The Life of Frida Eversmann

First woman engineer of Wageningen 1919

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Preface

For this biography we used what Margreet van der Burg and Marian Bos-Boers published in their 2003 book *"Vrouwen, Wageningen en de Wereld; Wetenschap, studie en loopbaan (*Women, Wageningen and the world. Science, study, and career*), 1918 – 2003."*[1] This book provides a short biographical portrait of Frida as the first women agricultural engineer from Wageningen and highlights of her life at work and beyond. We followed up and searched for more details on her background, life, and work in the archives. Also, through articles in newspapers and journals we got to learn more about her career and personality. The offer of Margreet van der Burg to read a draft version, to check the information and share additional one, we happily accepted.

When almost finalized the book, we got in touch with family members of Frida. Etha Struick en Peter Eversmann, grand children of Frida's brother Georg, searched for us in the family archives. This way we got additional valuable information and photos of their aunt Frida. We could also speak with Mrs Fransje Brakkee-Eversmann, who actually had met her aunt when she was very young. As result we could include several photos and an 'in memoriam' published by the association *De Sleutelbos*.

Photo front page: Frida Eversmann 1920s, Source: Family archive Eversmann

Content

Parents and ancestors

Godefrida Anna Alida (Frida) Eversmann is born in Amsterdam on 2 December 1890. Her father is Franz Georg Wilhelm Eversmann, born in Alfhausen (Lower Saxony, Germany, north of Osnabrück) on 12 June 1851. Her mother is Alida Theresia Theodora Barnasconi, born in Amsterdam on 5 February 1862. Grandfather Barnasconi was a tradesperson.

Father Eversmann had come to Amsterdam at a youthful age; we found him in the migration registers of Amsterdam of 1869. He arrived prepared since he could hand over the required documents from Ambt Bersenbrück and started as shop attendant at Stall, a shop for fine textiles in the Kalverstraat. The family Stall originated from Lower Saxony in Germany as well; the birth name of Mrs Stall is Böcker likewise the name of the mother of Franz. We therefore can safely assume that they were related. During the course of time several other family members Eversmann were also registered on the same address of the family in Amsterdam, probably to help each other. It was not uncommon in the 19e Century that German turned to the Netherlands for work. In March 1888, her father Franz received the Dutch nationality.

Frida's parents married on 5 July 1883 in Amsterdam. Their three eldest children are born in Amsterdam. First, a girl Everdina in 1884, then a son Georg in 1886, and then Frida in 1890. Her father in the meantime had become co-partner at the firm Stall which was again dismantled on 31 December 1886. On 1 January 1887 already, Franz Eversmann announced by advertisement that he together with Mr Bartel had taken over the firm Schade & Oldenkott, also for fine textiles and housed in a big building at the Nieuwedijk in Amsterdam.

In 1894 the family moved to Nijmegen at the Berg en Daalscheweg 51 where they stayed until May 1897. The oldest son Georg of 10 years old was not registered in 1894 in Nijmegen; he lived in Beuningen from May 1893 onwards. The last year in Nijmegen was a difficult time for the family in private matters. The fourth child, a son born in May 1896, got very sick and died 7 January 1897. The fifth child, also a son named Joseph Franz was finally born in The Hague on 16 January 1900.

Father Franz was still registered as tradesperson in fine textiles in the Nijmegen period. Reason to leave Nijmegen for The Hague must have been the acquisition of a building at the Spuistraat/corner Venestraat at The Hague. Franz Eversmann signed the documents on 29 December 1896. Mr Bartel had mandated him to buy this capital building for the firm Schade & Oldenkott for 70.000 guilders. That would be around € 2.000.000 in 2022. We know from newspaper advertisements that it was the renowned Magasin *De Keizershof* in fine textiles they continued under the name of Bartel & Eversmann, as part of the firm Schade & Oldenkott.

Magasin Keizershof (Bartel & Eversmann), shop for fine textiles, Spuistraat 2, corner Venestraat), by Arnoldus Francken, ca. 1899. Source: Municipal Archive, The Hague, nr. 0.66458

The father of Frida deceased in 1922 in The Hague; her mother in 1929 but in Wageningen. Since she was registered on the same address as Frida, we can assume that Frida has taken care of her mother.

School and study

The family had not been complete for all the time in The Hague. Frida's sister of 6 years older her age, Everdina Elisabeth Eversmann, moved to Venray in November 1897 and came back as a 20-year-old to The Hague in August 1904. She had been at a boarding school for Roman Catholic girls, managed by the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union. Frida went there as well for 2,5 years. Frida arrived at Venray in December 1902, just after her 12th anniversary and moved back to The Hague in April 1905, then ample 14 years old. This means that the sisters have been together at this school for 1,5 years. Later, we read in the newspaper *Het Vaderland* of 7 August 1909 that Frida got her diploma for the 5-year HBS in The Hague and soon after she received a diploma as pharmaceutical assistant in July 1910. Then she registered as an almost 20-year-old at the *Rijks Hoogere Land-, Tuin- en Boschbouwschool* (State College for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry) in Wageningen. By then, it had a 4-year curriculum at the secondary level with 6 specializations of which Frida chose agricultural chemistry. Her interest in chemistry seems to have found a fine follow up after her pharmaceutical diploma.

During her study time Frida was formally still registered in The Hague, although she lived in Wageningen. She stayed in the Hoogstraat, first with the family of a Catholic cigar producer G.Th. Kraaijvanger, and later at another street number with Catharina Christina Goossen, who was single, pension keeper, and daughter of the painter and city historian Gerrit Goossen (1844-1901).

From 1901 onwards, some more young women registered at the College in Wageningen; most came from better-off families.[2] For instance, Nelly Nieuwland was one of the them who also studied agricultural chemistry. She graduated in 1906 and was immediately hired as assistant to the agricultural chemistry section by J.H. Aberson. Aberson was responsible for the study programme and the laboratory of agricultural chemistry. In 1914 Nelly Nieuwland finalized the article *Bijdrage tot de kennis van het botervet*[2] as lead-author together with Aberson, married with the just graduated student in colonial agriculture J.G.B. Beumée, and then left with him to Indonesia, by then a Dutch colony. Remarkable is that this first women assistant kept on pursuing her profession at least for some time; in 1922 and 1930 she published new research she conducted there.[3]

Meanwhile, Frida graduated as agricultural chemist in 1914. She got a job in Maastricht at the *Rijks Proefstation voor Meststofonderzoek* (State Fertiliser Experimental Centre). One year after Nelly left, Frida returned in 1915 to Wageningen as assistant to Aberson.

