

Vincent van Gogh  
From Scholte  
to Ravoux



Vincent van Gogh  
From Scholte  
to Ravoux

Ruud Hobo

The story about Vincent van Gogh,  
about his life as a painter during his stay in

PART 1  
Hoogeveen,  
New Amsterdam,

PART 2  
Nuenen,  
Antwerp,  
Paris,  
Arles,  
Saint-Rémy-de-Provence  
and  
Auvers-sur-Oise

told by Vincent himself.

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

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

The photos were taken by me.

First English edition, April 2024

ISBN paperback: 9789465015033

Writer: Ruud Hobo

Cover design: Ruud Hobo

Translated with A.I.: Ruud Hobo

© Ruud Hobo

Publishing platform Brave New Books

## **Tabel of content**

1	Introduction.....	6
2	The meeting in Nuenen in the spring of 1884 .....	9
3	The Hague September 10, 1883.....	11
4	From The Hague to Hoogeveen on September 11 .....	17
5	Hoogeveen September 12 – October 2.....	20
6	To New Amsterdam on October 2.....	35
7	New Amsterdam October 3 – December 4 .....	40
8	October 2023 .....	59
9	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890 .....	68
10	Nuenen December 5, 1883 – December 1, 1884 .....	73
11	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890 .....	85
12	Nuenen December 1, 1884 - November 24, 1885 .....	92
13	Antwerp November 24, 1885 – February 28, 1886 .....	99
14	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890.....	106
15	Paris February 28, 1886 - February 19, 1888 .....	108
16	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890.....	115
17	Arles February 20, 1888 – October 23, 1888.....	117
18	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890.....	136
19	Arles October 23, 1888 – May 8, 1889 .....	138
20	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890.....	149
21	Saint-Rémy-de-Provence May 8, 1889 – May 16, 1890.....	150
22	Paris May 16, 1890 – May 20, 1890.....	166
23	Auvers-sur-Oise May 20, 1890 – July 14, 1890 .....	168
24	Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890.....	174
25	Auvers-sur-Oise - Thursday, July 13, 2023 .....	175
26	The Van Gogh House Drenthe .....	180
27	List of images .....	184
28	Information sources .....	185

# 1 Introduction

This book consists of 2 parts, namely "The Story of Vincent in Drenthe" (ISBN 9789465014593) and "The journey of the painter Vincent van Gogh". (ISBN 9789465014982) Both parts are also available as separate books.

In both parts, Vincent van Gogh tells the traveling salesman Alex de Goede about his experiences as a painter. These stories are based on the letters Vincent wrote. In Drenthe he wrote 23 letters. In the period that followed, approximately 500.

Vincent tells the story about Drenthe when Alex comes to visit him in Nuenen in the spring of 1884. Vincent lived and worked in Drenthe for twelve weeks in the autumn of 1883. You will wonder: "Only twelve weeks in Drenthe. What could that possibly mean?" Yet this relatively short period was important for Vincent van Gogh's development as 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.

You may also wonder, "There are already countless books about Vincent van Gogh, so why this book?" The reason comes from my volunteer work in 'The Van Gogh House' in New Amsterdam. I am a guide/storyteller there. The Van Gogh House 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? Who was he talking to and what? What did he even think of Drenthe?" But also "Why did he leave again?"

Numerous books have been written about Vincent's life before Drenthe. I'm not going to repeat that in this book.

When Vincent goes to Drenthe, he 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, his life up to that point 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?"

In part 2 we go a lot further in time to the year 1890. In Auvers-sur-Oise, Alex the Good meets Vincent again.

After leaving Drenthe, Vincent made quite a journey looking for the right place to become an accomplished and successful painter. That journey

takes him via Nuenen, Antwerp, Paris, Arles, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Paris again to Auvers-sur-Oise.

We don't know exactly what he experienced in those places. The letters that Vincent wrote in Drenthe up to and including his stay in Auvers-sur-Oise only provide a limited picture. Unfortunately, except for a small number, the letters Vincent received from Theo, his parents and artist friends are no longer there. We can deduce a few things from Vincent's reactions in the letters he wrote.

The meetings and conversations he had are events that I invented myself. The story is therefore a mix of fiction and non-fiction. The meeting that Vincent has with Alex de Goede is of course completely fictional. Although... in letter 889 of June 17, 1890, Vincent writes: "*I was pleased to meet the Dutchman who came yesterday.*" .....

This book is different from almost all other books about Vincent van Gogh. Those books are indeed about Vincent. In my two books I let Vincent himself speak.

