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Aletta Jacobs

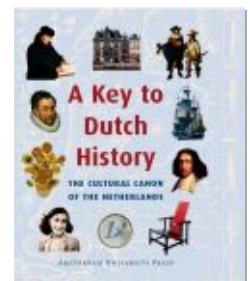
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Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

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1854 - 1929

## Aletta Jacobs

### The emancipation of women

Aletta Jacobs was the first woman in Dutch history to be officially admitted to university. This took place in 1871. As a schoolgirl she had written a letter to Prime Minister Thorbecke requesting permission to be allowed to attend “academic classes”. Aletta Jacobs’ dream was to become a doctor. Thorbecke answered within a week, but did not write to Aletta herself. Instead, he wrote to her father that permission had been granted. And so, thanks to a seventeen-year-old girl, in 1871 universities in the Netherlands were opened to women. Prior to this time, universities and most schools as well were only open to young men. Only Anna

Maria van Schurman, an educated woman (she had a command of no less than ten languages) who lived in the seventeenth century, had ever been allowed to attend any lectures (in Utrecht). However, she had had to sit behind a curtain so as not to cause a distraction for the young men.

Throughout her life, Aletta Jacobs fought for the rights of women. As a doctor, for example, she opened a practice that assisted women with contraception so that they did not have to become pregnant every year. She also fought against the abuses of the retail trade. In her practice in Amsterdam, she had noticed that shop girls suffered from many physical

complaints because they were forced to remain standing for the entire working day (which was then eleven hours long). Thanks to Aletta Jacobs, a bill was passed that obliged shops to provide their staff with seating facilities. For fifty years, Aletta Jacobs also fought for the right to vote for women, together with other men and women who supported the rights of women. These women called themselves “feminists” and made their voices heard in a variety of ways: they organised exhibitions, published newspapers and pamphlets, established societies, held demonstrations and submitted petitions. However, it was only in 1919 that the right to vote for women was introduced in the Dutch Constitution. In 1922, Dutch women voted for the first time. Aletta Jacobs was 68 years old at the time.

For centuries, politics had been the exclusive domain of men, just like the academic world, the Church and the armed forces. People believed that women were not the equals of men: their job was to run the household and care for children, and therefore they could not participate in public life. There had always been criticism of this “patriarchal” view of life, but real changes only took place in the twentieth century. And a second wave of feminist campaigning was needed to achieve these changes. In the early 1970s, the “*dolle minas*” [Dutch women’s libbers] carried out a campaign for the emancipation of women. They did not want to be condemned to lives as housewives like their mothers before them. In 1980 the Equal Opportunities Act came into force.

## Sub-topics

### Primary education sector

Famous women from Dutch history like Jacoba van Beieren, Kenau Simons Hasselaar, Anna Maria van Schurman, Betje Wolff, Wilhelmina Drucker, Queen Wilhelmina, Joke Kool-Smit and Queen Beatrix

Running a household in the past: the emancipation of women at home and in the workplace  
The rise of the workers’ movement

### Secondary education sector

The struggle for the universal right to vote  
The first wave of feminism and other emancipation movements  
The Dolle Mina action group and the youth revolution of sixties  
International comparison of the granting of rights to women (right to vote, education, right to work, etc.)  
Medicine as a field for both men and women

### Past and Present

Are women fully emancipated?

### In the Treasure Chest

Attributes of the feminist movement (badge with the female sign, etc.)  
Postcards with slogans for the vote for women (published by the IIAV)

## References

### Places to Go

Heesch: Poppenhuismuseum  
Arnhem: Open-air Museum

### Books for young people

Kaye Stearman, *Feminisme* (12+ info)

### Background literature

Mineke Bosch, *Een onwrikbaar geloof in rechtvaardigheid: Aletta Jacobs 1854-1929*, Amsterdam 2005  
Fia Dieteren, Els Kloek and Antoinette Visser, *Naar Eva’s beeld: De geschiedenis van de vrouw in de Europese cultuur*, Amsterdam 1987  
Judith Amsenga, “Dolle Mina (1969-1977)”, in Els Kloek (ed.), *Verzameld verleden: Veertig gedenkwaardige momenten en figuren uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis*, (Verloren Verleden 24), Hilversum 2004

### Websites

[www.alettajacobs.org](http://www.alettajacobs.org)  
[www.vrouwenlexicon.nl](http://www.vrouwenlexicon.nl)  
[www.iiav.nl](http://www.iiav.nl)