

history thesis

# **architecture as a mirror of prosperity.**

---

how architecture on the hogeland reflected the social-economic  
vision of Herenboeren.

17-04-2025

Written by: Johannes Hegge

Tutor: Ivan Nevzgodin



## Prologue.

Over the past ten weeks, I have dedicated myself to writing this history thesis. The inspiration for this work stems from my childhood. For eighteen years, I grew up on a farm in the Hogeland. As a child, you don't pay much attention to your background, but in recent years I've found myself exploring both my personal history and that of my surroundings. This thesis offered the perfect opportunity to dive into that research.

It has been a meaningful project, full of moments of recognition. Buildings and landscapes that once seemed ordinary now revealed their deeper stories. Through this thesis, I've had the chance to engage in many conversations with family and to read numerous books about the region where I was born. In doing so, I've gained a clearer understanding of my roots, as well as a deep appreciation for the rich history of the Hogeland.

It was truly a pleasure to conduct this research, and I hope you, as the reader, will enjoy this paper as much as I enjoyed working on it.



# Table of content.

<b>Abstract</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	7
<b>Chapter 1: The Early History Of The Hogeland</b>	8
1.1 Landscape Formation and Early Settlement	8
1.2 The Role of Monks in the Hogeland	8
1.3 The End of the Monastic Era	9
<b>Chapter 2: The Agricultural Transformation In The 19th Century</b>	9
2.1 The Shift from Grassland to Arable Farming	10
2.2 Technological Innovations in Agriculture	10
<b>Chapter 3: Farm Architecture As A Reflection Of Prosperity</b>	11
3.1 The Impact of Agriculture on Farm Types	11
3.2 Kop-hals-romp Farm	13
3.3 Oldambtster Farm	13
<b>Chapter 4: From Farm To Villa</b>	15
4.1 Architectural Styles and the Dwarshuis	15
4.2 Separation of Living and Working Spaces	16
<b>Chapter 5: Influence Of Jugendstil And The Amsterdam School</b>	16
5.1 Stylistic Shift Towards Expression and Individuality	16
5.2 Examples in the Hogeland	17
<b>Chapter 6: Landscape Design As A Symbol Of Status</b>	20
6.1 Slingertoen and Monumental Beeches	20
6.2 Windbreaks for Protection and Demarcation	20
<b>Chapter 7: Social Aspect Of Agricultural Development</b>	21
7.1 The <i>Herenboer</i> 's Role in Social Progress	21
7.2 Vereniging ter Bevordering van Landbouw en Nijverheid te Leens	21
7.3 Education and Public Services	21
7.4 Farmworker Housing and Berlage	22
<b>Discussion</b>	24
<b>Conclusion</b>	25
<b>Bibliography</b>	26

## Abstract.

This thesis investigates how the architecture of the *Herenboeren* in the Hogeland reflected socio-economic developments in the agricultural sector between the 18th and 20th centuries. At the heart of this research is the dual role of architecture: both as a functional response to agricultural needs and as an expression of rising social status. Key themes include the relationship between wealth and architectural form, the role of architecture in shaping cultural identity, and how the built environment reinforced the position of the *Herenboer* as the new rural elite.

The study focuses on the architectural transformation of the Hogeland during and after the 19th-century Agricultural Revolution, beginning with the shift from grassland to arable farming and the growing influence of technological innovations. As prosperity increased, *Herenboeren* invested in new farms such as *kop-hals-romp* and *Oldambtster* types and gradually transitioned to more villa-like residences. Later developments show the adoption of Jugendstil and Amsterdam School styles, to showcase their power and wealth even more.

Through a combination of literature review, archival research, and fieldwork, this research highlights how these farms, villas, and landscapes were not just products of their time but lasting symbols of power, progress, and identity in one of the Netherlands' most prosperous agricultural regions.

## Introduction.

In 1850, a farmer from the Hogeland made a journey to the United States that would change the province of Groningen forever. His name was Cornelis Borgman (1822-1889), a farmer born in a small village on the Hogeland, a rural region in Groningen. Like many before him, he traveled to America in search of fortune. But unlike most, his fortune would not be gold or land, it would be the *arendsploeg*, Eagle Plow (Steenhuis, 1997). Upon his return, he introduced and imported this plow to the Netherlands. Unbeknownst to him, the eagle plow would catalyze Groningen into the agricultural revolution that transformed this area into one of the wealthiest parts of the Netherlands at that time.

This revolution not only brought economic prosperity to the Hogeland but also transformed the region's social landscape. Het Hogeland is home to an often overlooked yet rich architectural heritage that reflects both these economic transformations and the social hierarchies that emerged alongside them. The architecture of this region tells the story of how the 19th-century Agricultural Revolution transformed it, with its effects still felt to this day. At the heart of this transformation were the *Herenboeren*, wealthy farmers who used the new agricultural methods to gain significant wealth and power. Their farms, so-called *Graan Paleizen* (grain palaces), villas, and public buildings they commissioned became symbols of their newfound power and wealth.

This research explores how the architecture of the *Herenboeren* in the Hogeland reflected socio-economic developments in the agricultural sector between the 18th and 20th centuries. The study examines the dual role of architecture and how it served both as a functional response to agricultural needs and as a social tool to showcase power. Themes explored include the relationship between wealth and architectural expression, the role of architecture in shaping cultural identity, and how the *Herenboeren* built environment reinforced their status as the new elite of that period.

While studies of architecture and agriculture

in the Netherlands and Groningen have been undertaken, few have specifically explored the intersection of wealth, power, social vision, and architectural design within this context. Existing works, such as Stenvert (1996) on monuments in Groningen and Panman and Possel (1992) on architecture and the urban environment of Groningen between 1850 and 1940, provide a solid foundation but lack depth on the Hogeland region and do not fully explore how architecture reflected the social and economic changes of the time. This thesis builds upon these works by focusing specifically on how the architectural choices of the *Herenboeren* served as a reflection of their rising social class and wealth. To investigate this, a combination of literature review, archival research, and fieldwork will be conducted.

The thesis is structured around seven chapters. The opening chapter provides historical context, outlining how the Hogeland gradually took shape over time. The second chapter discusses the agricultural transformation of the 19th century, focusing on the shift from grassland to arable farming and the technological innovations that changed ordinary farmers into *Herenboeren*. The third chapter explores the development of building types such as the *kop-hals-romp* and *Oldambtster* farms. Building on this, the fourth chapter investigates the transition from traditional farms to villa-like residences, analyzing how architecture such as the *dwarshuis* reflected the growing social and economic status of the *Herenboer*. A shift in the early 20th century from neoclassical architecture to Jugendstil and the Amsterdam School forms the focus of the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter moves from buildings to landscape, examining how *slingertoentjes*, monumental trees, and windbreaks created idyllic paradises. The final chapter explores the social role of the *Herenboer*, particularly regarding labor conditions, education, and public architecture.

