



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

1608 Seventh Street, Moline, Illinois 61265

(309) 762-0167

www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



May, 2019

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Diana Slininger

Calendar of Upcoming Events

| | | |
|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| May 4th | Waffle Breakfast | 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. |
| May 4th | Belgian Lacemakers | 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. |
| May 13th | Board Meeting | 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. |

Visit the Center for more information and to stay updated on current events.

Schedule for Volunteers

The May schedule is as follows:

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Gift Counter</i> | <i>Host/Hostess</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Wed., May 1st | Steve Slininger | Steve Slininger |
| Sat., May 4th | Diana Slininger (a.m.) | Barb Michalek (p.m.) |
| Wed., May 8th | Bonnie Newman | Mary Lou Andrae |
| Sat., May 11th | Mary Gardner-Karcher | Mary Gardner-Karcher |
| Wed., May 15th | Linda Polich | Linda Polich |
| Sat., May 18th | Millie Kale | Millie Kale |
| Wed., May 22nd | Bob Francione | Bob Francione |
| Sat., May 25th | CLOSED for Memorial Weekend | |
| Wed., May 29th | Diana Slininger | Diana Slininger |

Contact Diana Slininger at (309) 792-2790
as soon as possible if there is a schedule conflict.

..... HAPPY

Mother's Day

OPEN Wednesday & Saturday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Waffle Breakfast 1st Sat. of each month

A Little Miracle in Moline

Editor's Note: This is a reprint of Bill Wundram's column from the *Quad City Times*, February 23, 1997, that appeared in the CBC newsletter back in May 2007. It's definitely interesting and worthy of another read. CBC member Pat VandeKerckhove was the son of Albert and the nephew of Mike, the subject of Wundram's column.

With an oatmeal cookie in one hand, and a cup of black coffee in the other, last week Mike VandeKerckhove toasted the year 1917 – 80 years ago when he was 8, and his brother Albert was 10, and they had arrived in Moline but didn't know who they were.

The VandeKerckhove brothers were tiny miracles who drew national attention because their only identity was a big No. 19 attached to each of their coats when they got off the boat in New York from a World War I battered land in Belgium. Those numbers "19" meant they were brothers. But brothers, who?

Mike (real name Michell), an exuberant 88, now lives in a nice neighborhood on Second Street in Moline. His brother died a decade ago.

If there is a moral to this story, it is of the pluck of our founding fathers – the likes of the thousands of Belgians – to reach the promised land of Moline. In 1914, Mike and brother Albert were left with a grandmother in Belgium, while mother and dad came to Moline. When enough money had been made, they would send for their little boys. But grandma died and the little boys went into an orphanage, which came to be blasted to bits. Little Mike and brother Albert were cast askew as wandering refugees of war.

Taking another gulp of coffee, Mike says, "We were hungry little kids, wandering in the mud, sleeping under cannons. I always kept losing my left wooden shoe."

The parents, in Moline, were frantic that the boys were dead. Money was sent to relief agencies to locate them, but it fell into the wrong hands. Finally, a kindly Chicago priest got into the act, located them (apparently unsure of their names) and got them aboard in steerage on the steamship *Rotterdam*.

"Can you imagine how scared we were, two little brothers?" Mike says. He holds thin fingers to his head and wags, "We wondered if we were alive."

Coming down the gangplank in New York harbor, the refugee brothers were photographed by the *Post*. That picture appeared in many newspapers.

The frightened brothers were sent to Chicago, and Mike remembers, "We didn't even know who we were, except the word 'Moline' meant something to us. A woman who spoke Flemish put us on a train to stop in East Moline." Too bashful to ask for food, not even knowing their last names, Mike remembers they ate orange peelings that people had dropped in the depot.

"Our mother was told we were coming to Moline, and for days she met every train, but we were never on them. We had been left in East Moline." While waiting, she picked up a copy of the *Chicago Herald Examiner*. She screamed. On the front page was the picture that she recognized as her sons.

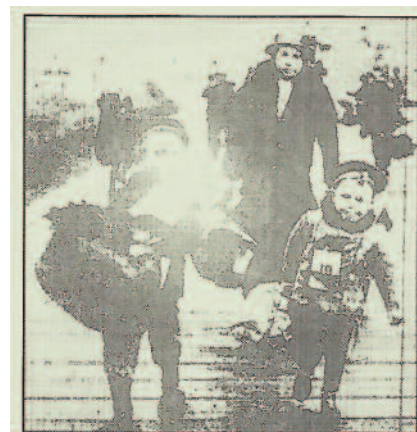
Well, all's well that ends swell. The boys and mom and dad finally caught up with each other in Moline.

"When mother hugged us, we didn't know who she was."

The boys became celebrities. In Moline, the Mayer & Johnson store fitted them with new clothes, and Wyne Brothers replace their worn, hole-soled shoes with shiny oxfords. The old shoes were displayed in the Wyne store window. The *Chicago Tribune* sent a photographer to take their picture in the new clothes.

After all that, Mike and brother Albert grew up to be successful tradesmen. Both brothers retired from Farmall after becoming skilled mechanics.