There are two important themes in Vincent's life. These two aspects also play an important role in this story:

- Vincent regularly suffers from depressive moods. Back then it was called melancholy. The only effective way for Vincent to suppress melancholy was to paint a lot and seek distraction.
- 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.

Enjoy reading!

Ruud Hobo – Drenthe, April 2024

# **PART-1**

## **The Story of Vincent in Drenthe**



## **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.

Today I am in Nuenen. Next week I will be going to Eindhoven on business, as I mentioned. But I have decided to go to Brabant already this weekend. A few weeks ago, I spent about four days in Southeast Drenthe in connection with the peat trade that I already mentioned. I stayed in New Amsterdam at Hendrik Scholte's guesthouse. I slept in a nice room with a balcony. One evening Hendrik and I started talking and when I mentioned that I was interested in painting, he told me that last year in October and November a strange guy was staying in the same room. For nine weeks. In the village they still talk about it and laugh about it. That man thought he was a painter, but no one really liked what he made. Probably just himself. Who makes drawings and paintings of sod huts and other poor houses? One morning he disappeared very secretly, like a thief in the night. He was supposed to pay his outstanding

debt that day. He had left a lot behind because he would return with his brother in the spring. At least that's what he had told Hendrik. "Well Alex, I didn't believe that right away. Maybe I should have seen it coming. He was waiting for a letter with a money order and the letter had not arrived. That made him more and more nervous," Hendrik said to me. "And indeed, that guy never came back. He did pay the outstanding debt with a money order from Nuenen, very surprising." Hendrik also told me his name: Vincent van Gogh. Unfortunately, Hendrik did not know whether Vincent lived in Nuenen. I had to ask that to the innkeeper Hartsuiker in Hoogeveen. Since I had to go to Hoogeveen to continue traveling there by train, I did so. Indeed, Hartsuiker knew the address.

The story about that painter had aroused my curiosity. That's why I decided to go to Brabant earlier to visit Vincent in Nuenen.

So, at the beginning of the evening in Nuenen I walk into the local pub. In a corner a man with reddish hair and a reddish beard is sitting with a sketchbook, drawing something. I walk up to him and ask: "Are you Vincent van Gogh, the painter?"

He looks at me in surprise and agrees.

"My name is Alex de Goede. I am a traveling salesman. "I was recently in New Amsterdam at Hendrik Scholte's guesthouse and there I heard a strange story about a painter who had been there," I continue. "I would like to hear that story from your side too. Purely out of interest."

"If you really want to hear the story, Alex, get two tankards of wine and come sit here at the table with me," Vincent answers.

I get the two tankards of wine, sit down, we toast, and I listen.....

### **3 The Hague September 10, 1883**

*"Let me start my story on Monday, September 10, 1883, the day before I travelled to Drenthe."* With those words Vincent begins his story.

You always have those days that stay with you. You probably have that too, Alex, and September tenth is one of those too. I remember that day like it was yesterday. It was drizzly outside for the umpteenth day and a field of mist hung over the peat area. I watched it apparently relaxed, but nothing could be further from the truth. I stood there often, with my hands behind my back and a pipe in the corner of my right mouth. According to Sien, that was a characteristic attitude of mine. And many times, I took my sketch paper and chalk or charcoal to capture that view again.

We had been living on the Schenkweg for almost two years. First at number 138. Unfortunately, that house was not very good, a bit rickety. The rental price was therefore favourable. Then at number 136. That house was a lot better, and I had enough space in that house for my own studio. You will understand that this was not unimportant to me. But it was a lot more expensive, namely 12.50 guilders per month. It was part of a new residential area just outside The Hague. The neighbourhood is also close to the *Rhijnspoor* train station. Of course, I first discussed this move with Theo. You should know that Theo paid almost all my bills at that time. And he still does.

That Monday I wasn't in the mood to draw. I was about to leave Sien, whom I was planning to marry, her two children, Maria and Willem, and The Hague. Of course, you understand that this was a verry difficult decision for me. But the pressure from my family became too much for me. They desperately wanted me to abandon my plan to marry her. Besides, her family was also against it. My painter friends such as George Breitner and my former teacher Anton Mauve broke off their friendship with me, partly because I lived unmarried with a prostitute. The situation I found myself in was anything but pleasant and because of this the melancholy took hold of me again.

