

# Vincent in Drenthe



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Ruud Hobo

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

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

*The photos in this book were taken by me*

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## 1. Introduction

Vincent van Gogh lived and worked in Drenthe for twelve weeks in 1883. During his stay there, he sent one letter to his parents and 22 letters to his brother Theo. In this book I tell you the story of Vincent's stay in Hoogeveen (three weeks) and Nieuw-Amsterdam (nine weeks) based on these 23 letters. Rather than a report about Vincent's life during that period, this book lets Vincent speak for himself. The story about Vincent's time in Drenthe in 1883 is presented as a conversation Vincent had with an interested listener.

You might wonder, "Only 12 weeks, what could be the great importance of his stay there?" Yet, this relatively short period was important for Vincent van Gogh's development as a painter. In Drenthe, where he felt increasingly lonely, he came to an important realization about himself. What that realization was, you will read in this book.

Of course, we do not know everything Vincent experienced in Drenthe. The letters he wrote provide a limited view. Unfortunately, the letters Vincent received from Theo and his parents are no longer available. In the letters written by Vincent himself, he responds to passages from the received letters. This allows us to infer certain things. We know very little about the meetings and conversations he had. These are events I have filled in myself. This also applies to the conversations he had with his housemate Sien before leaving The Hague. Therefore, the story is a mix of fiction and non-fiction.

You might also wonder, "There are already countless books about Vincent van Gogh, so why this book?" The

inspiration comes from my work at 'The Van Gogh House' in Nieuw-Amsterdam, where I am a volunteer/guide. 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 led me to the idea for this book. Questions like: "Where did Vincent wander in this region? What did he do? Who did he talk to and about what? What did he think of Drenthe?" But also, "Why did he leave?"

As mentioned, we of course have his letters. However, the full story of his daily life in Drenthe cannot be found anywhere. So I started wondering what it would have been like. The result of those reflections is this book. Moreover, very few books have been written about the period Vincent stayed in Drenthe.

Many books have been written about Vincent's life before Drenthe. I will not repeat that in this book. However, it is useful to describe Vincent's situation at the beginning of his Drenthe adventure in 1883.

Vincent had been living in The Hague since the end of November 1881. One day, he met Sien Hoornik there. She had been thrown out of the house by the man who had made her pregnant. She already had a daughter whose father is unknown. Sien had an alcohol problem and was a prostitute. In short, only misery. Vincent took care of her, and Sien became his model. After a while, they started living together. In the eyes of his painter friends and his family, this was a very wrong choice. He was living together unmarried, and with a prostitute. That was not done. His so called friends broke completely with Vincent. Only Anthon van Rappard remained friends with him. When he told his family that he

and Sien wanted to get married, Vincent's family revolted. They were strongly opposed. Vincent was put under heavy pressure by his family to leave Sien. They even urged him to leave The Hague. He was strongly advised to go to Drenthe. Many painters he knew had already been to Drenthe and spoke highly of it.

Vincent was already thirty years old and still did not have a clear idea of what he wanted to do with his life. Up to that point, his life had been a series of failures. Vincent was therefore faced with 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 suffered from depressive moods. At that time, this was called melancholy. The only effective way for Vincent to suppress the melancholy was to find distraction, for example, through painting.
- Since his dismissal from Goupil on April 1, 1876, Vincent had never earned money on his own. As a result, he was always dependent on what Theo and sometimes his father gave him. He was always short of money. This meant he could not always paint and draw, which allowed the melancholy to resurface.

What you just read is of course all in the past. It is more than 140 years ago. Is there anything left from that time? In other words, is there in Drenthe anything from Vincent's time that is worth visiting? 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, where there are also sod huts and much more to see. And what about Vincent's lodging places, such as Scholte's inn? It is worth investigating. Read the chapter "October 2023" to find out more.

Enjoy reading.

Ruud Hobo - Drenthe November 2022 / October 2024

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

Let me introduce myself. My name is Alex de Goede, 42 years old. I am a traveling salesman by profession. I trade in anything that can make a profit. This can be trading in wood, but also, for example, in peat, grain, or gin. Basically, anything 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 find this industry worth investigating further. After all, man has to be open to new opportunities.

Without boasting too much, I can say that I am quite good at my job. I know where there is demand or where it is almost certain to arise, and I capitalize on that. For example, I have set up a lucrative trade in peat. Amsterdam has a growing need for peat, and I have good agreements with the landowners 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 Nieuw-Amsterdam will yield me a nice profit again this year. Because things are going so well financially, I don't have to work six days a week from early morning until late at night. This gives me time for other things. For example, I am interested in art, especially painting. Not to trade in, but out of pure interest. I am also interested in the story behind a painting or the life of the painter. Therefore, 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 nicely combine my trip with a visit to that museum. Due to an ever-expanding railway network, many places are easier to reach. And much faster and more comfortably than by horse and carriage, as in my early years as a traveling salesman.