



# CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



June, 2020

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## Center Closed for Safety

As of press time and since we are still under the rules imposed by the Governor of Illinois, the Center will not be open, nor will there be a waffle breakfast for June. The lacemakers will not meet and we will not have a formal board meeting.

## I'M MAD

This newsletter tries to stay away from things political. Instead, your editor tries to show some of the history of Belgians in this area and interesting news from and about Belgium. But I'm going to veer just a little and take an op-ed writer for the *Washington Post* to task. Please note this is my opinion and not that of the Center for Belgian Culture.

For several weeks, I've been trying to find actual and true statistics on Covid-19. There have been so many different sets of numbers published that my brain has been spinning. I ran across something in *FlandersToday* about testing for the virus by Belgium that I was going to use for this newsletter, but then I was forwarded an article by Walt Sonnevillie that really got to me.

The writer, a Max Boot, was trying to show what a rotten job President Trump was doing because he was a lousy leader. Fine, that's his opinion and not what jumped out at me. Boot was comparing countries that were run by populists (those who appeal to ordinary people who feel their concerns are disregarded by elitist groups) with those countries that were run by technocrats (decision-makers selected on their expertise in a given area, especially scientific or technical knowledge) that have tested early and often and use contact tracing. He states that in countries that have transparency, the figures for Covid-19 cases look worse, and he uses Belgium as an example. He states that Belgium has the second-highest per capita death rate in the world because its numbers include both confirmed and suspected fatalities – even if the victim wasn't tested for Covid-19. Boot goes on to say that some of the most successful countries in fighting Covid-19 include Australia and Germany. Those comments really stuck in my craw.

*continued on page 3*

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

**Waffle Breakfast 1st Sat. of each month**

## Belgian-American Brotherhood

Several months ago, I was asked about a building in the west end of Rock Island that had something to do with Belgians. That building was originally the West End Settlement House, located on the northwest corner of 5th Street and 7th Avenue.

Susanne Denkmann, the wealthy daughter of lumberman Frederick Denkmann, established the settlement in 1908. This was in an era before formalized social work, and the settlement provided many services to the very poor. Those services included the teaching of cooking, sewing, “physical culture” and reading to both women and men. The settlement had bathing facilities for all, and babies got free milk and exams by the Visiting Nurses.

In 1923, Denkmann (now Mrs. John Hauberg) felt social conditions had improved enough that the West End Settlement was no longer needed. The building was donated to the Rock Island YWCA to use as additional dormitory space.

In 1931, a group of Belgians who lived mainly in Rock Island, started a social club fashioned after Moline’s Belgian-American Club and named it the Belgian-American Brotherhood (the BAB). Its headquarters was in a building on the 3rd Street block of 7th Avenue. The group soon outgrew that building and was able to purchase the former Settlement

House in mid-August, 1933. After remodeling, the building was now the official home of the Brotherhood as of October 1, 1933.

The club had two ballrooms, game rooms, dining room, and bar. It was a place for socializing and was the venue to many public receptions as well. At one point, a one-story addition was added to the west end of the building for rolle bolle courts.

By 1980, the Belgian-American Brotherhood was no longer in existence. More recently, the building served as the home of the Elite Temple and the Esquire Lodge.



## Too Many Taters

The Covid-19 virus has had many consequences across the globe; toilet paper, sanitizing products, face masks, etc. But who would have thought potatoes? Well, Belgians were asked to eat fries at least twice a week, as more than 750,000 tons of potatoes might be at risk of being thrown away.

The coronavirus has led to a surplus, as the demand for frites – the popular twice-fried potato often eaten in bars, restaurants, and on the street as a snack – has slumped amid Belgium’s lockdown. The 750,000 tons of potatoes is enough to fill 30,000 large trucks and will probably not be processed.

Frozen potatoes account for about 75% of Belgium’s potato processing. As inventories built up, freezer capacity was being squeezed. To mitigate the problem, the Belgian potato industry asked that Belgians up their weekly intake of fries. The remaining 25% of the potato industry, which includes the production of fresh potato and snack products, was doing well as more people were cooking and snacking at home.

Potatoes that could not be processed were being sent to food banks and exported to Central Europe and Africa, where there were shortages. Anything left over after that was being made into animal feed or biofuel.

What kind of an impact was had on potato farmers? Before the virus hit, the market was doing well. Spuds were selling around \$145 per ton. However, in mid-March, the market collapsed to \$16.22 per ton.

