



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

1608 Seventh Street, Moline, Illinois 61265

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www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



January 2022

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

January 1st	NO Waffle Breakfast	
January 8th	Belgian Lacemakers	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
January 10th	Board Meeting	5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

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

News of the Membership

Thank You to all members who baked and furnished items for the Christmas bake sale at December's waffle breakfast. There were plenty of great goodies and they sold quickly!

Condolences are offered to: **Leo Hugaert** and family on the death of wife and mother Virginia, 84, of Moline, who passed away December 5, 2021, at Hope Creek Care Center in East Moline; **Gary Francque, Jason Francque**, and family on the death of wife and mother Margo, 69, of Moline, who passed away December 9, 2021, at Unity Point Trinity in Moline; and to the family of **Mike Kerckhove**, 75, of Moline, who died December 8, 2021, at Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago.

World Champions

Belgium's skydiving team, HayaBusa, has landed the world championship title for jumping in formation at the military world championships held in Doha, Qatar. This was the 12th victory in a row for the Belgian military team. The four skydivers in the team face the challenge of completing as many formations as possible from a list during their 35 second free fall. Everything is filmed by a cameraman, a fellow skydiver.



(Thanks to Colin Clapson)

OPEN Wednesday and Saturday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Waffle Breakfast 1st Saturday of the month.

An Error Pays Off

(Millie Kale sent along an excerpt from the book *Bazarre Tales from World War II* by William Bleuer. We both think this incident and its result were rather interesting.)

Late in June 1943, the sixty-ninth mission of the U.S. Eighth Air Force was launched. Fifty bombers were being sent to pound a German airfield on the outskirts of Brussels.

There was a haunting risk of killing Belgian civilians, because the approach to the German airfield would take the bombers directly over Brussels. The route was thought to be the safest, because the Germans seldom wasted anti-aircraft guns to protect cities they occupied in Europe.

The U.S. bomber crews had been warned at a briefing to be especially careful about dropping their bombs on anything but the designated airfield.

As the flight of bombers was passing over Brussels, the bombardiers opened their bomb-bay doors and checked their bombsights. Practicing for the real thing coming up in a few minutes, the lead bombardier spotted a large park in the middle of a crowded residential area, and he used it as a simulated aiming point.

Suddenly, the young lead bombardier was stricken with fright: he felt the bomber shake as his bombs were released. As was the practice, the other bombardiers behind him in his combat group saw the bombs drop and they released their bombs. Looking down, the horrified bombardier saw the park and the neighboring houses being devastated by the fiery explosions.

Back in England after the mission, the base was wrapped in gloom. Never before had an entire group of bombers errantly dropped its collective payload that no doubt killed hundreds of civilians sympathetic to the Allies.

Two days later, the crews taking part in the mission were summoned to the headquarters of Brig. Gen. Robert Williams. The error would be reviewed the fliers knew, and no doubt severe punishment would be meted out to the errant bombardier and perhaps others.

"I don't know how it happened," the lead bombardier testified. "Whatever the cause, I alone am to blame."

Williams said that the Brussels mission had been investigated by Allied agents in Belgium and by "other intelligence sources." The latter category no doubt was

referring to Ultra, the code name for the British interception and decoding of German radio messages.

Williams paused. His audience presumed he was about to reveal the huge death toll among Brussels civilians. "We have learned that the results aren't nearly as bad as we had feared," he said.

"We have been informed that the German authorities in Brussels had felt the park and upscale houses surrounding it were ideal for billeting troops, and the entire circumference of the park was being used for that purpose. There were more than twelve hundred casualties among the German soldiers – and only a few Belgian civilians had been killed or injured." Williams continued, "The mission has resulted in the German leaders in Belgium calling it a remarkable exhibition of American precision bombing. Such are the fortunes of war. This incident is now closed."

Belgium Farmers Like Deere

Flemish farmers have taken to the highway on 3,000 tractors to protest the lack of a nitrogen policy. The farmers' intent is to drive around on their tractors to slow the traffic. No blockades are planned by the group.

The protest follows a court decision in which a judge refused to license agricultural expansion because a farm was producing too much nitrogen. And no new licenses are being issued ahead of the introduction of promised, by the end of the year, new nitrogen policies.

As noted in the accompanying photo, Belgian farmers seem to like John Deere. And we like the Belgian farmers for supporting John Deere with their purchase of Deere tractors.