I had managed to postpone the decision to leave for a long time. Perhaps against my better judgement. During sleepless nights I kept wondering why... Wouldn't it be better to... maybe.... It kept going

through my head. It was quite a struggle for me. I didn't want to make that important decision lightly. Just try to imagine what it's like to be pressured into leaving the woman you want to marry. And for good! You know, Alex, it felt like another failure. I was sent away again. That had happened to me so many times. I thought I had finally made it for once and then it failed again. I really wanted to have a normal family life and with Sien and the children that would be possible. I was already thirty years old. At that age you are already settled, you already have an idea of what you are going to do for the rest of your life. I didn't have that image at all yet.

I had made the decision to leave Sien and The Hague the week before. Because of the melancholy, it would be good for my peace of mind to go to Drenthe. At least, that's what was pointed out to me several times. I desperately needed peace and space in my environment, but especially peace in my head, because otherwise that attack of melancholy could get worse. I really wasn't looking forward to that. Of course, I recognized the signs. Going to a quiet area would be much better for me. Perhaps even vital. I was convinced of that by now. But coming to that realization had taken a long time. I always hoped that I could turn the situation with Sien around for the better, but unfortunately...

There was a map of Drenthe on the dining table. It is a sparsely populated province. Here and there are some places and some smaller settlements of at most a few houses and farms. Those settlements may already be a bit larger because the map is a few years old. Places such as Meppel, Hoogeveen, Assen and Coevorden are clearly smaller than The Hague and Amsterdam where I lived. And certainly, smaller than places like London and Paris where I have also lived. A traveling salesman like you will certainly know that, Alex. I had indicated Hoogeveen on that map with a red dot. East of Hoogeveen it says "Peat area" in large letters with a canal that runs almost to the German border.

The painters I know from The Hague have all been to the north of Drenthe. Mauve, for example, in Eext and Van Rappard in Rolde. I chose a different part of Drenthe. So, I had made a well-considered choice for Hoogeveen. There were a few reasons for that for Alex. Hoogeveen is easily accessible by train. At Hoogeveen you have the farmland that I love so much, but what really made the difference was the peat area on the east side of that place. The indication "Peat area" on the map made

me think back to my youth in Zundert. During the school holidays I took long walks there with my parents and later with my brother Theo across the vast heathlands and peatlands. Theo and I talked extensively along the way about nature, faith and the poverty that was visible everywhere.

*I can almost hear you thinking, Alex: "Yes, a 14-year-old boy and a 10-year-old boy, how deep or extensive were those conversations?"* Well, I can assure you that they were good conversations for us, and it created a huge bond between Theo and me. I had not yet experienced poverty myself. My father was a pastor in Zundert as he is now here in Nuenen. As a result, he has a reasonable and steady income, and the family is also quite wealthy. Just look at my uncle Jan in Amsterdam. Rear Admiral is no small feat. A few years ago, when I stayed among the miners in the Borinage, I experienced the bitter poverty, and how! I even walked back and forth from Mons to Courrières once with less than 10 francs in my pocket. A journey of three days and nights in early March in rain and wind without a roof over my head.

My cousin Anton Mauve and my friend Anthon van Rappard, among others, had been to Drenthe before and spoke highly about the beautiful nature in Drenthe. The latter also said that you cannot live anywhere as cheaply as in Drenthe. Not unimportant to me. Of course you understand that, Alex. I had also heard that Max Liebermann, a German painter whom I admire, regularly stays in Drenthe. Maybe I could meet Liebermann there if he were in Zweenloo at that moment, for example. Julius van de Sande Bakhuyzen also regularly stays in an inn in Exloo and can therefore regularly be found in Zweenloo. So, the idea of going to Drenthe, to an environment that fellow painters are very positive about, was an attractive thought. I was actually looking forward to traveling around that area and going further into the peat area on a barge over one of the canals. In search of the workers on the land, the primitive life of the population and certainly nature. I wanted to capture all that with my drawings and paintings. The ordinary life of ordinary people. The real life. Not those fictional landscapes that I had seen by many other painters and that you will also be familiar with, Alex. Yes, Hoozevee, that would be my first destination in Drenthe. The next day I would go there by train. That would be a very long journey, I knew.

After the decision was made to leave The Hague and Sien and her children, a lot of things had to be arranged. That's why I first went to Smulders on the Spuistraat to purchase some paper and other drawing

materials. I couldn't get much. I just didn't have the money for it, and I knew I had to be frugal to last a while in Drenthe. Theo had promised that he would regularly send some money in exchange for my drawings, paintings, and studies that I would make there. In any case, being frugal was always a good thing. At that time, I still assumed that I would stay in Drenthe for at least a year. My goal was to capture nature and farm life in Drenthe in the four seasons. I hoped to improve my drawing and painting skills with this.

