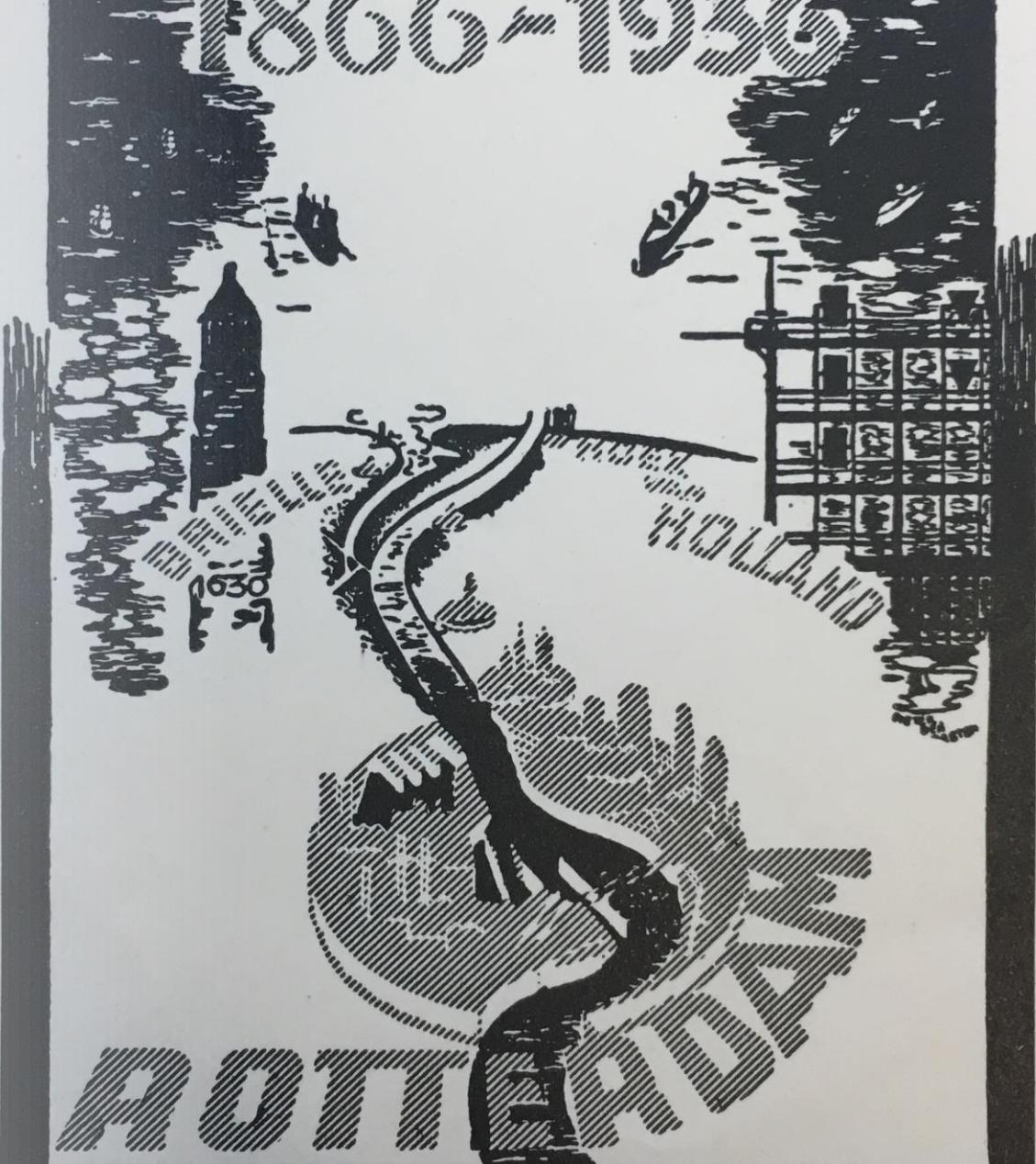


The dependence of Rotterdam on its New Waterway



National water work, urban icon?

PORCUS
the online magazine of *mercator*

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Home / Portus Portrait / PORTRAIT Rotterdam | Currents of the Past in the Present: History, Heritage, and Adaptive Reuse (II)
Caland Against the Tides: The Turbulent History of the New Waterway

A green-toned map of the New Waterway in Rotterdam.

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Abstract
In October 2016, it was 150 years since the Prince of Orange dug the first spade of the Nieuwe Waterweg (New Waterway). Accompanied by salutes, mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb of Rotterdam opened the first ship to sail through the Waterway, the "Army of The Netherlands". This shows how the New Waterway is still regarded as bringing Rotterdam and The Netherlands together. The article traces the history of the New Waterway from its opening in 1865 until the 150th anniversary in 2016. It also looks at the 150th anniversary of the opening of the New Waterway in 1865, the first spade in 1866, or the first ship to sail through the Waterway. The port city of Rotterdam celebrate the anniversary of this direct connection from Rotterdam to the sea. This article is a portrait of how a product of national engineering has become an icon of the port city region of Rotterdam, and - in the run up to yet another anniversary - poses the question of what role it should play in the future of the region.

[PDF](#)

Rotterdam's New Waterway: The Iconification of an Infrastructure (1860-1947)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/12389>

Keywords: Infrastructure, Culture, Port Cities, Urban Iconography, Port Culture

Abstract

Rotterdam is not just a port city defined by its significance as a transit, petroleum or container port, but also by the heterogenic images and narratives

The book cover features a large yellow vertical bar on the left and a small image of a ship on the right.



Timeline

1858: first plan by Pieter Caland

1863: **national** law on two Waterways

1866: first spade by the Heir Apparent

1872: first ship

1880s: trouble and criticism

1902: Caland dies

1907: Caland monument in Rotterdam

1930: Gidding's Diorama

1932: Establishment Port Authority

1935: Rotterdam in Nood"

1936: Waterway exhibition

1941: "De Weg naar Zee"

1947: "De Waterweg Heroverd"

1953: "Caland en de betekenis van zijn werk voor Rotterdam"

