

PROGRAM
OF TEYLERS THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN HAARLEM
FOR THE YEAR 2025

THE DIRECTORS OF TEYLERS STICHTING (TEYLERS FOUNDATION) AND THE MEMBERS OF TEYLERS GODGELEERD GENOOTSCHAP (TEYLERS THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY) invite submissions for their essay competition. Deadline: 1 May 2028

Further explanation

In 2028, the Teylers Foundation and both Teylers societies will celebrate their 250th anniversary. This is an occasion for celebration, but also for reflection and contemplation. How do the values of the Enlightenment in general, and those expressed in Teyler's last will in particular, relate to the lived practices of the time, and how are they relevant to the present?

The status of women in early modern society remains a complex issue. Philosophically, for example, the influence of minds such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Locke has been examined. Besides debates about the philosophical origins of emancipatory ideas, we can also ask questions about lived practices. We have well-documented studies of the lives and works of women who made their voices heard in the early modern period, such as Anna Maria van Schurman, Antoinette Bourignon, and Maria Sibylla Merian – interestingly enough, all operating from an unorthodox Christian perspective. In the cases mentioned here, the role of religion appears to have been more influential than a (proto)feminist stance. This is interesting, but rarely explored in more detail.

There are ample opportunities to enrich abstract theoretical questions of ‘gender equality’ with (or bring them into dialogue with) more detailed research on specific people, times, and places. Early modern Haarlem offers an excellent, yet understudied, starting point for this. It is particularly within the Mennonite community where women are prominently present, including in the overlapping fields of entrepreneurship and culture. Numerous sources are available to researchers.

In the Netherlands the (myth-shrouded) shipbuilder and timber merchant Kenau Simonsdochter is still famous. Less spectacular, but perhaps more exemplary, is Margarieta van Bancken, who, married to the printer Abraham Castelijm, continued the publication of publications under her own name after his death, including the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* (one of the oldest newspapers in the world), and was appointed official printer of the city in 1681. Other enterprising women could follow the same strategy. The *Haerlemse Courant* of June 15, 1728, announced that the silk and decorative wallpaper business of the late Levinus Vincent on the Grote Markt would be continued by his widow, Johanna van Breda, who would ‘continue printing on all kinds of fabrics, beautiful whole and half silk, shot with silver and gold’. Van Breda had previously taken on the management of her husband's then world-famous natural history cabinet, which had been located in Haarlem since 1710 and can be considered a prefiguration of Teylers Museum. At the end of the seventeenth century, Haarlem native Elisabeth Koolaart-Hoofman made a great impression—both locally and in the Republic of Letters—with her knowledge of the Bible, the classics, and her poetry. Another, somewhat later example is Keetje Hodshon, whose city palace would serve as the headquarters of the Holland Society of Sciences from 1752 onward.

It is against this background that the competition announced here calls for submissions that can shed new light on the often-neglected yet important role of women in the intellectual, cultural, and economic life of Haarlem in the early modern period. As early as the seventeenth century, Mennonite Haarlem proved to be a very fertile environment for entrepreneurship, the arts, and the sciences. The role of women in this was significant, but remains largely unknown.

Interested parties are therefore urged to conduct further research, both at the level of individual cases and at a more sociological and/or philosophical level. Which women can we identify within the given Haarlem context? Do we know anything about their motivations for entrepreneurship and/or artistry? What roles did they play within the community of family, extended family, and the urban context? What were their relationships? Can we consider the activities of these women within a broader narrative of the Enlightenment, or should we limit ourselves to a more pragmatic description of lived praxis? The directors of the Teylers Foundation and members of the Theological Society welcome both a collection of case studies and more comparative and/or interpretive submissions.

Submissions may consist of a single comprehensive study, in the form of a text prepared for publication, or multiple publications, most of which must appear within the three years.

preceding May 1, 2028. In the latter case, participants must also submit a previously unpublished text, written specifically for the competition, which places the previous publications within a broader scholarly context.