## Chapter 1: The Early History Of The Hogeland

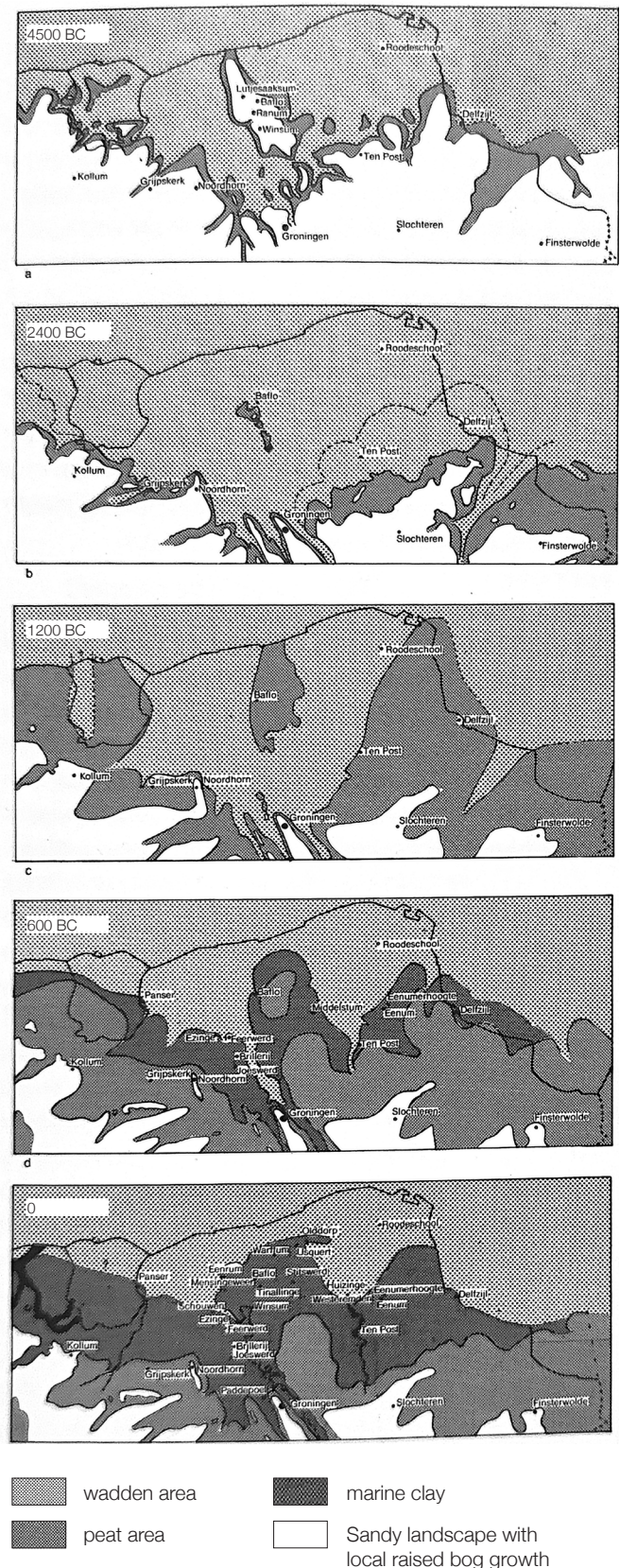
### 1.1 Landscape Formation and Early Settlement

To better understand the history of the *Herenboeren* and the Hogeland, it is essential to examine the historical context dating back to approximately 5000 B.C. During this period, the foundation of Groningen and Het Hogeland began to take shape. Recurrent flooding by the North Sea deposited layers of clay, gradually forming the region's distinctive landscape (Panman & Possel, 1992). The clay that was left behind was highly fertile. Despite the dangers posed by the sea, people began to settle in this area. Farmers benefited greatly from this newly formed land. To protect themselves and their cattle, the population constructed *wierden*, artificial mounds made of clay, manure, and sand, designed to remain above water during floods (Panman & Possel, 1992; Steenhuis, 1997).

### 1.2 The Role of Monks in the Hogeland

Until the 12th century, people continued to live on or near the *wierden*. This changed when the first dikes were constructed. The building of dikes was initiated by the local population but was primarily driven by the monks of the monastery in Aduard. Through the efforts of these monks, the province of Groningen and the Hogeland gradually took on the shape it would have in the 19th century. Bit by bit, the monks reclaimed land from the sea by continuously extending the dikes further north. With the help of *rijdsdammen* (brushwood dams), the silt carried in by the tides was trapped, eventually forming new clay layers (Steenhuis, 1997).

The monks were not only instrumental in the construction of dikes but also established farms throughout the Hogeland region. Many of these farms still exist today (not the original buildings) and played a crucial role in the agricultural revolution. To enable larger constructions and to make houses and farms more durable, the monks also introduced brickmaking to Groningen. According to Steenhuis (1997), they



**figure 1:** This map shows the development of the clay area in what is now the province of Groningen from 4500 BC to the year 0. Initially, the water left the higher areas untouched. (based on Gierde & Roelenveld, 1983, taken from Panman & Possel, 1992, p. 9)

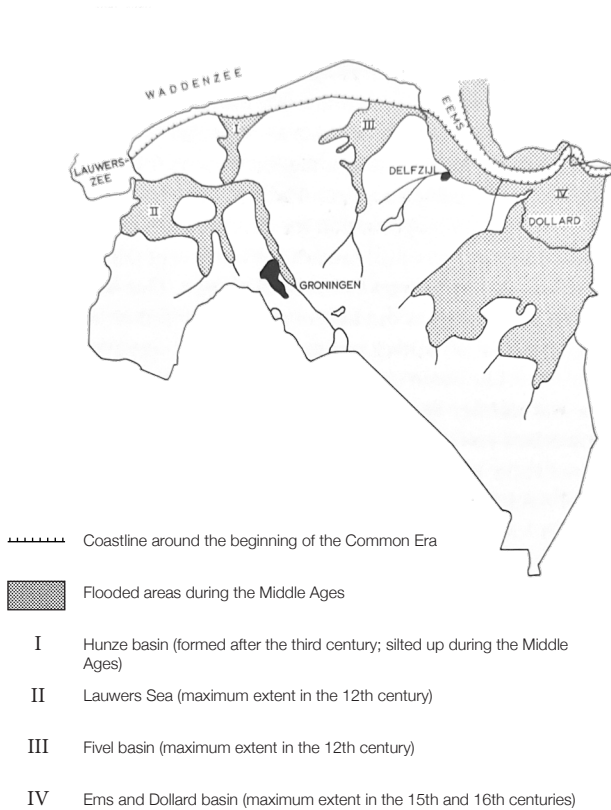
## Chapter 2: The Agricultural Transformation In The 19th Century

### 2.1 The Shift from Grassland to Arable Farming

After the era of the monks, not much changed in the agricultural landscape of Groningen until the early 19th century, when a remarkable transformation began to take place. From that point onwards, agriculture in Groningen started to evolve in ways that set it apart from developments in the rest of the Netherlands. While most of the arable land had previously been used as meadows, grassland began to be replaced by arable land. The exact reason for this shift remains uncertain. The cattle plague is often cited as a major cause, but more recently, it has become widely accepted that this cannot be the sole explanation for the shift. Other contributing factors likely played an important role as well.

