

English

MUSEUM
**WILLET-
HOLTHUYSEN**



Audio tour

English



Have you seen the introduction film? If you haven't, we recommend that you do before beginning this audio-tour.

Welcome

Welcome to the Museum Willet-Holthuysen.

This was the beautiful Amsterdam canal house which was home to Abraham Willet and Louisa Holthuysen.

Thanks to the film, you already know the basic story of this extraordinary house. But this tour is also about the meeting of two worlds: the world of the rich and the world of the ordinary people who worked in this house as servants. Indeed, the entire basement floor of this house was the servants' domain. In the 19th century, this room you are now standing in was a storage room.

The servants lived and worked in an age before electricity and if you look towards the doorway,

you can see next to the door a hollow niche in the wall where a candleholder could be placed.

So, as we're already in the servants' domain, let's begin our story here. If you leave this room and turn left, you will see a room at the end of the corridor. That is the servants' room and our next stop on this tour.

Personnel

This was the servants' room, a place where the servants could have a sit down during the day. The Willets usually had a staff of four or five personnel who lived with them in the house, including a manservant, a cook, sometimes a caretaker, and several maids responsible for a variety of cleaning and sewing duties. Louisa also had a lady's maid and there were probably also a kitchen maid and an errand girl who took messages to the couple's friends and acquaintances around the city – a useful function before the invention of the telephone. They may even have had a coachman, although this is not certain.

During the 19th century, employing servants was completely normal for the rich and affluent, and, in the years the Willets lived in this house, their

records show that 26 men and 29 women were employed as servants for one job or another. Most of the servants worked here for less than a year, but there were some notable exceptions.

To hear more about one of these exceptions, press A.

Extra Story: Heinrich Wilhelm Götze

The Willets had a personal cook, which was exceptional even among the wealthy of Amsterdam. His name was Heinrich Wilhelm Götze and he was born in Dresden, Germany. He first joined the household as a manservant at the age of 35, but later became their cook, often joining his employers on their international travels. In around 1881, he married the chamber maid, Anna Schmidt, and they had three children together. But Götze would stay as the Willets cook right up to the death of his mistress, Louisa, having worked for her family for 25 years. There was clearly a good relationship between them, because Götze and his children inherited fourteen thousand guilders upon her death - around a

hundred and eighty thousand Euros in today's money.

Tiles

Just take a moment to look at the tiles on the wall. These are the original ceramic tiles from the days when servants walked these corridors. And near the back door on the right, you can also see a small marble basin featuring a beautifully carved seashell.

By the way, if you get the chance, take a stroll around the garden. We'll talk more about it upstairs where you can see it from the window of Louisa's private tearoom, but it's well worth a look around before you leave.

Also, down the corridor you can see a wooden bench to the side. This is the original bench in the spot as mentioned in the inventory of the house. And if you take a close look at the carved backrest, you might be able to make out in

the woodwork the Willet monogram: 'AW' for Abraham Willet. Afterwards, please continue on into the house and turn left into the kitchen.

Kitchen

The kitchen was the working centre of the household. Preparing and cooking daily meals was a full-time job. The stove was lit first thing in the morning and would stay burning virtually all day, making this room cosy and warm in the winter. The cook first made the Willets breakfasts, which would be taken upstairs by the maids. Depending on their employers' itinerary, lunches and dinners would have to be prepared, especially if their employers were entertaining guests. Festive dinners would be planned days, and sometimes weeks, in advance.

The kitchen as it is furnished now is not, strictly speaking, how it would have appeared in the late 1800s — the years the Willets lived here. For example, instead of the closed fireplace you see here, there was originally a large stove.

Unfortunately, none of the original furnishings have survived and instead this kitchen has been reinterpreted to how it might have looked at the turn of the 18th century. Take a look at the beautiful old tiles, for example. On the fireplace are some tiles illustrated with vegetables such as aubergines or eggplant, and if you look at the plates within the big yellow cupboard, you will see that these vegetables are also illustrated on the dinnerware. Although it looks quite modern, it is actually a 99-piece French dinner service made by the firm Criel Montereau from the mid-19th century.

