



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



May, 2021

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Waffles are Back!!!

The Center will once again hold a waffle breakfast on Saturday, May 1st, from 8:00-11:00 a.m. at the Friends Circle. Please understand that Covid-19 precautions will be in effect, and we will have distancing in the seating. We hope this will work out well so we can continue on a monthly basis again.

News of the Membership

Sympathy is offered to: the family of **Joan DeClerck**, 91, of Moline, who died March 18th at Friendship Manor in Rock Island. Also, to **Mary Lou Andrae** and **Bonnie Newman** on the death of their mother, Bernice Taets Beiermann, 98, of Moline, who died April 5th.

A Bit of Belgium in Your Pocket

When you put your hand into your pocket and feel a \$1 bill, you're feeling something special. You not only feel the somewhat iconic nature of the dollar bill, but also the flax it contains. And that flax has been supplied to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing by the Belgian Vervaeke Fiber company for many years.

Vervaeke Fiber is the world's oldest flax company, dating back to 1892. Since the early 1960s, there has been demand from the United States to supply flax, specifically for use in dollar bills. A one-dollar bill consists of 75% cotton and 25% flax. Flax supposedly makes the bill much stronger. Prior to the use of flax, old rags that were torn up were used.

(Thanks to *BE Bulletin*)



B.A.B. Revisited

About a year ago, I wrote a short piece about the Belgian-American Brotherhood. It was in answer to a question about its building and existence in the west end of Rock Island. Your editor decided to look into the group a little further.

The Brotherhood was founded in September 1931, in the home of Achiel DeSmet. The founding members were DeSmet, John Maes, Vital Dhondt, Louis VanPuymbroeck, Joseph Poma, Henry Bulins, Edmond Dryoel, Alfons Borgonjon, and Clement Engels. The object of the group was to unite all persons of Belgian descent to closer ties and develop social activities.

For the first few weeks, the men continued to meet at the DeSmet home, but would soon open its headquarters in a rented commercial building at 301 - 7th Avenue in Rock Island. Once the headquarters were opened, meetings would be held the third Sunday of every month.

By mid-1933, membership had grown to several hundred and its headquarters were no longer sufficient. At its August meeting, the Brotherhood would vote on purchasing the former West End Settlement House up the street in the next block. The purchase price was said to be \$10,000.

The building was an attractive one, as it contained a gymnasium, baths, auditorium, and social and reading rooms. There was also room on the building's adjoining lot for rolle bolle courts and outdoor archery range. On September 1st, the B.A.B. took possession of the building.

A parade through the Rock Island business district, reception, concert, and dance were part of the dedication ceremonies the first weekend of October. The Rock Island mayor, honorary consul Ed Andries, and the presidents of the Belgian-American clubs of East Moline and Moline, the Friends Circle, and the Belgian-American Brotherhood were all part of the formal program.

Once used as a center for the poorer of Rock Island, the B.A.B. facility would again be put to use by the community. In early February of 1934, the Brotherhood voted to allow its headquarters to be used as a center for public recreation. The Rock Island Parks Department was granted use of the building at all times, except when the club was holding meetings or special events. Programs for men, women, and the younger boys and girls were developed by the park department. Included were dramatic, sports, music, and gymnastics programs. Many members of the B.A.B. assisted with the programs.



Even though the club facilities were used as community center, the club held many events of its own. Dances, dinners, and picnics at Jens Grove were monthly activities. Perhaps more well-known were the rolle bolle and archery contests held weekly. Many top winners were members of the B.A.B.

In August 1936, the B.A.B. celebrated its fifth anniversary. Count Robert VanderStraten, the Belgian ambassador to the United States, was a guest of honor for the festivities that included a parade and a special Mass at St. Paul's Catholic Church.

Over the ensuing years, the club continued to act as a community center and social center for the Belgian and Rock Island community at large. It added a one-story addition to the west to house its rolle bolle courts from the weather. Newspaper accounts demonstrated the members' prowess at rolle bolle, archery, baseball, and even basketball.

