

## Anna van Eysinga (1594-1655)

Dedicated housing for independently living elderly existed in the BENELUX countries at least from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Usually group living of older women was organized in a collection of small independent dwellings, attached to each other in the shape of a square with central facilities in the inner garden, and 2 gates that were closed at night for added protection. In Leeuwarden (Frisia, the Netherlands) one of these so-called 'hofjes' has been in continuous use for about 350 years as elderly housing, and is currently posted on the local senior web as an assisted-living housing facility<sup>1</sup>.



The Boshuisengasthuis, located at number 7 Jacobijnerkerkhof in the centre of town, was erected in 1652 by Anna van Eysinga (1594-1655) to replace the orchard from the former Jacobijner Cloister. Originally it consisted of 19 or 20 well-designed dwellings built around a bleach field with water pump. After 2 modernisations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it now consists of 8 larger dwellings, still located around an inner court, and occupied by 8 independently living older women.

At its erection it was stated that women occupants should be at least 60 years old, be widowed, of blameless conduct, and poor.



Misconduct, or dependency caused by accidents or chronic disease were a ground for eviction from the 'hofje' by the board of the estate. Housing was free of charge, and included a limited amount of peat for heating (Formerly! Currently central heating is present). Expenses were paid out of the interest of the estate that was part of the erection deed. In former times a small allowance in money was also bestowed upon the occupants. A resident female porter kept strangers out and served as guardian of the peace in the 'hofje' society.

The gate of the Boshuisengasthuis bears a motto that has survived the ages: 'What you see here, like it or not, has been built to support the poor and to comfort the widows' (Het geen hier staet, uyt nijt oft haet doch beschout, Tot armoedts hulp en weduwes troost in het geboudt). On the inner gate the year of erection in Roman numerals (MDCLII) is written, as well as the initials of Anna (AvE), since these sheltered living quarters for older citizens were meant to remember her.

Anna van Eysinga, scion of old Frisian nobility both from her mothers and her fathers side<sup>3</sup>, and one of the richest women of the state of Frisia, was born in 1594 in the middle of the 80-years independence war of the Dutch against Spain (1568-1648). She lost her mother, Rintje van Gratinga, at an early age of 19, and apparently did not see much of her father, Juw van Eysinga, who was active in warfare as captain of an infantry company, fighting at the Belgian-Dutch border in 1603

as lieutenant-colonel, and becoming lieutenant-general of Frisia later in life. Both Anna's husbands were also active in warfare. The first one, Hero van Burmania, a cavalry captain, was killed in the siege of the Southern Dutch town of Maastricht in 1632. Anna remarried Philip van Boshuisen in 1635 who had come to Frisia in 1620 as captain of the guard of the new Frisian Stadtholder Ernst-Casimir.

Most relatives of Anna, however, were not active in the military but in local and national government, diplomacy, or in court, and were well educated at the local universities, such as the one in Franeker, where they also served as curators. It was most likely the influence of Anna that helped her 2<sup>nd</sup> husband, a foreigner to Frisia, to obtain in 1644 the governmental positions of 'grietman', head of police, court, and government of the municipality 'Het Bildt', and of deputy of the State of Frisia at the States General of the Republic of the Seven Provinces in the Hague.

Both marriages of Anna remained childless. After Philip's death in 1652 Anna decided to erect a 'hofje' to the remembrance of her husband and herself. It was apparently built the same year. The trusteeship went to her nephews who were also nephews of her first husband since niece-cousin marriages were common in the Frisian nobility. Anna died 3 years after completion of the 'hofje', at the age of 59 years. Anna and Philip have both been buried in the church of Stiens where a gravestone carrying their sculptured picture is still present.

## References

1. [www.ouderen-leeuwarden.nl/Huisvesting/Huisvesting.htm](http://www.ouderen-leeuwarden.nl/Huisvesting/Huisvesting.htm)
2. Ruijtenbeek M. [www.iec.nhl.nl/socvak/grotekerk/boshuis](http://www.iec.nhl.nl/socvak/grotekerk/boshuis)
3. Nederlands Adelsboek 1907; 5:203, 1909; 7:66-68, 1912; 10:462, 1936; 34:286

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## BOOK REVIEW

Eli and Doron Peli. Driving with confidence – A practical guide to driving with low vision. New Jersey, London, Singapore, Hong Kong: World Scientific Publishing. 192 pages, of which 112 are 6 appendices and Index. ISBN 981-02-4704-4 (Bound: US\$ 28, £19), ISBN 981-02-4705-2 (Paperback: US\$ 10, £ 12).

This book is just what the title indicates – a practical guide for individuals with low vision who want to learn to drive or who already have a driver's license and want to continue to drive despite having an eye disease which in some way reduces visual capacity. The book is also useful for ophthalmologists, optometrists, opticians, and other professionals involved in medical assessments of fitness to drive, as it describes different types of visual aids or different types of eye surgery that may help a low-vision driver to drive safely. Although the book is based on regulations and requirements in the different states of USA, it can be helpful for specialists as well as for visually impaired drivers in all places of the world. It is not, however, a legal document.

At the very first line of chapter one, the authors discuss the issue of whether driving is a right or a privilege and clearly state that driving is a privilege that can be revoked at any time when the necessary prerequisites for holding a driver's license are not longer present. This position is, however, tempered further along, when the authors invoke the individual right to enjoy the mobility afforded by a car. This gives a somewhat contradictory impression that is a good illustration of the complexity of the issue.

A useful and well-structured overview entitled 'Vision and driving – facts and fiction' conveys information that is easily understandable for the layman. Here, the authors mention a fact well known among