In 1946, sociologist E.W. Hofstee argued that the transition was driven primarily by social motivations. This theory is supported by the fact that, even before the outbreak of the cattle plague, farmers in Groningen typically already operated mixed farms. A survey conducted in 1818 reveals that arable farmers held a significantly higher social status than cattle farmers. Cattle were primarily valued for their ability to provide manure, which was essential for maintaining soil fertility (Panman & Possel, 1992). It is therefore quite plausible that the shift toward cropland was motivated by a desire to gain a higher social status.

Hofstee's thesis, however, received considerable criticism. During the 1950s and 1960s, scholars such as B.H. Slicher van Bath, A.G.J. Dietvorst, and J.D.H. Harten challenged his sociological explanation, arguing that economic factors were the primary reasons behind the expansion of arable farming (Priester, 1991). This alternative perspective could also be a logical explanation. Not only were grain prices favorable until around 1880, but Groningen also benefited from a distinctive land tenure system known as *beklemrecht*, a form of fixed leasehold that granted farmers the freedom to cultivate their land without interference. In contrast, such



**figure 2:** After the formation of the Lauwers Sea basin around 800 AD, four sea basins existed in the province of Groningen. This map represents the situation at that time. (based on L.A.H. de Smet, 1965, taken from Panman & Possel, 1992, p. 9)

derived the recipe for bricks from the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. However, it is more likely that the knowledge of brickmaking came from the clay-rich regions of Denmark and gradually spread to Groningen via Northern Germany and Frisia (Stenvert, 1992). This introduction of brickmaking led to the development of the *kloostermop* (monastic brick), which became a crucial building material in the Hogeland area.

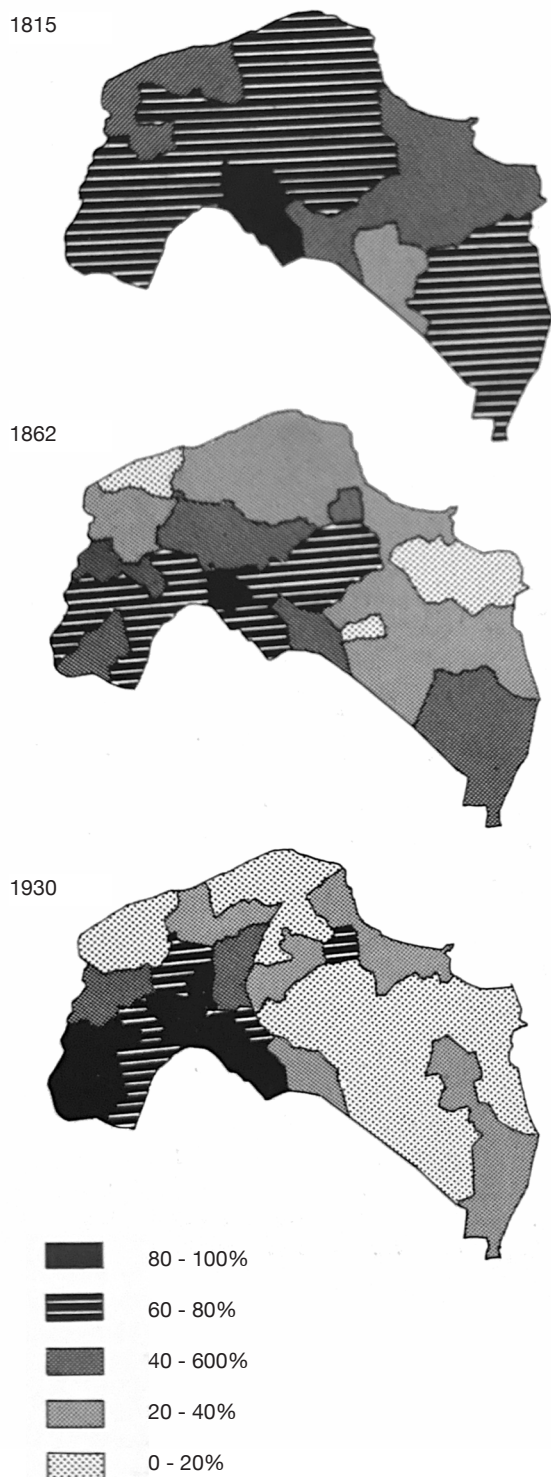
### 1.3 The End of the Monastic Era

For 400 years, the Aduard monks contributed to the landscape of Groningen until they were driven away, and their monastery was destroyed by the *Geuzen* during the Eighty Years' War. With the fall of the monastery, much knowledge was lost, yet the local population managed to continue their work. Land reclamation continued in the same manner as the monks had practiced it until the last century (Steenhuis, 1997).

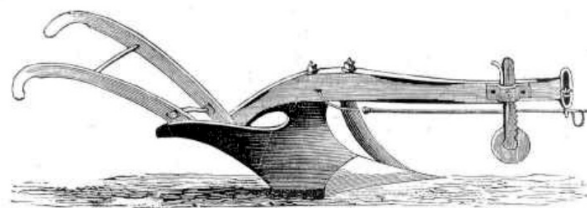
autonomy was lacking in other parts of the Netherlands, making a comparable shift from grassland to arable land less feasible elsewhere (Panman & Possel, 1992; Stenvert, 1998).

## 2.2 Technological Innovations in Agriculture

The development of arable farming continued throughout the second half of the 19th century. European demand for agricultural products remained strong, especially for wheat. Meanwhile, several innovations emerged: drainage techniques were introduced, modern agricultural tools like the *arendsploeg* came into use, row planting became common, and the first experiments with the newly discovered artificial fertilizers were conducted (Panman & Possel, 1992; Priester, 1991). Thanks to these advancements, the average farmer started to transform into a wealthy *Herenboer*.



**figure 3:** The percentage of grassland relative to the total area of cultivated land in the province of Groningen in 1815, 1862, and 1930. (based on: E.W. Hofstee, 1985, taken from Panman & Possel, 1992, p. 35)



**figure 4:** Drawing of the Eagle Plow.

This is the plow that Cornelis Borgman (1822–1889) brought from America to the Hogeland in 1850, marking the beginning of the agricultural revolution in the Netherlands. Image retrieved from Zuurdijk.nl, originally published on Techniek in Nederland (2008). <https://zuurdijk.nl/c-j-borgman-en-de-arendploeg/>

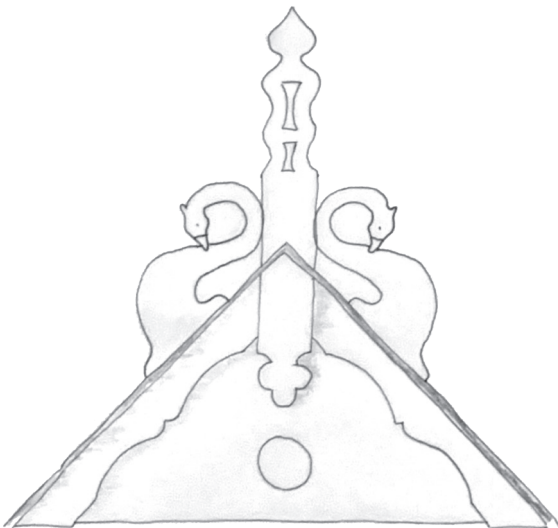
## Chapter 3: Farm Architecture As A Reflection Of Prosperity

