

## VU Amsterdam objects and their stories

### 1930-1935: 'The saver' and Vrouwen VU-hulp



Pieter de Monchy, *De spaarster* (*The saver*), bronze 1980, in the entrance to the main building, 2014, VU heritage and collections

Looking back on the history of VU University Amsterdam, the story of Vrouwen VU-hulp (Women's Aid for the VU) should naturally not be left out. It symbolises the support of the reformed supporters for 'their' university, the social involvement of the VU and the role of women within this organisation. Frans van Drimmelen reflects on the importance of VUvereniging nowadays.

By: Liselotte Neervoort

In 1980, on its 100th anniversary, the VU received a bronze statue from the Rabobank. It represents the many female savers and organisers of [Vrouwen VU-hulp](#) who have helped the university financially since the 1930s. The statue, created by the artist [Pieter de Monchy](#), was placed in the wildlife garden of the [VU Hospital](#) and later in the [Botanical Garden](#). In 2014, it was displayed in the entrance to the main building for a while, after which it was given a nice position in the [guest house](#) of the VUmc. 'Stichting gastenverblijven VUmc' offers low-priced rooms for family and friends of hospital patients, a project that ties in well with the other interests of Vrouwen VU-hulp.

Until 1950, the Vrije Universiteit was fully funded by [private individuals](#). As a result, there was never enough money to achieve the ambitions of this constantly growing university. From 1932 onwards, several women – led by [Sibbeltje Verdam-Okma](#) – started raising funds in order to set up a Medical Faculty. As an 'intermediate step', they also saved up for the Mathematics and Physics laboratories. After the hospital was established in 1966 and the VU gained financial equality in 1970, the women saved up for necessary 'extras' such as improved accessibility to the hospital for disabled people and all kinds of projects in developing countries. The women would put change aside from their housekeeping money, keeping it in the famous VU tin.

The long-term and extensive savings campaign by Vrouwen VU-hulp was entirely organised by women. This active contribution was at odds with the widespread idea among the reformed population that women's responsibility was primarily at home, in the family. However, the organisation made a great difference to VU Amsterdam. Although this specific supporting task was role-confirming, it also contributed greatly to the emancipation of reformed women in their own circle.

Given the fact that the savings campaign had 115,000 savers at its peak, its coordination (emptying the tins and counting the money) was very labour-intensive. The Netherlands was divided into territories that each had its own head, and rounds were made to each household to empty the tins. A lot of money was involved: Vrouwen VU-hulp raised a total of almost 30 million euros (converted and taking inflation into account).

Also watch the video 'The end of the VU collection tin'

<https://www.geheugenvandevu.nl/beeld-en-geluid/films/1991-de-ondergang-van-het-vu-busje> from 1991, when people switched to paying via the bank.



The classic green VU tin, VU heritage and collections (Photo: René den Engelsman, 2017)

### The lasting significance of the VU Amsterdam collection box

By Frans van Drimmelen, Chairman VUvereniging

The members of the [VUvereniging](#) (VU Association), the association that founded VU Amsterdam 140 years ago, continue to form a wide-ranging network in society of those who feel connected to the university. My great-great-grandmother Lijntje Maris-de Haan was a great fan of Abraham Kuyper and VU Amsterdam, and was a member of the VUvereniging from the very beginning. Although she lived in West Brabant, she was an active participant in Amsterdam meetings. From the very beginning of the savings campaign in 1932, the VU Amsterdam collection box featured prominently on her mantelpiece – just like it did on the mantelpiece of my great-grandmother Anna Punt-Maris and my grandmother Heiltje van Drimmelen-Punt. They saved money faithfully, as did many other women. They were early heroes of VU Amsterdam. By supporting projects in society and providing grants, the VUvereniging continues the tradition established by Vrouwen VU-hulp (Women's Aid for the VU) and others. Although the VU Amsterdam collection box has become academic heritage, the commitment of VU Amsterdam alumni and many others remains strong to this day.

A new memorial to Vrouwen VU-hulp, for which the VUvereniging has awarded a grant to VU Heritage and Collections, is planned for 2021. You can find an overview of the projects subsidised by the VUvereniging in 2020 [here](#).