1963: 100 year anniversary

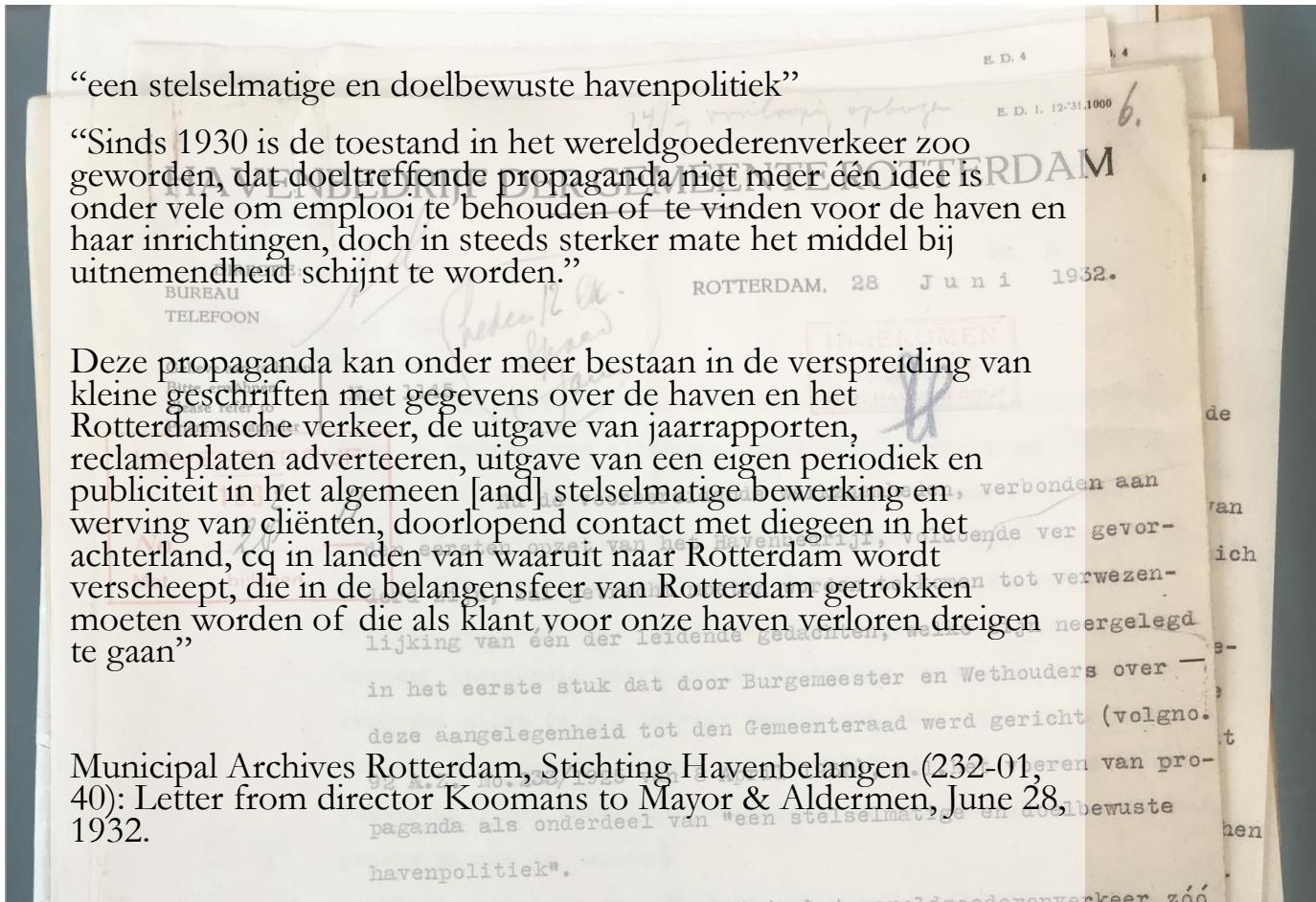
1966: 100 year anniversary

1967: The "Oil Trench"

1972: 100 year anniversary:
exhibition, plaque



“Purposeful Port Politics”



June, 1932:

- “a systematic and purposeful port politics”
- "Since 1930, the situation in the world traffic of goods has become such that effective **propaganda is no longer one idea among many to maintain or find employment for the port and its facilities, but increasingly appears to be the means par excellence.**"
- “This propaganda can include
 - the distribution of small documents with data about the port and Rotterdam traffic,
 - the publication of annual reports, advertising posters, publication of one's own periodical and publicity in general [and]
 - systematic **processing and recruitment of clients**,
 - continuous contact with those in the hinterland, or in countries from which shipments are made to Rotterdam, **who must be drawn into the interests of Rotterdam or who are in danger of being lost as a customer to our port**”

KAMER VAN KOOPHANDEL EN FABRIEKEN VOOR ROTTERDAM



HET GEBIED DER KAMER OMVAT DE GEMEENTEN ROTTERDAM, BARENDRICHT, BERGSGHENHOEK, CAPELLE AAN DEN IJSEL, HILLEGERSBERG, HOOGVLIEFT, IJSELMONDE, KRIMPEN AAN DE LEK, KRIMPEN AAN DEN IJSEL, OVERSCHIE, PERNIS, POORTUGAAL, RHOON, RIDDERKERK EN SCHIEBROEK.

ROTTERDAM, 14 September 1932.

BERICHT OP SCHRIJVEN VAN

BEURSINGANG NOORDBLAAK

TELEFOON: 040-04420

TELEFOON: 24420 (3 LIJNEN)

ONDERWERP : Propaganda voor de haven van Rotterdam.

BIJ ANTWOORD VERMELDEN : S. 27918

Een commissie, ingesteld door het bestuur van het departement Rotterdam van de Nederlandsche Maatschappij voor Nijverheid en Handel, heeft een plan uitgewerkt tot het instellen van een organisatie, die zich zal bezig houden met de propaganda voor de haven van Rotterdam. Een exemplaar van haar rapport met begeleidend schrijven gelieve U hierbij aan te treffen. Op bladzijde 17 daarvan vindt U den financiën opzet.

Bestuursleden van het departement Rotterdam hebben zich nu tot den Voorzitter gewend met het verzoek te bevorderen, dat de Kamer van Koophandel in de bedoelde kosten jaarlijks zal bijdragen. Voorlopig wordt gedacht aan een bedrag van 15.000,- per jaar.

Het Bureau zal deze zaak in zijn vergadering van a.s. Maandag bespreken, en zal het daarom op prijs stellen, wanneer U des namiddags om 2.15 uur op dien dag in zijn midden aanwezig wilt zijn, teneinde aan de gedachtenwisseling doel te nemen.

Een gelijk schrijven wordt gericht tot den Voorzitter van de Commissie voor de Scheepvaartbelangen en van de Commissie voor de Financiën.

