

# The story of Vincent in Drenthe



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Ruud Hobo

The story about Vincent van Gogh's Drenthe period  
told by Vincent himself.

*Unfortunately, due to the high licensing costs, I cannot show Vincent's  
paintings in this book.*

*Vincent's works can be found at <http://www.vggallery.com>.*

The photos in this book were taken by me.

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## 1. Introduction

In 1883 Vincent van Gogh lived and worked in Drenthe for twelve weeks. During that period he sent a large number of letters, including 1 to his parents and 22 to his brother Theo. In this book I provide an impression of Vincent's stay in Hoogeveen (three weeks), and New Amsterdam (nine weeks) based on these 23 letters. Not as a report on Vincent's life during that period, but in this book, I let Vincent speak for himself. The story about this period is set up as the report of a conversation that Vincent had with an interested listener.

You will wonder: "Only twelve weeks in Drenthe. What could that possibly mean? What is the importance of this period?" Yet this relatively short period was very important for Vincent van Gogh's development to become a painter. In Drenthe, where he feels increasingly lonely, he comes to an important realization, an important observation about himself. Which one, you will read in this book.

Of course, we don't know what Vincent exactly experienced in Drenthe. The letters he wrote provide a limited picture. The letters Vincent received from Theo and his parents are unfortunately no longer there. In the letters written by Vincent himself, he does respond to passages from the letters received. This allows us to deduce a few things. We know nothing about the meetings and conversations he had during his stay in Drenthe. These are events that I made up myself. This also applies, for example, to the conversations he had with his fiancé Sien before leaving The Hague. The story is therefore a mix of fiction and non-fiction.

You may also wonder, "There are already countless books about Vincent van Gogh, so why specifically this book?" The reason comes from my work in 'The Van Gogh House Drenthe' in New Amsterdam. I am a volunteer and storyteller there. The Van Gogh House Drenthe is the only publicly accessible building in the Netherlands where Vincent van Gogh actually lived and painted. The questions I received from visitors during the tours gave me the idea for this book. Questions such as: "Where did Vincent walk around in this region? What did he do there? Who was he talking to and what? What did he even think of Drenthe?" But also "Why did he leave again?"

As mentioned, of course we have those 23 letters. However, the full story about his daily life in Drenthe is nowhere to be found. That's why I started wondering what it could have been like. The result of those reflections has become this book. And besides, very few books were written about the period that Vincent stayed in Drenthe.

Numerous books have been written about Vincent's life before and after Drenthe. I'm not going to repeat that in this book. Yet it is useful to describe Vincent's condition at the start of his Drenthe adventure in 1883. Then you can better understand why things happened the way they did.

Vincent has lived in The Hague since the end of November 1881. There he met Sien Hoornik. She had been thrown out of the house by the man who had made her pregnant. She already had a daughter, six years old, whose father is unknown. Sien has an alcohol problem and is a prostitute. In short, nothing but misery. Vincent takes care of her and Sien becomes his model. After a while they move in together. In the eyes of his friends and family, he made a big mistake. He lives unmarried and with a prostitute. That is

why his painter friends break with him. Only Anthon van Rappard remains friends with him. When he tells his family that he and Sien want to get married, Vincent's family revolts. They are strongly against it. Vincent is put under heavy pressure by the family to leave Sien. They even insist that Vincent leave The Hague. He is urgently advised to go to Drenthe. Many painters he knows had all already been to Drenthe and were very positive about it.

Vincent is already thirty years old and does not yet have a good idea of what he wants to do next in his life. In fact, up to that point his life is a series of failures. Vincent therefore has the question "What am I going to do with my life, what does my future look like?"

There are two important themes in Vincent's life.

- Vincent regularly suffers from depressive moods. Back then it was called melancholy. The only effective way for Vincent to suppress melancholy was to find distraction through painting, for example.
- Vincent has never actually earned any money himself since his dismissal from Goupil on April 1, 1876. He has therefore always been dependent on what Theo and sometimes his father gave him. He is always short of money. As a result, he cannot always paint and draw, which could cause melancholy to arise again.

As far as the past that as I write this is 140 years ago. Does any of that history still exist? In other words, is there anything left from Vincent's time that is worth a visit? Of course, people in Drenthe no longer live in sod huts and those old farmhouses that Vincent drew and painted are no

longer there. But there is still peat, and it is still being cut. Demonstrations of this are given in the *Veenpark* and there are sod huts in the park and there is much more to see. And are Vincent's places to stay, such as Scholte's guesthouse, still there? It's worth investigating. Just read the chapter "October 2023".

Enjoy reading.

Ruud Hobo - Drenthe November 2022 / March 2024

## **2. The meeting in Nuenen in the spring of 1884**

I will introduce myself. My name is Alex de Goede, 42 years old. I am a traveling salesman by profession. I trade in anything that I can make a profit from. This could be trading in wood, but also in peat, grain, or gin. So, in everything that is in demand. Interesting emerging markets are the tobacco industry and the coal trade. The tobacco industry is mainly found in and around Eindhoven. I think that industry is worth investigating further. After all, you must be open to new opportunities.

Without boasting too much, I can say that I am quite good at my job. I know what there a demand is for or will almost certainly arise and I respond to that. For example, I have set up a lucrative peat business. Amsterdam has a growing need for peat, and I have good agreements with the landlords in Drenthe to meet that need. That is why I have been going to Drenthe in the spring for several years. The peat excavation around New Amsterdam will yield me a nice profit again this year. Because things are going financially so well, I don't have to work six days a week from early in the morning to late at night. This gives me time for other things. For example, I am interested in art, especially painting. Not for trading, but out of pure interest. I am also interested in the story behind a painting or the life of the painter. That is why I like to visit museums at home and abroad. As a traveling salesman, I visit many places and if there is a museum there, I can combine my trip with a visit to that museum. An ever-expanding railway network makes many places easier to reach. And much faster and more comfortable than with a horse and cart as in my first years as a traveling salesman.