### 3.1 The Impact of Agriculture on Farm Types

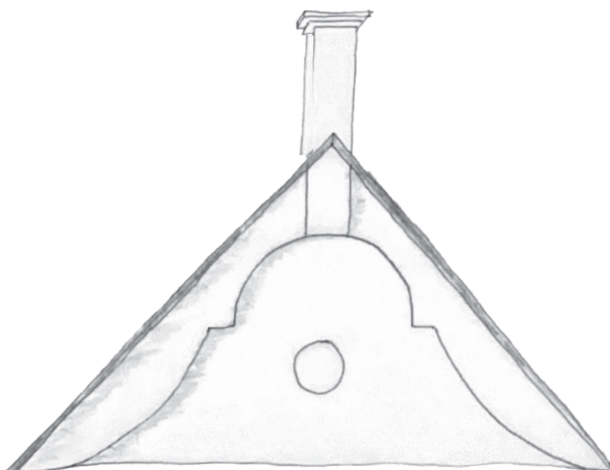
The agricultural developments also had a significant impact on the architecture of farms. As cattle numbers declined and grain storage became more important, a new type of barn with increased storage capacity was required. This need gradually introduced a Frisian barn style to the region, characterized by steeply pitched roofs and an open floorplan. This barn type had already developed in Frisian arable farms during the 16th century and began appearing in the western part of the Hogeland in the early 18th century (Panman & Possel, 1992; Stenvert, 1996; Bos, 2017). Broadly speaking, five main

types of farms made use of this Frisian-style barn in the province of Groningen: the *kop-hals-romp*, the *Oldambtster*, the *stelp*, the *Westerwoldse*, and the *Gorechtse types*. Of these, the *kop-hals-romp* and the *Oldambtster* were especially influential in the Hogeland region.

One of the most distinctive features of these barns was the *uilenbord* (owl board) with a temple-like ornament placed on top. A clear distinction can be observed between the Frisian and Groningen variants: the Frisian boards typically feature elegant swan-neck ornaments along the edges, while in Groningen, more sober S-shaped decorations became popular. Owl boards are typically painted in a dark green and white color scheme.

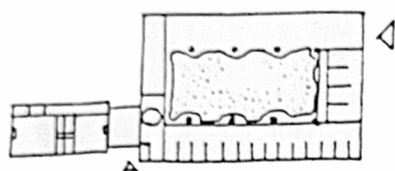


**figure 5:** A drawing of a typical Frisian uilenbord. Characteristic elements include the swan-neck shapes and the central pediment. (Drawing by the author, 2025)

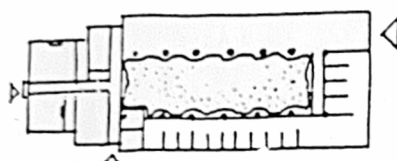
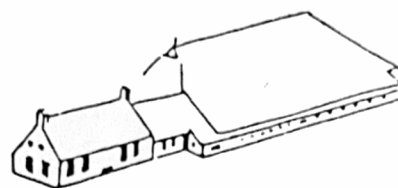


**figure 6:** A drawing of a typical Groningen uilenbord. In appearance, it is considerably more modest than its Frisian counterpart. Characteristic features include the S-shaped curves and the heavier pediment, giving it a more robust impression. A similar decorative pattern can also be found on Swiss farmhouses in the Emmental region. (Drawing by the author, 2025)

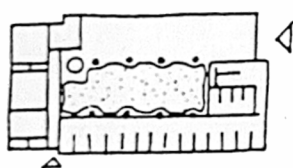
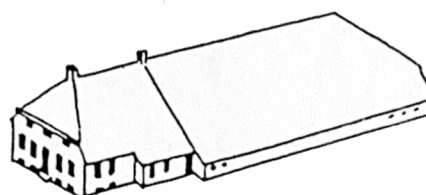
## five types of farms.



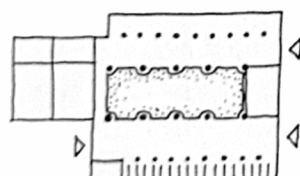
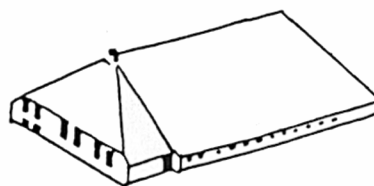
kop-romp-hals farm



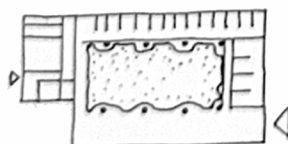
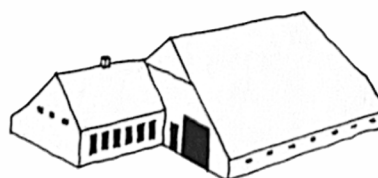
Oldambster farm



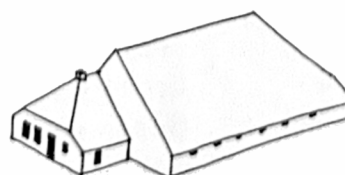
stelp farm



Westerwoldse farm



Gorechtse farm



**figure 7:** Floor plans and main shapes of farm types in Groningen. (based on; B.K. Pater 1986, taken from Panman & Possel, 1992, p. 39)



**Figure 8:** Restoration of the farm “Plaats Melkema” in Huizinge.

A typical Groninger version of the *kop-hals-romp* farmhouse. The main entrance is still located in the *hals* section, and the house is asymmetrically positioned in front of the barn.

Image retrieved from Buro de Rooy (n.d.). Restoration of Plaats Melkema in Huizinge. <https://buroderooy.nl/project/restauratie-plaats-melkema-in-huizinge/>

### 3.2 Kop-hals-romp farm

In the western part of the Hogeland, the Frisian-style barn was initially adopted in what is known as the *kop-romp* (head-body) farm. In this layout, the living quarters (*kop*) are placed asymmetrically in front of the barn (*romp*). Starting from the 18th century, in good financial years, a new house would be built in front of the old one, creating what came to be known as the *kop-hals-romp* (head-neck-body) farm. In this configuration, the new house formed the head, the old one became the neck (*hals*), and the barn remained the body. The *hals* would typically house the kitchen or the butter-making room and was later often repurposed as a hallway (Panman & Possel, 1992; Stenvert, 1996).

As farmers grew wealthier, not only did the houses change, but also the barns. While the layout and appearance of barns generally remained the same, expansions became necessary due to increased scale. Initially, smaller barns, referred to as *hut*, were constructed beside the

main barn for machinery and cattle. As storage demands increased, these huts were replaced by a second large barn, identical to the main one. To create even more space, the wall separating the two barns was removed and a third roof was constructed over the two original roof trusses, giving rise to the so-called *driekapschuur* (triple-roof barn). The central section beneath this new roof would be used as the threshing floor, where all the grain was processed (Stenvert, 1996). Notable examples include Lutjebosch in Usquert (1808), Melkema in Huizinge, and Elema in Eenum (circa 1880).

