collections from various Dutch congregations engaged in missionary work around the world. Objects loaned or donated came from various religious groups in different Catholic parts of the Netherlands, from Tilburg to Maastricht. In addition, a large number of ethnographic items were donated by private individuals.

The collection of the Ethnographic Museum comprised some 6,000 objects originating from many different areas, with a focus on South and Southeast Asia. In the 1982 [*Museumboek voor Noord-Brabant*](#), Harry Verwiel describes the layout of the Ethnographic Museum at that time. Four regions were permanently represented with their own extensive collections: Latin America, Indonesia, New Guinea and Africa. The Latin America section contained many objects from pre-Hispanic tombs, such as statues of warriors, while statues of Mayan gods were also on display. The Indonesia section included leather and wooden wayang puppets, textiles, wickerwork, jewellery and statues. It also featured a large ancestral altar from the Tanimbar Islands. The New Guinea section consisted mainly of wood carvings: masks, large ancestral figures, canoes, shields and statues of gods. The Africa collection comprised masks and statues.

In order to reduce its connotations with its ecclesiastical background the museum changed its name to the Nederlands Volkenkundig Museum (Netherlands Ethnographic Museum) in 1969. After the museum closed in 1987 loans were returned, with many ending up in the Elsendael Carmelite monastery in Boxmeer. The remaining collection was transferred to the Nijmegen Ethnographic Museum, which was managed by the Catholic University of Nijmegen (now Radboud University).

The [Peerke Donders Pavilion](#), which opened in Tilburg in 2009, uses various objects to tell

the life story of Peerke Donders, who was a missionary in Suriname and the former Dutch East Indies. The [Stadsmuseum Tilburg](#) (Tilburg City Museum) also manages a collection, which includes items from the Friars of Tilburg. It mainly comprises an extensive collection of [Caribbean Heritage photographs](#).

Provenance research

A significant portion of the archives of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum is available at the [Regionaal Archief Tilburg](#) (Regional Archives of Tilburg) (Tilburg Regional Archive). A description of the collection can be found in [box 20](#). An edited version of this inventory can be found in the article [*Het Nederlands\(ch\) Volkenkundig \(Missie-\)Museum 1936-1986, een roomse erfenis*](#) by Cees van Raak.

Nijmegen's Radboud University also holds a small amount of relevant archive material about the Volkenkundig Missiemuseum. This mainly consists of formal correspondence regarding the loan and repurposing of the museum collection after the closure of the Nijmeegs Volkenkundig Museum in 2005. The archive material includes two inventory lists as appendices: the 'loan collection of the Ethnographic Mission Museum Tilburg' and the 'loan collection of the Capuchin Friars of Tilburg'. The inventories only give brief descriptions of the objects (lender, name of object and place of origin). To view the archive, please contact the administrator of the Radboud University archive, [Marianne Waldekker](#).

Related Aids

- [Museums and collections](#)
- [Christian missionaries in colonised territories](#)
- [Missiemuseum Steyl](#)
- [Natuurhistorisch en Volkenkundig Museum Oudenbosch](#)
- [Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap](#)
- [Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal](#)

Primary sources

Archive:

NL-TbRAT toegang 517 Plaatsingslijst van het archief van het Volkenkundig Museum te Tilburg, 1932 - 1989 Archive of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum (Netherlands Ethnographic Missionary Museum) at the Tilburg Regional Archive. Box 20 includes an inventory of the museum collection.

<https://www.regionaalarchieftilburg.nl/zoek-in-archieven/?/file/8fe8c8d66b2d3d5d8a2e8a73eb87563a>

Secondary sources

Article:

Raak, Cees van. 'Het Nederlands(ch) Volkenkundig (Missie-)Museum 1936-1986, een roomse erfenis.' Tilburg. Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis, monumenten en cultuur 21, no. 3 (2003): 90-98. . Article by Cees van Raak (in Dutch) on the history of the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum in Tilburg. The article gives a detailed description of the museum's history, the various parts of the collection and the

curators over the years.

<https://www.historietilburg.nl/wp-content/uploads/Jaargang-21-2003-nummer-3.pdf>

Book:

Verwiel, Harry. Museumboek voor Noord-Brabant. Bosch & Keuning, 1982. Booklet from 1982 with descriptions of various museums. The chapter 'Van vreemde volken' (Of foreign peoples) briefly discusses the Nederlands Volkenkundig Missiemuseum in Tilburg.

<https://search.worldcat.org/title/781496494>, WorldCat 781496494, ISBN 9789024644247

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