This has probably been the most crucial step in her life. Frida got the opportunity to further develop herself and do scientific work under the guidance of Aberson. It was an exciting period in which the transition of the Agricultural College to higher education institute has been prepared and finally effected in 1918. Aberson had been key to this 'upgrading' according to Prof. Olivier.[4]

Frida took her chances and alongside her work prepared and took examens offered to former Wageningen graduates to achieve the degree of agricultural engineer as was explained in a meeting on 11 February 1918. In 1919 Frida succeeded and as Ir. F. Eversmann became the first woman agricultural engineer, specialisation agricultural chemistry.

The book of Margreet van der Burg and Marian Bos-Boers shows that there were considerable doubts about the suitability of women for scientific research, especially at the Ministry. Up to 1953 at Wageningen there were no appointments of women higher than scientific assistants.

Intermezzo: J.H. Aberson (1857-1935)

Johannes Hendrikus Aberson was born at Olst on 30 October 1857. Originally meant to become an engineer, fate led him to the* Normaalschool *at Deventer to be qualified as primary school teacher. He indeed started a teaching career at the public primary school in the smalltown of his birth. At the age of 21 he switched to Wageningen and managed to achieve a teaching qualification for mathematics at the secondary school level.
Mr Beyering and Mr Ritzema Bos of the Agricultural College got acquainted with him. Encouraged by them, he succeeded in gaining additional teaching qualifications for mineralogy, geology, botany, and zoology. Aberson got convinced that biological questions required fundamental chemical knowledge. Therefore, he decided to study chemistry and physics under the guidance of Van 't Hoff, Gunning and Van der Waals in 1882-1884. This resulted in new teaching qualifications in physics, chemistry, and cosmography. Ultimately, in 1884 he returned to Wageningen as assistant in chemistry at the Agricultural College. Two years later he was hired as college teacher which enabled him to fully develop himself as teacher, researcher, and manager. First, he developed the curriculum in chemistry and in 1903, he took over leadership in agricultural chemistry and fertilisation theory from Adolf Mayer. Both periods are reflected in his research; the first period entailed more generic chemistry and physics, and during the later years he devoted his attention especially to agricultural problems. Aberson was not only a great teacher but also a capable researcher and manager. As director to the Agricultural College appointed in 1917, he manoeuvred the College well into its new status as Higher Education institute in 1918.
The same year Aberson got promoted to Professor and appointed as first Rector Magnificus.
Surely an illustrious career for a person who started as primary school teacher as a 20-year-old.
Himself he liked to truly declare himself an autodidact to the students.[5]

The government honoured Aberson by bestowing him* Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw *in the academic year 1918/1919*[6] *and later* Commandeur in de Orde van Oranje Nassau *by Royal Decree (KB) of 18 March 1924. The College Senate finally granted him an honorary doctorate during the festivities of his farewell on 13 November 1928. He died in 1935.

Period 1918-1929: collaboration with Aberson

Graduated engineer, Frida continued her work at the Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory of the Agricultural College. Her task was to supervise the Wageningen students in the new curriculum established for chemistry after 1918 and to conduct agricultural chemical research. Since Prof. Aberson became the first Rector Magnificus of the upgraded college, Frida took a large share in the work needed. For instance, she was his right hand in the research on the influence of manganese on plant growth and the effect of soil lime condition on of agricultural crops as oat. She then collaborated intensively on the publications on these subjects. Furthermore, she was in day-to-day charge of the agricultural chemistry laboratory.

Her four research publications show that Frida had ample opportunity to conduct and write about her research.[7] In these publications Frida is listed as a co- author or lead author with Prof. Aberson.

These investigations included the reaction of the soil and the need for lime, and the effect of so-called stimulants (including trace elements). From the very extensive research reports we can learn with what precision and great variation the experiments were conducted, followed by a highly critical evaluation of the analysis of the results obtained. Several studies required four or five years, with both laboratory and field trials, mainly at the Wageningen College. From time to time the investigation included fertiliser products developed by commercial companies, though the scientific standard was always explicitly upheld. We found several examples illustrating that sometimes the claimed benefits in the prospectuses of these companies or even in the official publications of international universities were mercilessly refuted.

Frida –June 1920 and ca 1925 at work in a testing field at the Wageningen Eng.
Source: Family archive Eversmann

Of great significance has been the research into the cause of oat disease in peat-soils areas, a disease about which Aberson published as early as 1916. He came to the preliminary conclusion that the symptoms of this oat disease were associated with insufficient nitrification and the occurrence of a de-nitrifying bacterium. In 1923, Frida revisited the research on an extensive scale over a period of four years. She investigated to what extent it was indeed a bacteria-induced disease and what other factors might affect its occurrence. These questions were carefully examined in the laboratory on a very wide range of formulated and scientifically controlled conditions. Finally, the experiments were repeated on experimental fields in Oosterbeek, among others, by assistant J.W. van Dijk. The trials led to the conclusion of two optional methods to better prevent oat disease. Either by the addition of manganese as supplement, which would strengthen the oxidation, or by sterilisation (by heating) of the soil before sowing.

A very extensive publication of this research was published as *Mededelingen van het Landbouwscheikundig Laboratorium van de Landbouwhogeschool* (Communications of the Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory) in the *Landbouwkundig Tijdschrift* of 1927. It is remarkable that Frida Eversman l.i. (agricultural engineer) is listed first as the author of this article, followed by Prof J.H. Aberson. In our opinion, this shows the great appreciation of Frida's work by Aberson and the lead Frida must have had in this research. It also received international acclaim including a translated publication of this article in the volume of the *Landwirtschaftliche Jahrbücher* of the same year. The great responsibility Frida assumed in the laboratory under Aberson over the years probably also enabled Aberson to fulfil his many advisory and supervisory positions in addition to his research work.