### 3.3 Oldambtster Farm:

Around the beginning of the 18th century, another type of farm was introduced to Groningen, but this time from East Frisia, Germany. This design also incorporated the Frisian barn but differed from the *kop-hals-romp* layout by positioning the living quarters centrally in front of the barn. This farm type became most common in the eastern Groningen region called the Oldambt,

from which it takes its name: the *Oldambtster*.

The *Oldambtster* type is characterized by a continuous roofline that extends seamlessly from the house into the barn. This feature was unique for its time and indicated that the farmer had enough wealth to construct both the house and barn at once. In addition to the uninterrupted roof, another defining characteristic are the *krimpen*, stepped setbacks between the house and the barn (Bos, 2017).

From the outside, *Oldambtster* farms are further distinguished by narrow horizontal windows with small arches, positioned at both the cellar and attic levels. While these windows served functional purposes such as ventilation and lighting, particularly for seed storage in the attic, they were primarily added for aesthetic reasons. Their careful placement contributes to the balanced composition of the façade, reinforcing the strong sense of symmetry that was common

for *Oldambtster* farms (Panman & Possel, 1992; Stenvert, 1996; Bos, 2017).

While the barn layout resembles that of the *kop-hals-romp* type, the living quarters are quite different. Typically, a central hallway runs through the middle of the house, dividing it into two symmetrical halves. Around this hallway, all the main rooms are arranged, usually with the living and sleeping quarters situated toward the front. At the end of the hallway stands a grand front door. In Groningen, it is said that this door is only opened twice in a farmer's life: once when he marries and enters the house, and once when he passes away and is carried out. As such, the door serves more of a symbolic and aesthetic function than a practical one. For everyday use, the house is entered through a side door or via a direct connection to the barn, often leading into the *bijkeuken*, the utility room. Well-known examples of the *Oldambtster* type in the Hogeland include the Stoepemaheerdt (Hoofdweg 4, Zuurdijk) and Watwerd (Wadwerderweg 62, Usquert).

**figure 9:** *Watwerd Usquert (1848) is an Oldambtster farm.*

The *Oldambtster* is characterized by a continuous roofline that extends seamlessly from the house into the barn, signaling the prosperity of the farmer. Note the grand entrance, the cornice, and the emphasis on symmetry. (taken from A. F. Bos, 2017, p.18)





**figure 10:** Overview of the farm "Zuidpool" in Usquert, showing the front house with path.

This early variant of the Groninger dwarshuis type was reserved for the wealthiest farmers. Architecturally, the house reflects neoclassical styles popular at the time. Note the grand entrance at the front and the common entrance on the side. The surrounding landscape is designed in the English garden style (*slingertuin*).

Image by Serge Technau (2005). Beeldbank Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed. Retrieved from <https://rijksmonumenten.nl/monument/528076/zuid-pool/usquert/>

## Chapter 4: From Farm To Villa

### 4.1 Architectural Styles and the Dwarshuis

As agricultural prosperity increased, the appearance of farms evolved continuously. From the mid-19th century onward, wealthy *Herenboeren* began to invest considerable attention and money into the external presentation of their farms. Not only did the *driekapschuur* become a sign of wealth, but more focus was put on the design of the residential quarters and the surrounding gardens.

In terms of architectural style, the *Herenboeren* followed the trends that were popular during that time in the Netherlands, particularly those emerging from the western part of the country. Whereas the rural part of Groningen had previously lagged in adopting new architectural

styles, the province began to embrace the fashionable neo-styles from around 1800 onward. These styles placed a strong emphasis on symmetry and ornamentation (Stenvert, 1992). Many farms, especially the living quarters of the *kop-hals-romp* and *Oldambtster* types, were built or renovated in neo-classical, neo-renaissance, or eclectic styles.

The pursuit of symmetry not only influences façade design but also the layout of the house itself. In traditional *kop-hals-romp* farms, the main entrance would typically be located on the side. Now, it was moved to a central position on the front façade. The interior layout would be restructured around a central hallway, with an entrance similar to that of the *Oldambtster*. To showcase their wealth, these entrances would get decorated with ornaments. Cornices would also be added along the roofline, and simple



**figure 11:** *Farm Oudelaan Wadwerderweg 82 Usquert*

A modern version of a dwarshuis or villa farm (1924), located on Wadwerderweg 82 in Usquert. Despite being relatively young compared to other farms, it appears traditional. This was likely a reaction to modern architectural styles of the time, such as Jugendstil and the Amsterdam School. The architect was C. de Groot from Hilversum.

Image by Gouwenaar (2011). Retrieved from [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Wadwerderweg\\_82\\_Usquert.jpg](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Wadwerderweg_82_Usquert.jpg)

gables were replaced with *wolfeinden*, hipped gables. To maintain architectural symmetry, the older longitudinally oriented front house was often replaced with a transversely placed one. This resulted in a new variation of both the *kop-hals-romp* and the *Oldambtster* farm types: the dwarshuis, a transverse house. In the *kop-hals-romp* type, the dwarshuis was placed in front of the *hals* section, while in the *Oldambtster* type, it was aligned centrally in front of the firewall, preserving the equal ridge height between the house and barn (Panman & Possel, 1992).

## 4.2 Separation of Living and Working Spaces

The dwarshuis represented not only a significant architectural shift but also a transformation in the spatial and social organization of the farm. Increasing modernization and wealth meant that the traditional integration of house and

barn under one roof was no longer necessary. Farmhands and maids were given separate housing, which led to the division between residential and working spaces. Eventually, by the early 20th century, *Herenboeren* began to commission freestanding villas, separate from the farm buildings. The *Herenboer* had now become more of a director than a farmer.

## Chapter 5: Influence Of Jugendstil And The Amsterdam School

### 5.1 Stylistic Shift Towards Expression and Individuality

The new villas facilitated the arrival of several architectural styles to the Hogeland that were particularly popular in the Netherlands around the early 20th century. The two most prominent were Jugendstil, also known as Art Nouveau, and

the Amsterdam School. While the 19th century had been dominated by neo-styles focused on rigid symmetry and classical order, the turn of the century showcased a shift toward these more expressive and organic movements. Jugendstil drew inspiration from nature, featuring curved lines and plant-like motifs in its architectural detailing. Both Jugendstil and the Amsterdam School were rich in ornamentation and symbolized wealth, providing the *Herenboer* with a visible display of his social status and power. These stylistic choices marked a departure from purely functional farm architecture and reflected a growing interest in aesthetics and individuality (Stenvert, 1992).

