



The magnificently painted coat of arms of the Queen of The Netherlands graces the doors of the caleche. Lions face each other, where once they glowered fiercely at the viewer. (Photo by Ken Wheeling)



Bits of gold leaf and old varnish are being removed from the carved lion's face on a board beneath the door. (Photo courtesy of Firma Stolk)

hearts. In 1898, in preparation for the coming inauguration, Queen Emma commissioned the Dutch coach builders in Den Haag, M. L. Hermans & Co., to build a postilion calèche, which she presented to her daughter. It was an open carriage, which provided a somewhat more familiar contact between the people and the princess, and it was white, a color synonymous with innocence. Ordered as "*de Witte Kronings Calèche*," it is today universally called "The Crème Calèche."

The selection of a native Dutch coachbuilder, Mattheus Hermans, was a shrewd move calculated to help foster national pride. Hermans, when still a young boy, learned the art of carriage building at the technical school that was attached to the firm of Johannes

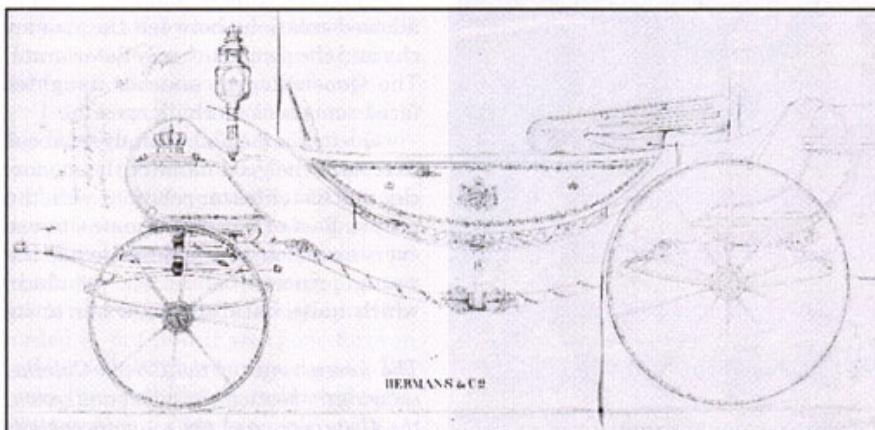
van den Bergh, in the Denneweg. By 1841, he was established in Den Haag, on the Korte Poten, employing six people. By 1870, he was employing 155 people, and had established his business on the Fluwelen Burgwal. He had taken into the business Andries Haaxman and Jan Paesie, the first as a foreman, the other as a bookkeeper. In time, they became co-directors. Hermans died in 1876, leaving his company to his five daughters, who wisely placed the management of the firm in Haaxman and Paesie's hands. The company prospered, gaining a worldwide reputation, which included the Royal Houses of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, in addition to the Dutch Royal Family and the Sultans of Java.

In correspondence, the coach was called a gala calèche, and it has also been called a dress calèche. As it has no provision for driving it from the box, it is

properly called a postilion calèche. Technically, it is an eight-spring calèche, having four C-springs and four elliptical springs, the topside of which is a dumb iron. Hermans submitted two designs for building it, one in blue and one in cream white. "The design sketch was a very detailed pencil drawing with three flaps that could be unfolded to show different variations. The first Crown Equerry, Baron C. A. Bentinck, initialed the design."¹

The vehicle chosen was to be painted cream white, a daring choice considering that varnish darkened in time. "The colour, creme white, was [a] vulnerable aspect. Nearly half a century later it would be said, concerning this coach: '...these light colours, that are indeed extremely sensitive and apt to show variegation, have worn excellently well for thirty years and have not been repainted until 1928, and then, with specially made lacquers.'"² The paint, as well as the varnish, was chosen by the company's head painter, Jacob t'Hart. Valentine & Co. (New York) supplied the varnish, aptly called "Hard Drying Body" and "Wearing Body" varnish. Paesie, quite confident they had made the correct choice, later wrote a complimentary letter to Valentine & Co, and then published it in three languages.³

At the front of the coach, a gilt wooden sculpture "à la Rubens" of the Three Graces, lifting a wreath of laurel, was mounted. At the rear, another gilt wooden sculpture of two similar ladies, likewise holding aloft a laurel wreath, was also mounted, somewhat reminiscent of the ambassadorial coaches of the



An original drawing of the Crème Calèche done by Hermans & Co. shows the changes made by Prince Hendrik in 1908. (Courtesy of L. L. M. Eekhout, Nationaal Rijtuig Museum, Leek)