The Roots of Our Roots

(I was asked by the son of a newer member how Belgian came about. Here is a compact version that was run in the newsletter in 2017. It is reprinted here to answer that young boy's question.)

From approximately 57 BC to 431 AD, Rome ruled over Gaul, an area that is now France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. The land was then inhabited by independent tribes of Celtic origin. Julius Caesar's account of his efforts to subdue the area gives us the first written record of what came to be called Belgium.

The Romans looked on Belgium as a defensive barrier to the Franks, Germanic tribes that eventually settled in what is now Flanders. Language patterns followed the settlement patterns. Germanic speech evolved into Dutch in the north, and the Latin of Rome developed into French in the south. These language patterns, which were established by the third century AD, have altered only slightly up to the present day.

With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Franks held sway for more than 550 years. With the death of Charlemagne in 814, the country was divided into France, the Holy Roman Empire (Germany), and the "Middle Kingdom," a buffer state comprised of the Lowlands and Belgium. Feudal states developed, and in the later Middle Ages the dukes of Burgundy ruled the Low Countries.

In 1516, Belgium became a possession of Spain and remained so until 1713, when the country was given to Austria as settlement in the War of the Spanish Succession. Belgium was annexed by France in 1795, and placed under the rule of The Netherlands after Napoleon's defeat in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. In 1830, Belgium declared its independence, adopted a constitution, and chose its first king, Leopold I. He was succeeded in 1865 by his son, Leopold II.

(Prepared and written by Jane Stewart Cook)

This Doesn't Seem Right

Back in 2016, the Ghent municipal authorities ending all existing contracts for chip (frites) stalls. They decided to auction all the locations, and prices for a chip stall then shot through the roof. The venue on the Vrijdagmarkt went for 48,000 euros a year: three times the old price. Fifteen thousand euros was bid for the stall space on the Fratersplein.

The owner of the stall that offered 48,000 euros/year struggled to keep up payments ever since. The owner of the stall on the Fratersplein had the same problem. Neither seller of the Belgian French fries could keep up payments, and by the start of the pandemic the arrearage reached 100,000 euros. The City of Ghent took the matter to court and gained a favorable ruling to have the two chip stalls removed.

It seems that there several problems with this. First, the prices Ghent wanted for the locations were, perhaps, way too high. Second, the locations were probably not worth the prices bid. Third, the pandemic didn't help the issue, as many businesses were closed down in the name of safety.

Belgium is not alone in this issue, as we've seen many small businesses in the U.S. disappear because of Covid rules and closings.

(From Colin Clapson)



THE BELGIAN FLAG

Do you know what the colors of the Belgian flag represent?

BLACK

Fighting for
independence

YELLOW

Grain waving
in the field

RED

Blood of the
soldiers keeping
the country free

Happy
2022



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Deinze Pays Big for Toy Cars

In the last century, the East Flemish city of Deinze had a thriving stroller and toy industry. Strollers, as well as dolls, children's furniture, and toys, were made in the city's various factories. The toys were sold in exclusive toy and department stores and were known for their quality. Children from all over the world, even children of kings and emperors, played with toys from Deinze.



The best known of the toys were the pedal cars and Tork was the best-known brand, but are rarely found today. While they were some of the best, competition entered the market place by the 1970s with cheaper goods.

Recently, Deinze acquired a collection of 26 Tork toy cars and posters. The collection had been held in a private collection, but the owners wanted to sell. The city paid 125,000 euros for the collection, since the Tork toys are linked so closely to Deinze's history.

Visitors to Deinze's museum will have smiles on their faces when they see the collection and remember their childhood. Money well spent.

(Thanks to Martina Luxen)

World's Smallest Book

A copy of the smallest book in the world was just auctioned off in Brussels for 3,500 euros. The book measures 5mm by 5mm and was printed by the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, Germany in 1952.

The book contains seven versions of the Lord's Prayer and had been valued at between 1,000 and 1,500 euros, but brought more than double that when it was hammered "sold" in Brussels.

The book is no bigger than one-sixth of a thumbnail and is bound in leather. The printing is microscopic. One can read the text, but only with a magnifying glass.

This particular book is not unique. The Gutenberg Museum was in need of cash to pay for reconstruction work after the war and decided to accept the technical challenge of publishing this miniature book. Several hundred copies were printed.

Books are accepted as miniatures if they measure 7cm or less. The U.S. and Europe boasts many collectors, but the size of the present tome means it's an exceptional specimen. It was kept in a jewel box as if it were a gem.



(Thanks to Colin Clapson)