The Amsterdam School became popular after the Jugendstil movement and found an early foothold in the province of Groningen. This was largely thanks to a small group of local architects who maintained close contact with leading Amsterdam-based designers and were well-informed about the latest stylistic developments. One key figure in this was the architect S.J. Bouma (1899-1959), who played a significant role in introducing the Amsterdam School to the province. His projects in Groningen in

the 1920s and 1930s served as influential examples for others in the region. Through these developments, younger architects who would later have a big impact on the architecture of the Hogeland, such as Egbert Reitsma (1892-1976) and Willem Reitsema Tzn (1885-1963), were undoubtedly exposed to the contemporary debates surrounding form, material, and function and began incorporating these ideas into their work (Fennema et al., 2006).

## 5.2 Examples in the Hogeland

The influence of Jugendstil and Amsterdam School architecture remains visible in the Hogeland to this day, particularly in villages like Usquert, which was historically home to some of the wealthiest farmers in the region. Driving through the area, one can still see numerous villas built in these styles. Most of these were constructed as retirement residences for *Herenboeren*, although some also functioned as working farms. Notable examples include Westerhouw (1908) in Ulrum and Kooienburg (1923) in Zuurdijk.

**figure 12:** *Jugendstil villa in Usquert*

A typical retiree's villa built in the Jugendstil style. Characteristic features include the use of color and the many ornaments inspired by patterns from nature.

Image by Verver Jet Winters Makelaars (2023). Retrieved from <https://noorderland.nl/artikel/489326/pa-rel-op-funda-prachtige-villa-in-usquert>





**figure 13:** *Ulrum Westerhouw farm*

Westerhouw is a villa-farm built in 1908 in the Jugendstil style, featuring elements of the less popular chalet style. Notable are the use of color and the farm's name inlaid in tilework. The name "Westerhouw" refers to its location west of the wierde de Houw. Image by Willemjans (2011). Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulrum\\_Westerhouw.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulrum_Westerhouw.JPG)

Westerhouw is a farm built on a wierde in the Jugendstil style, designed by architect P.M.A. Huurman (1863-1944). Surrounding the farmhouse, originally, there would have been a landscape garden, likely designed by Jan Vroom Sr. Although the garden has since disappeared, the house and barn remain preserved, offering a glimpse into the decorative elegance of turn-of-the-century rural design.

Kooienburg is a large farm designed in the Amsterdam School style by Willem Reitsema Tzn. The current complex was built in 1923 after the original structure was destroyed by fire in 1922. Reitsema, a renowned figure in the Hogeland

region, was known for blending traditional forms with Amsterdam School detailing. In his design for Kooienburg, he retained familiar elements such as the *kop-hals-romp* layout and the characteristic Frisian barn but enriched them with expressive brickwork, a sculptural entrance bridge, and redesigned owl boards. From afar, the farm appears rooted in tradition, but up close, its Amsterdam School details speak to a bold and deliberate architectural statement.

Together, these two examples show how economic prosperity and cultural ambition came together to transform the architecture of the Hogeland in the early 20th century.

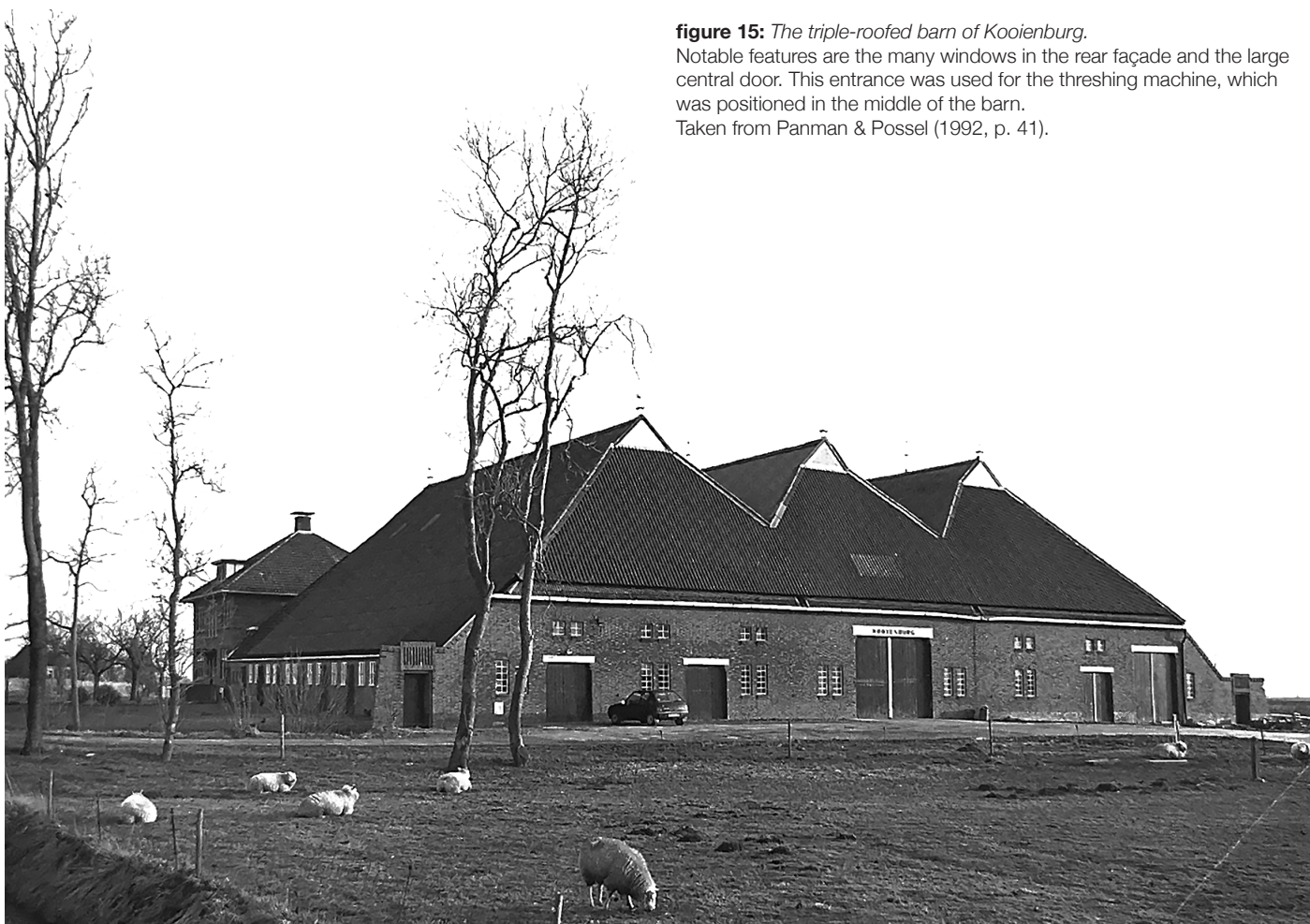


**figure 14:** *Farm Kooyenburg Vlakkeriet 4 in Zuurdijk*

The farm Kooienburg (1923), designed in the Amsterdam School style by Willem Reitsema Tzn. An almost identical farm, also designed by Reitsema, is located in Oudedijk. Image by Gouwenaar (2010). Retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kooyenburg\\_Zuurdijk.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kooyenburg_Zuurdijk.jpg)

**figure 15:** *The triple-roofed barn of Kooienburg.*

Notable features are the many windows in the rear façade and the large central door. This entrance was used for the threshing machine, which was positioned in the middle of the barn. Taken from Panman & Possel (1992, p. 41).



