

A collection with a princely touch.

A cultural-historical assessment of the Wassenaar Municipal Fire Brigade Museum (the Van der Mark fire brigade collection)

Introduction

The Municipal Fire Brigade Museum is located in the Wassenaar town hall, in the De Paauw House dating from 1747. Following a planned renovation of the town hall, the Fire Brigade Museum will not return to this location, and no other location is currently in consideration. The question arising from this situation, and the reason Korpora, Public Safety Heritage, became involved, is what this means for the Fire Brigade Museum and, in particular, for the collection. After all, the collection is the beating heart of the museum.

Before making plans for the collection, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of its value and significance. Therefore, a cultural-historical assessment of the collection of the Wassenaar Municipal Fire Brigade Museum (i.e., the Van der Mark collection) has been conducted. This concerns an old historical collection assembled by one person, which largely gives the collection its value. The first and largest part of this cultural-historical valuation is therefore a brief historical overview of the most important facts in this case.

The second part consists of the actual valuation, based on the method developed by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, with which Korpora collaborates closely, including in the field of fire brigade heritage.

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1. Firefighter, contractor, and architect

On October 1, 1923, a "small, yet carefully assembled, fire department museum" was established on the top floor of a building on Zuylen van Nijeveltstraat in Wassenaar, which, in that year's era of the so-called police fire department, housed both the police station and the fire station. It was an exhibition of the fire department collection of Gerardus Jacobus van der Mark (1866-1946), intended to provide the most complete historical overview possible of the development of the Wassenaar fire department. The collection could be viewed by appointment and, as far as is known, was the first fire department museum in the Netherlands.

Van der Mark was himself a firefighter and began his career with the volunteer Wassenaar fire brigade in 1895 as a fire chief, and in 1911 was promoted to chief fire chief and chairman of the fire brigade, a title that was changed to commander on May 5, 1925. Hence Van der Mark's interest in the subject.

However, Van der Mark came from a family that had already owned a business for two hundred years around 1900 and trained as a constructor in Leiden and also qualified as an architect. Van der Mark built extensively in Wassenaar and was a well-known resident.

Van der Mark's collection was initially built with municipal equipment, but he soon received increasing donations from estate owners, private individuals, and other organizations. Van der Mark stated that the core of his collection is that of Prince Frederik van Oranje-Nassau (1797-1881). This son of King William I gathered firefighting equipment at Huize de Pauw, which came into the possession of Van der Mark in 1926. The Van der Mark collection grew into a unique collection of

firefighting objects dating from 1695, and an extensive collection of documentation primarily from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Van der Mark meticulously recorded the donations, which adds enormous value to the objects and collection.

2. Museum owner

Van der Mark regularly achieved high acclaim for his collection from the outset. When the International Fire Brigade Exhibition (I.B.T.) took place in Rotterdam in 1924, his collection was first displayed on the 3 top floor of the Wassenaar police fire brigade building, and Van der Mark submitted an entry that was awarded third prize.

In 1930, Van der Mark again attended the I.B.T., this time collaborating with the Utrecht Fire Brigade Museum. They, the press reported,

sent a large collection of helmets, fire engines, photographs, prints, old regulations, etc. This entry alone is worth a visit to the I.B.T. The fire engine from Huize de Pauw, which Prince Frederik acquired around 1840, will, alongside Merryweather's old Rotterdam steam engine, demonstrate the tools used to extinguish fires in the past. Exhibitions of the collection were also held

In 1931 and 1932 at locations in Wassenaar, where more could be displayed than in the actual museum. In 1932, the collection boasted over "500 objects and manuscripts."

When Van der Mark completed his thirty years with the Wassenaar fire department in 1925, this was not overlooked; quite the opposite. He was honored extensively by the mayor and aldermen, and to top it all off, the mayor announced that the municipal council was providing a subsidy of 75 guilders, "to be spent on the fire department archive already assembled by the jubilarian." The municipality also paid an annual sum of 3,000 guilders for the insurance premium for the municipal portion of the collection.

In 1935 and 1936, there was considerable controversy surrounding the Van der Mark collection. The mayor felt, among other things, that it was desirable for it to become the full property of the municipality to better preserve the valuable collection for posterity. This was preferable to leaving the collection in private hands. A significant factor in this disagreement was a difference of opinion regarding the ownership of the municipal portion of the collection. Van der Mark argued that the objects from the municipality had already been donated to him in 1921, thus before the establishment of the fire brigade museum, with a few exceptions, namely a four-wheeled transport vehicle for fire engines and fire engine 1 with transport and hose cart.