In addition to cooking meals, the kitchen was also where the household's tin and copper utensils were polished. You can see a copper kettle in the fireplace and a brass samovar on the kitchen surface by the window. For their water supply, the household still relied on rainwater collected in a cistern under the kitchen floor. From there it was drawn up with a pump. This water was

also filtered to make higher quality drinking water. That large, dark grey stone object near the scullery doorway with a white bowl in the top is a 19th century water filter.

Window cleaning spray-gun

To the left of the hearth, you can see a long tube-like object with a lever leaning against the wall. This is a spray-gun for cleaning windows. The maid would fill it up by placing the end in a bucket of water and pulling the lever, which sucked the water into the tube. She could then clean the windows on the first and second floors, as the pressure was enough to spray water a distance of several metres.

This kind of window spray-gun was a normal part of a 19th century kitchen's inventory. However, after the 'Amsterdamsche Glazenwasscherij' window-cleaning company was set up in 1878, professional window cleaners increasingly took over this job from the maids, using retractable ladders to reach the higher windows.

Scullery

This was the scullery which was used for dirty work such as cleaning pots and preparing fish. In many households, the scullery maid spent virtually her whole working life downstairs, cleaning things. The servants adhered to a strict hierarchy in which male servants were usually near the top and female servants near the bottom - and the scullery maid tended to be the lowest of them all. Perhaps the most unpleasant cleaning job of all was to clean the chamber pots which were used as night-time toilets.

Speaking of toilets, Louisa, Abraham and any guests would have used the water closets on the ground floor upstairs. They were primitive by today's standards as the flushing toilet had yet to be invented. And if you were a servant, your toilet would be in one of the outbuildings.

If you look at the wall, you can see a couple of interesting things. The glass object with the orange liquid is a barometer. Can you see how the fluid levels between the bulb and the stem are different? Well, the smaller the difference, the greater the atmospheric pressure which meant rain or even thunder. And, to the side of the glass barometer, are tiles illustrated with a bird in a cage. You may already have noticed some of these in the main kitchen. It was a time when exotic birds were beginning to be brought into the country and it was quite fashionable for the wealthy to have a bird in a cage.

Larder

If you look through the glass of this door, you can see shelves of food. This was the larder and it is located here in the basement hall because it's close to the kitchen without being inside it. As the kitchen was kept warm, food needed to be stored somewhere cooler, especially perishables like fruits and vegetables.

We have reached the end of our tour of the basement floor. The stairway before you marks the border between the servants' domain and the people who owned and lived in this house. Household residents and staff lived strictly separated lives; indeed, the museum entrance through which you came in was actually the original servants' entrance. But now it is time to step into another world altogether – the world of the Willets.

»» *Please make your way up the stairs and turn left. Our story continues by the front door.*

Main Entrance

This is the main entrance – the door Abraham and Louisa used when entering the house. And if you were a guest, you would have climbed the stone steps outside and rung the great bell. The large front door would open and you would be greeted by the manservant, who showed you inside and announced you to either the master or the lady of the house. Imagine stepping in and allow yourself to be impressed by the vestibule and the hallway.

This was the principal floor of the house, then known as the ‘Bel Etage’. Take a good look around. The carpets in the hallways and stairs were recently made, based on surviving fragments of the old Deventer carpets. Can you also see the two wooden benches? These have been decorated with the coats-of-arms of both the Willet and the Holthuysen families. The Willet

coat-of-arms shows three climbing lions and the Holthuysen coat-of-arms shows three wooden houses with a carpenter's square and a plough. You can also see a longcase clock which takes its customary place in the main hall. And if you closely at the clockface, you can see that it not only tells the time, but also tracks the phases of the moon.

In around 1865, Abraham Willet had this hallway refurbished in the elegant style of Louis XVI, along with the other rooms on this floor. Sixteen wall decorations were hung along the walls, each made by the French painter Paul Alfred Colin. They include romantic scenes adapted from the paintings of 18th century French masters such as Watteau, Fragonard and Chardin.