De Secretaris der Kamer,

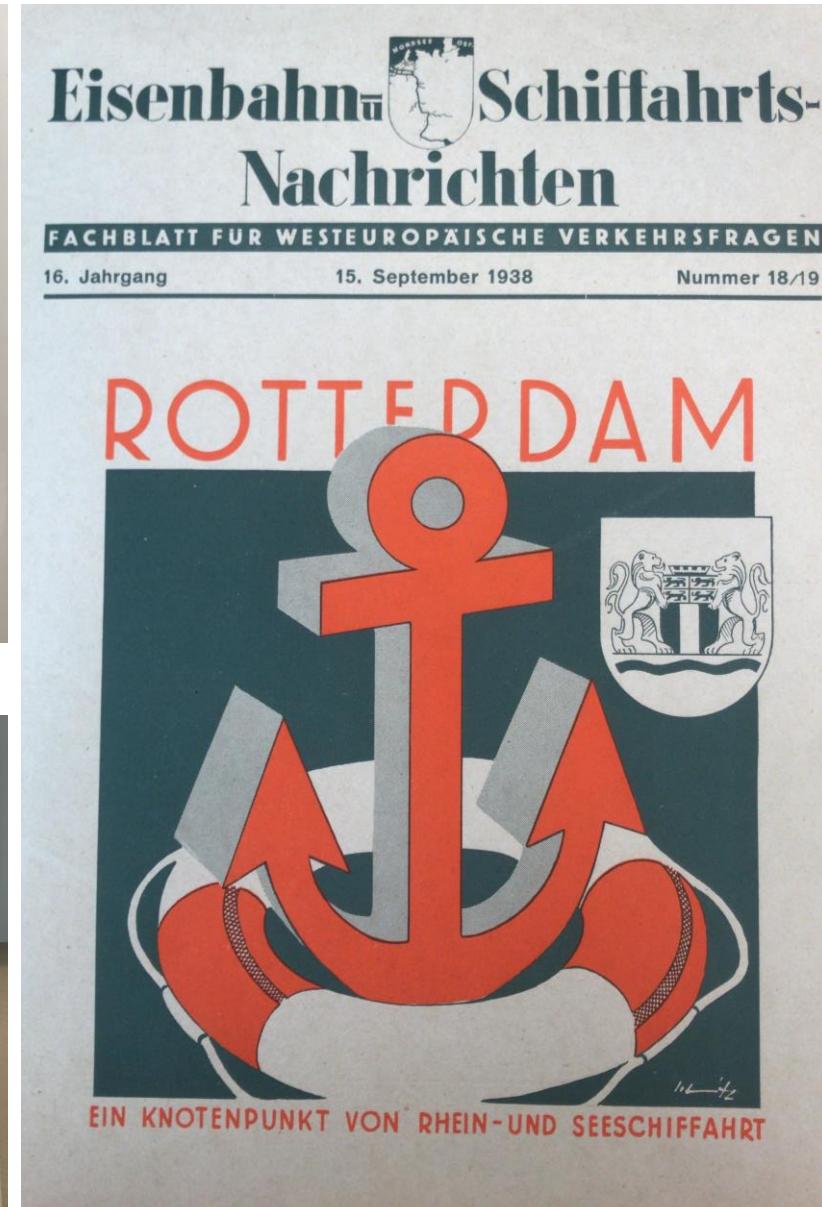
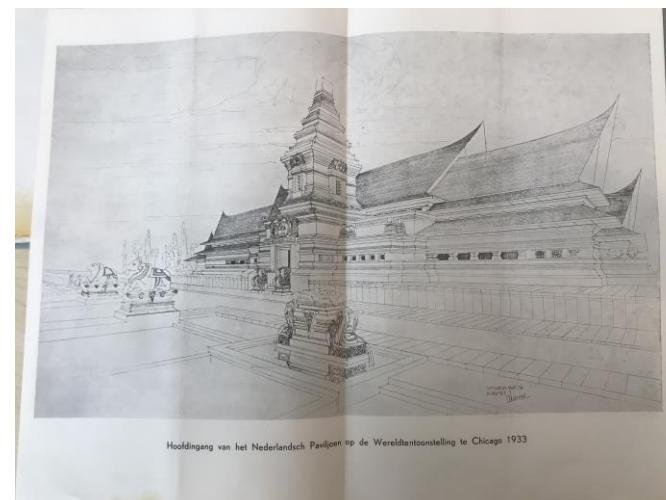
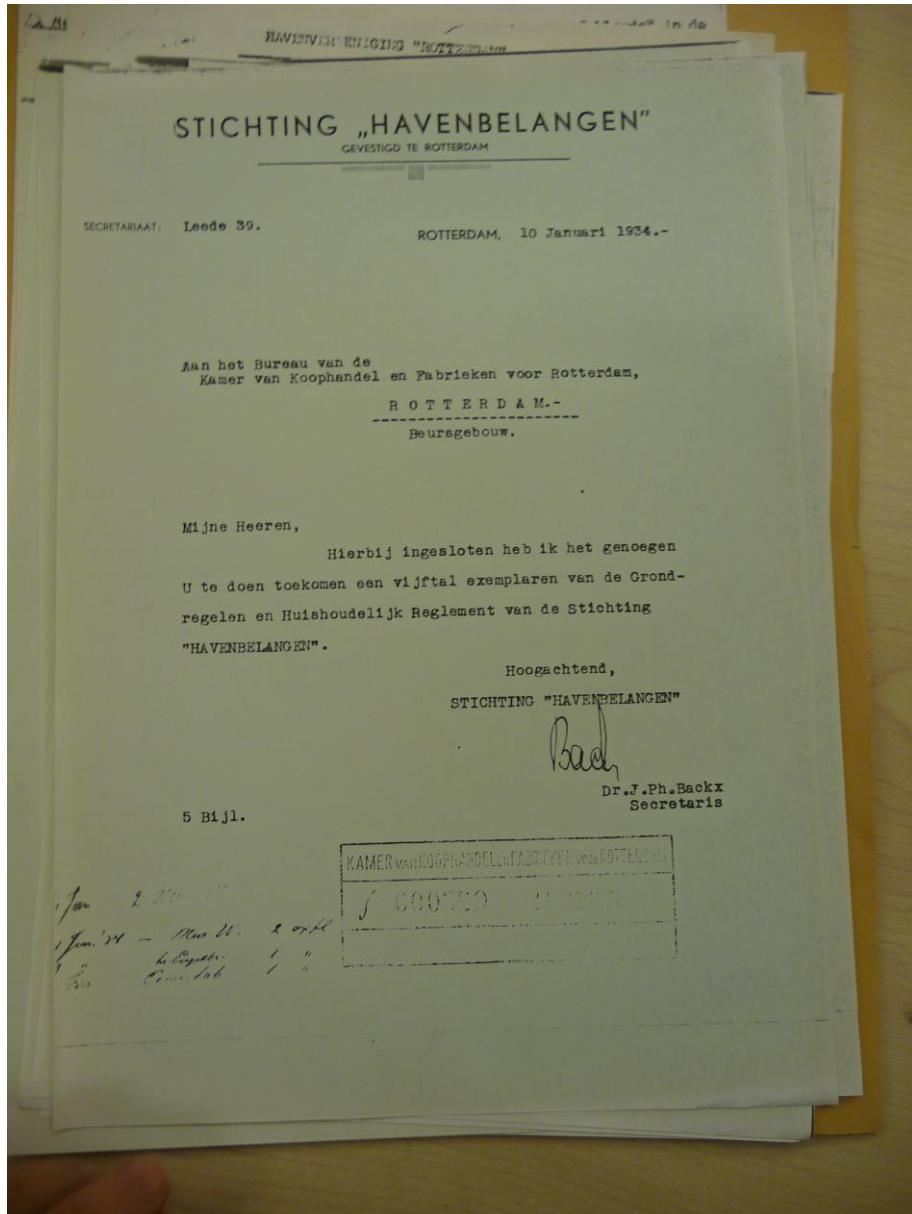
Coll. ||

Den Heer Voorzitter van de Commissie voor Algemeene Zaken,

Rotterdam.

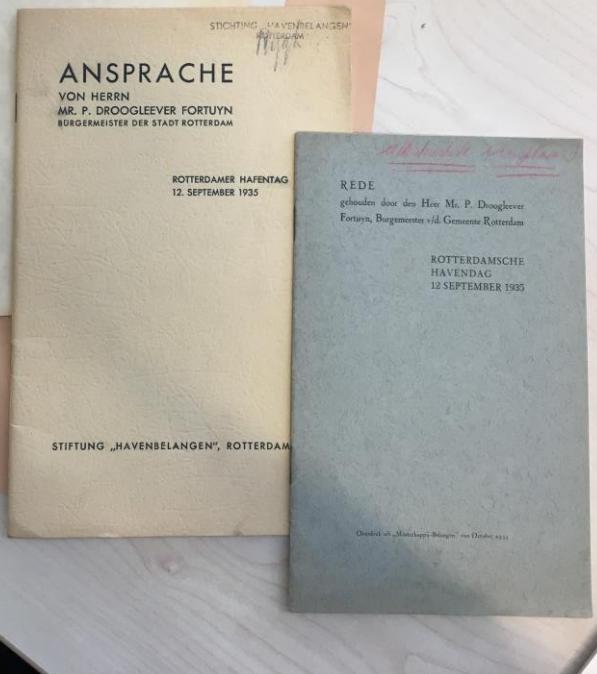
“In the meantime, we should not wait...”