I had purchased a domestic passport valid for twelve months. That passport gave me the right to go wherever I wanted and to stay there for as long as I felt necessary. To be on the safe side, I didn't want to leave Sien and the children empty-handed. I gave her money for a few weeks' rent and to provide for their living expenses for the foreseeable future. I just had to wait and see whether Sien would find decent work that would earn her enough money.

That tenth of September would be a day of saying goodbye. I wondered whether I should visit Anton Mauve, my cousin by marriage. He only lived a few blocks away, but I figured it was best not to do. Things didn't go that well between us. We still have disagreements about views on art and especially artistry. That's what you have with two "stubborn" figures who don't want to admit anything. He had also made very negative comments about Sien and my relationship with her. Maybe I could go to *Juffrouw Idastraat*, where my painter friend Breitner had his studio. I had to see if I had time for that, because visiting George always took a lot of time. With George you don't leave after fifteen minutes!

As I was considering that, the postman came with a letter for me. Fortunately, it was another letter from Theo, my beloved brother. Theo's letters are always pleasant and uplifting moments for me on difficult days. Especially when I feel the melancholy that has bothered me since my early childhood. During those times I feel so very depressed, and the words of my beloved brother are more than welcome. I was just about to start reading the letter when Sien came storming in. *"Another letter from your brother? That troublemaker. What is he getting involved in? He is far away in Paris but knows it better than you. If he didn't interfere in our lives, you wouldn't leave, the children would still have something like a father in you."* Sien was clearly having a hard time with my upcoming departure and that was why she had these kinds of outbursts. We

planned to get married and then break up..... Yes, I understood her anger, Alex. In Sien's eyes, it was all Theo's fault. She thought that I relied too much on Theo's opinion and that I should have an opinion of my own. Also, that I was too financially dependent on Theo. I would have liked to respond to her, but the words would no longer come. We had talked about it so many times. What else was I supposed to say now? Sien did not want to stop her work as a prostitute. How many times have we argued about that? *"The children are already with my mother, and you must leave again this afternoon. I'm going to earn some money myself again this afternoon. Customers are coming. At least I earn my own money and don't have to hold my hand up like you do with your brother."* That was one of the accusations Sien regularly made to me. And yet we were crazy about each other. That didn't make it any easier for us. Sien still did not want to see her family forcing her into prostitution. Before I could respond to that last outburst, Sien slammed the living room door shut, stormed down the stairs, and disappeared from the house. It had happened that way often lately. Sien had those moods, but a little later everything was fine again, and she was sweet and kind to me again. But those moods Alex, those moods ....

I was really sure that I had to leave, away from the lives of Sien and the children, away from The Hague to the peace and quietness of Drenthe. But I didn't find it easy. I had to sit down, fill a new pipe, light it, calm down and read the letter. That was the most important thing for me at that moment. There was an extra of 100 francs in the letter. That was very welcome. This allowed me to purchase some more paint, brushes, and paper. Of course, not too much, I didn't yet know how expensive life in Drenthe would be and what my stay would cost if I could find an accommodation at all. Theo's words did good to me, as always. They gave me peace and support. I immediately wrote back a letter in which I of course thanked Theo for the money, but also explained my plans again.

After I had read through Theo's letter and my letter a few times, I took my letter to the post office. Afterwards I wandered through the city with the feeling that this would be the last time. I kept thinking back to all those afternoons when I went out with George Breitner to draw people in, for example, the soup kitchens and waiting rooms of the station. In the *Molenstraat* where Johannes Leurs has his shop for painting and drawing supplies, I regularly bought pencils and charcoal. When I walked in that afternoon, I was greeted with a big smile. "Good afternoon,

Vincent. What did I hear? Are you going to leave The Hague?" And so, a conversation arose in which I could explain the situation. By the time it got dark, I was back on the *Schenkweg* and, somewhat nervously, I went inside.

There was still some food waiting for me. Fortunately, Sien and the children were also at home. I was really afraid that she would stay with her mother out of anger. After dinner I packed some things, such as my clothes and some drawing supplies. In fact, I was ready for the journey. The week before I had packed my paintings and studies and sent them to my brother Theo in Paris. That tenth of September was the last sad day in The Hague.