The 1927 one was also the last official scientific publication Frida collaborated with Aberson since he retired on 18 September 1928 after having been working there continuously for more than 44 years. The festivities around his retirement honoured him abundantly. A plaque with his portrait was presented to him to be hung in the Aula and several people addressed him with speeches of great appreciation. We read in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 14 November 1928, that Frida spoke at his farewell on behalf of the assistants and laboratory staff. She recalled how Aberson managed to instil interest in the work among all his staff members and had also been a fatherly friend and counsellor in private matters. He died seven years later in Wageningen at the age of 78 on 10 December 1935.

Arrival of ir. Hudig as successor of Aberson

After the retirement of the widely esteemed Prof J.H. Aberson in 1928, Ir J. Hudig[8] became the new professor of agricultural chemistry. Hudig was born in Rotterdam on 18 March 1880. He came from an old lineage of ship owners and merchants but chose quite a different direction for himself. After he attended the H.B.S. in Rotterdam, he continued his studies in Germany at the Technical College of Hanover. There he started with electrical engineering but later swapped to chemistry. His studies also included agricultural chemistry and microbiology. In 1903, *Het Vaderland* reported that he was graduated as chemical engineer at the Hanover Technical College.[9] One year later, in 1904, he was appointed at the Dutch State Agricultural Experimental Stations, first in Goes and Maastricht, and in 1905 in Groningen. In Groningen, he became director of the second department of the State Agricultural Experimental Stations focusing on the cultivation on sandy and peat-colonial soils in 1916. Hudig continued to consider other positions, as evidenced by an unsuccessful application in 1918 for a position at an industrial research laboratory.

When the application of the results of soil research for practical purposes began to resume some importance, the Agricultural Experimental Stations lacked testing capacity. Therefore, on the initiative of Hudig, the agricultural organisations and the *Heidemaatschappij* founded the *Bedrijfslaboratorium voor Grondonderzoek* (Company Laboratory for Soil Research) in Groningen in 1927. Ir. Hudig was appointed its director. The opening took place in February 1928. Hudig, together with C.W.G. Hetterschij, described the layout of this laboratory in the *Chemisch Weekblad*.[10] The laboratory would provide farmers quick and cheap examination of soil samples needed to determine what fertilisation they could apply on their poor sandy and peat-colonial soils. The research used the methods elaborated on the Groningen State Agricultural Experiment Station.

Hudig's interest clearly went beyond the work in Groningen. His great opportunity to extend his reach came when Prof. Aberson retired. On 1 January 1929, at the age of 48, he was indeed appointed his successor and became professor and head of the Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory. He arrived in Wageningen as a widower; after 19 years of their marriage in 1905 his wife had died in Groningen in 1924.

On his arrival in Wageningen, Prof. Hudig was accompanied by Prof. Aberson to visit the agricultural chemistry laboratory at the Heerestraat. Hudig immediately expressed his ideas on updating it to modern standards. During the indeed granted redesign, Hudig also simultaneously built himself a residence and a private laboratory "on the mountain" in Wageningen. The latter must have caused some surprise, especially as it turned out later that he conducted research in the same research domains there as he was responsible for as professor at the Agricultural College.

As a professor, he had to familiarise himself with preparing and giving lectures and with chemical laboratory training in the first few years. Agricultural chemistry was a compulsory subject both for the agricultural chemistry candidates as well as for all other students. These activities were of a completely different nature than he was used to do in his previous business-oriented work. Quickly, Frida must also have noticed the difference between his approach to research and what she had learned from Aberson.

The "Quaestie Hudig – Eversmann"

We read in the archives that in the period from 1929 to late 1932, early 1933, an apparently unresolvable situation developed between the chemist Frida Eversmann and the professor Hudig, which continued until early 1935 with a temporary posting, and finalized in 1939 by an honourable discharge. A fistful of files is saved in the Gelderland Archives under the name "Quaestie Hudig - Eversmann". From these we draw the highlights of this history.

In October 1932, Frida entered a discussion with the secretary of the College's Board of Trustees about the possibility of qualifying for special crisis redundancy pay to which, she believed, was entitled to. She referred to the September speech of the Rector Magnificus Prof. ir. J.H. Thal Larsen. Frida argued she would be eligible ahead of all other officials and civil servants at the College. She was then 41 years old and had been working at the Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory for 17 years. She reiterated this request in a letter on 24 January 1933 to the Minister of Economic Affairs and Labour, referring to the case of Dr.

Ir. W.S. Smith, in rank her equal, who had been granted this on 1 January 1933 following his honourable discharge the same date. Colleague Smith had been awarded a doctorate with Aberson in 1927 (Cum Laude) and had apparently received an appointment to the laboratory with a higher salary. Frida expressed that under the civil service regulations she was the one to be put on such redundancy pay.

On 7 March 1933, Prof. Hudig asked for clarity on the matter by letter to the Board of Trustees. He expressed that he was of the opinion that Frida was not entitled, and that the work would being harmed as he has no replacement for her. He argued that he had been unable to find a suitable person to take over Frida's work for the lower salary that would be allocated for her replacement. He stated that he would not find someone for a salary low as DGld. 2400,-- which was significantly less than what Frida was earning at the time. Hudig wrote that he needed someone experienced in the field, who could replace him in the management of laboratory, and was scientifically skilled enough to give the students a proper scientific education. He felt that the agricultural chemical laboratory with at least 200 students passing through each year, should be properly managed as a business would require. From this, we can draw the conclusion that Frida's job was discussed, but replacement only granted for less money.

Why Frida was so persistent on getting an abundancy allowance becomes clear from her later written complaints about Prof. Hudig of 28 June 1933. She referred to a conversation with Prof. Hudig on 29 December 1932 in which she "unfolded her objections to the way he thought he should do his job." She later claimed that she by then concluded that she could no longer put trust in the professor's conduct and saw in such an arrangement the only possibility to terminate her work under Prof. Hudig as soon as possible without suffering drastic financial consequences.

Frida decided to share her complaints about Hudig in a conversation with the President of the Board of Trustees on 23 January 1933. We do not know whether he afterwards communicated these with the Minister, however, two months later, Frida was summoned to The Hague for a meeting with the Minister on 23 March 1933. She went and informed him about Hudig that day. Meanwhile, Hudig thought to have proof to question her conduct and sent an official complaint about Frida's unauthorised absence that day. The note of the Secretary of the Board of Trustee consulting with the board members about the unauthorised leave also revealed that Hudig indeed was working on a reorganisation in which Ms Eversmann could be missed and it might be seen as a worsening situation of nasty behaviour.

