

The new Mission House

“However, where do we now find the mission house itself?

Don't be shocked, dear friend, who perhaps have come here with all kinds of splendid ideas in your mind, when I show you between the church of Steyl and the river Maas a house painted over with green, lime paint, 46 meters long; of which only 16½ meters have two-storeys, with eight windows in the front. The other 29½ meters, together with a small additional building of 3½ meters width, are one-storey and, besides three rather bad doors and some small windows which had fallen into decay, have 2 wide doorways such as you see in farm barns.

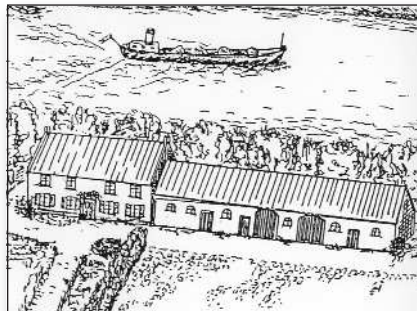
The longer, one-storey part is the out-building, consisting of stable, barn and brewery. Its walls are about 11 feet high, thin and dilapidated. They afford important rooms; but it will be quite an art to make something useful out of it without investing much, which the building is not worth. Things are much better with the two-storey residential building which has eight windows at both the front and the back and ten rooms in all. This part will have to be completely taken into use at first; however, we hope also to be able to make relatively good use of the out-buildings for some time to come, particularly since such an institution, if it continues to grow, will soon need many rooms, and new buildings cannot be immediately built nor can they straightaway be lived in.

That dear Reader is the German – Dutch Mission House; it is like the project itself, which is only just coming into being and which awaits from the future what it is to become.

In this it is certainly like the newborn child whose whole hope lies in the future, and which at first is only great in its needs. And as you gladly allow him to cry to make his needs known, one may also understand the great needs of this young child in order to give him a helping hand. Even if a child is weak and in need of help, it still has the potential to grow eventually into a strong man. Hopefully we, too, are not totally lacking in this potential.” An advantage of the new mission house is that it is surrounded by a vegetable garden and a good number of trees “so that there is not only space for necessary extensions, but also kitchen needs are met and people can go for a stroll. Furthermore, there is the absolutely beautiful location at the Maas which here has high banks with lush meadows. ...”

(To be continued)

The Mission House 1875



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Missionshaus Steyl | Postfach 2460 | D-41311 Nettetal ■ Missiehuis St. Michaël | St. Michaëlstr. 7 | NL-5935 BL Steyl/Venlo

The Arnoldus Family Story

In our “Arnoldus Family Story” we have already heard of Steyl as the home of the new mission house. Arnold Janssen informed the readers of his mission magazine “*Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote*” (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart) of the name “Steyl” only in the magazine’s July 1875 issue, after the sales contract for the house had been signed.

In the article “*Das neue Missionshaus der auswärtigen Missionen für Deutschland, Österreich und die Niederlande*” [The new mission house for foreign missions for Germany, Austria and the Netherlands] he described for his readers where Steyl was located and how they could get there, as well as what kind of building the new mission house was. This issue of “The Arnoldus Family Story” will bring a few excerpts from this article.

The New Mission House for Foreign Missions for Germany, Austria and the Netherlands

Prayer for the new mission house

Arnold Janssen began the article with a prayer for the new mission house which at the same time sounds like a vision statement:

“On the graced day of June 16th of this year, a hitherto provisional sales contract became final. It concerns the future German – Austrian – Dutch mission house. With God’s help it has finally gained a piece of land along with a few bricks and thus a dwelling place, in regard to which one can pray:

‘ Lord, look graciously upon this new holy place which is not destined for profit or ordinary earthly interests but for the highest act here on earth. It is to be dedicated to You, the supreme Lord of the universe Himself, it is to serve the spread of your divine kingdom unto the farthest pagan countries. Here you are to reign, totally and fully according to the principles of your holy and sanctifying doctrine.- Here men are to grow up who are completely consecrated to you, body and soul, with their money and possessions, totally, until their last breath – men who, following in the footsteps of the holy apostles and so many missionaries of other countries undertake, without regard for their own honour,

their own safety and comfort, yes with the gift of their own life, to carry the honour of the divine name and the light of your saving doctrine to those peoples who are still in the darkness of spiritual death and who are waiting for the coming of the spiritual helpers, waiting already for so long. What a great and holy thought! May the Lord who gave grace to the initiative and the beginning, grant that grace is not lacking for the completion, and that all pious people help us towards that end with prayers and donations; because without their help, those who have begun the project are powerless'."

