Beginning in 1941 in Holland, in the early years of World War II, there developed an increasing shortage of all kinds of goods, and that included games and toys. Nearly all of the games sold in Holland before the war were imported from England or Germany. However, with the conflict it was no longer possible to import these types of articles. The trade with the UK was blocked and German factories were ordered to only manufacture war-related goods.

**Handmade MONOPOLYs from the 1940s**

**Article by Fred Horn**

But what was created (by German orders to stay indoors after dark) was a huge demand for these types of entertainment. An enjoyable way to spend time at home with your family was in the playing of games. Thus within a very short time a lot of people started making and selling games. A complete new industry evolved in the country and many tried their luck to make money by publishing a game.

On the other hand, there were also intelligent people, like my father, who were bright enough to make their own game(s) based on well-known published ones.

During my “collecting” period, I found some interesting examples of MONOPOLY variants personalized by their makers through the use of street- and station-names from their hometown.

Does that ring a bell indicating a direct line to ‘inventor’ Charles B. Darrow and his fondness with Atlantic City?

Following are MONOPOLY variants and their stories for three principal towns in Holland: Amsterdam; Rotterdam, and The Hague.
Some information on the game of MONOPOLY in Holland:

In 1936, Waddington began selling the game in England (for the English market), adapting the original version of MONOPOLY with the streets of London. The Dutch firm “Perry & Co” also started that same year importing the “English” version of the game into the Netherlands.

The only difference was the company included translations of the rules and a leaflet for the text on the cards. The game’s configuration included the MONOPOLY board separate from a small box containing the playing material.

With the existence of the war, all imported goods from England were halted, so Frederik Louis Verster, Perry’s director in Holland, started to design an original Dutch version of the game. For the streets and the towns he used the locations of the company’s shops and warehouses in the Netherlands along with a plausible value.

The print firm of Smeets Drukkerijen, based in the town of Weert, began production of the game in 1940, but in the more usual format for Holland: a box large enough for storing both the board and all of the game material inside.

Besides this standard arrangement, beginning in 1941, one could also order a Banker’s Tray as well as a smaller ‘MONOPOLY JUNIOR’ version.

N.B. The Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and the first Den Haag versions are typical “clones” of the first standard publication.

Amsterdam

(Board pictured on opposite page)

It was not difficult for me to find this variant as this was the MONOPOLY game I knew from my own youth. It was the game my family and I always played with.

I remember how disappointed I was when I saw for the very first time the regular published version of the game, with all those strange streets from all sorts of towns!

As far as I knew, my father, Wim Hom, had made our game in (1944) the last year of the War. When we cleaned up the house after his death and later after my mother moved into an elderly-assisted home, the game went into my collection.

The areas on this board followed (in the correct order) the published version. Only the names of the streets and stations were altered to their Amsterdam counterparts. Even the values of the spaces are copied from the original from the first year (1940) of the War. In the center of the board the name Monopolie appears—the Dutch translation for MONOPOLY. The angled positions on the board for the 2 x 16 cards are incorrect: mirrored along a vertical line. All of the self-made play material for this game has survived as well as the typed rules. >>

Property deed cards of the region’s streets, railroad stations, and utilities.
Rotterdam
(And a little surprise in store!)

In this version of Monopoly, the order of the fields is also like the original, but the streets and stations are now named after the real locations of Rotterdam. The values on the corresponding fields are identical as well.

The angled placement of the cards and “Kans” have been changed to: “BANK” and “WISSELEN” (English: Bank and Exchange). Only the board for this version survived (see story below) no game material could be found.

N.B. On the other side of this item there is a painted board for another Dutch game: HET BEURSSPEL, in its original form published in Holland in 1939.

N.B. Rotterdam was bombed during the first days of World War II and many of the streets on this board do not exist any more.

Above: Front side shows the Rotterdam variant

At right: On the backside of the game board was another game, Het Beursspel!
The story of how to stumble upon a game board:

For many years we owned a holiday cottage in Oostmahorn in the province of Friesland, located in the northern part of the Netherlands. We would go there on weekends and visit the region’s towns and villages. During one Sunday visit in the early 1980s, on a sunny morning, we were walking through Leeuwarden on route to see an exhibition in the local museum.

At one moment, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a gameboard! We continued down the road about a half a street length further when I said to my wife Saskia I wanted to take a better look. Upon our return, to my great surprise, it really was a game board nailed into a small bathroom window. And I knew the game: HET BEURSSPEL, published in 1939.

I bewildered my wife by immediately ringing the doorbell. After some time a lady opened the door, obviously not expecting anyone at that moment, all the more amazed after my introduction that I was a collector—and after my next question—asking her to give me the board out of her bathroom window.

“But do you have a substitute board with you?” she said, completely confused. I had to conclude that that was not the case.

She turned out to be a nice lady, asked us to come in and have a cup of coffee, and to talk about it. In her living room I immediately recognized a ceramic replica of THE GAME OF UR, so I asked her where that came from.

Flabbergasted she looked at my wife and said: “That is the first time anyone not only knew this game, but could also mention its name. A friend of mine, a ceramic artist made it for me as an object.” Saskia explained that our home was filled with games and that I knew my games! In a complete turn-about, the lady was willing to give me the board when I wrote down the rules for the game of Ur.

Unexpectedly, when removing the board from her bathroom window there was a great surprise of a second painting on the other side—a MONOPOLY board depicting the streets of Rotterdam. Unfortunately the lady could not provide me with any clue on how this game board from Rotterdam popped up in Leeuwarden.

She explained that after the window in her bathroom broke she looked for a small piece of wood in the attic. She had found this board, surely left by one of the former renters. Immediately she visited the attic again to see if there were any additional items left with the board, but she could not find any trace of anything else. After a welcoming coffee hour we continued our route to the museum, with my newest acquisition under my arm.

