

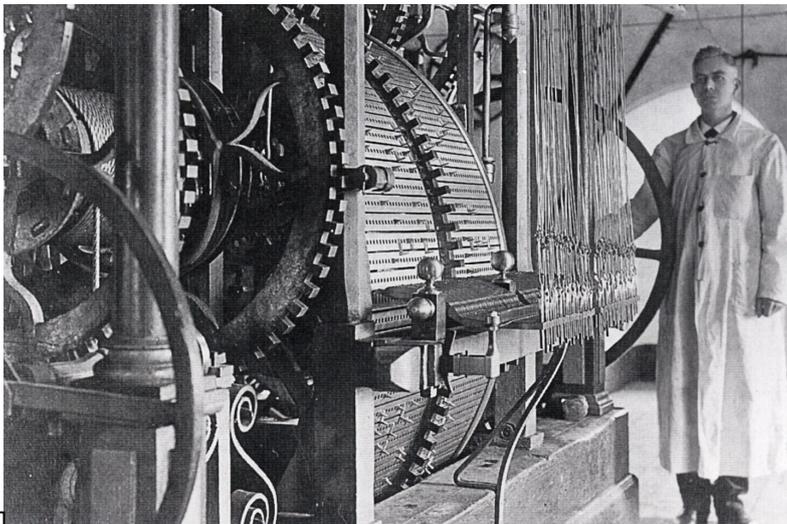
## Roelof Jan Gort's music career.

Notes by Alfred F. Gort updated June 3, 2005

### Chronological sequence of events:

My father, Roelof Jan Gort was born on June 3rd, 1900 in Arnhem, Netherlands. He was the oldest of 7 children; he had 5 brothers and one sister. Of his early years not much is known but his education must have included music from an early age. The Gort family lived in the Turfstraat 22 in Arnhem which also housed the family retail business of watches and jewelry. The family had several musical instruments including a piano and a small organ. My father studied organ with de Wolf, the organist of the Grote Kerk before he had the opportunity to study carillon.

My grandfather Roelof Gort was the “Stads uurwerkmaker” which included the maintenance of the 17<sup>th</sup> century clock in the Eusebius Tower and its carillon play mechanism (“speeltrommel”) as shown in the photo below. This involvement with the tower and its carillon led to the acquaintance with Jef Denijn who modernized the carillon in 1919. Jef Denijn must have suggested that my father come to Mechelen to study carillon at his newly opened “Beiaard School”. This episode of the improvement of the Arnhem carillon is in detail reported in the book “De Torens Zingen” by D. J. van der Ven. Arnhem had a dedicated group of carillon supporters of which my grandfather was one; he was on the board of the local chapter of the Nederlandse Klokkenspel Vereniging. (see references).



The photo on the left taken in September of 1915 shows Roelof Gort, my grandfather, at the mechanism that plays short melodies on the carillon on an hourly basis. This mechanism was also destroyed during the Battle of Arnhem in September of 1944.

In 1925 my father went to Mechelen to study carillon playing at the Beiaard School of Jef Denijn. During this academic year he worked part time at a small factory that produced large clock mechanisms for towers. My father must have been very busy with carillon practice to become sufficiently proficient to do the final exam after just one year at the school. He graduated on August 12 of 1926 “met onderscheiding” indicating that he had come a long way in his one year in Mechelen. A copy of his Graduation Recital program shows works by Niccolai, deVeer and Benoit; the Preludium III by Matthias van den Gheyn was a mandatory piece played by all 6 graduates. This Preludium is also on the Arnhem Carillon recording we have.

The carillon curriculum included harmony theory, improvisation and composition; Jef van Hoof was the instructor for these subjects. A short composition for carillon was one of the graduation requirements which my father completed; we have no copy of this, neither has the Beiaard School in Mechelen. Also in the curriculum

was a lot of detail about the mechanics of the St. Rombouts carillon of Mechelen. This was probably an effort to get other carillons updated to the “Mechelen system” as was done in Arnhem and several other carillons in the Netherlands. A copy of the final exam questions and answers from my father was graciously supplied by the Beiaard School in 2004.