September, 1932



Rotterdamsche Havendag

12-IX-1935

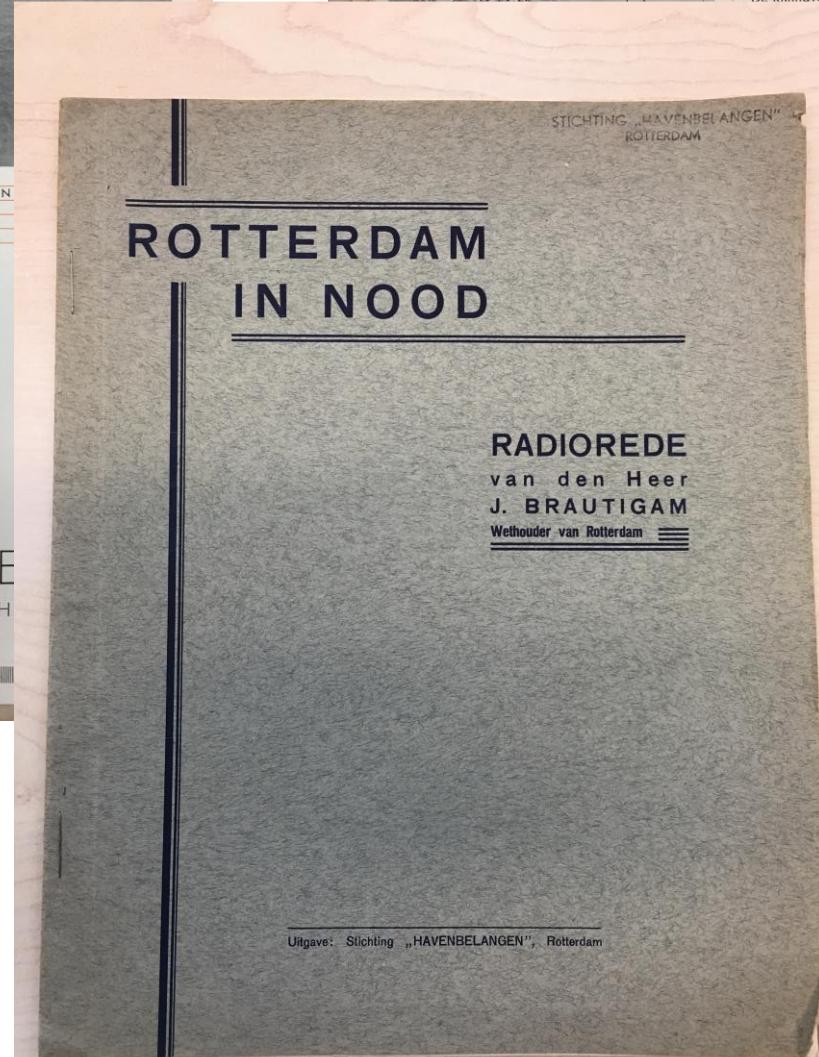


Day of the Port,
1935

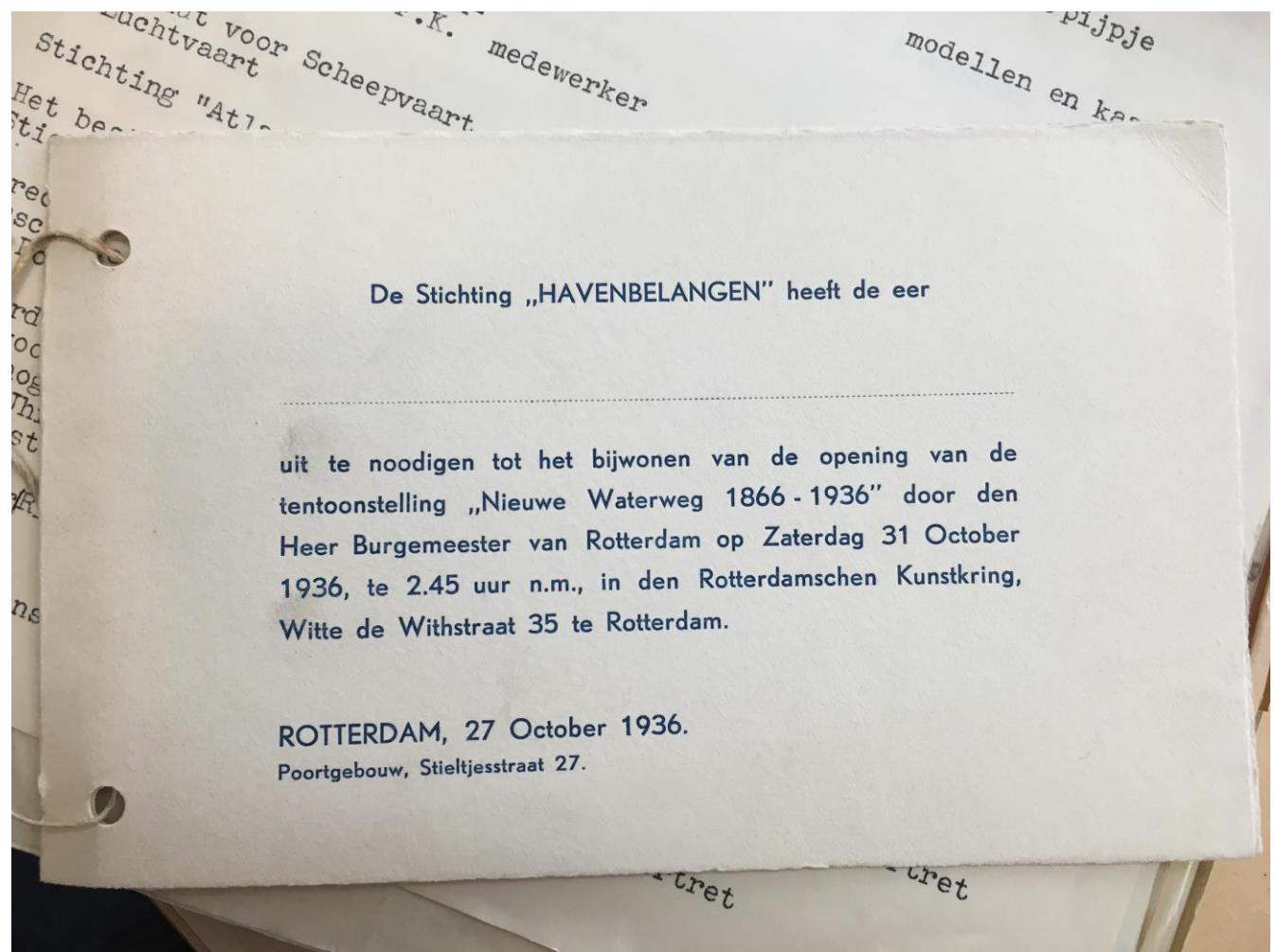
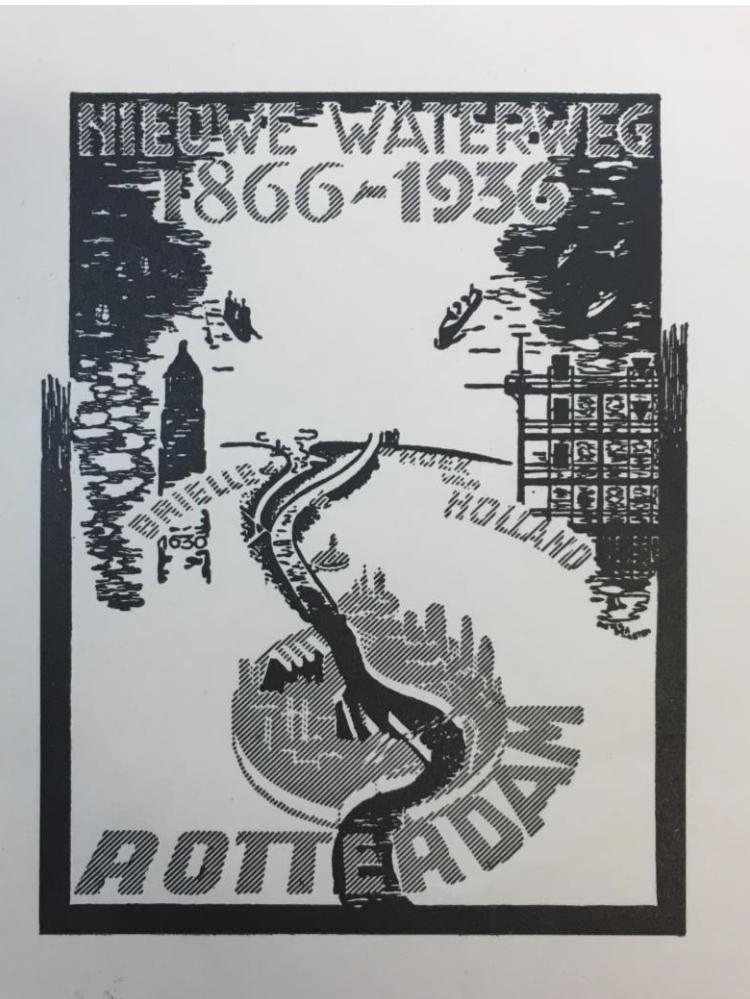