N.B. Both boards for the Monopoly game variants of Amsterdam and Rotterdam are one-time creations. These were only made for use within the family and without doubt there was no intention to start production to try to sell the game.

But that is different for the next two items concerning Den Haag. Both boards were neither hand drawn nor painted, but instead printed and subsequently with cardboard, linen, and colorful paper glued together into a foldable board, which indicates a kind of production line. Also for both, boxes had been made to store the game materials.

Den Haag
(The Hague)

'S-Gravenhage (English: The Hague)

A few months ago Rob van Linden, from the website HONGS, drew my attention to an item which was part of an Internet auction. An article he felt was exactly ‘my cup of tea!’ And it was. After a tough bidding competition (there were many interested people) I ended up having the highest bid and could lay claim on the parcel.

Along with the board came a small box which held the game material and a map of The Hague from the 1940s. The lid of the box (probably with the name written on it) was missing. Also, no game pieces/pawns had survived.

The paper on the face of the board was a print. It was later hand-colored and glued onto cardboard stuck with a piece of linen joining the two halves. This allowed the board to be folded.

All of the positions were in sequence, copied from the original; just the names were changed to represent The Hague area. Only this time, the manufacturer wanted to play the game like millionaires because the property values were sky high for that time.
That time period, as the whole picture depicts 1) the war years, or 2) the years shortly thereafter, I think is confirmed by the added map of the same (1940s) period. "Algemeen Fonds" and "Kars" are changed to "Oome Jan" (in Dutch the popular name for the governmental Pawnshop) and "BOFFE" (Dutch slang for 'having luck'). Only their positions have been changed!

The drawings in the four quarters on the board are a good representation of the original views of these sections of The Hague.

Curious about the history of this item and hoping to gather more information about the manufacturer, I decided to place an ad in the weekly "De OUD HAGENAAR."

Mercurius

(A very different look and feel)

Out of the village Son en Breugel in the province Brabant I got a response from a certain Mr. Leo van der Laken, stating his father and uncle manufactured this game during the War under the name MERCUERIUS. They had sold it in shops in The Hague.

Leo had also previously put in the same paper an appeal for more information about Mercurius (September 16, 2014), but there had not been any response at all. I had reason enough to travel south for an interview with Leo to hear more.

Upon my arrival, Leo was well prepared, having already placed his game and all of its materials on the table. But to my astonishment, (it is easy to see from the picture on the next page) we had completely different games from what I had bought in the auction.

It is clear Mercurius is also based on the game of Monopoly, and aimed at residents of Den Haag, but the execution differed completely from the original version. So, while I was there, why not record Leo’s story for historical reasons!

It was 1942-43 and the German occupiers forbade, also in The Hague, everything that in some way had to do with England or its language. Books, films, (jazz) music, and even such an innocent thing like the family game Monopoly were banned.

Leo’s father, Leendert Jan van der Laken (1907-1982), saved together with his brother-in-law Ab Muller (1932) an opportunity for an identical game to be sold in The Hague. Leendert Jan worked at the Nederlandsche Indische Handelsbank located at the 'Vijverberg' and Ab was a technical student with some experience in drawing.

The War generated a lot of spare time and the demand for family games was huge. Both brothers-in-law also had time to spend so they decided to develop an identical game under a different name (MERCUERIUS = Speel van Handel en Fortuin = Game of Trade and Fortune).

Using the names of streets and stations in The Hague, in addition to taxi organizations and cinemas. Uncle Ab designed a MONOPOLY-like board with two kinds of FORTUNA Cards (counterparts of Chance and Community Chest).

Leo was just 7 years old at the time, but he observed all. It was later on he assisted with the production of the games. Uncle Ab lived at Mandarijnstraat 2, but the production of the games took place at the vander Laken residence located at the Asterstraat 102.

Uncle Ab reproduced his graphics for the board on a small silk-screen printing machine. After the ink was completely dry, he hand-colored the paper. (Leo still remembers his mother’s anger the time the children were at the table squabbling and the small container filled with ink fell to the floor).

Next came the foldable board manufactured with some linen and cardboard, and all glued together. The pawns and houses/hotels were sown from wood.

The money was also made by hand. Proper values were stamped onto pieces of colored paper and then cut into shape. All of the text on the cards (PROPERTY and FORTUNA) were typed by hand and then cut to size as well.

Leo stated that besides the board, a small box was made for storing all of the game material. However it was lost over the years.

The finished manufactured games were sold at the bookshop 'van Zanten' where Leo's father had a side job as a bookkeeper in the Piet Heinestraat, and at a shop in the Prinsenstraat.

After the War, Leo’s father told him that in total some hundreds of their games had been sold. No rules for the game have survived, but Leo relayed that the game play is "like Monopoly."

Various handmade game materials: property deeds, money, and tokens—all to be played with the Den Haag Monopoly variant.
N.B. Glued on the outside of the **Mercurius** board was a small piece of paper with a drawing and the name of the game. According to Leo van der Laken this picture was also on the lid of the accompanying box.

Very faint in the corner one can discern the letter 'K' along with a number, more or less similar to the numbers used for the paper distribution during the War. The only appropriate solution would be number K-982, which was given to the The Hague printing firm, Albedon.

Because Leo stated that all of the game production took place at their home, a good guess would be all the cardboard and paper was purchased with help from this firm, using its quota. Not having such a number on an article made for public sale was against German laws!

To my disappointment this story is still incomplete and has open ends. **Rotterdam** and the first **The Hague** game remains a mystery—the exact rules for the games are missing as well as the pawns for some of the games and all material for the **Rotterdam** game. But who knows what the future may bring!

Handmade property deeds; Leo van der Laken and the **Mercurius** board and label.