It is only on 3 June 1933 that Frida was asked to substantiate her complaints so that the Board of Trustees could further investigate. She provided an extensive letter of 32 pages with her complaints on 28 June 1933 in which she referred having informed the Minister. The complaints mainly concerned her view on how Prof. Hudig harmed the agricultural extension in the Netherlands as well as the Agricultural College in its education and finances.

When Hudig learned about her letter with complaints, he informed Frida in writing on 13 July 1933 that he no longer wanted to see her in the laboratory; he assigned her work to do at home. This way she was completely relieved of any daily activities at her workplace in favour of administrative work for the agricultural chemistry laboratory. The work at home involved drafting reports of a series of scientific studies that had long been lying idle.

Her absence was first disguised by the holiday period, but was hard to miss after September according to Frida in her letter the president of the Board of Trustees Jhr. S. van Citters. She included a copy of a letter of Hudig that he still thought there was enough work for her to do at home until 2 October. Frida informed Van Citters she agreed to do so but would also like to see this undesirable situation ending as soon as possible. We also found a letter of September by Hudig to the Rector that he did see no reason to grant the mentioned chemist any yearly salary because of her capabilities nor service at work.

The requested letter with the complaints by Frida of 28 June 1933 was very extensive. The first part concerned reprehensible behaviour with a female analyst and the other part tampering with research results and financial gain, which would be detrimental to the college's education and interference of commercial interests with standards of independent scientific research. Frida named a few large companies with which Hudig had contacts and for whose research finances from The College were mixed with his private laboratory. The big companies were certainly not the least at the time: Mekog, Nettolin, Enci, Calvé Delft and the *Instituut voor Suikerbietenteelt* (Institute for Sugar Beet Cultivation) in Bergen op Zoom.

These companies had every interest in having a leading agricultural chemist like Prof. Hudig who would confirm the efficacy of their products.

Nothing more was found about the first part of the accusation. The other part of the complaint boiled down to the situation that Hudig had various laboratories under his management, both public and private, wholly, or largely financed by industry. In return for commissions, Frida argued that he would regularly advocate the benefits of products from industry and omit worse research results in publications.

Regarding the financial aspects of the complaint, the *Crisisaccountsdienst* (Crisis Auditing Service) was commissioned by the Ministry to investigate the accounts with the assistance of the Board of Trustees and Prof. Hudig. The audit noted that Hudig had submitted all financial records and bank accounts, but a final judgement would require an additional audit of the involved companies which paid for research. They stated having no chance that these firms would cooperate on this. The auditors therefore concluded that Hudig was indeed commercially minded and recommended making business transactions more transparent in the future by running everything according to the regulations of the State Treasury.

In November 1933, Prof. Hudig wrote a letter to the Board of Trustees complaining about the Ministry's failure to take further adequate action following the infamous and unsubstantiated allegations against him. He noted that he knew from a visit to The Hague that the auditors' report was remained on hold. Despite Hudig's insistence and reassurance that he did and would continue to provide full cooperation like he trusted would be given to him, the Board of Trustees did not act promptly. Only after lengthy delays two important steps were taken in this integrity "quaestie". On 8 November 1934, the College of Trustees organised a hearing in the Senate Chamber, and, in April 1935, the Ministry of Economic Affairs installed an "Honorary Council".

Prof. Hudig formally defended himself against Frida's complaints in writing. From a document titled: Prof. Hudig's final defence against the complaint of Ms G.A.A. Eversmann, the professor appeared to be close to despair by the lack of decisions. He concluded his defence with: *"I hope I have now written to your college for the last time on these matters. Bear in mind that for four consecutive years I had to work in an atmosphere spoiled by cancer and resistance and have had to do everything alone. I have not had any good help, to which I am entitled, to fulfil my task. A good result of the education is therefore not to be expected if this calamity is not provided for in the right way. There is only one alternative, either the Professor goes or the complaining completely unreliable sabotaging civil servant.*"

w.g. (signed by) J. Hudig

Meanwhile, with the new academic year Prof. J.A. Honing succeeded Prof. ir. H.K.H.A. Mayer Gmelin as Rector Magnificus in September 1933. Prof. Honing intensified the investigation on the matter from May 1934 onwards. His action followed a meeting with Frida at his office hours. The occasion was her complaint about the delay of her salary raise but they seemed to also have talked about the "quaestie". We found a letter dated 18 May 1934 in which Prof. Honing addressed the Board of Trustees to support her yearly salary raise Frida was entitled to. In the same letter he also gave his opinion about Prof. Hudig in no unmistakable words. He referred to his own observations during meetings of Senate committees and on ongoing educational matters. He noted that the ongoing "quaestie" had not been any longer a matter for the Agricultural College alone for some months by then. He warned that several other related government agencies got involved which would not help the reputation of the Agricultural College. He later wrote letters in June 1934 and late September 1934 to the responsible Minister of Economic Affairs, cc. the Board of Trustees. These documents show that Prof. Honing was of the opinion, based on his own observations and conversations with witnesses, that Prof. Hudig's actions were detrimental to the College's education and the prestige of the many other agricultural organisations operating in the Netherlands.

In the files of the Gelderland Archives, we find internal notes by the secretary and president of the Board of Trustees. These show that the actions by Honing also evoked resistance. We read that Honing was considered biased and not impartial in the matter with Ms Eversmann.

Prof. Honing kept taking the matter seriously after having stated several times he could not leave the accusations as slander by Eversmann and her former colleague and having recalled misconduct of Prof. Hudig in other matters. He at last provided information to the responsible Minister of Economic Affairs by a letter dated in September 1934. He wrote that he had learned from Frida that none of the witnesses to

corroborate her complaints had been heard by the College, and therefore he had taken action to do it himself. He attached about a dozen documents supporting Frida's complaints, including feedback of his conversation with Dr. Marie Löhnis. Marie Löhnis was surely considered a good witness, as she was the daughter of the well-known former inspector J.B. Löhnis who also had been member of the Board of Trustees before. She had worked in Hudig's private laboratory in 1934.[12] Marie obtained her PhD in Utrecht in 1922 and afterwards spent about five years in the United States to gain more research experience. She returned to the Netherlands around 1927.