Roelof returned to Arnhem in 1926 but could not become the “Stadsbeiaardier” there as this position was already filled by Jac Oremus (1877-1946). Records indicate that my father was the “Stadsbeiaardier” in Almelo from 1926 until 1928. He also returned to his previous profession of retailing in watches and jewelry in the family business of his father. In 1927 he participated in the two carillon competitions which were held on August 29 in Utrecht and on August 30 in ‘s-Hertogenbosch. My father received the second price on both occasions after F. Timmermans from Rotterdam. These competitions are described in more detail by L.J. Meilink-Hoedemaker on the pages 96 through 102 in her book about Ferdinand Timmermans. The two carillons used in this competition had different mechanisms; only the ‘s-Hertogenbosch carillon had been updated to the Mechelen “tuimelaar system” that my father was used to. He chose to play different selections on these 2 days while Timmermans played the same program on both days. There was some controversy about Timmermans receiving the first price over my father in ‘s-Hertogenbosch; the details about this are in the book by Meilink pages 98 through 100. This was probably the period that my father played at his best.

From 1928 we have a program that was performed in Arnhem by several carillonneurs a.o. Oremus (Arnhem), Verbist (Mechelen), Meyll (Nijkerk), Lannoy (France), Timmermans (Rotterdam) and my father R.J. Gort. On 4 days in the period from August 17 through August 28 two recitals were given per evening; all this was part of a summer carillon festival. My father’s recital was on August 20; the Fantasia III by Peter Benoit which we have on the recording is one of the selections he played.

Earlier in 1928 a series of concerts were given in ‘s-Hertogenbosch starting on May 31 ending on June 30. My father played one of those one hour concerts; other carillonneurs were Van Balkom (Den Bosch), Adriaens (Mechelen), van Stappen (Mechelen), Gebruers (Antwerpen), Donnes, Verbist and Nees all three from Mechelen. This new carillon (1925) had been designed with guidelines from Jef Denijn so it is not surprising that Mechelen was well represented among the participants especially if the Dutch graduates (Gort and Van Balkum) are also included. We have no program of these concerts.

In 1929 (this is my best guess) the recording was made in Arnhem of a 30 minute recital by my father; how this came about is not known to me. The Nederlandse Radio Omroep came to Arnhem to do this. My father never mentioned that event and it came to light during a transmission via the Nederlandse Radio Omroep on an anniversary of the Airborne attack on Arnhem on September 17, 1944. We obtained 2 copies of this recording on reel to reel tape; this program consisting of 6 selections has now been transcribed to a CD. The recording shows my father’s proficiency in the Mechelen tremolo style developed mostly by Jef Denijn. The Hemony bells of Arnhem are almost all gone now but their warm sound is still quite evident especially in the last selection on the recording, the Fantasia III by Peter Benoit.

In 1930 there was again a summer concert in Arnhem by my father on July 29 this time. He played a one hour program beginning with the Preludium III by van den Gheyn; the Koekoek Preludium was also played as the 7<sup>th</sup> selection. Two pieces by Grieg were also on this long program of 9 selections. It is not known if this was again part of a series of concerts with guest carillonneurs.

The second Carillon Competition in the Netherlands was organized in 1931 and my father did participate again. As usual the competition was on 2 successive days, this time August 28 in Rotterdam and August 29 in Breda. The Rotterdam event was only attended by three participants while Breda with its “tuimelaar systeem” from Mechelen attracted 8 entries among which my father. The Menuet by van Hoof was a mandatory piece; it is also

on the Arnhem recording. My father was praised for his technique and received the third prize after Creman (Zwolle) and van Balkom (Den Bosch). This was the last competition that my father participated in and we have no record of any concerts after this event in 1931.

Upon my grandfather's death in 1935 my father became the "Stadsuurwerkmaker"; this included the maintenance and programming of the automatic playing mechanism (the "Speeltrommel"). A photo of this mechanism dating from 1650 is shown above.

In 1944 the Eusebius Tower as well as my father's practice keyboard were lost during the airborne attack on Arnhem; after this loss practicing was out of the question and my father's playing was now totally halted. Still he was copying carillon music by hand from manuscripts sent to him by Staf Nees in Mechelen. He must have hoped to get back to carillon playing in the coming years as he was only 44 years old at this time.

