

Third design by Abraham van der Hart of 1783

Maagdenhuis, Brief description:

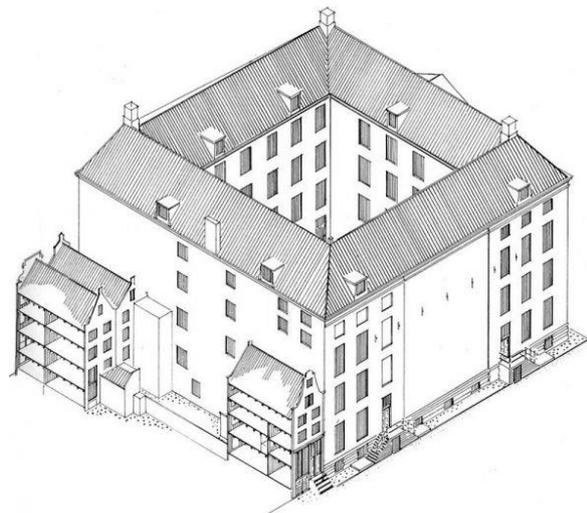
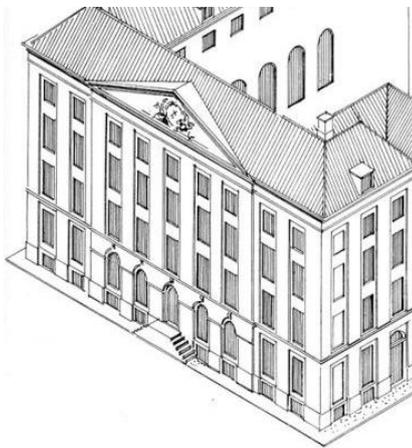
Catholic girls' orphanage designed by city architect Abraham van der Hart in 1783 as a rectangular building with a hipped roof. The facade treatment is suggestive of pilasters. The middle ressaute is crowned with a large triangular pediment with sculptural ornamentation. Round-arched windows – entrance on main floor - double stoop.

The institution known both as the Meisjeshuis and Maagdenhuis was founded in 1570. In that year Aeltje Pieter Foppens and Maritje Laurens Spiegel took the responsibility upon themselves to care for Catholic girl orphans. They eventually managed to rent four houses in different parts of the city for this purpose. In 1628 a new double plot canal house of a type current at the time was built on Spui to accommodate these girls. The large number of children who needed to be cared for meant that extensions soon became necessary. Over the years, neighbouring houses were bought and linked to the original building. In the 18th century the orphanage consisted of all the houses on Spui between Handboogstraat and Voetboogstraat. In 1783 the city architect Abraham van de Hart demolished these houses and began the construction of the current building. The approximately 300 orphans were moved temporarily to the Spinhuis on Oudezijds Achterburgwal which had recently been vacated following the completion of the Nieuwe Werkhuis (New Workhouse) in 1782. The Maagdenhuis was ready for use in 1787.

An initial design by Abraham van der Hart of 1780 only projected a single wing on Spui and Voetboogstraat. In 1783 it was decided to build a much larger establishment consisting of four wings around an inner courtyard with a chapel on the first floor of the Voetboogstraat wing. In addition to its main facade on Spui, the Maagdenhuis has free-standing facades on both Handboogstraat and Voetboogstraat. This building, which measures 125 x 140 feet, provided accommodation for 350 to 400 people, including orphans, staff and management. At 92 feet high, this sober brick building projected above the neighbouring properties. It was a building which could not be overlooked. At its time of construction it was the largest and most modern private foundation in the city and a demonstration of the Roman Catholics of how far they had come after two centuries of subordination. After the new Maagdenhuis was complete, no book on Amsterdam could fail to

mention it. The building became a city landmark. After Spui was drained and filled in in 1883, the building found itself overlooking a square which was well suited to its scale. The size of the building still impresses.

A string course divides the facades into a basement and upper storeys. The arched bays of the basement of the front facade draw attention to the entrance. The entrance to the Nieuwe Werkhuis had already set a precedent for this. The main facade is balanced and imposing. Although it does not have true pilasters, it is treated as if it were designed with a giant order of architecture with window piers treated like pilasters: the windows of the three upper storeys are linked together in a single recessed compartment while the piers which separate them are treated as projecting lesenes. The five middle bays form a ressaout which is crowned by a triangular pediment with a relief by Antonie Ziesenis. The relief consists of a medallion supported by two orphan girls illustrating the text from Mark 10:13: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.'



1, 1780 appearance. Drawing by R. Meischke

2, 1787 appearance. Drawing by R. Meischke



3 - 18th century engraving (Fouquet's Atlas)