On 8 November 1934, finally, the hearing session of a committee from the Board of Trustees took place in the Senate Chamber of the Agricultural College. The committee consisted of the president of the Board of Trustees Van Citters and member E. Van Welderen Baron Rengers, assisted by the Board secretary. Present were Prof. Hudig, Frida and witnesses à charge, her former colleague Dr. Ir. W.S. Smith, and Ir. G. Veenstra and à discharge O.J. Cleveringa and Drs. A.C. Schuffelen, all men. A detailed report was made of the hearing, which can be found in the Gelderland Archives. But subsequently it is not clear what conclusions were drawn and to whom these were then communicated.

Besides the audit and the 8 November hearing, another important action was initiated by the Minister of Economic Affairs. The already mentioned 'Honorary Council' was installed by order of 12 April 1935. Its task was to investigate and report whether, and if so to what extent, the scientific integrity of the professor at the Agricultural College, Prof. Dr J. Hudig at Wageningen, had been compromised due to the way in which he organised his scientific work and formulated his advice. Th.A. Fruin of Rotterdam, (chair), Dr. H.R. Kruyt, professor at Utrecht, and Dr.ir. I. Rietsema, director of the RC Agricultural and Horticultural School in Breda were invited and agreed to join. Two weeks later, the secretary-general, on behalf of the minister, informed Prof. Hudig that the committee had been officially installed and invited him to provide any oral and written information the committee felt needed.

In December 1935, the committee headed by Fruin produced its final report, which was sent to the Minister and Hudig. The Minister was the Catholic Dr. L.N. Deckers. During 1935 the directorate of Agriculture regained its own Ministry so the "quaestie" was handed over to him. We have not been able to find whether Honing received it after his term as Rector Magnificus stopped or a copy was also sent to the Board of Trustees. The conclusion of the Fruin report reads: "*The committee trusts that it has presented the results of the requested investigation as fully as circumstances required. From the conclusions of the various parts of its investigation already follows what its final conclusion should be. The Committee has not found any facts that would justify the conclusion that the scientific integrity of the professor had been compromised in the ways he organised his scientific work and formulated his advice.*" We note that in its final conclusion, the Fruin Committee did not comment on the notorious stories Honing was concerned about.

Prof. Hudig began to lose patience and wrote to the Minister about the final conclusion on 16 February 1936. He requested a personal interview. He wanted further clarification of the minister's opinion as he quoted him: "*although several of these complaints could not be considered without merit, the results of this investigation do not give him sufficient reason to seriously reproach Prof. Hudig in this respect*". This interview took place on 25 February, about which Hudig wrote to the president of the Board of Trustees Van Citters one day later. He reported he had a good and constructive conversation with the minister. We do not infer from this that the minister went back on his earlier judgment. However, we do read in a letter dated 12 April 1936 to Prof. Hudig, that a commitment has been made by the Minister of Agriculture, L.N. Deckers, that a "secret report" has been extracted from Hudig's file, personally sealed, and inscribed that it could only be viewed by the minister himself. And that the minister and the single officer who had access to the contents of this report should not use it under any circumstances.

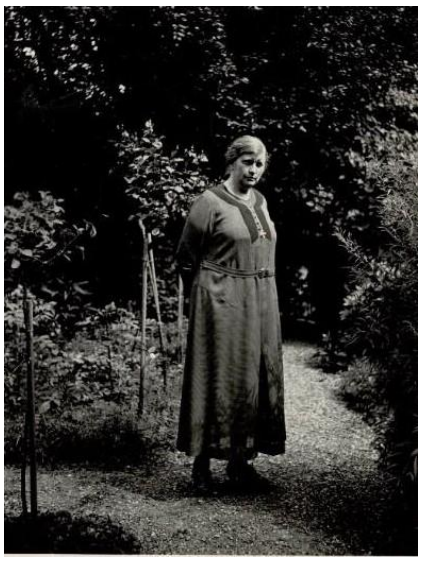
Many details can be found on this issue in the adversarial writings. It is mentioned that this resulted in an increasingly tense situation for many years at the laboratory, both for Frida and Prof. Hudig and, of course, for the other staff.

Reflecting on this after almost 100 years and as outsiders, we cannot but conclude that this also led to the necessary discord within the management of the College and hesitations in how to act and cut the Gordian knot. On the one hand, it must have been impossible to simply dismiss Frida because of the turmoil she caused. She already had received high praise for her work for years. And on the other hand, the financial input Prof. Hudig generated by his cooperation with the Dutch industry, especially in the

'fertiliser' field, was very much welcomed by some. It allowed the research work to continue despite of the very sparing support by the government. Also, it might have been that scientific integrity had not yet been weighed so heavily by everyone.

It seems that the "Quaestie Hudig - Eversmann" ended ultimately without consequences for Prof. Hudig. He remained professor until his retirement in 1949; ten dissertations were produced under his responsibility. After his retirement, Hudig remained active for about 18 more years, wrote some more books and died in 1967 at the age of 87.

For Frida, the issue had definitely damaged her career at the Agricultural College. We read in a letter dated 14 February 1935 from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Directorate of Agriculture: "*Since it is to be expected that a decision on the matter of Prof. Hudig will have to be postponed for some time and since it is desirable that the chemist at the Agricultural Chemistry Laboratory, Ms G.A.A. Eversmann, be employed during this time, I would like to assign her temporarily to the Agricultural Extension Service. I trust this will meet with the approval of your college and I look forward to receiving confirmation of this as soon as possible. Signed by the DG of Agriculture.*" In a handwritten note to this received letter, we read that it was not happy about this, as it meant they could no longer dispose of Frida's "tract".



Frida, August 1935
Source: Family archive Eversmann

It seems that the Ministry had to decide for a Salomon's judgment: teaching and research at the agricultural college had to return to full strength, which required Hudig. For Frida, another position within the state agricultural services was necessarily arranged and she was rehabilitated by the decision of 11 March 1935 to adjusting her annual salary retroactively with the annual increments from 1 October 1933 onwards.