(Thanks to CNBC)



## Rank & Coryn

While researching another subject, your newsletter editor came across some information about the Rank & Coryn grocery store. I thought you might find it interesting, as it also concerns a pioneer Moline family and several locations that will be familiar to many of you.

In 1880, Henry Karstens moved into a house at 1311-15th Street, on the Moline bluff. He opened a tavern one door south of that house. Henry's son August opened a grocery store one door south of the tavern, at 1317-15th Street, in 1893.

Edward Coryn came to America and Moline in the mid-1880s. He first worked as a laborer at a lumber mill and then the Deere plow factory. Around 1892, Coryn teamed with Charles Rank to open a butcher shop. It was located on the northwest corner of 15th Street and 13th Avenue. That building still stands and has been occupied for years by the Blaser Sweeper Co.

By 1895, August Karstens had gotten tired of the grocery business and sold his store to Coryn and Rank, operating under the name Rank & Coryn. That new location was much larger than their previous shop, just a half block away.

The Rank & Coryn grocery operated very successfully for a total of 14 years and was sold in 1906 to William Karstens and John Hendricks, two of the stores employees. That same year, Coryn and Rank dissolved the partnership. Charles Rank went into the feed business for a year, then moved to Chicago and opened a butcher and grocery store there.

And as noted in previous newsletters, Edward Coryn was not only a successful businessman, but aided immigrating Belgians, organized the Belgian Working Men's Union, founded the Belgian-American Club, was a founder of the *Gazette Van Moline*, helped create Sacred Heart Church, and became the first honorary consul in Moline.

What about August Karstens? The family homestead still stands on 15th Street. The former grocery store building later became DeBruyckere's Tavern and is today the El Mariachi Restaurant. August purchased a brickyard south of 19th Avenue and west of 7th Street. When there was no longer any clay for bricks, he built homes on much of the property and gave one full block to the city for a playground for the area's youngsters – Karstens Park.



## They Want to Continue

A survey of 3,000 people who started working from home during the virus lockdown shows 84% of them want to continue doing so. Advantages include less commuting time and perhaps, better concentration on their work.

A previous survey showed that 90% of workers would like to work from home one to three days/week after the crisis is over. Researchers feel that would be a better fit than working at home fulltime. The worker would still feel connected and could share information informally with other employees, maintaining a working relationship.

(From *FlandersToday*)

## I'm Mad

*continued from page 1*

The article from *FlandersToday* noted that figures compiled by Statista showed that Belgium was in the top three when it came to testing. Only Portugal and Spain had tested more people. As for Germany, it tested 25% fewer people than did Belgium. But Boot thinks Germany more successful. As for suspected fatalities even if the victim hadn't been tested . . . that seems to be going on everywhere, not just Belgium. Furthermore, Belgium universities and bio-medical companies have been leading the world in seeking diagnostics, cures, and possible vaccines since the very beginning. And Belgium was one of the early ones to actually start contact tracing.

It's too bad that Max Boot didn't spend more time checking some of his facts instead of trying to lump Belgium in with his distaste for Trump.

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## **Closes – Maybe Forever**

If you've ever been to Brussels, you might have visited the legendary Hotel Metropole. The five-star hotel is known for its plush interior and art nouveau elegance. Maybe you were just there for its famous café. Both residents and tourists enjoy having a drink in its luxurious atmosphere.

The Café Metropole opened in 1890, and the hotel followed four years later. It was the first hotel in Brussels to have both electricity and central heating.

Unfortunately, the hotel is closing its doors – perhaps forever. It's a victim of circumstances. It was hurt when tourism dropped off after the 2015-2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. With construction on a pedestrian zone and a metro station outside its doors, the hotel has had to deal with plenty of noise for an extended period of time. And now the coronavirus has really put a damper on its ability to function economically. The Metropole was simply no longer an attractive option for individuals or event organizers.

Let's hope the closing won't be forever.

(Thanks to *FlandersToday*)



## **Busting Out**

Grass is growing like crazy between the cobblestones of Brussels' Grote Markt. Normally, people walking all over Markt square act as lawnmowers, keeping grass and other vegetation at bay. Now, with no tourists and few locals wandering around it, plants are sprouting up all over. Seeds are now germinating that normally can't because of lack of people and street cleaning.