

## **Rotterdamsche Bank, 1863-1965**

### **A false start, 1863-1911**

Rotterdamsche Bank (RB) was founded in Rotterdam on May 16, 1863 by a group of businessmen and bankers. One of them was Marten Mees, a partner in R. Mees & Zoonen (RMZ), who thus unwittingly created a formidable rival for his own Rotterdam bank. The founders sought to establish a credit institution modelled on Britain's Colonial Bank to meet the growing borrowing requirements of companies operating in the Dutch East Indies. Along with other banks including RMZ, RB suffered heavy losses in the Pincoffs Affair (1879) and after licking its wounds confined its activities to the Netherlands.

### **Expansion, 1911-1922**

A period of expansion started with the arrival of Managing Director Willem Westerman. On April 19, 1911 RB merged with Rotterdam's Deposito- en Administratie Bank (est. 1900) to form Rotterdamsche Bankvereniging (Robaver). The two banks were a perfect match. RB was first and foremost a merchant bank while Deposito- en Administratie Bank concentrated on the securities business. Both banks were looking for a way into the Amsterdam Stock Exchange. Robaver achieved this goal in the very year of the merger by taking over the old Amsterdam brokers Determeijer Weslingh & Zn. (est. 1765). This move caused quite a commotion in Dutch financial circles on account of the traditional rivalry between the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Two years later Robaver took over Amsterdam-based Labouchere, Oyens & Co.'s Bank, successor to Ketwich & Voomborgh (est. 1790). This was followed in 1915 by the acquisition of Nationale Bank of The Hague. Numerous local banks were added to the list of acquisitions. Within just a few years, Robaver grew more than it had done in the first fifty years of its existence, and became one of the largest banks in the country. These moves by Robaver triggered a process of concentration and amalgamation among the commercial banks in the Netherlands, which was in keeping with a similar development in trade and industry. But it heralded the demise of many of the smaller banks.

From 1916 onwards the network was expanded primarily through the take-over of small banking firms, which were not included in the Robaver organisation but organised in Nationale Bankvereniging (Natobank) of Utrecht or Zuid-Nederlandsche Handelsbank (Zuidbank) of Tilburg. Robaver controlled majority interests in these two banks. On December 31, 1920 Zuidbank was integrated into Natobank, and on January 1, 1929 the entire Natobank organisation was integrated into Robaver. In this same period Robaver was vigorously establishing

overseas banks. They included Bank voor Indië, Nederlandsche Bank voor Zuid-Amerika, Nederlandsche Bank voor de Middellandsche Zee, Nederlandsche Bank voor West-Indië and Russisch-Nederlandsche Bank.

### **Readjustment, 1922-1927**

The over-optimism of the boom period after the First World War gave way to pessimism due to Germany's economic troubles. In the general banking crisis of 1922-1925 Robaver was one of the most prominent victims. During the preceding period of expansion, Robaver had extended far too much credit without creating sufficient reserves. In 1924 the Dutch Minister of Finance, Hendrik Colijn, personally instructed Nederlandsche Bank, the central bank, to assist Robaver, which was obliged to sell off all its interests in banks with foreign branches. The worst of the crisis was over by 1927 and the bank resumed normal business, albeit without President Westerman.

### **Back to business, 1928-1964**

In response to a growing number of female clients, Robaver established Vrouwenbank (a bank especially for women) in Amsterdam in 1928. Times changed, however, and the bank was closed down in 1971 when it no longer met a demand.

In July 1939, RB and Amsterdamsche Bank (AB) had almost completed plans for a merger but these were shelved when the Netherlands appeared likely to become embroiled in the Second World War. The bank re-adopted its old name of Rotterdamsche Bank in 1947 and took over Nationale Handelsbank in 1960 (see pdf document).

The old contacts between RB and AB were revived with success in 1964 when the two banks merged into Amsterdam-Rotterdam Bank (Amro Bank), with registered office in Amsterdam.