My mother mentioned that she went to Mechelen with my father in 1945 for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Staf Nees' position at the Beiaard School there. It is not clear if my father played at all on that occasion as we have no record of that event. There was often mention of Staf Nees at home and as the surviving correspondence shows there remained some contact with him after 1945. At this time my father was considered the "Stadsbeiaardier" for Arnhem and was asked to get advice from the Beiaard School in Mechelen with respect to the rebuilding of the carillon in Arnhem. To date I have not found any record of recommendations that should have come from this meeting.



Around 1950 plans for a new carillon for Arnhem were drawn up and fund raising was started. To stimulate interest a traveling carillon was brought to Arnhem and a recital was given by my father on this. This event was shown on the television at that time. He was at first reluctant to do this as he was seriously out of practice not having a practice keyboard or carillon to play on but he did perform after all. I remember a short practice session he played on this instrument which was set up near the Eusebius tower. This is probably the last time that my father played on a carillon; the tower and carillon would not be ready until 1962. As I had moved to the USA in 1961 I have no knowledge of my father ever playing on the new carillon at Arnhem. He passed away on February 11 of 1967 at the age of 66.

The photo at the left shows my father a few years before his death in 1967.

Looking back, my grandfather, Roelof Gort, who was active in the Nederlandse Klokkenspel Vereeniging, was the driving force behind my father's carillon career in the 1920's. Examining his relatively short active career from 1926 until the early 1930's it must be noticed that my father, Roelof Jan Gort, was one of the early pioneers to bring the Jef Denijn method of playing from Mechelen to the Netherlands. Timmermans, van Balkom, Creman, Maassen and others were all part of this movement in the 1920's and 1930's to develop the traditional technique to a higher level. He must also have played a small role in the planning for the new carillon that was installed in 1962. It is fortunate that we have the 30 minute recorded recital from him as he played it on the old Arnhem Hemony carillon of the Eusebius Toren an instrument he must have loved and cared for.

## Programs and Repertoire:

It has been possible to piece together much of the repertoire my father played on the carillon. Concert records, competition records as well as records from the KBS “Jef Denijn” in Mechelen (the “Beiaard School”) show a varied repertoire. The listing below is arranged alphabetically by composer:

Alpaerts, F.	Thema met varieties
Benoit, Peter	Fantasie III
Benoit, Peter	Uit de van Rijswijk-Cantate
Benoit, Peter	Het Lied der Vlamingen
Denijn, Jef	Preludium in G-minor
Denijn, Jef	Andante Cantabile met varieties
Gerbrands, D. J.	Daar woont aan het smalle Noorderstrand
Gheyn, Matthias van den	Preludium III
Gheyn, Matthias van den	Koekoek Preludium
Gheyn, Matthias van den	Fuga
Grieg, Edvard	Matrozenlied
Grieg, Edvard	Bruidsmars
Grieg, Edvard	For dine Fodder (aan Uw voeten)
Hoof, Jef van	Menuet
Hoof, Jef van	Preludium quasi una Fantasia
Hoof, Jef van	Sonate voor Beiaard
Kersbergen, J. W.	Rondino
Nicolai, Valentin	Derde Sonate
Nicolai, Valentin	Zesde Sonate
Planquette,	Les Cloches de Corneville
Smits,	Vlaggelied
Tetterode, L. A. van	Menuet voor Beiaard
Traditional,	De Zilvervloot (Gort bewerking)
Traditional,	Piet Hein Lied
Veer, Johan de	Klein Vogelijn
Vitelleschi, G.	Meditazione
Vitelleschi, G.	Breves Flores Rosea
Vletter, M.	Uit de Kinder-Cantate
Weckerlin,	Roches inaccessible
Westerheene, P. A. van	De Twee (the 2 large bass clocks)

## References:

1. “De Torens zingen” by D.J. van der Ven
2. A. G. Schulte, “De Grote of Eusebiuskerk in Arnhem”
3. Koninklijke Beiaardschool “Jef Denijn”, school records of graduates
4. Nederlandse Klokkenspel Vereniging, publications from 1927 to 1931 (from Gelders Archief)
5. Gort Family manuscripts and other records
6. L.J. Meilink-Hoedemaker, Ferdinand Timmermans. 1991.