



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

1608 Seventh Street, Moline, Illinois 61265
(309) 762-0167
www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



February, 2020

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 1st	Waffle Breakfast	8:00 to 11:00 a.m.
February 1st	Belgian Lacemakers	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
February 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 February schedule is as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Gift Counter</i>	<i>Host/Hostess</i>
Sat., Feb. 1st	Closed (a.m.)	Barb Michalek (p.m.)
Wed., Feb. 5th	tbd	tbd
Sat., Feb. 8th	Mary Gardner-Karcher	Mary Gardner-Karcher
Wed., Feb. 12th	Bonnie Newman	Mary Lou Andrae
Sat., Feb. 15th	Diana Slininger	Diana Slininger
Wed., Feb. 19th	Steve Slininger	Steve Slininger
Sat., Feb. 22nd	tbd	tbd
Wed., Feb. 26th	Bob Francione	Bob Francione
Sat., Feb. 29th	Diana Slininger	Diana Slininger

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

CBC Spring Election

At our upcoming April business meeting, the Center will be holding its election of officers. **All offices are open.** If you would like to be on the board, please let a current officer know. Face it, the same people can't be doing these jobs forever. And we are only as good as our volunteers. Please consider joining the board of your Center for Belgian Culture!

Please Check Ahead

During these winter months, please check ahead before visiting the CBC. We want everyone – visitors and volunteers – to be safe.

**OPEN Wednesday & Saturday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Waffle Breakfast 1st Sat. of each month**

Olde Town Memories

In the September 2019 newsletter, I asked that readers contribute a commentary regarding their Belgian heritage. Walt Sonneville, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, was the only one to contribute so far. Walt stated that the material comprised memories more than his Belgian heritage. But memories and heritage is exactly what I was hoping for. Thank you, Walt, for your memories!

I was born in Moline, June 1929. Our residence at that time was 1012-18th Avenue A. About 1937 our family relocated to the Sonneville Apartments, where my parents remained until their ages brought them to the Kahl Nursing Home in Davenport.

My memories of Moline and the Belgian community relate to the years 1929-1956, after which time I visited Moline periodically to visit family. At an early age I was conscious of a generational cultural divide between those of us who were first-generation Americans and the Flemish people who immigrated to Moline. Like them, we youngsters referred to Belgium as the "Old Country," but we gave the term a less affectionate connotation. Few of us first-generation Americans spoke Flemish. It was a language used by our parents to communicate privately. My fellow students at Sacred Heart elementary school were a mix of Flemish, Irish, English, Italian, and Polish. This ethnic mix was prominently true as well of the Belgian community centered at 7th Street. There was Wally Lundholm who ran a drug store at the corner of 7th Street and 18th Avenue. Weigandt's had a soda fountain on 7th Street where one could order a "Green River," – a carbonated lime drink not available elsewhere. De Greve's had a meat market and Art Goethals had a clothing store, founded by his immigrant father near Wally's drug store. Near Goethals was the office of Dr. Errico. Across the street was an interior decorator shop (paints and wallpaper) operated by the Pearsons.

As one approached 8th Street, there was a small jewelry store operated by Mr. Van Hulle. An auto mechanic, a Belgian, had a home close to the jewelry shop, where cars were repaired in a rather large garage. Near the auto mechanic was a plumbing shop operated by Mr. Swanson, later becoming Blondell Plumbing after Cyril Blondell married Mr. Swanson's daughter. Across the street from the Sonneville Apartments was Frank ("Butch") Blancke's grocery and meat market. I remember, as a young teen, buying on my parent's credit and getting a meaty soup bone, if requested, at no cost when other groceries were purchased.

At 18th Avenue and 10th Street there was the Jennish Drug Store, not as popular as Wally Lundholm's store. Lundholm attracted some customers because of his witty and, sometimes, borderline-ribald sense of humor. For example, when a customer asked for a tube of toothpaste, Wally might ask: "Do you want the big or the large?" Either answer produced the largest size. Wally was a good jolly man, a bachelor who took care of his ailing sister. At the corner across from the Jennish drug store was a tavern that had a rolle-bolle court in the fenced back. Walking past that court taught me a few cuss words in Flemish, some of which I have not forgotten. At the opposing corner stood an old former farm house, occupied by a very elderly lady. The house had no electricity. Illumination was provided by kerosene lamps. Apartments replaced that old house after the Second World War.

Trolley tracks ran down 18th Avenue to downtown Moline. About 1938 I remember watching WPA workers (FDR's Works Project Administration) removing the tracks in preparation for the new bus service. We depended greatly on bus service as almost every family had but one automobile (if that). During the day that single car was used by the father of the family, making the wives and children depend on bus service. During the latter stage of the Depression the price of gasoline on 7th Street was 15 cents a gallon. For that you got your windshield wiped and your oil-level checked at no charge.

My maternal grandparents came from Bellem, East Flanders, which I tried to visit five years ago only to discover it had been absorbed by the neighboring village of Aalter. Mom's father, Henry "Pa" Hendricks, was a beloved character in the Moline community. At first, Henry farmed in Iowa, but was overwhelmed by the agricultural depression of the 1920s. He eventually became a long-time city employee in Moline. My mother came to America at the age of five. When asked her name by her first teacher, she responded in Flemish: "Julia." The teacher thought she had said "Celia." From that day forward she was Celia, even to her own parents. Pa Hendricks brother was Phil Hendrickx (note the different spelling of the family name, due to an error made at Ellis Island). Phil operated a dry-goods store on 18th Avenue just west of 7th Street.