## Chapter 6: Landscape Design As A Symbol Of Status

### 6.1 Slingertoen and Monumental Beeches

Not only did the farmhouse and barns receive careful attention from *Herenboeren*, but the garden also played a crucial role in the presentation of wealth. Many farmers commissioned elaborate gardens inspired by the English landscape style, which was popular throughout Europe at the time. These gardens featured winding paths and artificial mounds to simulate a natural, organic environment. In Groningen, these gardens were often called *slingertoentjes*, winding gardens, due to the curving paths. At the center of these *slingertoentjes* often a red beech would be planted. This tree was typically planted during the farm's founding and was intended to grow old alongside the farm. Today, many of these

monumental red beeches still stand, towering above the landscape and providing a striking contrast to the surrounding landscape. These trees have become iconic in the rural areas of Groningen and are often protected as landscape monuments. The size and age of such trees often serve as a visual indicator of the historical age of the farms they accompany (Van der Tuuk, 2002).

### 6.2 Windbreaks for Protection and Demarcation

Traditionally, a windbreak, locally known as a *windhaag*, was planted around both the garden and the farm to shield it from the strong sea winds that constantly swept across the flat coastal clay soils. These windbreaks typically consisted of rows of elm or linden trees.

**figure 16:** A red beech was a sign of luxury

An exceptionally large red beech tree. In the background, the farm to which this tree belongs can be seen. Its striking color makes it a prominent feature in the landscape. Image by Beke Hendriksma (2023). Retrieved from <https://mijnbuitenplaats.nl/blog/een-rode-beuk-was-een-teken-van-luxe/>



## Chapter 7: Social Aspect Of Agricultural Development

### 7.1 The Herenboer's Role in Social Progress

Agricultural progress in the Hogeland left its mark not only on the landscape and architecture but also on society itself. The *Herenboer* influence went beyond his farm. His progressive ideas also shaped the social life of the Hogeland. He introduced improvements that benefited the whole community, not just himself. This is evident in the innovations introduced by the *Herenboer* in the region. Although these advancements largely benefited the farmer, the welfare of the laborers was not overlooked. New technologies and methods have made the work of agricultural laborers significantly less heavy. Prominent *Herenboeren*, such as Derk Roelfs Mansholt, the grandfather of Sicco Mansholt, who would later become president of the European Commission, led the way in these developments (Westerman, 2001).

### 7.2 Vereniging ter Bevordering van Landbouw en Nijverheid te Leens

The *Vereniging ter Bevordering van Landbouw en Nijverheid te Leens* (Association for the Promotion

of Agriculture and Industry in Leens) also played a vital and often underappreciated role in this progress. It functioned as a socio-economic platform that actively stimulated innovation and knowledge sharing. "The yearly 'discussion points' introduced by this social organization encouraged debate within local chapters about innovations and market developments, while the publications released by the association served as a valuable source of information for its farmer members," according to Priester (1991).

### 7.3 Education and Public Services

The progressiveness of the *Herenboer* was not limited to machinery and the *Nijverheid*. Their liberal and social spirit also found expression in the public buildings they funded. Following the 1863 Secondary Education Act introduced by Johan Thorbecke, a request for a *Hogere Burgerschool* (HBS) swiftly emerged from the Hogeland. Wealthy *Herenboeren* from Usquert and Warffum financed the school so their children, and those of the middle class, would not have to travel to the city for education. Although agricultural laborers were not included in this initiative, the fact that the *Herenboeren* made education accessible to the middle class marked a significant social advancement.



**figure 17:** *Farmhand's cottage behind Kooienburg, at Vlakke Riet*

This cottage was built on the Kooienburg estate. Many farms once had such cottages on their property, but most have since been demolished. This example is one of the few remaining farmhand houses still standing on the farmer's land. Image retrieved from Mijn Buitenplaats (2015). Retrieved from [http://zuurdijk.org/gallery-items/huisje-achter-kooienburg-bij-het-vlakke-riet/](http://zuurdijk.org/gallery-items/huisje-achter-kooienburg-bij-het-vlakke-riet/http://zuurdijk.org/gallery-items/huisje-achter-kooienburg-bij-het-vlakke-riet/)

## 7.4 Farmworker Housing and Berlage

This social spirit was also visible in architecture. It was normal for the wealthiest *Herenboeren* to construct small workers' houses on their farms, providing accommodation for farmhands. This created a kind of symbiotic relationship; laborers enjoyed decent housing, while the farmer was assured of a constant presence on the farm. A

good example is Kooienburg, where a farmhand's house was added during its reconstruction in 1923.

The *Herenboer* also exerted influence on architecture within the municipality. A notable example is the town hall of Usquert. This region, traditionally the wealthiest part of the Hogeland, boasted no fewer than twelve millionaire

**figure 18:** *Raadhuis Usquert*

One of Berlage's final works, the Usquert Town Hall (1930). This building symbolizes both the peak and the end of the era of the *Herenboeren*.

Image by Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed te Amersfoort (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://hoog500.nl/gebouw/raadhuis-11487>



*Herenboeren* during the peak of agricultural prosperity. Yet Usquert was also known for its social orientation, largely because laborers formed the majority of its population.

At the time, the village lacked a *raadhuis*, a town hall. On June 13, 1928, the municipal council received a proposal to construct a new one, prompted by the state archivist's concern about the municipality's documents being stored in the local tavern. The council approved the plan, and with support from the liberal mayor T.E. Welt (1868–1958), who offered land next to his own home, a representative new building was realized. They wanted Hendrik Petrus Berlage, who was the star architect of the Netherlands during that time, to design it. This choice of architect was unanimously supported by both liberals and socialists. To everyone's surprise, Berlage accepted the commission. Whether this was due to his social convictions remains unclear, but his design remains a tangible testament to an era in which the *Herenboer*, despite his power, sought to give something back to the collective. The Usquert town hall thus marks not only the pinnacle, but also the symbolic closing chapter of a period in which agriculture, architecture, and social ambition went hand in hand.

## Discussion.

The main topic in this historical thesis underwent several adjustments during the research process. Initially, the goal was to investigate the social vision of the *Herenboeren* in the Hogeland region. However, it soon became apparent that there was little to no literature on this topic available. To ensure a better study, the research was revised to focus on socio-economic relations, a theme for which significantly more relevant information was available. This adjustment made it possible to answer the research convincingly based on existing literature.

A follow-up study into the social vision of the *Herenboeren* would still be interesting, mostly because of the lack of in-depth research on this subject. A valuable method for such a future study could involve interviews with locals, as they are the ones who have directly and indirectly experienced the influence of the *Herenboeren*. It would be particularly insightful to interview descendants of prominent *Herenboer* families and former farmhands. This would allow for contrasting perspectives to be brought together, contributing to a more balanced understanding of the social dynamics and the impact these *Herenboeren* had on their environment. In a follow-up study about social vision, this thesis could be used as a base for a wider, more general view of the *Herenboeren* and their role in Hogeland.