DE HAVEN VAN ROTTE ONTWIKKELING, UITRUSTING EN ECONOMISCH

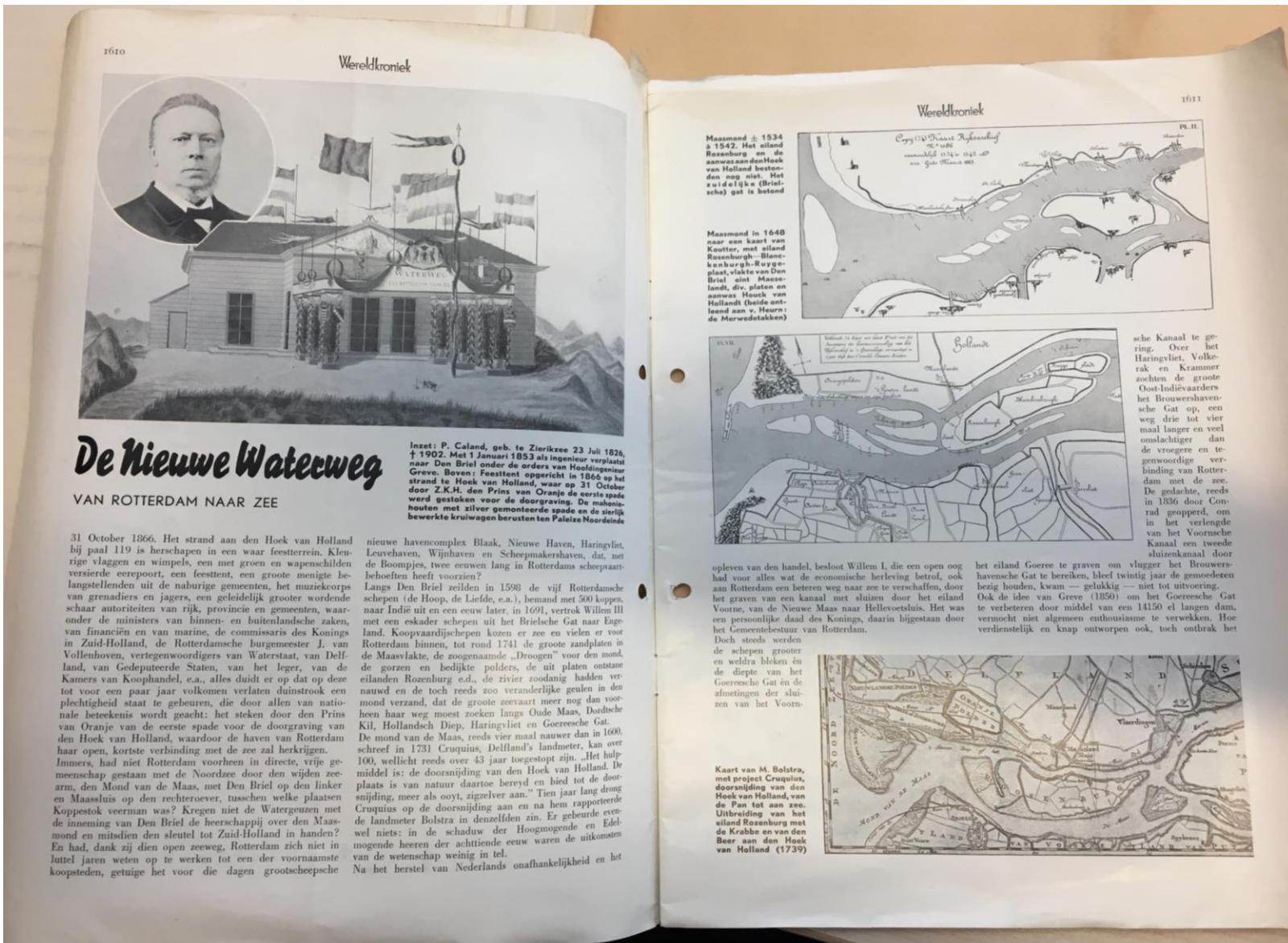
"Rotterdam
in distress"
1935



INHOUD VAN DEN TEKST	
Titel	Blz. 1
De stroomgebieden van Rijn en Maas	2
De toegang naar zee	3
De vrije Rijn	4
De schakel tuschen zee en achterland	5
De oude havenstad	6
De bruggen over de rivier	7
Binnen- en Spoorweghavens	8
De Riithaven	9
haven	10
umterreinen	11
pleumhaven	12
kgoedhavens	13
an het grondgebied	14
van havens	15
o palen	16
bestaande uit caissons	18
commodatie	19
.....	20
.....	21
ooren	22
.....	23
.....	24
.....	25
.....	26
oor opslag, outilage	27
.....	28
particulier initiatief	29
.....	30