Frida was given a pivotal role at the Regulatory Commission of the Agricultural Experimental Fields, as State consultants from all over the country came to her with their questions. After four years of temporary secondment to the Regulatory Commission, she was finally honourably discharged from the College by Royal Decree on 16 November 1939. Fortunately, Frida, then almost 49 years old, was newly appointed in a managerial position as engineer in the agricultural extension service. She was put in charge of one of the Departments of the newly established Central Institute for Agricultural Research (C.I.L.O.) in Wageningen. This appointment allowed her to continue living in her own city. The C.I.L.O was just founded in 1939 by the Ministry of Agriculture, replacing the Regulatory Commission Frida was posted to before.

Unfortunately, she could only work in the new position for only a few years, as Frida fell ill and died on 12 November 1941.

Social interests of Frida beyond her work

In the period of working with Prof. Aberson, Frida also found time to pursue public activities of social importance that were of great interest to her in addition to her work for the Agricultural College.

In the Roman Catholic newspaper *Het Huisgezin* we read that Frida signed up in 1919 for a committee to promote that a greater number of Catholic young people would study. This was right after the recognition of Wageningen as a higher education institute. The committee argued that Roman Catholic young people were "*outstanding by aptitude and commitment*" and should be helped to study and supported financially, when necessary, through scholarships and raising funds from private individuals. This committee included around 30 very prominent Catholic persons, mainly from education, universities, unions and some members of the House of Representatives with board members Henri Hermans, Msgr. Prof. Mr. J.H. Nolens, and A.I.M.J. Baron van Wijnbergen and Dr. L. Deckers as secretary. Yet it is notable that the same Deckers later assessed the 'Quaestie Hudig - Eversmann' as the responsible Minister of Agriculture.

Three years later, we see that Frida started to propagate and facilitate additional education and development for Catholic women and in particular Catholic farm women and her daughters. As early as 1922, she wrote in *'t Boerinnehoekje* (Farm women's corner), a section of *De Katholieke Vrouw (*The Catholic Woman) which was the weekly magazine of the Catholic Women's Organisation. She wrote in *De Katholieke Vrouw* that Catholic farm women should join women in a women's organisation. Together, it were the women who would be able to break down the divide between classes and stations. [13]

Frida also exposed her views in brochures, such as in *De Roomsche Boerin (*The RC Farm Woman) of 1922. This booklet was initiated by the Catholic clergyman P. Damasus o.m.c. to urge women of Catholic farm families to take education beyond compulsory primary education. Frida wrote the second section, entitled "*De Roomsche boerin. Vrouw en moeder en haar ontwikkeling (*The RC Farm Woman. Woman and mother, and her development)."[14] Two things stand out: firstly, the archaic language used, which is completely absent from her scholarly work, and secondly, the subordination imposed on women to seek advice from her pastor regarding joining an association. For general aspects, she argued, the parish priest would mention the Catholic Women's Association as the most obvious association. Frida took a very practical and purposeful approach in her advice by mentioning many institutions and courses, which may or may not be provided by Catholic institutions. If not, ecclesiastical approval would be needed. Some examples she mentioned were government-subsidised winter courses for agriculture and horticulture, and courses for adults which already presuppose knowledge of agriculture and horticulture. Accordingly Frida was asked to chair a Commissie van Onderzoek voor Landbouw-huishoudcursussen (Committee of Inquiry on Farm household management courses)[15].

In the world of adult education, Frida made quite a name. Frida was announced in the programme of a three-day meeting of Roman Catholic social leaders in Arnhem in September 1922[16]. She would be a speaker to introduce the theme of Labour, to discuss options to professions in combination with what industrial and agricultural education have to offer. Later, at a multi-day congress by the *Volksuniversiteit* in 1926, she presented as a pre-advisor on the question: is it desirable and possible for the institutions dedicated to adult development to benefit the rural population, and if so, how it should be done. This followed the question addressed at the National Congress for Adult Development held earlier in the same year. That question was whether there was sufficient cooperation among the various organisations for this purpose, and if not, how to ensure that this would happen. An article in *Het Volk*[17] in 1926 tells that Frida spoke there and garnered applause with her views on the cultural significance of various farmers' unions that were not satisfied with the current professional development of the farmers. She regretted that cutbacks are stopping the expansion of agricultural education. She noted that such cultural work is best entrusted to farmers' unions since these are most knowledgeable about their situation and mentality. She expressed that they had to keep the main lead in development work.

We also frequently came across her name in *De Tijd*, a Catholic newspaper in which announcements of meetings and lectures of various Catholic women's organisations can be found. Elsewhere we read that Frida made an appeal to involve RC farm women in the Women's Union at a meeting of Diocesan RC Women's Union in 1924. She felt that there was a prejudice that the RC Women's Union would be a 'Ladies' Union. She called on the diocesan board to collaborate in a campaign to attract more rural attention. The RC Women's Union expressed to have all confidence in Frida, recalling that she is the only

Catholic agricultural engineer in the Netherlands. The Archdiocese, together with the *Mariabond,* set up the committee to promote and guide the development of the Catholic farm women, as women, wives, mothers, and farm women. Frida became the only woman member of a committee to organise the Catholic farm women in which she played a vital role from 1924-1929.

In *Het Centrum* and *De Tijd* of June 1927, an announcement was made for a retreat open to women graduates in August that year at a boarding school in Ubbergen. Inquiries and applications had to go through Frida. Until 1939, her name often appeared often as contact person in similar announcements in Catholic newspapers.

Group Picture of the retreat participants in either 1922, arrow pointing at Frida (last row) Source: Family archive Eversmann

In the *Katholieke Sociaal Weekblad*, Frida often wrote the Women's Section. In the edition of 22 January 1927, we found an extensive article on education and development of the rural female population. In November that year, she addressed girls' professional choices. She pointed out that a quarter of women do not marry and need to support themselves. She encouraged women to making the most of the opportunities available to them as men do. She was very outspoken in her writing: "*Women, like men, have the duty, but also the right to develop their personality freely, to work and proliferate with the talents bestowed upon them. Women must not be content with lesser work and lesser achievements than they are capable to. But women should choose in line with their nature and aptitude, so that in the long run they can live up to their task, making their work a source of satisfaction and happiness, and a blessing for society.*"[18]

The following year, in the same section of September 1928, she called upon upper-class women to use their talents and free time for the social good, also after their marriage. As she wrote: "*The wedding day does not have to be the date on which one thanks the Catholic woman, on which she cancels her membership of the* R.K. Vrouwenbond*, on which she believes she can no longer fulfil a management function of a social or charitable association. Especially not when it does not involve a comprehensive secretariat. Especially women from the higher classes have more opportunity than women from the middle and working classes to continue to look after at least part of their social work or to take up that work.*"[19]

In the winter of 1928/1929, Frida gave an introduction on lime on clay soils for the winter courses of the Landbouwhuis in Klundert. In April 1929, a lecture by Frida on the domestic education of young girls was scheduled at the membership meeting of the *RK Vrouwenbond* in Utrecht.