The mayor disagreed, citing the lack of a council resolution on the matter. Furthermore, this was not apparent from the justification for the annual subsidy of 75 guilders that Van der Mark received for supplementing and maintaining the collection. Although Van der Mark's own acquisitions register suggests that a larger portion of the collection was municipally owned, she concluded that the influence and authority over a significant portion of Wassenaar's cultural heritage was inadequate. Regardless, decades later, the collection became municipally owned, managed by the Wassenaar Municipal Fire Brigade Museum Foundation.

3. "Like the Fire Brigade to Utrecht"

Three years after the Fire Brigade Museum in Wassenaar, in 1926, a (national) Fire Brigade Museum opened in Utrecht, although the initiative for that had already been in place for ten years. Despite

the constant lack of space that Van der Mark faced, he initially did not join this initiative. In 1930, Van der Mark did collaborate with his Utrecht colleagues on the I.B.T.

The first national fire museum in the Netherlands.

In 1916, at the initiative of The Hague fire chief C.F.H. Tückermann, the Dutch Association for Fire Brigades and Emergency Services, better known as the Royal (from 1920) Dutch Fire Brigade Association (KNBV), was founded. This association also included a fire brigade museum combined with the association's library. For the latter purpose, Tückermann succeeded in obtaining two fire brigade collections on loan: the collection of W.A. Bickers in Rotterdam and that of H.G. Bom Jr. in The Hague.

The museum subsequently opened its doors on November 17, 1926, in the former Catharijneconvent, an old monastery building. The aforementioned collections were supplemented by various donations and loans from mayors and municipal councils of the four major cities, to which was also added the very extensive fire brigade collection of the Utrecht Fire Brigade Company, founded in 1851.

When the municipality of Wassenaar, in the context of the aforementioned discussion about the Van der Mark collection, discontinued its subsidy to him, he subsequently placed his collection (on loan) with the Fire Brigade Museum in Utrecht. Consequently, Van der Mark attracted considerable attention again in 1936, as his collection was considered a significant acquisition. The press, which paid national attention to the loan, reported:

With this collection, the museum, which was already of great significance, has gained even more value and importance. Mr. van der Mark himself provided the necessary explanation and told us that this important collection had been assembled in Wassenaar since 1923. [...]

The collection is of great significance both for firefighters themselves and for the public. First and foremost, we'd like to mention the fire engine from 1805 from the Benthuisen tower, which now finds a place in the museum's engine room. Besides the many interesting old fire engines, this one is particularly noteworthy.

The largest part of the museum's upper room is now dedicated to the van der Mark collection. Here, you'll find medals, regulations, helmets, leather fire buckets, and highly interesting objects related to firefighting. We were particularly drawn to the old writings, which demonstrate the attention paid to the fire department even in earlier years.

The models on display provide a clear picture of the efforts made in the past to improve equipment. The drawings and objects by Jan van der Heyden are particularly instructive and unique. It's too much to list everything the van der Mark collection actually encompasses, but the fact that the available space had to be used efficiently proves that the museum has gained a great deal. This has greatly enhanced the museum's appeal, and the acquisition will certainly benefit museum visits.

In 1941, however, the Fire Brigade Museum in Utrecht was threatened with closure when the Royal Dutch Fire Brigade (KNBV) was disbanded by the German occupying forces. To prevent the closure of the Fire Brigade Museum, the Ministry of the Interior took over the lease of the Catharijneconvent and the museum's management. The sign above the entrance was then changed to "National Fire Brigade Museum," and in 1944 the museum was forced to close due to the war.

By then, Van der Mark's collection was no longer (completely) present, a huge loss for the museum. Due to the threat of war in the late 1930s, Van der Mark, on behalf of the municipal council, requisitioned all fire engines to be made operational for the Air Raid Protection Service (LBD). Had this not happened, Van der Mark's collection would now most likely have been part of the national collection of the Dutch fire brigade, managed by Korpora.

The Fire Brigade Museum/NBM and the NVI/Korpora.

When the Utrecht Fire Brigade Museum was considered for reopening after the liberation, the municipality terminated the lease. Another location in Utrecht was no longer available, and the collection moved to The Hague for a temporary exhibition. "This morning, the large fire engine from 1870 hobbled through the city behind a moving van," wrote the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad* in May 1948. "Many paused, and the man who remarked: 'That belongs in the museum,' had unknowingly touched on a burning issue." The newspaper lamented the departure after Utrecht had also lost the Railway Museum to Amsterdam during the war. However, that museum would return in 1951 to be located in the Maliebaan Station. This was not the case for the Fire Brigade Museum, which only found a permanent home elsewhere in the Netherlands in 1963, where it remains today.