1936: The New Waterway Exhibition



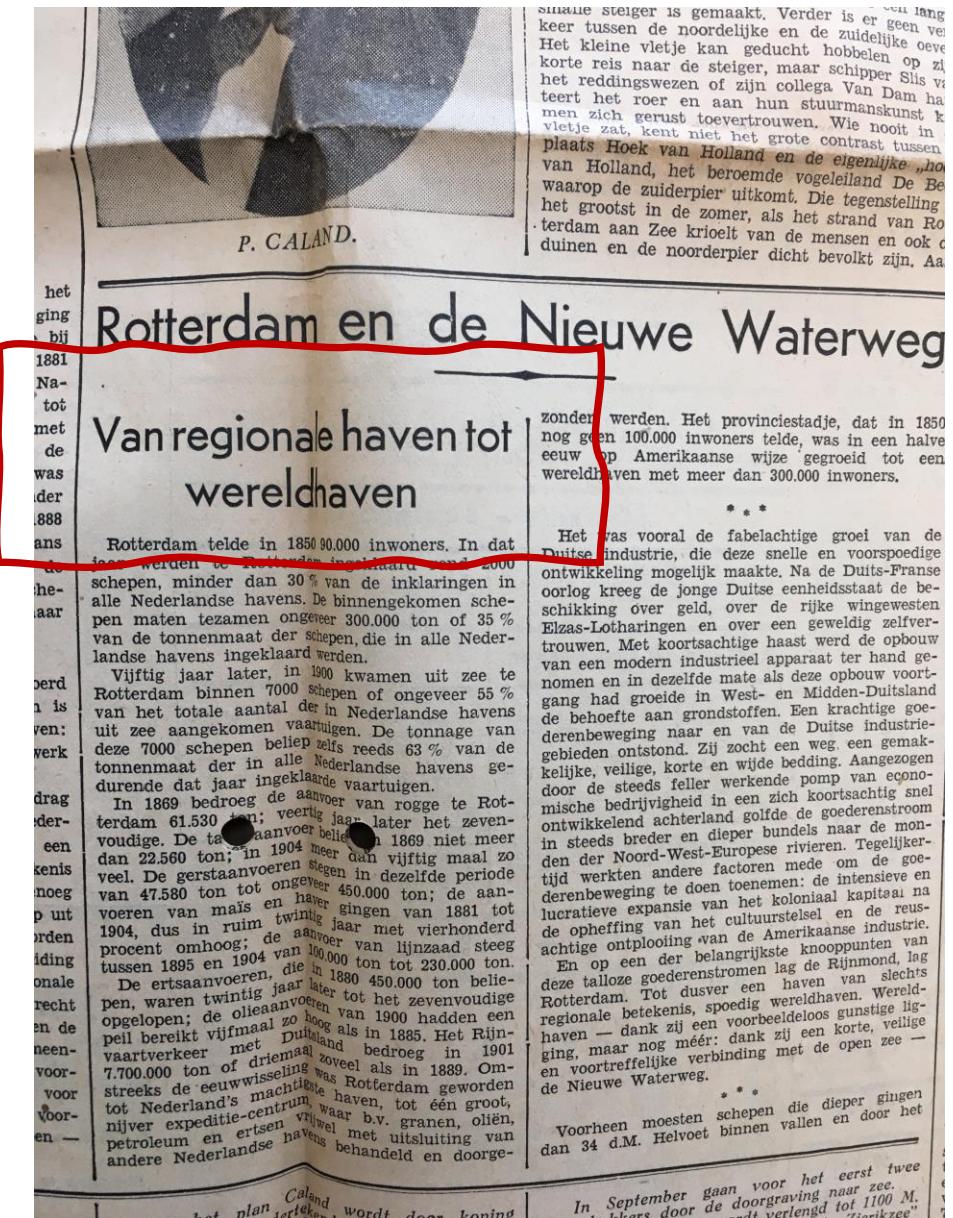
Values of the Waterway

“From regional port to world port”

“The Waterway meant a strengthening of **civic power** and **confidence in times of adversity**, moreover, an ever more deeply rooted awareness of the

tight bond of our
1. port city with our
2. country in its
3. global relations.”

W.A. Engelbrecht, *Rede Ter Gelegenheid van Den Aanvang van Het Werk Der Doorgraving van Den Hoek van Holland* (Rotterdam: Kamer van Koophandel en Fabrieken, 1936).







STADIONSPEL
**de waterweg
heroverd!**
Onder algemene en artistieke leiding van Carel Briels
Geschreven door A. den Doolaard - Koorleiding Eduard Flipse
Alléén kaartverkoop aan
het Secretariaat Coolsingel/Doelwater
en het Stadion Feijenoord
30 AUGUSTUS EN 1 SEPTEMBER (KONINGINNEDAG) TE ROTTERDAM: AANVANG 15.30 UUR



GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE LAST 75 YEARS, DUE TO THE "NEW WATERWAY" FROM ROTTERDAM TO THE SEA.

The hydraulic engineer Caland came to the rescue of the Maas city in 1858. The stroke of genius whereby Caland, as it were, became the creator of modern Rotterdam, was to have an open, straight and therefore short connexion from Rotterdam to the North Sea thus bringing it once more within 20 miles of Rotterdam. A channel accessible to the biggest ships of the time, it was nothing more nor less than the reopening of the northern channel of the broad mouth of the Maas as it existed earlier. The "Hook" of Holland, that formidable "spit of sand" shooting out from the Dutch coast, which had closed up and made shallow the wide river mouth, had to be dug through again. "Stream channeling" i.e. the natural working of ebb and flood was to hollow out and keep open the new waterway to the sea still known as the "Nieuwe Waterweg".

After 14 years of work and an expenditure of 15 million gilders, choking sand deposits threatened to bring about the failure of this daring work. The depth in the mouth, 11 feet at ebb tide in 1875, fell to 8 feet on the bar between the two heads in 1878: half of what had been hoped. Doubt arose. But, it was argued, was Rotterdam to be eliminated and cut off from the rising flood of world commerce? Discouraged, some began to think of resorting to sea lock gates. But even if these lock gates had not cut off Rotterdam from the sea they would, nevertheless (apart from the loss in time for each arriving and departing ship), have shut up city and harbour within its narrow confines. The plans for an open, free channel were therefore continued. The wide North Sea itself was to bring ships to Rotterdam.

At last, in 1885, the required depth of 17 feet at low tide from Rotterdam to the sea was achieved in the "Nieuwe Waterweg". In 1895 it was 22 feet. Gradually it increased to 25 ft., to 30 ft. and to 33 ft. Now, at low water, it is 36 feet and an average of 5½ feet more at high tide. In 1949 a start was made with the restriction of silting up the neighbouring land, special attention being paid to the damming up of the mouth of the Briel, which, although still 1,000 yards wide, was completely shallow. Thus the centuries-old "wide mouth of the Maas", was removed in its entirety and firmly kept in check between the piers at the Hook of Holland of Caland's New Waterway from Rotterdam to the sea.