We find it very curious that we after 1929, the time Prof. Aberson left and Prof. Hudig succeeded him, did not find her name in the newspapers and journals anymore. We did not see any testimony of her continuing any public social activities outside the agricultural chemistry laboratory except of the retreats. We wonder why. After all, Frida had been working on these with so much drive and increasing recognition and intensity for ten years. Was it Prof. Hudig who made it almost impossible for her to combine these activities with her work at the College? Was it the increasing effect of the 1929 stock market crash that led to a drastic change to pursue the public social activities she participated in? Or did the increasing turmoil surrounding the "Quastie Hudig - Eversmann" take its toll and lead to Frida's withdrawal from publicity?

The *Sleutelbos*

One cannot help wondering what a profound impact the entire crisis period and the uncertainty of the prolonged conflict handling and posting had on Frida's life. Still, we could trace Frida Eversmann in the 1930s as one of the founding members of the organisation of Roman Catholic graduated women *De Sleutelbos*[20], founded in 1931. It must have provided her with many, friendship-based, intensive contacts with kindred spirits. Its aim was to improve the position of Catholic unmarried working women in Dutch society. Frida promoted open networking. She proposed to also open the membership of the *Sleutelbos* in its first founding meeting which was rejected. She continued her membership, but we do not find much of her in the minutes of the meetings than several mentions of the retreats she organised for all Catholic graduated women, not *Sleutelbos* members only.

The central figure at *De Sleutelbos* was M.J.W. (Jacqueline) Hillen. Jacqueline was also member of the study committee for a report on women's labour in 1935 and member of the *Nederlandse vereniging voor vrouwenbelangen en gelijk staatsburgerschap* (Dutch association for women's interests and equal citizenship) and the *International Women's League for Peace and Freedom*. An example of curtailing women's rights came from the Catholic Minister Romme in 1937 '*preliminary draft law containing restrictive provisions on married women's labour*'. It aimed to ban labour for women in the public service and in companies to free labour positions for the many men who had become unemployed due to the growing crisis. There was much opposition to this proposal. *De Sleutelbos* also objected. The *Comité tot Verdediging van de Vrijheid van Arbeid voor de Vrouw* (Committee to Defend Women's Freedom of Labour) founded in 1935, coordinated the protests with a press campaign and meetings.

Epilogue

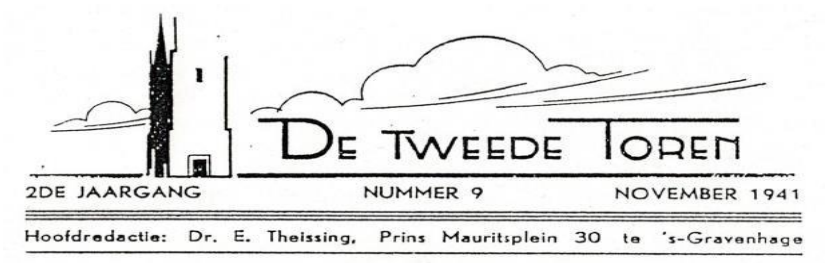
While doing archive research on Frida Eversmann's scientific work, we came across a report from the *NRC* on 28 February 2023 with extensive information on the completion of the Ecotron. With this installation at the Science Park in Utrecht (investment €10 million), the universities of Utrecht and Wageningen will study the natural resilience of plants in controlled mini ecosystems to make ecosystems and agriculture more sustainable. In this new lab, very precise research can be done on mechanisms and interactions that may be important for crops to grow under different conditions. This article shows that even now, the findings from the artificial ecosystems are still being checked to see if they match the complexities of the real world, for that there are still experimental fields from Wageningen University.

Photographer Bram Petraeus

In essence, this work is the kind of research that Frida extensively engaged in in the agricultural chemistry laboratory in the 1920s in a much simpler way. Frida also completed her research in experimental fields. Research on agricultural crops has been around for more than 100 years and there is still much to discover.

Recognition

In Memoriam in* De Sleutelbos *its magazine* De Tweede Toren, *1941[21]



The first from our circle has passed away. On 12 November Frida Eversmann passed away in the Lord.
At our last Sleutelbos *meeting we had already suspected that it might be her very last, but we had not realised that her earthly life would end so soon. She herself had been as busy and cheerful, optimistic, and full of heartfelt interest as ever, taking part in all the discussions, happy that the retreat, which we had come from and which she had not been able to attend, had been a success, with more participants than ever.*

For most of us, our first encounter with Frida Eversmann was linked to a retreat. As secretary, first of the Committee for the Retreat of the Girl Students, and later for women graduates, she managed to take away the last hesitations that many might have kept them from attending their first retreat with an encouraging note. For more than 25 years, she cared for students and graduates in this way. She was delighted about every new 'recruit' and introductions to her never disappointed anyone. A personality herself, she appreciated every personality, whom she met, she did not wish people to be alike and conform to herself but knew how to appreciate the good in multiple forms.

She was more and did more than most could expect. She did not show off her gifts and talents, nor her good use of them.

