



## The Mauritshuis in 1822



We do not know for sure on what day the Mauritshuis opened as a museum, but it was probably Saturday 5 January 1822. There are no drawings, prints or paintings of the opening or the first visitors. And as far as we know, there was no festive, official opening with speeches and ribbon-cutting, nor did the press pay any attention to it.

It is also unclear exactly who took the initiative to open the Mauritshuis to the public. King William I (1772-1843) was most likely the co-initiator of the opening to the public. The Dutch State had purchased the building in 1820, and in July of that year a Royal Decree was published designating the 1644 building as the home of the *Royal Picture Gallery* and the *Royal Cabinet of Rarities*. Both had been established in 1816 by the King himself. The first (unpaid) director of the Royal Cabinet of Paintings was Jonkheer Johan Steengracht van Oostcapelle (1782-1846).

On Thursday 3 January 1822, the Government Gazette published a small report: 'From now on, the Royal Cabinet of Paintings in The Hague will be open for visits on Wednesdays and Saturdays, from ten to one o'clock, to anyone who is properly dressed and has no children with them'. The building also housed the *Royal Cabinet of Rarities* (on the first floor), which was open under the same conditions from 13.00-15.00 hrs. The caretaker on duty therefore only had to open one floor at a time. There were no security guards or ushers yet. The collection of rarities included a large collection of arts and crafts but also - what we would now call - 'curiosities'. Antique utensils, weapons, porcelain, clothing, stuffed animals, curiosities but also, for example, thousands of Chinese and Japanese objects. No pictures of this cabinet are known, except for a drawing from 1843 that shows visitors in a crowded interior. In 1875, the 'rarities' disappeared from the Mauritshuis and were distributed to various locations, including the Rijksmuseum, where the objects related to 'national history' were kept.

Until 1875, the *Royal Picture Gallery* had to make do with one floor, the top one. The core of the painting collection consisted of works that had been assembled by Stadholder William V (1748-1806). This collection had been brought to Paris by French troops in 1795 and returned to The Hague

after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. When it opened, 305 paintings were displayed in the cabinet (currently about 400 in the entire museum and the Prince William V Gallery).

Unfortunately, no pictures have survived of this floor either, but it probably looked like today's Mauritshuis's Gallery Prince William V: walls filled from top to bottom with paintings. In those days, there was no selection based on quality; everything hung next to each other and mixed together. Of the 305 paintings, 127 were from Willem V's collection. In the year of the opening, Vermeer's *View of Delft* (c. 1660-1661) was acquired immediately, followed a few years later by Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* (1632). For a long time, the Mauritshuis had to make do without the famous *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, which only arrived at the museum (as a bequest from Mr. A.A. des Tombe) in 1903.

No records have been kept of how many visitors the Mauritshuis received in 1822, but by 1824, 30,000 had already visited the 'new museum'. Admission tickets for the paintings could be collected at the private address of the deputy director, and for the rarities at the Mauritshuis itself. Both admission tickets were free.

Source: Quentin Buvelot, *Mauritshuis, the building*, Waanders Publishers 2014