However, like other groups, membership began to wane and the building began to show its age. Upkeep was becoming expensive. The B.A.B. wanted to sell its current home and move to a smaller building. Two men had interest in purchasing the building for a nightclub, but the City did not allow the zoning change. Unable to rebuild the membership or have the money needed to modernize the building, the writing was on the wall that the club would no longer be viable.

In July 1981, the B.A.B. sold its headquarters to the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World. From a one-time membership high of 450, the Belgian-American Brotherhood was no longer.

Let's Salute Her

Our friend in Belgium, Paul Callens, has asked our members to send a card and birthday wish to Margaret Roets.

Margaret was very involved with the *Gazette van Detroit* and remained so until the *Gazette* ceased publishing. She was one of four widows who kept the paper going as long as possible. In 1983, she and a few others of Flemish descent founded the Family Expert Association along with the late Fr. Karel Denys.

Margaret remains a pivotal figure there to this day. She has had problems with her eyesight, but with special tools she was still able to continue her work and make contributions for the members of the Flemish Family Scientists in America.

When the pandemic hit, there was no longer access to their classroom and archives that were in the basement of a retirement home. Since then, these folks have continued to work from the basement of Margaret's house.

Would you please send a card to Margaret as a thank you and an encouragement to keep up her great work with the Flemish heritage? Her address is as follows: Margaret Roets, 26208 Princeton, St. Clair Shores, MI 48081-3810.

What's In a Name

When two Dutch-speaking parents wanted to register their son with the Brussels authorities, the civil registry office official thought the name they wanted to give their child – Hannes – was too similar to the French word “anesse,” or donkey. The official refused to accept it.

The misunderstanding was later corrected, but it wasn't the first time that Dutch-speaking parents have encountered difficulties in registering baby names in Brussels. What happened and who was responsible had not been determined, but it certainly raised the ire of many.

City councilor Mathias Vanden Borre stated, “It is incomprehensible that Brussels did not want to recognize a declaration because it did not like a name. These are attitudes better suited to the 19th century.”

Vanden Borre revealed that two years ago, in the absence of a Dutch-speaking office clerk, a father was forced to wait several hours before he could register his child because the clerk did not believe that the letter combination “IJ” existed.

Hmm . . . seems English isn't quite as hard as we think it is.

(Thanks to Nick Amies)

Preserved for Posterity

It's been at least ten thousand years since woolly mammoths roamed the Land of Scheldt in East Flanders. In Berlare, all kinds of animal bones and even shark teeth were recovered from a local sand quarry in the early 70s. That collection was donated to Belare and now the municipal authorities are eager to show off its natural sciences' heritage. The collection includes mammoth teeth, beaver and wolf jaws, as well as woolly rhinoceroses and giant deer.

The bones are tens of thousands of years old and need to be treated before they turn to dust. Yes, they will turn to dust unless treated. They contain pyrite. When in contact with the air and dampness, a chemical reaction occurs and the bones erode into dust.

But how did shark teeth show up? Sharks are not indigenous to this inland town or river. Evidently when the North Sea flowed further inland, the ur-Scheldt brought the teeth from tropical waters. They remained in a clay layer at Berlare's deepest point and got mixed with the bones of the other animals.

(Thanks to *flandersnews.be*)



Remember the
Fallen & Our
Dearly Departed
May 31st



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The Pieces Fit Together

Freddy Declerck has been doing volunteer work for several years to help identify New Zealand soldiers who perished in Flanders Fields. There are still over 100,000 unknown soldiers in Flanders Fields. Declerck managed to put a name on the grave of an unknown resting in Dochy Farm New British Cemetery in Langemark-Poelkapelle.

“At a certain moment, I found that six missing captains from New Zealand were mentioned on the ‘Memorial to the Missing’ on Tyne Cot Cemetery in Zonnebeke. I knew that a missing captain was buried on Dochy Farm, a place I know very well. Ever since I was a child, I often went there. After extensive research, I managed to find out that it was Ernest Parry resting there.”

A newspaper article from 1917 served as the final piece of the puzzle: it turned out that Parry and a sergeant were hit by a grenade in that Dochy Farm area. A fragment from a diary mentioned Parry died on October 6, 1917. That extra information helped Declerck reach his conclusion. Finally, a

specific name can be mentioned on the grave stone and his family can now come to visit the grave.