Partly influenced by the opening of a fire brigade museum in Rotterdam in 1954, the re-established Royal Dutch Fire Brigade Association (KNBV) attempted to revitalize the old museum and find a suitable location. A committee was established for this purpose in 1960. An opportunity arose in Hellevoetsluis, where the Naval Shipyard had been closed and the empty buildings transferred to the municipality. In 1963, the National Fire Brigade Museum opened there in an independent form, as a foundation separate from the KNBV.

When the cooperage gradually became too small, the municipality was again willing to help by making the adjacent building, the Groot Magazijn (Large Warehouse), available.

In 2011, the NBM was incorporated into the National Safety Institute Foundation (NVI) in Almere. The new foundation aimed to collect, preserve, and present to the public tangible heritage related to safety, public order, and emergency services in the Netherlands, thereby contributing to awareness of safe living. From 2014 to 2021, the NVI operated the PIT Safety Museum in Almere.

In 2022, the NVI transformed into Korpora, Heritage Public Safety in Apeldoorn. Korpora is the heritage institute for public safety in the Netherlands and currently encompasses the national collections of the Dutch police, fire department, Civil Defence, and the Red Cross. Korpora is an initiative of the Ministry of Justice and Security, the National Police, the safety regions (NIPV), and the Netherlands Red Cross. Korpora's core task is to manage, provide access to, and acquire physical and digital collections related to public safety in the Netherlands, including emergency services and crisis management.

During the war years, the Van der Mark collection was stored in many places in Wassenaar to protect it from the German occupiers. After several years, it proved impossible to maintain the collection. The collection was stored in the cellars of Huize De Paauw, which was used as the town hall, and remained there for many years. Dampness and mold had their destructive effect.

Until 2010, the collection was managed by the fire department, which was then part of the municipality of Wassenaar. With the regionalization of the fire department, this had to change. Today, the Wassenaar Municipal Fire Brigade Museum Foundation manages the collection, which is owned by the municipality and currently exhibits it in the town hall, located in Huize De Paauw.

4. 'Fire Department Historian'

A significant added value of the Van der Mark collection is that the compiler was not solely interested in 'hardware,' like many collectors, but also in archival materials, documents, publications, images,

and so on, as well as in fire department history, both that of Wassenaar and in general. Van der Mark also conducted his own research, publishing and giving lectures. In 1925, he co-authored a book on the history of the Wassenaar fire department, and in 1931, he gave a comprehensive lecture on 'the history of the fire service,' beginning with the Roman Emperor Augustus, for the Association of Residents of the Wassenaar Parks. This lecture is preserved on written sheets in the collection of the Wassenaar Municipal Fire Department Museum.

Cultural-historical valuation of the Van der Mark collection

It is clear that a collection that is the oldest of its kind in the Netherlands, that is local/regional, and the construction of which began firsthand more than a hundred years ago, and that has been meticulously documented, is of great (cultural) historical value. Nevertheless, it can do no harm to place the Van der Mark collection on the so-called Museum Scale. This new, general and widely applicable method for the valuation of museum objects and collections was published in 2013.

Using this methodology, well-founded choices in collection management can be made and justified. The RCE has developed a new system – in six steps – for the valuation of museum objects and (sub)collections. It is an approach that allows for updating the valuation and that is always based on a reason. Various perspectives are possible from which a collection can be assessed. The methodology offers insight into (new) valuation criteria and describes how value scores should be substantiated with arguments.

Characteristics: • condition; • ensemble; • provenance; • Rarity and representation. Cultural-historical values: • historical; • artistic; • informative. Socio-cultural values: • societal; • experience. Use values: • museum-related; • economic.

On the Museum Scale of the RCE, the Van der Mark collection scores high on eight of the eleven criteria and average on the remaining four (see Appendix I). Therefore, based on the Museum Scale, it is clear that the Van der Mark collection should be highly cherished and that further research is necessary to safeguard it for the future and to keep (parts of) it accessible in some way.

Literature

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Waarderingsformulier

Bijlage 1

De gegevens op dit deel van het formulier worden bij de hele waardering gebruikt en kunnen steeds naar een nieuw formulier worden gekopieerd.