Small Salon

This was the small salon – the room in which the lady of the house received her visitors. These modest daytime receptions were an important social event for the ladies and the doors to the adjacent room would have been closed on such occasions. The paintings on the walls reflect Abraham and Louisa's taste, both of whom loved genre and still life paintings.

Rooms which serve this kind of purpose had to be representative of the owners' taste and standing. To achieve this, the highly fashionable Louis XVI style with its symmetrical, sleek looks was considered ideal and took full advantage of the high ceiling and considerable wall space. The Willets acquired most of this valuable interior from Paris. Little is left of the original grandeur, with yellow, silver-grey and purple as dominant

colours, although remnants of the original flock wallpaper can still be seen in various places.

Sunlight has taken its toll since these rooms were decorated almost 150 years ago and the museum is currently restoring the Small Salon to its original condition.

You may also see two outfits in this room - one for a gentleman, the other for a lady - although for special events these are sometimes displayed elsewhere. *To hear more about them, press A.*

Extra Story: Outfits

The clothes you can see are reconstructions of those worn by Louisa Holthuysen and Abraham Willet, based on the portraits which you can see in the exhibition upstairs. The patterns were taken from a 19th century pattern book and care was taken to only use material which looked like the materials available at the time.

The dress is made of green satin with a white gilet fastened with copper buttons. The chemisette, which is a garment to cover the upper body, is

made from original embroidered fabric, as are the collar and sleeves. Although ladies of that time usually wore a crinoline, which is a kind of stiffened petticoat, Louisa was not wearing one in the painting. She does however wear a white underskirt beneath her dress.

Abraham, on the other hand, was dressed as a true gentleman in his painting. He wears a velvet waistcoat over a white shirt, topped off by a jacket made of wool with a velvet collar. His trousers are also made of wool.

Grand Salon

In 1865, the Willets focused on the most prominent reception room in the house and had it transformed into a Grand Salon, with huge mirrors, gilded frames, a monumental chandelier, and tapestries. This room with its opulent furniture became the most ornate room in the house, following the latest fashion inspired by the luxuriant Louis XVI style. Orders were placed with Braquenié and Barbédienne, Parisian businesses with an international reputation. The tapestries and rug were specially made. Abraham paid about 6,000 Guilders for the interior fabrics alone, which is roughly 60,000 euros in today's money. And the seating furniture was second-hand and rumoured to have been bought from an opera house.

The new salon was finished when the Willets

returned from a three-month trip to Paris on the 27th October that same year. Today, their creation is regarded as one of the most beautiful 19th century interiors preserved in the Netherlands. This was where Abraham and Louisa organised musical performances, literary evenings and costume balls for their art-loving friends. Abraham was at the centre of Amsterdam's cultural life, but Louisa was also up-to-date with the latest artistic developments. And when the Willets organised a costume ball, guests were expected to wear historic clothing. For these occasions, Abraham would delve into his own small personal collection of historic costumes. We know that Louisa played the piano, like other ladies of her class. She may well have played the piano during these festive evenings in the Grand Salon.

One more thing: Take a look across to the far right-hand side of the room. Can you see the open doorway? The alcove through there served

as a passage for staff who had to go in and out of the Salon, doing their work while staying out of the way of the guests. And, in 1882, it was also where artist Willem Steelink Jr. sat to paint the picture of the Grand Salon you can now see on the easel in this room.

Side Room

The first thing to notice about this room is the monumental ceiling painting by Jacob de Wit from 1744. This 18th century artist was famous for his deceptively real painted imitations of marble and terracotta reliefs. One example is the painting of nude cherubs over the fireplace. And if you look up into each corner of the ceiling, you can also see representations of the four seasons. The large central piece depicts the personification of Dawn, banishing Night with her torch. There are also many wonderful paintings on the walls.

Some of them are from Abraham Willet's original collection, while others come from collecting peers such as Fodor and Van Eeghen. On the wall to the right of the door, you can see a portrait of Abraham's St. Bernard dog, Figaro, painted by Wouter Verschuur Jr., a famous animal painter of that time.