Where is the new mission house to be found?

"But now, what kind of a house is it and where on earth can it be found?" With this question Fr. Arnold continues his article. At that time he himself lived in Kempen and, therefore, he first gave a short description of the district of Kempen and then he wrote:

"At present Kempen is surrounded by railways from five directions and easily accessible."

From Cologne, "the great traffic centre of northwestern Germany to where all roads lead," one gets by train "in 1½ to 1⅔ hours to Kempen... From Kempen ... a side railway track leads West to Venlo in Holland.

From Kempen to Venlo it is a short, pleasant journey through the northern part of the district of Kempen, and soon one arrives at the last Prussian town of Kaldenkirchen and from there it goes to Venlo.

Venlo is already a town with a true Dutch character. All the signs are in the Dutch language; ... but a German can manage there easily. The currency most in circulation is German. Many German railway officials are stationed there. German is understood everywhere and some [Dutch people] are even able to answer in German. Foreigners are treated in a friendly manner, the priest is greeted by everybody, even by the military; for Venlo, like the whole region, that is the Dutch provinces of Limburg (diocese of Roermond) and North Brabant (diocese of Hertogenbosch), is a Catholic town and is proud to be Catholic. Venlo is not very big; the town population is over 8000, the parish has around 10,000 souls; but it seems to have a future. Since the Dutch State extended the National Railway here and built a bridge across the river Maas, the town's importance grows year by year. At present Venlo has become a true railway junction, ... The three big railway companies of Northwestern Germany, the Cologne-Minden (Venlo-Hamburg), the Rhenish and the Bergisch-Maerkisch companies, have reached out until here, in order to connect with the Dutch railway network.

In addition there is the Maas water route which, coming from Metz, Liege, Maastricht and Roermond, passes Venlo, joins the Rhine further on in Holland

and flows near Rotterdam into the sea. Because of all these connections Venlo is easily accessible from Holland as well as from Germany.

It is near to this town where hopefully the beginning is to be made with the mission house, which for a long time has been generally recognized as necessary. Dear Reader, please accompany me from Venlo one hour southwards to the small village of Steyl."

From Venlo to Steyl

"Steyl" is the name of the place where the new mission house will be located. Let us follow Arnold Janssen on the way from Venlo to Steyl. He writes:

"Imagine we had come [to Venlo] with the Rhenish railway from Cologne via Kempen or with the Bergisch - Maerkisch from Paderborn, Duesseldorf, Trier, Luxembourg or Aachen via [Mönchen] Gladbach or with the Venlo-Hamburg railway from Osnabrueck or Muenster via Wesel, then in Venlo we first have to go through customs. But that is not all that bad if you don't carry anything on which customs and excise duty is imposed. Nobody is asked to present his passport. ...

Once we have passed customs, we can immediately travel with the Dutch National Railway to Tegelen which is only 15 minutes from Steyl. However, when the weather is good, it is as pleasant to take the one hour walk to that little village of Steyl. If you wish, you can make a detour through friendly Venlo. Otherwise you turn left immediately, passing the Dutch National Railway and leaving Venlo to your right. In that way you soon reach that spot where the southbound, beautiful national route leaves the town. Having arrived here you turn left and follow the route to the south. At the same time you have time to look around to the right and to the left. Immediately to your right you now have the river Maas. Whilst you usually don't see it, since it is lying too low, you do notice all the more clearly the bridge across the Maas and on the other side the village of Blerick. The Dutch National route... leads after about a half hour walk to the village of Tegelen. ... Having left the village of Tegelen we see to our right a nice, friendly tower: it is the church tower of Steyl, the pride of every inhabitant of this place. From Tegelen you reach Steyl in 20 minutes. A pretty field path leads there..."

Steyl

"Steyl is a small place, numbering perhaps not even 500 inhabitants. It belongs to the parish of Tegelen and the Tegelen mayoral district includes the villages of Tegelen and Steyl together. However, Steyl has its own church with a rector for the church services, as well as its own school and its own teacher." There is also a road which leads from Steyl to Kaldenkirchen "which is only a good hour away".