In many fields she was a pioneer. She studied at the Rijks Hoogere Land-, Tuin- en Boschbouwschool (RHLTBS) *in Wageningen and was one of the few, and probably the last, to obtain the diploma of Agricultural Chemist there: the programme was discontinued shortly afterwards. She got her first job in Maastricht at the* Rijks Proefstation voor Meststofonderzoek *(State Fertiliser Experimentation Centre) but was able to return to Wageningen after a year: when she was appointed assistant to lecturer J.H. Aberson. After the recognition of the* RHLTBS as a *higher education institute as Agricultural College in 1918, Prof. Aberson became the first Rector Magnificus, giving his first assistant a large share of his work when needed to organise the newly established college. As soon as the examination to the engineer degree was instituted, Frida Eversmann exercised her right to participate and became the first woman agricultural engineer in agricultural chemistry in 1919.*

She increasingly became Prof. Aberson's reliable assistant in his research on the influence of manganese on plant growth, the influence of soil lime condition on crop growth, etc. She collaborated intensively on all publications on these subjects. She was also in charge of the day-to-day management of the engineers-practicum, which allowed her to exert her influence on the training of her future colleagues. From that time also dates her work to advance better agricultural and farm household management education for girls, on which she wrote articles in De Katholieke Vrouw*, among others. She may not have chosen a so-called feminine profession; she though certainly lived a feminine life.*

Some years after Prof. Aberson's retirement, Frida Eversmann was given another job with the Regulatory Commission for the Agricultural Experimentation Fields, which gave her intensive contact with the agricultural advisers. She became the central point to which each person had to turn with his questions about the trial fields under his jurisdiction.

She herself was more particularly focusing on the influence of different conditions, such as soil type, type of fertilisation and the like on the taste of potatoes. Hundreds of potato samples were cooked and tasted under her direct supervision!

When the Regulatory Committee got incorporated into the Centraal Instituut voor Landbouwwetenschappelijk Onderzoek *(Central Institute for Agricultural Scientific Research), Frida Eversmann was transferred there as engineer in the agricultural extension service. In the more recent years, she had more managerial work.*

This as far as concerns her formal work. And what beyond? A very large part of her 'free' time she gave to social work: then we heard of clubs, which she organised, then of a singing choir, which she led, then about care for the sick or maternity women,

in which improvements needed to be made. What has she not done? When she laid in an infirmary in Nijmegen this summer, actually already deathly ill, the tables and chairs were still covered with letters and papers, witnesses to her wide scope of work. "No appeal to her help went unheard" reads her funeral card. She did everything her hand found to do, full of concern for the spiritual and temporal well-being of all around her. She was a woman in one piece, a righteous person, a devout Catholic, who knew how to unify her religious, scientific, and social life. We are grateful to her for her friendship and example.

Now God has called her to Himself. And when we henceforth come across the words, which are our battle slogan, we will hope and pray, and perhaps more so believe, that she may share the joy of the Women Saints, from whose Office derived, because she too has lived:

"propter veritatem et mansuetudinem et justitiam"

(For the sake of truth, kindness, and justice).

J.H.

1946 - Dominican Tertiary – co-founder of the Neerlandica Dominicana

In the 20th century, the Dominicans played a major role in the renewal movement in the church. In 1946, Frida's name was cited in the monthly magazine *Neerlandica Dominicana* as "*one of the ardent and capable Tertiaries*" as one of the co-founders of the magazine with the Dominican Fathers.

1947 - Memorial book 1940 -1945 of the Catholic academic community

The 1940-1945 memorial book lists all who were affiliated to the Catholic student associations and died during the war years. The chapter of *KSV Franciscus Xavier* commemorates eight members and former members. From this we draw the conclusion that Frida was an (extraordinary) member of KSV. About her is written: "*Things happen in life every day, which we find difficult to understand. But God must have had something good in mind when, on 12 November 1941, He took Frieda Eversmann away from the life in which she stood so strongly that others sought support from her. Her urge to live was great and the battle she fought when the incurability of her illness became clear, must have been fierce. But in her faith, she knew how to find the strength to accept this great sacrifice like a* mulier fortis. *Rich and deep was also her spiritual life. For many years she organised the retreats for the women graduates and after her death she donated a bequest to the* Meisjes-Studenten-Interacademiale van de Unie *(Union Girls' Students Inter-Academy) to promote retreat work among the women students. For her sacrificial, heartfelt affection, her unwavering loyalty to principles, her great willpower and her many other fine qualities, her memory remains in our hearts. Will not forget us but be our intercessor in the other life."*[22]

The financial report from 1 October 1941 to 30 September 1945 states that it was a bequest of fl. 725.02 which was placed under the administration of the executor of the will and paid out after the liberation.

*2023 - An apple tree in the "*Orchard in honour of women engineers*", the Marina van Damme orchard on the campus of the University of Twente in Enschede*

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Frida Eversmann was born in Amsterdam in 1890.

She graduated in 1914 from the Rijks Hoogere Land-, Tuin- en Boschbouwschool in Wageningen as an agricultural chemist and in 1919 she obtained the title of agricultural engineer at the by then legally recognised Agricultural College as a higher education institute.

Frida was a scientific assistant at the Agricultural Chemistry laboratory of the Agricultural College for about 20 years. The courage with which she stood up for scientific integrity caused a labour dispute with the new professor of agricultural chemistry. This conflict was brought to the highest level of minister and president-curator and lasted for years. It eventually led to the professor being allowed to continue his position, including to continue teaching as normal. The highly respected Frida, however, had to accept a break in her career. She was given a new position at the overarching Regulatory Committee and later CILO institute of the Agricultural Experimental Fields and Research.

Apart from her professional work, Frida had a keen interest and impact on the strongly growing movement to promote the development of Catholic women. She manifested herself as a female agricultural engineer in various male-dominated organisations. She also published in Catholic magazines to reinforce her views. In accordance with her religion, she organised retreats for Catholic women students and graduates for many years. She also promoted the advancement of education and the participation of Catholic farm women and their daughters that specify their preparation for their roles in farming families and farming.

Unfortunately, Frida got an incurable illness; she died in November 1941. In the presence of her family, with whom she had a close relationship, she was buried in the R.C. cemetery in Wageningen. She lives on to this day among her distant relatives as the firm aunt Godefrida who devoted her life to science and social work according to her faith.

Frida was written about appreciatively in the journal *Neerlandica Dominicana*, in which she is mentioned as a co-founder, and in the 1940-1945 memorial book of the Catholic Academic Community. In 2023, Frida Eversmann was commemorated in honour of the celebration of 120 years of women engineers with the placement of an apple tree in the "Orchard in honour of womne engineers" in the Marina van Damme orchard at the University of Twente in Enschede.

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