ANCIENT PASSAGEWAY NAMED "THE ARMENIAN BRIDGE"

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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 5 September 2013

An ancient Amsterdam bridge , which was a frequent passageway for Armenian merchants in the 17th century, has been named "Armenian Bridge", thanks to the efforts of one man--60-year-old Nikolai Romashuk.

Jerusalem-born Romashuk, whose mother was Armenian, emigrated to Holland in 1976 and settled in the northern city of Assen. Since then he has been an active member of the Dutch-Armenian community.

He said that he spent years researching the history of the Julfa Armenian merchants at the Dutch National Archives at the University of Amsterdam. And after that several more years to convince the Amsterdam municipality that naming the old bridge after the Armenian merchants was a worthwhile idea.

To help get the green light from city hall, Romashuk also pointed out that he had discovered the graves of a number of Armenian priests and merchants in the Old Church in the heart of Amsterdam. One such grave bears the number 444. To further buttress his case of the long-time and Armenian-Dutch relations, he added that Soviet Armenian soldiers, veterans of the Second World War, are buried in the Dutch city of Leusden.



This is not the first time Romashuk has raised the Armenian profile in his adopted country. Some years ago, Romashuk--founder and chairman of the Armenian Social and Cultural Foundation--helped bring to Assen a huge khachkar from Armenia. Now every year, on April 24, Assen Armenians commemorate, in front of the khachkar, the genocide of the Armenians by Turkey in 1915. There are 300 to 400 Armenians in the city, mostly from Armenia, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

Romashuk has also helped establish an Armenian cemetery in his town--the only one in Holland. It's named after Hrant Dink. Time and funds permitting, he also publishes "Parev Tsez", the only Armenian journal in Holland.

Married to a Dutch woman, Romashuk has three children and two grandchildren.