



# CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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March, 2014

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## Center Update

Things are moving along, but probably not as fast as we had hoped. Bids on refinishing the floor were expensive, so a good cleaning will have to do for now. Painting has started at the new location and packing is underway at the old. Hopefully we'll be out of our old address by the end of the February.

One thing that has put us in front of a monetary gun is the severity of our winter and dealing with heating bills at two locations. Who knew that we would have one of the longest, harshest winters that we've had in years?

For those of you who are wintering somewhere warmer (and possibly drier), the Quad Cities set a new record that stood for over 30 years. For meteorological winter (December 1st thru February 28th), the National Weather Service recorded 53.3 inches of snow (135.38 cm). And February isn't over yet, as this is written. The previous record was during the winter of 1978-79 with 52.9 inches (134.37 cm). Another way to look at it is that our snowfall to date is more than double the average, 25.5 inches (64.8 cm).

As for temperature, February was averaging 15 degrees below normal temperatures and has been colder than an average January.

## A New Belgium

On January 6th of this year, Belgium's leading politicians came together to sign a landmark constitution reform that was two years in the making. The reform to the constitution, known as the sixth state reform, fundamentally changes the government structure of Belgium. The document, titled Een Nieuw België/Une Nouveau Belgique: The Sixth State Reform, consists of 82 new laws approved by six political parties in the current coalition government. The reform shifts many powers from the federal government to the regions and language communities.

Some of the politicians attending were Brussels' Region Minister-President Rudi Vervoort, Flemish Minister-President Kris Peeters, Walloon Minister-President Rudy Demotte, and German-speaking community Minister-President Karl-Heinze Lambertz. Peeters noted, "The regions now have the power to make their own decisions to create a strong economic policy and efficient government."

Belgium is both a constitutional monarchy and a federal state made up of three regions and three communities (based on the languages of Dutch, French, and German). The federal level is responsible for issues such as justice, defense,

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## A Taste of Genealogy

The Rock Island County Genealogical Society is hosting “A Taste of Genealogy.” The one-hour program will be at Butterworth Center’s Library Room on Thursday, March 27th, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Who should attend? Anyone who has an interest in researching his/her family history, but is not really sure what genealogy is all about! The cost is free, but preregistration is required due to limited seating.

To register, contact Linda Polich (309)236-1985, or Lorraine Hathaway (309)787-1826. Deadline for registration is March 20th.

## 40th Annual Quad Cities Genealogical Conference

The Rock Island County (Illinois) and Scott County (Iowa) Genealogical Societies are hosting a conference on Saturday, April 26th, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Viking Club, 1450-41st Street in Moline.

This year’s speaker is Jeanne Larzalere Bloom. Topics that will be covered are: “Internet Techniques for Locating Lost Relatives;” “The Journey to America: Passenger Ship Records;” “Lost Children: Orphans, Vagrants, Delinquents, Half-Orphans, Dependents, Surrendered, and Adopted;” and “Pushing Up Daisies: Cemetery Research.”

The cost is \$25/person, which includes conference handouts, coffee, and buffet luncheon. Mail your name, address, and phone number, along with your check made payable to Quad Cities Genealogical Conference, to: QC Genealogical Conference, Attn: Dean Arney-Registrar, 2322 Oak Lane, Bettendorf, Iowa 52722. Dead line for registration is April 21st.

The Center for Belgian Culture will have a vendor table set-up at this conference.

### A New Belgium

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finances, and foreign affairs – matters that affect the entire country. The geographical entities (the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, and the Walloon Region) are responsible for matters related to their territory, such as public works, environment, and economy. The communities are responsible for matters that directly affect residents, such as education, welfare, and culture.

(From *Gazette van Detroit*)

## Scholarships

Applications for both the CBC Scholarship and the Ruth Lambrick VanTieghem Scholarship have been distributed to local area high schools and colleges. Copies will also be available at the Center when our move is complete.

## Flemish Cuisine during WWI

The attack by Germany on Belgium’s border on August 4, 1914, was the beginning of four lean years, and not only in a figurative sense, according to Brecht Demasure. Times were extremely tough for everyone, even far from the fighting, with some foods simply unobtainable, and others in short supply. However, the situation seems to have brought out the best in some people, not least housewives, who quickly learned to be more creative than had ever been necessary before.

The first domestic effect of the war was to shut down all trade with the occupied area, which forced Belgium to become wholly self-sufficient overnight – an impossible demand. At the time, around 80% of grain used to bake bread was imported, and supplies soon vanished or were commandeered by the German army. By November, three months after the invasion, shortages started appearing. By early 1915, food prices were through the roof, and the real risk of famine was on the horizon.

The race was on to find cheaper and more available calories: meat, butter, eggs, and milk vanished from kitchens, and potatoes became the staple food. Four out of five people lost weight as a result of malnutrition, and the cost of food took up to 85% of a family’s income.