It was a completely safe channel, suitable in all circumstances for even the biggest ships of our time and realised at a cost of 53 million gilders for construction and improvement and, up to and including 1938, 25 million gilders for maintenance. The work of three quarters of a century, it was an open channel without a bridge or a lock gate and was free of ice in the winter.

Presently an ingenious radar security system was to guarantee safe piloting

for ocean-going vessels even in the thickest mist and the most darkness. From the North Sea it now takes hardly 1½ hours, for every ship, to reach the quays and moorings of Rotterdam. A century ago less than 2,000 ships (to be exact 1,940) docked every year; small-sized ships according to our present ideas entered the Nieuwe Waterweg, 10 years after the depth or more had been reached. There were more than 10,000 in 1910; more than 1926 and 1929; 17,000 in 1938.

Shipping tonnage rose even further; the ships grew continually in size. Whereas in 1850 the whole of the incoming Rotterdam sea traffic was only 350,000 net registered tons, and the first million n.r.t. was reached in 1870, 5 million n.r.t. entered the Nieuwe Waterweg in 1896. In 1907 there were 10, in 1913, 13, in 1926 during the British coal strike, there were even 22 million n.r.t. More than a hundred times as many as a century previously. In one single week half as much again in shipping space as in a whole year in 1850.

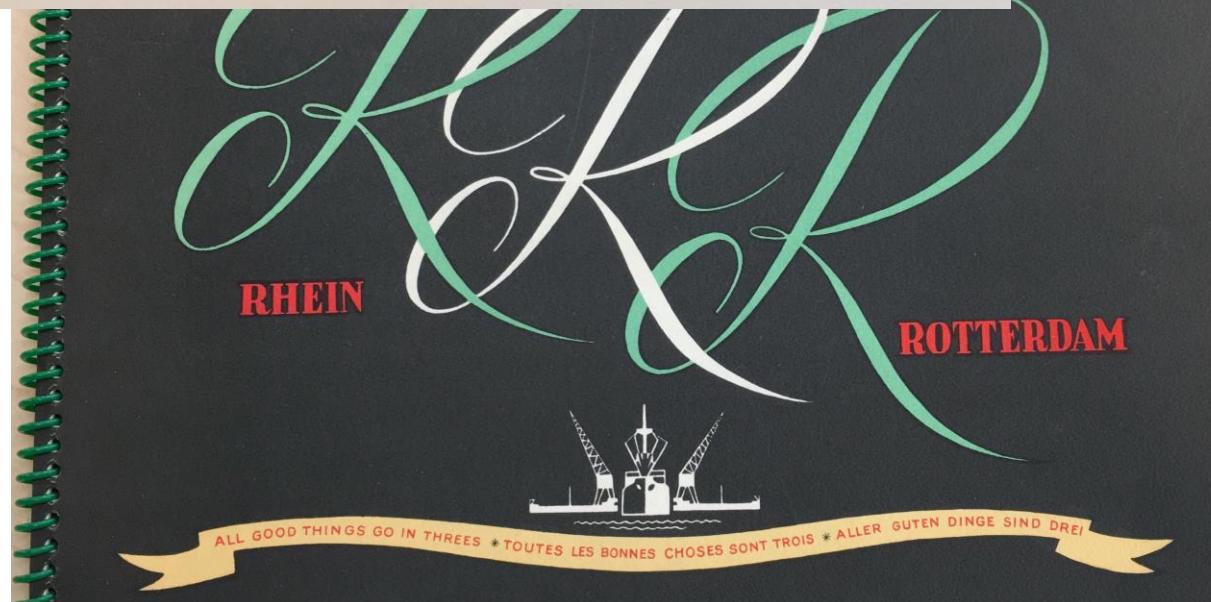
The Nieuwe Waterweg started as "a daring work" and ended as a success. Successful in all respects; very much more so than the enthusiasts of the first hour and the preservers of the second had ever dared dream. It was the fruit of the united and undaunted efforts of a far-seeing courageous merchant spirit, a wise national policy, and the skill of Dutch hydraulic engineers.

The Rotterdam "city of water" of 1870, covering an area of hardly 250 acres, has since expanded, in three quarters of a century, into a harbour which, at the turn of the century, covered 625 acres, excluding the river but including water, quays, harbours and industries. It covered no less than 3,750 acres when the Second World War broke out and 4,500 acres including the harbours and quays of Schiedam and Vlaardingen which grew along with it.

The expanse of the whole Rotterdam area (excluding the Hook of Holland, which belongs to Rotterdam) increased, by successive annexations, from 4 square miles three quarters of a century ago to 24 square miles in 1914 and 55 square miles at present. Including the adjoining harbour municipalities of Schiedam and Vlaardingen 75 square miles. A "harbour province" within the state!

The population increased sixfold in three quarters of a century. To take only the 120,000 Rotterdammers of 1870: their number increased fivefold in this short time to more than half a million. In spite of the destruction of the heart of Rotterdam, the city now has 700,000 inhabitants. The interdependent harbour complex of Rotterdam, Schiedam and Vlaardingen has more than 800,000. Their source of prosperity is the harbour, their harbour, with its traffic, trade and industry.

The hydraulic engineer Caland came to the rescue of the Maas city in 1858. The stroke of genius whereby Caland, as it were, became the creator of modern Rotterdam, was to have an open, straight and therefore short connexion from Rotterdam to the North Sea thus bringing it once more within 20 miles of Rotterdam. A channel accessible to the biggest ships of the time, it was nothing more nor less than the reopening of the northern channel of the broad mouth of the Maas as it existed earlier. The "Hook" of Holland, that formidable "spit of sand" shooting out from the Dutch coast, which had closed up and made shallow the wide river mouth, had to be dug through again. "Stream channeling" i.e. the natural working of ebb and flood was to hollow out and keep open the new waterway to the sea still known as the "Nieuwe Waterweg".