## **4 From The Hague to Hogeveen on September 11**

When I woke up the next day, Tuesday September 11th, after a restless night, I noticed that Sien and the children were already out of bed. They were in the living room. Sien and Maria, her six-year-old daughter, were talking about my upcoming departure, which was going to take place that day. Fortunately, this time I didn't hear any whining or all kinds of accusations. Rather, there was an atmosphere of resignation. That is just how it goes and that there is nothing you can do about it. But we did have the feeling that things could have gone differently. A feeling of regret and disappointment prevailed in both Sien and me. Maria didn't understand it at all. Son Willem was just over a year old and therefore too small to understand anything.

After a shared breakfast I packed the last things. The four of us spent the whole morning together. We went for a walk and played some games with the kids. I don't remember exactly. It passed by in a blur for me. In any case, there were no more outbursts or accusations from Sien.

The train would leave at the beginning of the afternoon. I don't remember the exact time. After the sandwich it was time. I looked around one more time and then I finally left the house with a sigh.

It would be a long day traveling. On the advice of Anthon van Rappard, I had sorted everything out thoroughly. There is no train directly from The Hague Rhijnspoor to Hogeveen. It is a journey of more than seven hours with frequent transfers in between. In the meantime, I had to hope and keep my fingers crossed that the connections in Utrecht and Zwolle would go well with the various rail companies, otherwise I would not arrive in Hogeveen that day. Possibly there was a cow standing on the railway track somewhere, or a shepherd was just letting his flock of sheep cross the road, or the stoker could not keep the boiler running properly. This could cause the train to slow down and not reach the top speed of twenty kilometres per hour. As a result, I might arrive to late at the transfer station. And that was not a pleasant prospect, no, that would be a disaster. As a traveling salesman, you naturally know all about this Alex.

We lived close to the Rhijnspoor station. Of course, Sien and the children went to the station where the train was ready for departure. After a last hug, I got in and when the train left, my Drenthe adventure

began. Would I ever see Sien again? I hoped so, but I honestly didn't expect it. I had promised to pass on my address in Hoogeveen to the carpenter who lived next door. He would then pass on the address to Sien so that we could write each other. But I didn't really expect that.

The journey was indeed long and tiring. I did some sketching along the way, smoked a few pipes, and spent a lot of time staring outside. Always wondering what the future would bring. The journey was monotonous, but I found the Veluwe after Amersfoort station very beautiful. The beautiful nature with all the different shades of green and brown reminded me of the paintings of the painters from Barbizon. Paintings of the great painters such as Dupré, Corot, Rousseau, and Millet. Paintings that I have often seen during my time with Goupil in Paris.

When we arrived in Hoogeveen it was already dark. I stood on the platform looking around, a bit forlorn. Where was I supposed to go now? Fortunately, a man came along and offered his services as a porter. *"Sir, can I take your luggage somewhere? Will you be picked up or will you go to an address here in Hoogeveen yourself?"* he asked. I replied that I still had to look for somewhere to stay. I didn't know anything in this area. *"Well sir, you're in luck. I have a lodgement and I have a room available,"* the man replied. *"The accommodation is nearby, on the Toldijk, it is only a few hundred meters away."* And so, unexpectedly, I quickly found accommodation in Hoogeveen, not far from the station, with innkeeper Albertus Hartsuiker. That was a huge relief. It cost one guilder per day, including food and drinks. As you know Alex, one guilder is a lot, but I had no choice. Of course, I could inquire further in a few days about other places to stay. Albertus's lodging was an old farm where he lived with his wife, Catharina Beukema, and their three children. There is a spacious taproom where the guests of the accommodation can sit and where the meal is consumed together. I was given the back attic as a bedroom and studio and was allowed to leave my things in the attic if I was going away for several days. I only had to pay the accommodation price if I used the room. I thought that was very reasonable of Albertus. Fortunately, Catharina was still busy preparing the evening meal. Because they would only have dinner when Albertus had finished his work at the station. The train I arrived on was the last one of that day, so Albertus' work was done for the day. During the meal, which was also attended by a few other guests, I heard different stories about the area. This immediately gave rise to the idea of moving further

into Drenthe as soon as I had sufficiently explored the surrounding area of Hogeveen. In any case, I wanted to sail the entire *Verlengde Hogeveense Vaart* through the peat bogs, straight through the southeastern corner of Drenthe, at short notice. Then perhaps continue via Exloo to Assen across the beautiful heath. Exloo is a place where Julius van de Sande Bakhuyzen regularly stayed. But of course, the question remained whether this would happen. I was very curious about it.

After dinner I went to my room. I was really tired from my trip. You can imagine that. But I was not too tired to start writing a letter to Theo, in which I gave my temporary address at Albertus Hartsuiker and explained my plans.