



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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Center Closed for Safety

We're still being proactive so the Center remains closed, no waffle breakfast scheduled, and the lacemakers are not meeting at the center. Please stay safe.

News of the Membership

Thank You to **Mary Joy Allaert Feeney** and **Edward DeNeve** for their monetary donations to the Center for Belgian Culture.

Sympathy is extended to the family of **Dan DeBo**, 62, of East Moline, who died at home on February 6th.

Scholarships

Application forms for both the CBC and the Ruth Lambrick VanTieghem Scholarships have been sent to area high schools and colleges. The CBC offers three \$750 scholarships to high school seniors to use towards their college costs. The VanTieghem Scholarship offers a \$1,200 scholarship to a student who has finished two years of college and will continue his or her education. Because the Center is currently closed, applications will be sent via a broadcast email to everyone on our emailing list or you can email dtcoopman@gmail.com for a copy.

Apologies

Last month's insertion of the blurb titled "Last Supper Redo" may have been viewed as in bad taste. As editor, I try to stay away from the political and controversial. While the original artwork by Belgian artist Bert Dries may have meant more to those in Belgium and what Belgium has been going through, it was brought to my attention that it didn't belong in the CBC newsletter. If it offended you, your editor apologizes.

Some Robin Hood Follow-up

Our friends in Belgium, André Bollaert and Werner Vols, both responded to last month's article "Belgian Robin Hoods." Werner sent a huge file of images illustrating that popinjay shooting and archery are still alive and well in Belgium. André noted that the delayed European Archers Festival will be held next year in Deinze. You may recall that we've noted in past newsletters that many of the emigrants in the Quad-City area came from Deinze and the surrounding villages.

The library of the local historical society Het Land van Nevele holds the archives of two old Flemish archer societies: Sint-Sebastiaan Merendree (founded in 1717) and Sint Sebastiaan Nevele (refounded in 1818).



Our Newsletter Helps

Member Rita Van Raes recently contacted your editor regarding a great find she received from a blurb published back in April, 2020. The small article relayed a request from the Red Star Line Museum for documents written in Flemish by emigrants to America between 1873 and 1934. Rita noted that she had copies of several articles written by Father J.B. Culemans, the founding pastor of Moline's Sacred Heart Church. She thought the documents might be of use to the museum's project. Rita sent scanned copies along with an email explaining what was happening in the parish that prompted Father to write them. She did not expect the response back that she received.

One of the museum directors wrote back expressing interest in Father's story and requested pictures, which Rita sent. The museum was able to put the Sacred Heart archives in contact with a great-nephew of Father who supplied the archives with a great deal of information on Father Culemans, his family, and his life in Belgium before coming to America.

And it all started with that small blurb. I'm grateful that Rita noticed that small article and that the newsletter helped fill in more information on Father Culemans for the church archives.

From the information and pictures Rita provided, the museum created a short video about Father, and you can view it at: <https://youtube/GZx4aX3O8M>. You probably won't understand the language, but the images are creative and entertaining. Your editor certainly enjoyed it!



A Belgian proverb for those celebrating St. Paddy's Day...

What you say when you're drunk should have been thought about beforehand!



Just Peachy

Did you know “the Peach State” has a Belgian background? The first large-scale horticultural nursery in the southeast was founded by Louis and Prosper Berckmans in 1858.

Louis Berckmans was a physician with an interest in horticulture. That same interest was held by Louis’ son Prosper, who was a university-trained horticulturist. Both father and son immigrated from Belgium to Augusta, Georgia, in the early 1850s, and founded Fruitland Nurseries. The nursery operated in Augusta from 1858 to 1918.

The Berckmans family introduced a variety of plants, shrubs, and trees to the Southeast. Prosper became famous for introducing new fruit varieties that were more conducive to growth in southern climates. He also developed or improved many types of peaches and became known as the “Father of Peach Culture,” putting Georgia peaches on the world’s map.

Among the peach varieties were the Honey peach and the Chinese Cling. From the Cling, Prosper eventually bred the Elberta, Belle, and Thurber peaches, which became Georgia’s primary commercial varieties.