Aanleiding voor de waardering: Toekomst van de collectie
Dient de collectie onderdeel te worden

Uitgevoerd door: Korpora

Vraagstelling voor de waardering: V/d Nat. Coll. Ned. Brandweer

Datum: 3/2/2025

Referentiekader voor de waardering met argumentatie: nationaal niveau
 gebruik desgewenst het referentiekaderformulier als hulpmiddel

Definiëring van het waarderingskader

Beschrijf waaraan een object of (deel)collectie moet voldoen om resp. laag, gemiddeld of hoog gewaardeerd te worden voor de verschillende criteria

| | Criteria | Hulpvragen | Laag | Gemiddeld | Hoog |
|-------------------------|--|--|------|-----------|------|
| Kenmerken | Toestand (staat, conditie, intactheid, materiële authenticiteit, materiële integriteit) | Verkeert object/collectie in goede toestand, is het compleet, is het de originele toestand, is het geschikt voor gebruik? | | X | |
| | Ensemble (compleetheid, eenheid, samenhang, conceptuele integriteit, conceptuele authenticiteit, contextuele authenticiteit) | Bestaat object/collectie uit onderdelen die samen een geheel vormen? Hoe? Is dat geheel compleet? | | | X |
| | Herkomst (documentatie, levensverhaal, biografie, bron, provenance, pedigree) | Is de herkomst van object/collectie bekend, gedocumenteerd, betrouwbaar? | | | X |
| | Zeldzaamheid en representatie (uniciteit, voorbeeldwaarde, prototype, type-exemplaar) | Is object/collectie uniek, in de wereld, in het land, binnen de collectie? Is het in hoge mate representatief voor een bepaalde periode, plaats, stijl, stroming, gebruik, thema, gemeenschap? | | | X |
| Cultuurhistorisch | Historisch (biografisch, sociaal-historisch, natuur-historisch, techniekhistorisch, wetenschapshistorisch) | Is er een associatie met een bepaalde persoon, groep, gebeurtenis, plaats, activiteit in het verleden? Is er een associatie met een bepaalde periode, proces, thema, ontwikkeling, tijdsbeeld of levensstijl? | | | X |
| | Artistiek (kunsthistorisch, architectuurhistorisch, ontwerp, vakmanschap, makelij, decoratie) | Is object/collectie bijzonder om zijn ontwerp, concept, uitvoering, vormgeving, techniek, creativiteit? Is het een representant van een bepaalde stijl, stroming, kunstenaar? | | X | |
| | Informatief (studie, onderzoek, wetenschap, documentatie, referentie, getuigenis, archief) | Wordt object/collectie bewaard vanwege de informatie die het bevat en kan die worden bestudeerd? | | | X |
| Sociaal-maatschappelijk | Maatschappelijk (sociaal, spiritueel, religieus, politiek, symbool, gemeenschap, identiteit) | Vervult object/collectie een functie voor een bepaalde groep of gemeenschap in het hier en nu? Zijn er groepen die nu een bijzondere band met het object hebben? Heeft het een actuele, sociale, religieuze, politieke, maatschappelijke betekenis? Is het object bepalend voor de identiteit van een groep op dit moment? | | | X |
| | Beleving (emotie, zintuiglijk, esthetisch, associatief) | Wekt object/collectie een bepaalde collectieve beleving op? Ademt het een bepaalde sfeer uit, roept het emoties op? Speelt het op een bepaalde manier in op de zintuigen? | | | X |
| | Museaal (presentatie, educatie, onderzoek) | Wordt object/collectie op dit moment gebruikt voor presentatie, educatie, onderzoek? Speelt het een bijzondere rol in de tentoonstelling? Wordt erover gepubliceerd? | | | X |
| Gebruik | Economisch (bedrijfskapitaal, financieel, pr, spin-off, toeristisch, reputatie) | Genereert object/collectie inkomsten voor de organisatie? Trekt het bezoekers? Is het bepalend voor de bekendheid en reputatie van de organisatie? | | X | |
| | Vul in | Omschrijf | | | |
| Aanvullend | Vul in | Omschrijf | | | |
| | Vul in | Omschrijf | | | |

* Waardering

De score van de waardering kan worden toegekend in woorden, bijvoorbeeld 'laag', 'gemiddeld', 'hoog'. Een criterium kan ook niet van toepassing zijn; vul dan n.v.t. in. Geef in het vak ernaast de argumenten voor de score.