The room is currently blue but, in the years when Abraham Willet used this as a reception room, the walls were green. The large table in the centre could accommodate from eight to ten people and Abraham would often organise art reviews for his fellow-collectors, showing them new acquisitions such as drawings, engravings and photographs. The table and chairs, along with a corresponding sideboard and art cabinet, formed part of a sizeable suite of furniture, made and delivered by Quignon of Paris.

To find out more about the décor of this room, press A.

Extra Story: Décor

The furniture was part of the original furnishings used by the Willets, but the rest of the furnishings in this room was not. At around 1980, museums preferred to replace a 19th century room with a reconstruction of a salon circa 1740. The marble mantelpiece over the fireplace, for example, was originally from a home on the Prins Hendrikkade;

it was found in the depot and considered just right for this reconstruction. The De Wit ceiling, which is the main eyecatcher, was originally from a house at the bottom of the Herengracht and had fallen into the hands of the city of Amsterdam in around 1900. It was suspended underneath the existing plaster ceiling, which is still visible near the windows, and this makes it seem lower than the ceiling really is.

View of the canal

Before you go any further, take a look at the view outside. What you can see is the Herengracht, one of the most prominent canals in Amsterdam to this day. It forms part of the world-famous 17th century canal belt and the houses at the end of the canal, near the Amstel, were built towards the end of the Golden Age. Looking outside, you can almost imagine the horse-drawn coaches rattling on the cobbles, while maids and suppliers made their way along the streets.

A few canal houses were built on a single plot of land – these are usually three windows wide. You can see this for yourself if you look at the houses across the canal. But to live in a double house with five windows, built on two plots of land? Only the wealthiest Amsterdammers, such as merchants, mayors and bankers, could afford

to live in such a house. And Abraham and Louisa were certainly in that category!

Dining Room

Intimate and atmospheric might be your first impression of the Willets dining room. Abraham and Louisa were connoisseurs and, as you can see, a lavish table has been set for six people. There was even a 275-piece dinner service of Meissen porcelain, enough to serve twenty-four diners, and they ate by the light of silver candelabras, heirlooms of the Holthuysen family. You may have noticed that this room has a somewhat lower ceiling. This is due to the entresol above this room which was used as a pantry, a room to keep crockery and suchlike.

If you want to find out what the Willets may have served their guests, press A.

Extra Story: Dinner

A host of cookbooks were published at the end of the 19th century and one of them was a bestseller. Published in 1895, it was called 'Recepten van de

Haagsche Kookschool' or 'Recipes from The Hague Culinary Academy' and it adorned the shelf of many an upper middle-class household. It was full of recipes which often formed the basis for entire twelve-course dinners.

How about this for an example? We begin with turtle soup, croquettes, salmon with parsley sauce, tenderloin with Madeira sauce and gammon with spinach. This is followed by Breda capon with mushrooms and eel in aspic with mayonnaise. After that, it's time for a refreshing entremets such as punch à la Romaine, followed by sweetbread with peas, truffle, turkey, pheasant, lettuce and Dutch asparagus. And when that course is finished, guests still might have some room for a diplomat's pudding, orange jelly and ice-cream. And, finally, dinner was concluded with pralines and candied fruit. It's enough to make your mouth water! Needless to say, when one of these dinners was organised, the household staff would be run off their feet.

Tearoom

This tearoom, with its angular shape, pale green woodwork and view of the garden, strongly resembles an 18th century gazebo. The two paintings flanking the door depict Flora, goddess of spring, on the left and Pomona, goddess of autumn, on the right. Both paintings are by Charles Rochussen, an artist and friend of the Willets. The room's original colour scheme and ceiling painting, done by Belgian interior painter Auguste Graux, were painted over in the years following the Willets, but they have now been uncovered and will hopefully be restored to their former glory. This also applies to the chairs, which are to be reupholstered with cretonne using a print featuring a colourful pattern of flowers. On summer days, Louisa used this small room as a tearoom. Tea was an exclusive and expensive drink for a long time, and only the wealthy could

afford to drink it. There would certainly have been a difference between the tea Louisa drank and the tea that the staff prepared for themselves downstairs in the kitchen. As was customary, the silver tea caddy which held the more expensive types of tea was locked and only the lady of the house or the head of the kitchen would have had a key.