The Berckmans were also responsible for introducing many other varieties of fruits and ornamental plants to the South, including the Kelsey plum, the Japanese persimmon, the kumquat, and the sand pear. Their large stock of azaleas and camellias contributed to the early and continued popularity of those flowers throughout the South.

Many varieties of trees and shrubs were grown at Fruitland, including the Darlington oak, the Chinese

pine, Chinese holly, and the Spanish cork. In 1860, Prosper introduced the amur privet hedge from France. Called the “Mother Hedge,” the original ten plants were the progenitors of all the privet hedges now found across the Southeast. He also introduced several species of arborvitae, both narrow-leaf evergreens used for formal garden planting.

Did you know the Masters golf tournament has a Belgian background? Today, the Augusta National Golf Club, home of the Masters, sits on the property of the former Fruitland Nurseries. In 1931 when the club was created, two sons of Prosper Berckmans assisted in the landscape design of the course. In addition, the Berckmans’ family home became the Augusta National clubhouse.

Many of the plant varieties developed and improved by the Berckmans family still grow at Augusta National as part of its designed landscape.

(Thanks to *BE Bulletin*)



Why A Consulate in Moline

(This article appeared in the 100th Anniversary program celebrating the establishment of an honorary Belgian consulate in Moline. As editor, I thought it might be of interest to our newer members and those who weren't fully aware of why this happened.)

According to a chart published by the Moline *Dispatch* in March of 1982, a small number of Belgians began arriving in the Moline area between 1840 and 1860. It is thought those who arrived first were drawn to the area’s lumber industry’s needs for laborers and by the land, as it was similar to land in the homeland and was relatively inexpensive.

By 1890, substantial numbers began to arrive due to the growth of industry, particularly the agricultural companies like the John Deere, Rock Island Plow, and Moline Plow companies. Additional opportunities existed with other implement firms, carriage, furniture, glass, foundries, and machinery manufacturing, and even later, ordnance, automobiles, and railroad equipment.

Belgians settled in Rock Island and East Moline in good numbers, but with Deere being the largest employer by 1910, the majority of Belgians settled in Moline, being

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convenient to Deere's factories. According to John Deere's Company, by Wayne Broehl, Jr., of Deere's nearly 2,300 employees, 456 workers, or 18.6% of its workforce, were Belgians. A.H. Head, superintendent of Deere's plow department noted, "The first and probably the most dependable of other nationalities have been the Belgians. They are found desirous of making good money and willing to return its equivalent in amount of work performed."

Many more Belgians arrived prior to World War I due to worsening conditions in the homeland, chain migration, and, no doubt, the catch-all heading of "wanting a better life." There is no doubt that Moline and the area did offer a better life with plenty of jobs for both the skilled and unskilled worker.

By the early 1900s, a substantial middle class was forming in Moline. Some of the immigrants began to form their own businesses, especially in the bluff area that today is referred to as Olde Towne. Those businesses included clothing stores, butchers and grocers, shoe repairing and retailing, hardware outlets, and printing.

One of the more successful Belgian businessmen and most prominent was Edward Coryn. After immigrating from Lotenhulle, he initially worked in the shops but prospered in banking and real estate investing. He also

served as a city councilman and the U.S. postmaster at Moline.

Perhaps Coryn, besides employment in Deere's factories, was most influential for the numbers of Belgians coming to Moline. He helped immigrating Belgians find homes and places to work; organized a worker's union that provided financial help when the worker became ill; founded a club for Belgians that provided not only social activities, but also offered classes to help them become U.S. citizens; was one of the founders of a Flemish-language newspaper; pushed for a Belgian church; and was first president of the Belgian-American Alliance.

The area's Belgian population was substantial. Dr. W.E. Taylor, a soil expert with Deere, noted in 1919 that Moline had about 8,000 Belgians, East Moline nearly 3,500, and Rock Island about 1,500. Henry, Bureau, Mercer, and Whiteside counties accounted for another 3,950, mostly engaged in farming.

With nearly 18,000 Belgians in the area and most residing in Moline, it became logical for the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to open an Honorary Consulate in Moline to assist the Belgian immigrants. And it did just that in June 1919, naming Edward Coryn as the first Honorary Consul. It became official in October that year when Coryn's resignation as postmaster was finally accepted.