All these years later, Mike is still talking about his refugee childhood. He loves to talk. It's fascinating to listen.



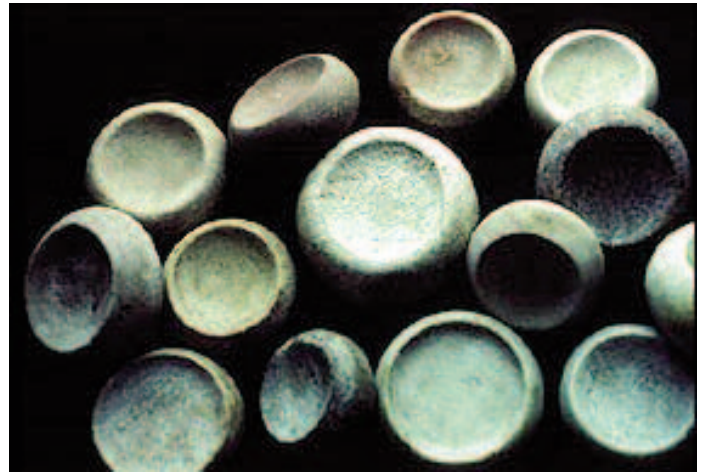
This well-worn photo is a copy of the original picture that appeared in newspapers around the country. Albert is the larger boy, Mike the smaller. Photo is courtesy of Pat VanderKerckhove.

Rolle Bolle . . . Sort of

CBC member Walt Sonnevile of Gaithersburg, MD recently wrote to us about a Native American game called “Chunkey.” It is somewhat similar to rolle bolle, in that both games use rolling discs. The game originated with Indians in the Cahokia region of what is now near present-day East St. Louis. Cahokia existed some 300-400 years before Columbus’ arrival and is best remembered for its massive mounds.

So how was it played? All of the games made use of a smooth stone disk, usually with concave sides, and two long, slender poles. Two persons played and onlookers wagered on the outcome of the game. The idea was to start the stone disk rolling along a smooth, level piece of ground while the two players threw their poles after it with the goal of either hitting the stone, or coming as near to it as possible when the stone came to rest. Nearest scored one point and hitting the stone scored two points. Games were played to 12 points and sometimes lasted most of the day.

The stones were generally made from hard quartz, polished and perfectly finished. They were considered quite valuable because they were difficult to make. The stones were not owned by individuals, but by a group or the town. Gambling was frequently involved, with some players wagering everything they owned on the game’s outcome. Losers were even known to commit suicide.



The Chunkey discs



Cherokee Indians bring back the fun of Chunkey.

Birdies for Charity

You may have already received a pledge card in the mail for this year’s edition of the Birdies for Charity drive. We again thank you for your past support, and hope you will make a pledge on behalf of the CBC to this worthwhile endeavor. Each year, the John Deere Classic golf tourney sets new records for giving to local charities and non-profits. It would like to keep the streak going. It only takes a penny (or more) per birdie made by the pros during tournament week. Single higher dollar pledges are also welcome.

All money raised through this program provides the CBC with funding for our scholarship program. Please fill out a pledge form. If you didn’t receive one in the mail, there are forms available at the Center and at the monthly waffle breakfasts.

MAY WAFFLE VOLUNTEERS



The waffle volunteers for May are Steve and Laurie Elliott, Jane Vershaw, and Karen VandeKerckhove. Mike Kerckhove will mix the batter and get things started, and Steve Slininger will cashier.

As always, we need volunteers!! Waffle breakfasts can only continue if we have volunteer help. If you can help, please contact Karen VandeKerckhove at (309)762-6725.

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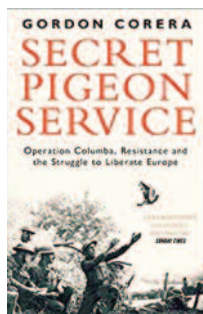
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Secret Pigeon Service

That's the name of the book that author Gordon Corera uses to tell the story of MI4 through declassified documents and extensive research.

Between 1941 and 1944, 16,000 plucky homing pigeons were dropped in an arc from Bordeaux to Copenhagen as part of "Columbia" – a secret British operation to bring back intelligence from those living under Nazi occupation. Messages flooded back, written on tiny pieces of rice paper tucked into canisters and tied to the legs of the birds. Real voices from rural France, the Netherlands, and Belgium – sometimes comic, often tragic, and occasionally invaluable with details of German troop movements and fortifications, new Nazi weapons, radar systems, or the deployment of the feared V-1 and V-2 rockets.

Who were the people who provided this rich seam of intelligence? Many were not trained agents, nor with few exceptions, people with any spy experience.



At the center of this book is the "Leopold Vindictive" network; a small group of Belgian villagers prepared to take huge risks. They were led by priest Joseph Raskin, a man connected to royalty and whose intelligence was so valuable, it was shown to Churchill, leasing MI6 to parachute agents in to assist him.

The book is a powerful and tragic tale of wartime espionage and reveals the wider history of a quirky, quarrelsome band of spy masters and their special wartime operations. It's available from leading booksellers and Amazon.

(Thanks to Simon Mayo of BBC Radio 2)