The public’s response was to look to a burgeoning industry of food advice for help, with authors from all walks of life – from family doctors to farmers to science teachers – publishing pamphlets on how to make the best of the situation. The German censor, who had to approve all publications, apparently made little attempt to prevent the pamphlets.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say, and the shortages forced women cooking at home to be more creative than ever in making something palatable from potatoes, lentils, and root vegetables and, in the place of butter, fats like suet and lard. Many of the recipes, concentrating on low-fat and low-sugar, scarce in meat and high in fish, could as easily be published today.

(Alan Hope from *Flanders Today*)

## The Serious and Not So

Belgian police recently carried out checks of drivers on the A12 Brussels-Boom-Antwerp Motorway and found nearly a quarter of the motorists were over the legal drink-drive limit. In all 124 drivers were stopped. 27 motorists were over the limit and had to hand in their driving license. Two were on illicit drugs. Drugs and arms were also seized. Four people on the wanted list were detained.

The checks were carried out by supervised pupils of the police academy. It was the students themselves who had planned the operation. The aim remains to cut the number of people killed and maimed on Belgian roads. Drivers are warned that even after a holiday season, police checks remain possible.

And speaking of drinking and driving, this happened to an Englishman in France who was totally drunk. A French policeman stopped the car the Englander was in and asked the gentleman if he had been drinking.

With great difficulty, the Englishman admitted that he had been drinking all day, that his daughter got married that morning to a Frenchman, and that he drank champagne and a few bottles of wine at the wedding and quite a few glasses of single malt Scotch afterwards.

Quite upset, the policeman gave the Englishman a breath test and asked him if he knew, under French law, why he had just been arrested.

The Englander answered with great humor, “No! Do you know this is a British car and that my wife is the driver . . . behind the steering wheel on the other side?”

## More on the “Iron Harvest”

Authorities in the westernmost corner of West Flanders – the former war zone now known as the Westhoek – have seized thousands of unexploded munitions dating from the First World War, found by farmers but never declared to the police.

The munitions – bombs and shells that never exploded and that are still technically live – were found in a barn on a farm north of Ypres. They were picked up by Dovo, the army’s bomb disposal unit. The thousands of shells filled ten containers. Further munitions were found in several other farms in the area.

The farmers are thought to have collected the shells they found from time to time, like many in the area where heavy fighting took place during the Great War, without informing the police as required by law. Normally, when an unexploded shell is discovered, Dovo takes it to a safe spot to be destroyed in a controlled explosion.

## Descendants Can Still Claim Ownership

More than 300 artworks stolen by the Nazis from Belgians during the Second World War and never returned to their original owners or their descendants are now in the possession of local museums, including the Fine Arts Museums of Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent, according to an investigation by De Standaard.

The newspaper based its finding on the addendum to a report drawn up in 2008 in connection with restitution claims made by the Jewish community in Belgium. That addendum was never published.

The artworks are among thousands plundered by the Nazis during the Occupation, usually from Jews forced to emigrate or deported. The works went to Germany, but after the war, successive Belgian governments made an effort to retrieve stolen works. About 1,150 works were recovered – far fewer than those recovered in the Netherlands or France.

Most of the returned works came into the possession of the state, with about one-third being sold at auctions. Another 639, including works by Jordaens, Memling, Cranache and Breughel, were given homes in 15 museums.

According to one expert, not enough was done post-war to track down the owners of the works, or more likely, their surviving descendants. Then as now, the federal government relies on those whose property is concerned to come forward with a claim.

“After the war, it would have been possible to find better solutions” than handing the works out to local museums, said Antwerp University professor Herman Van Goethe, who is also conservator of Mechelen’s Holocaust museum. “The rightful owners could have been more actively sought. The very least that can be done now is for full information to be made public, and if there are claims, there is jurisprudence on which we can base decisions,” the professor stated.

(From *Flanders Today*)

Discoveries of unexploded munitions from the war almost a century ago occur regularly across what was then known as the Western Front.

(From *Flanders Today*)



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## News Reporting is Changing

Having been involved with broadcasting at one time, your newsletter editor keeps his eye on the trends occurring in the media. Some of those changes are not good. For instance, one of Chicago's large newspapers fired its entire staff of photographers to save money. Photos for their editions now come from wire services, free-lance photographers, and with the proliferation of camera cell phones and iPads, the public in general.

The Flemish public broadcaster VRT recently announced the closing of its permanent news bureaus in Washington, DC and Beijing, China. It will use "pop-up correspondents" instead.

But unlike American media outlets that usually cut staff only to save money, VRT wants to react in a more flexible

manner and be able to send reporters to news hotspots for longer periods of time.

The news service will, for example, spend at least a month in Brazil during World Cup play this summer, not only to cover the sporting event, but also to "tell deeper stories from the heart of society."

According to VRT's editor-in-chief, political and economic challenges are now global in scale. "So the VRT needs to be in more places at one time, with expertise from a variety of angles and countries, making our coverage more mobile."

Although the bureaus in China and the U.S. are closing, the two countries will continue to receive VRT's full attention.