This room also offers a beautiful view of the garden. If you want to find out more about it, press A.

Extra Story: Garden

The garden you see through the window is not the original one. When the Willets lived here, their garden was half the size because of two outbuildings which used to stand right at the back. The garden you can see today was laid out in 1972 and is a reconstruction of a symmetrical 18th century city garden in the French style. It is home to several species of historic plants and this museum works with the National Museum 'Paleis Het Loo' in Apeldoorn to look after them. From

here, you can also see two sandstone sculptures in the bend of the garden: Our old friends Flora and Pomona, made in 1721 by the famous Amsterdam sculptor Ignatius van Logteren. And in the large niche at the back is a statue of Mercury, god of trade, which is quite appropriate for Amsterdam.

The outbuilding which stood at the back of this garden used to be a coach house. Owning your own coach and horses was a sign of great wealth, even in the days of the Willets. A horse and carriage might be needed for any reason, such as when Louisa needed a carriage because she wanted to take her companion and dogs to the Vondelpark for a walk. A servant would ring the bell in the yard behind the kitchen to alert the coachman. He would then get the coach hitched up and taken round to the front door on the Herengracht in time to take his employer for her ride.

After Louisa died, both buildings were rented out to the Flora Theatre next door on the Amstelstraat. However, both theatre and rented buildings burned down in 1929, and this garden wasn't laid out until many years later.

Passage

Do you remember the painting in the Grand Salon? Well, through this doorway was where the artist sat to paint it. It was also where servants went in and out during the couple's parties. Take a look for yourself!

Also, while we're here, this might be a good opportunity to take a closer look at some of the beautiful wall hangings in the main hall. Each one was individually painted and follows the same format: a main central picture, based on a celebrated romantic painting, and a smaller detail near the bottom, which illustrates some other aspect of the story. These illustrations are then lovingly decorated with plant motifs and details.

Pantry

In the entresol, situated between the dining room below and the study above, is the household pantry. This room with its low ceiling was used to store extra crockery, table silver and other items not intended for everyday use. Seasonal items such as foot stoves and coal boxes were also stored here, as were luxurious preserving jars and copper utensils.

If you look carefully, you can see some more copperware which the servants would have been responsible for keeping polished. Although nowadays we might think of being a servant as a humiliating job, it was considered legitimate employment at the time. People as young as 14 or 15 began their working lives as servants, learning disciplines and skills on the job. Many of the servants the Willets employed were from

Germany, travelling to Amsterdam to find work in a wealthy city. References from previous employers were very important as houseowners wanted to have staff they could trust.

Staircase

When Louisa Holthuysen's father bought the house in 1855, this magnificent staircase had already been here for more than a hundred years. One of the previous owners had already installed the gilded banisters and three marble statues, and if you look up you can see a skylight, letting in the daylight. The Willets liked this staircase so much that they never had it altered. The statues depict 'The Judgement of Paris' and, in those days, only very close friends could see them up close, because they were near the couple's private rooms on the first floor.

To the left of the grand staircase you can find narrow, steep stairs leading up to the top floors where there are two attics and a loft. These rooms are not accessible to museum visitors, but in the days of the Willets, this was where the

servants had their rooms. There was also a spare room and a great deal of storage space.

If you would like to hear the story of 'The Judgement of Paris', press A.

Extra Story: Judgement of Paris

The three life-size statues tell a story from classic Greek mythology: 'The Judgement of Paris'. The statue in the centre is Paris, son of the King of Troy. On the left stands Aphrodite and on the right is the goddess Hera. According to the myth, the gods of Olympus were holding a wedding feast when Eris, goddess of discord, threw a golden apple into the room. The apple bore the words 'For the Fairest' and the three goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite all claimed they should have it. To decide the matter, they appeared before Paris and told him to give the apple to the goddess he deemed the most beautiful. He eventually chose Aphrodite because she promised as his wife the most beautiful woman in the world. She kept her promise,

helping Paris abduct Helena, wife of King
Menelaus of Sparta, which led to the Trojan War.

