It was always there...

Grandpa's Solitaire

When visiting my grandparents in Amsterdam one of the great joys I remember was the playing of games. My father didn't come from a wealthy family, so buying games wasn't an option—there was no money for that. There were of course some decks of cards around and a few dice as well, but the games we played were made by my grandfather (Herman Horn) himself.

I for sure remember playing Gansnbord (Game of the Goose) and Zevenzak, as well as Solitaire. And when the whole family gathered together, some 20 people or more, on New Year's Day, we played the Loterij in drie bedrijven (Lottery in three Acts). But my favorite game was Grandpa's Solitaire. I would try to solve the problem hidden in my chair.

When we were clearing the house after my grandmother moved into an elderly home (my grandfather had died years earlier) I searched for the games, being a collector at that time. Only the Loterij and some packs of cards were to be found, but to my great surprise, his Solitaire game was there!

When taking a more closer look at the board, it turned out to be just a block of timber with drilled holes. The pegs were constructed of shortened matchsticks.

I also realized at that time this was not the 'normal' board as sold in game shops as each "arm" had an extra row of 3 holes! Asking my father if he could provide any information about the board being different, he only said: "I don't know, it has always been like that!"

Thus the game became my property and is now part of my donated collection in the Vlaams Spellenarchief in Brugge (Belgium).

But early October 2014, John Beasley, doing research on the subject of Peg Solitaires, had seen this game on the website HONGS and contacted me for more information.

He drafted the only data I could provide in an appendix to his paper on the subject—(see www.jsbeasley.co.uk) with the following text:

"In respect of the 45-hole board, Fred Horn has sent me a picture of a board of this size and shape which his grandfather had made, and which is item 18028 in the HONGS collection (Historisch Overzicht Nederlandse GezelschapsSpellen). He thinks it was made sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s, and he is sure that his grandfather would have had something that served as an example. However, this board appears to have been a private construction for use at home, not a surviving example of an item which had been on general sale, and it is not clear whether it provides evidence that the 45-hole board was in vogue in the Netherlands at the time, thus refuting my skepticism regarding the article in Algemeen Handelsblad, or whether the article itself had provided the example which his grandfather had copied."

This gave me instead and for sure a plausible solution of how my grandfather had come to manufacture this game: an article in a paper!
Especially having the article mention the use of matchsticks for the pegs—for me this was proof that my grandfather made his game after this example.

And at the same time this solves the problem of “when was the game made?” That should be in 1929.

The article refers to Napoleon as the inventor of this game, but that is not correct. John Beasley presents an earlier book (pictured above).