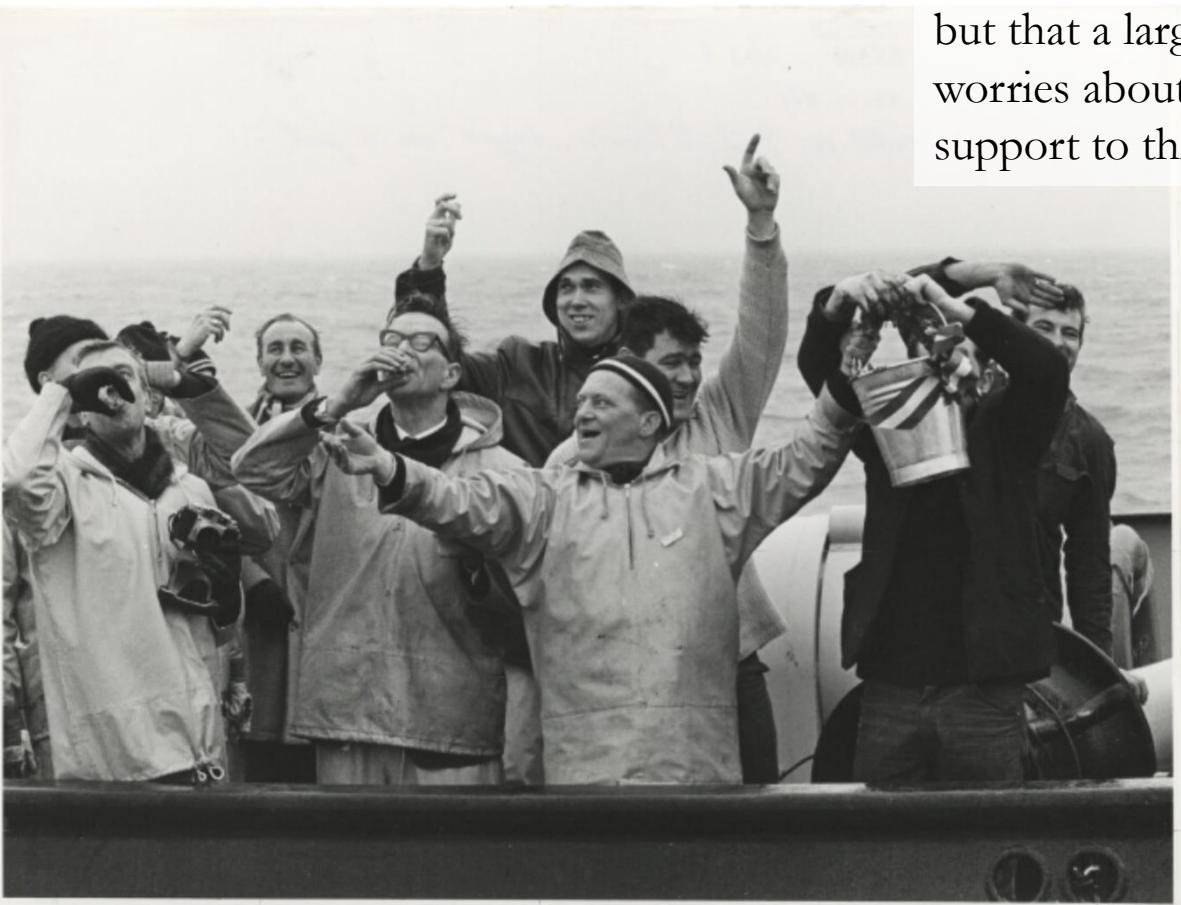
Booklet from 1950, published by *Stichting Havenbelangen*

Post-war reconstruction: J.A. Ringers

“As with a finger of immortality a line has been drawn on the map of the Netherlands, which points from Rotterdam to the sea and which will forever remind us of the creator of the Waterway, of the actual founder of **new Rotterdam**.”

J.A. Ringers, *Caland en de betekenis van zijn werk voor Rotterdam*, 1953.

1967: the “Oil Ditch”



“We want to show that our Mayor is capable of finishing the ditch in time, but that a large number of citizens is worried about the State holding off its support to this project”

(burgemeester W. Thomas ons in vakantie). „We willen daarmee aantonen, dat de burgemeester van Rotterdam niet alleen in staat is zijn streven om die geul op tijd klaar te krijgen, maar dat ook een groot aantal burgers ongerust is over het lange uitblijven van overheidssteun voor dit project”, aldus ondernemer A. H. van Ommen, een van de leden van S.P.E.

„Op onze laatste vergadering die als onderwerp politiek en economie had, is dit plan geboren. Ik zeg met nadruk dat hier geen enkele politieke bedoeling achtersteekt. Onze leden zijn mensen met verschillende politieke opvattingen, maar over deze zaak zijn ze het allemaal eens: het gaat hier om een welvaartsbelang”.

Met een technisch ingewikkeld apparaat — uitgedacht door een van de leden — zal men morgen in volle zee proberen wat zand van de Noordzeebodem omhoog te halen. Dat gebeurt in de buurt van het door de gemeente Rotterdam gegraven proefvak. De gehele actie wordt door de S.P.E.-leden uit eigen zak betaald. „Bij het baggeren maken we onder andere gebruik van een pijpje, verklapt geul-graver Van Ommen. Het emmertje zand leveren we nog dezelfde dag op het stadhuis af”.

25 ROTTERDAM

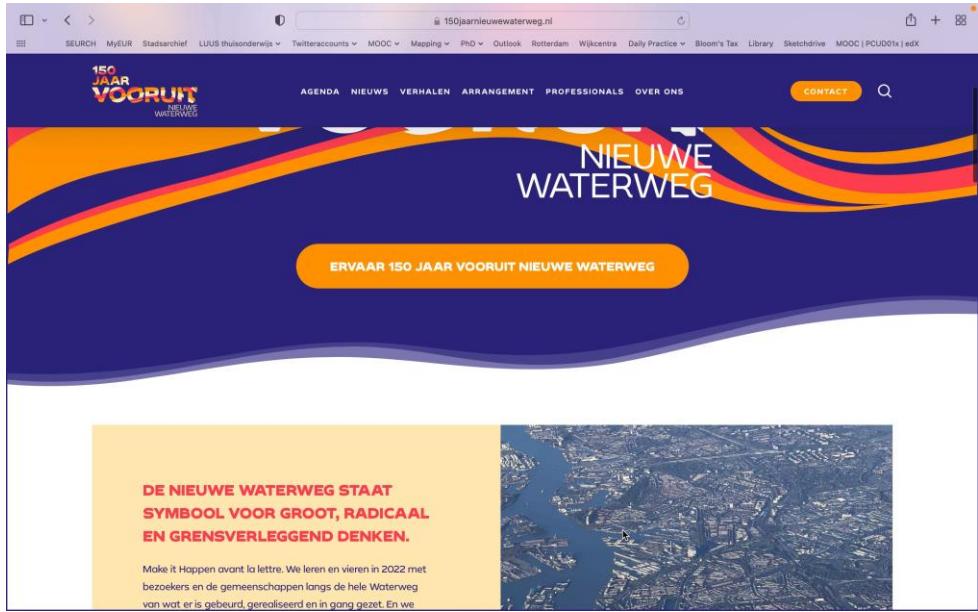
De oliegeul heeft ook al in een van de gemeentelijke publikaties een kunstzinnige uitbeelding gekregen. Het baggerwerk kan met moderne zuigers al tot 25 meter gaan.

1970: Countering the narrative



House of birth of Pieter Caland in
Zierikzee (Zeeland),
**“designer of the New
Waterway and therefore
founder of
Rotterdam’s wealth”.**
Plaque placed in 1972.





“150 years Forward”

“WHERE THE RIVER USED TO CONNECT THE PORT, IT NOW CONNECTS THE PEOPLE.”

“The New Waterway is a **symbol** of grand, radical and groundbreaking thinking”



Rituals (Cf. Ter Kuile 2015)

Values

Community

Collective identity

(Invented & re-invented)
traditions (Hobsbawm etc)

(Invented) **transitions** (Ybema 2014)



Groene Transitiie



Conclusions & questions

Reading the Waterway offers new perspectives on “the True, the False and the Fictive” (Ginzburg 2012) of the development of Rotterdam as a port city:

1. Caland’s *hero’s journey* is built into the city’s historiography as an origin myth for “new” or “modern” Rotterdam
2. Advertising/propaganda – notably by the Havenbedrijf/Port Authority as a modern mythmaking process
3. The plea for national investment rhymes several times (Depression, Reconstruction, Dredging)

This narrative has been recycled, but can it be de- and reconstructed?

Can it be retold with the same values, but with a different – more inclusive – outcome?