In one of the store fronts of the Sonneville Apartments there was a small clothing store with negligible inventory, operated by a Mr. Lootens. During the Depression Mr. Lootens would turn on the lights only when a customer entered.

My father's mother was born in Rouque, France, but moved to live with an uncle and her cousins (the Coryn family) when she was orphaned as a result of her parents dying from cannon fire during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). She moved to Moline to join her Coryn relatives upon reaching maturity.

Grandfather Sonnevile (Louis here but Aloys in Belgium) was born in Woumen, Flanders, and came unaccompanied to America at the age of 16. His father remained in Belgium and remarried following the death of Louis' mother. Louis did not feel part of the new family. Eventually he created a grocery business and a furniture store which later became part of the Sonnevile Apartments. My father, Frank, delivered groceries by means of a horse and wagon. His oldest sister, Minnie, was the bookkeeper of their father's business, leaving to become a nun (Sister Amidea) for over 60 years, teaching music to a black community in Jackson, Mississippi.

Louis' business success was said to be partly due to the easy credit terms he gave to Flemish immigrants. I was told that John Deere favored Belgian immigrants for employment because they were good workers. A joke I heard in my youth related that Belgians arriving by train to Moline would remain seated as the conductor announced the Moline depot station. Then the conductor would announce, loudly, John Deere! At that moment the Belgians on the train would get off. This anecdote, surprisingly, was authenticated in a 1982 book entitled *Joined by a River: Quad Cities* (page 106). Louis worked to provide food to the Belgians during World War I. For this, he and Art Van Lancker were awarded knighthoods by the King of Belgium.

Grade-school education for most of us in the Belgian community was provided at Sacred Heart. The school was a two-story brick building with eight classrooms and a basketball court/meeting hall and a classroom or two on the upper level. Staying in one classroom through the school day became very trying for some of us, leading to mischief and day-dreaming. The routine was relaxed when we reached fifth-grade and were required to walk to John Deere Junior High School where the boys were instructed in "manual arts" and the girls in "home economics." Manual arts consisted of making simple devices with hand tools, such as a bread board. I still have a bread board I made, inscribed with the date (1938) and my first name burnt into the wood.

Recess time at Sacred Heart School often involved the game we called "Snu-Sled," which may be a corrupt spelling of a Flemish term. The game used the tin lid of a snuff can, which, when inserted between two fingers and released with a thrust, would sail in the manner of a Frisbee toward the intended receiver. The game was

similar to touch football, with passing the only offensive play.

In 1982, twenty-two members of our forty-one member eighth-grade class of 1943 had a dinner reunion at the Plantation Restaurant. Our special guest was Father Paul Kinder, an assistant pastor to Father John Culemans. Father Kinder left our parish to become a chaplain during World War Two. We had not forgotten his gentleness to students while he was assigned to Sacred Heart.

Others who remain in my memory after these many years are Ralph DePorter, a realtor and insurance agent, Lucian Calbrecht, whose photography captured many of our portraits and marriage ceremonies, and Gene DeRoo, the funeral-home operator. Each of these men impressed me with their professional conduct. And there was the indefatigable Virginia Pauwels, the very personification of volunteerism, who kept spotless the altar area and sanctuary of Sacred Heart Church.

These nostalgic recollections illustrate the lasting memories of my youth in Moline's Belgian-American community. They are more vivid than memories of my mid-years.


News of the Membership

Thank you to **Mary Joy Allaert Feeney** for her generous donation, which will sponsor a waffle breakfast and a newsletter, and to the family of **Albert Raes** for naming the CBC as a memorial recipient. Albert's memorial raised \$938 for the Center.

Sympathy is offered to **Jane Vershaw** and family on the death of her husband John, 79, of Moline, who died December 24th at home.

FEBRUARY WAFFLE VOLUNTEERS

Your waffle volunteers for February are Kim Kochuyt, Mike DeBisschop, Marylin Vande Moortel, Yvette VanDriessche, Debbie Schwiebert, and Diana and Steve Slininger. Mike Kerckhove will create the batter and get things started.



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) 235-4425.

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Antwerp and Diamonds Part Two

Last month we discovered how diamonds had made their way across Europe from India and how they wound up in Antwerp, then Amsterdam. By the end of the 19th century, the diamond traders, cutters, and polishers were back in Antwerp. Moving forward to WWII, the Jewish people had to flee once again. Following the war, Antwerp mayor Camille Huysmans put out a call for all of the city's Jews to return home. He made it very clear that the Jewish community could safely come back. He made it clear that they would not face anti-Semitism and that anyone who had a different opinion would be punished.

His appeal worked. Many of the families who worked in the diamond business and had fled to New York and other places overseas returned to Antwerp.

Today, Antwerp's diamond industry is good for 42 billion Euros in import and export business every year, or 86% of the world trade in rough diamonds. Antwerp no

longer leads the diamond and cutting industry – low-wage countries like Vietnam and India handle those activities – but with nearly 6,000 traders, it is the leader in diamond trading.

There are other trading hubs, but Antwerp is crucial because it's neutral. For example, an Arab can't really go to Israel to trade. But in Antwerp, there is no problem for an Indian or Belgian trading with an Israeli, an Arab, or the Chinese. That's the strength of Antwerp.

The next time you look at a diamond, remind yourself that it no doubt made its trip to a finger, a wrist, or a neck, by way of Antwerp, Belgium.

(With great help from *flanderstoday*)


Happy Valentine's Day