During the investigation, most of the sources used in this research turned out to be from the 1990s, and many of them showed considerable overlap, especially in the way certain data was presented. Several studies appeared to draw from *Architectuur en stedenbouw in Groningen, 1850–1940*, written by Panman and Possel (1992), which raises questions about the diversity and independence of the material. Although the use of secondary literature was sufficient for this research, this strong reliance on older and partially overlapping sources did present certain limitations. A broader methodological approach, such as combining literature review with fieldwork or interviews, could lead to a more complete and nuanced understanding of the *Herenboeren* and their role in the Hogeland. This underlines the

importance of critical source analysis and shows how valuable new, original research could be on this topic.

## Conclusion.

The architecture in the Hogeland reflects the socio-economic transformations of the *Herenboer* between the 18th and 20th centuries. It all started with the initial formation of the Groningen landscape began around 5000 BC when the sea slowly retreated and deposited fertile marine clay. It was not until the Middle Ages that monks further developed the region through land reclamation and the construction of dikes. These interventions and rich soil allowed the Hogeland to evolve into a prosperous agricultural area. Especially from the 19th century onward, the shift from grassland to arable farming brought increasing wealth. With this prosperity came changes in both architecture and social structure. In this period, the ordinary farmer gradually became the new elite: the *Herenboer*.

As arable farming expanded and the *Herenboeren* became wealthier, the built environment showed their changing socio-economic position. The shift from simple farms to *kop-hals-romp* and *Oldambtster* types with their Frisian barns is a clear example of this development. These new types of farms also brought contemporary neo-styles of architecture to the rural area of Groningen, visually expressing the elevated status of the farmers. Furthermore, the rise of the *driekapschuur* demonstrated how even functional buildings adapted to increases in scale and prosperity.

The progression from *kop-hals-romp* and *Oldambtster* farms to *dwarshuizen*, and later to freestanding villas, shows the gradual transformation of the *Herenboer* from farmer to director. Architectural elements such as symmetrical façades, central hallways, richly decorated entrances, and landscaped gardens were not just aesthetic choices but also symbols of wealth and power. The adoption of Jugendstil and Amsterdam School styles further emphasized this with their expressive and artistic forms.

This transformation was not only evident in the living quarters but also noticeable in the landscape. The introduction of *slingertoentjes*,

monumental red beeches, and windbreaks shows how the *Herenboer* aimed to create a personal paradise amidst the often bare and windswept polders.

Socially, the influence of the *Herenboeren* was also significant, particularly in their support for education, agricultural innovation, and the welfare of the working class. Through organizations like the Vereniging ter Bevordering van Landbouw en Nijverheid te Leens, they contributed to regional development and promoted their liberal ideas across the Hogeland.

The development of the *Herenboer* in the Hogeland is a story of architectural evolution and a reflection of shifting economic systems and social hierarchies. What began as a small farm eventually became an architectural statement of power, progress, and identity. These farms are more than just historical buildings, they are physical reminders of a time when the Hogeland was one of the wealthiest regions of the Netherlands.

# Bibliography.

## Books

Bos, A. F. (2017). *Boerderijen in het wierden en dijkenlandschap*. Wierde en Dijk

Eliens, T. M. (2010). *Berlage in het Noorden*. De Kunst ; Stichting Berlagehuis Usquert

Fennema, B., Brinkman, A., & Bolt, H. (2008). *Willem Reitsema TZN (1885-1963): architect op het Hogeland*. Noordboek.

Panman, M., & Possel, J. (1992). *Architectuur en stedenbouw in Groningen, 1850-1940*. Waanders Publishers.

Priester, P. (1991). *De economische ontwikkeling van de landbouw in Groningen 1800 - 1910 : een kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve analyse*. Landbouwuniversiteit Wageningen

Westerman, F. (1999). *de Graanrepubliek*. Olympus

Steenhuis, A. (1997). *Stemmen van Groninger dijken*. Pandora.

Stenvert, R. (1998). *Monumenten in Nederland; Groningen*. Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg.

Tuuk, R. van der (2002). *Boerderijen op Het Hogeland*. Stichting Boerderijenboek Het Hogeland, Profiel.

## Documentary

*Huilende Bruiden;*

Many Herenboedrijven from the heyday of Groningen's grain republic are in disrepair. Residents are faced with a choice: stay or leave.

*Plaatselijke Tijd - Herenboerderijen;*

Television programme on themes from Groningen's history. Broadcasted in 2005 by RTV Noord.

*Overstag;*

Overstag is a personal portrait of the farmer and politician Sicco Mansholt (1908-1995) by his close friend Louis van Gasteren and his wife Joke Meerman. Through unique archival material and interviews with family, colleagues, and former politicians, including Max Kohnstamm, Jan Pronk, and Hans van Mierlo, a nuanced image emerges of this dedicated social democrat and influential politician with a vision.

# Bibliography.

## Illustrations

Beke Hendriksma. (2023). *Een rode beuk was een teken van luxe* [Image]. <https://mijnbuitenplaats.nl/blog/een-rode-beuk-was-een-teken-van-luxe/>

Bos, A. F. (2017). *Boerderijen in het wierden en dijkenlandschap*. Wierde en Dijk

Buro de Rooy. (n.d.). *Restauratie Plaats Melkema in Huizinge* [Image]. <https://buroderooy.nl/project/restauratie-plaats-melkema-in-huizinge/>

Gouwenaar. (2010). *Kooyenburg Zuurdijk* [Image]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kooyenburg\\_Zuurdijk.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kooyenburg_Zuurdijk.jpg)

Gouwenaar. (2011). *Boerderij Oudelaan Wadwerderweg 82 Usquert* [Image]. Wikipedia. [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Wadwerderweg\\_82\\_Usquert.jpg](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Wadwerderweg_82_Usquert.jpg)

Mijn Buitenplaats. (2015). *Huisje achter Kooienburg bij het Vlakke Riet* [Image]. <http://zuurdijk.org/gallery-items/huisje-achter-kooienburg-bij-het-vlakke-riet/>

Panman, M., & Possel, J. (1992). *Architectuur en stedenbouw in Groningen, 1850–1940*. Waanders Publishers.

Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed te Amersfoort. (n.d.). *Raadhuis Usquert* [Image]. Retrieved from <https://hoog500.nl/gebouw/raadhuis-11487>

Technau, S. (2005). Zuidpool, Usquert [Image]. *Beeldbank Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed* [Image]. <https://rijksmonumenten.nl/monument/528076/zuidpool/usquert/>

Verver Jet Winters Makelaars. (2023). *Parel op Funda: Prachtige villa in Usquert* [Image]. Noorderland. <https://noorderland.nl/artikel/489326/parel-op-funda-prachtige-villa-in-usquert>

Willemjans. (2011). Ulrum Westerhouw farm [Image]. Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulrum\\_Westerhouw.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ulrum_Westerhouw.JPG)

Zuurdiek. (n.d.). \*C.J. Borgman and the “Arend Plow” and more\* [Image]. Zuurdiek. <https://zuurdiek.nl/c-j-borgman-en-de-arendploeg/>