Bedroom

This was Louisa and Abraham's bedroom.

Unfortunately, this is not their furniture, but what you can see in this room is typical of the type found in the second half of the 19th century.

The four-poster bed, two bedside tables, a wash basin, a dressing table and a large wardrobe are all made of oak. The bed is a true eyecatcher, made up of twin beds with semi-testers pushed together – quite modern for those days. The bedding is made up of different mattresses and pillows. Servants had to plump up the feather-stuffed linen every day, which gave the bed its Dutch nickname *schuddebed* or 'shaky bed'.

There was probably also a chamber pot beneath it.

There is a dressing table by the wall where the lady of the house powdered her face and brushed

her hair. This table has an adjustable mirror with moveable candle holders on each side, so the lady of the house could look at herself from every angle. Small cosmetic items were kept in the drawers which were then locked with a small key. The lady's maid would have helped Louisa dress and brush her hair.

When the Willets lived here, there was still no water mains in this part of the city, although there was a water pump on this floor. But hot water had to be heated up in the kitchen and then carried upstairs in jugs - a demanding job for the maid who could not spill a drop on the expensive carpets.

The washstand where she would pour the water has a marble top. This was common at the time as marble was more stain-resistant and easier to clean than wood. The jug and washing items were placed on top of the washstand, while a spare jug was kept underneath to collect the dirty water.

And, every now and then, the Willets took a bath in the zinc bath. This was screened off from the rest of the room and, after it was used, it was returned to its storage place.

Study

This is Abraham's study. Before the window is his desk where he might have written his business correspondence or perused the latest artwork he may have purchased. There is a great view of the garden from his window. You can also see a green reclining couch upon which he might have relaxed to rest, read a book and perhaps drink a glass of wine. There are two imposing large bookcases and a prints cabinet which was used for keeping prints and other papers.

On the left-hand side, you can see a painting of a 17th century civic guard of the type sometimes found in Rembrandt's paintings. This portrait, however, is actually Abraham Willet himself, dressed up in one of his historical costumes. And if you look on the right-hand side, to the right of the fireplace, you can perhaps see the outline

of a doorway. This was actually a door which led to a short passage leading to Louisa's sitting room, which meant they could go see each other without bumping into the servants.

Today, Louisa's sitting room forms part of an exhibition celebrating the lives and art collection of Abraham Willet and Louisa Holthuysen. We are nearing the end of this audio-tour, but please don't forget to take a walk through those rooms. It's well worth it!

Cupboard hand basin

This cupboard contains the upstairs water supply. What you can see is a simple freestone basin with a tap. The water was brought up by means of a pump and then collected in a small lead reservoir, although the pump handle could only be reached through a door in the collector's room behind this one. Thanks to this water supply, staff didn't have to walk all the way downstairs for water. Although if someone wanted a bath they still had to go downstairs to get hot water!

Collector's Room

This is the last stop of this audio-tour. Please feel free to take a seat on the red couch for our final story.

This small octagonal room was Abraham's favourite place in the house and when he was alive, it was referred to as the 'antiques room'. In contrast with the rest of the house, the décor was inspired by the dark colours and frugal shapes of Dutch renaissance design. The doors, frames and ceiling are wood-panelled and painted in mock-oak with ebony details. The sober look of the room was also enhanced by the tapestry of red Utrecht velvet, featuring a pattern of large sunflowers. The highly colourful Deventer carpet has been remade by following the example of original fragments.

The stained-glass windows, which date back to the early 17th century, were bought especially for this room. The two central windows depict scenes from the Old Testament: one shows the trials of Job and the other depicts the Biblical Abraham. Both are images based on engravings by Maarten van Heemskerck. The cabinet also displays items from Abraham Willet's collection of arts and crafts such as glass trinkets, ivory sculptures and knick-knacks. All in all, it's almost like a miniature museum.

All right, that's it! Thank you for listening to this audio-tour. If you haven't yet seen the exhibition on this floor or taken a walk around the garden, please feel free to do so.

Goodbye! Or as they say in Dutch: 'Tot ziens!'

