



# CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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February 2022

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 5th	Waffle Breakfast	8:00 to 11:00 a.m.
February 12th	Belgian Lacemakers	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
February 14th	Board Meeting	5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

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

## Save the Date

The Family History Center in Davenport is reinstating workshops for 2022. On **June 11th**, the CBC's Mary Gardner-Karcher will be giving a presentation on Belgian record additions to Family Search and our Belgian museum genealogy resources. More details will be forthcoming as the date gets closer.

## New in the Kleine Winkel



The Center's gift shop now has a supply of very nice Belgian-logo'd sweatshirts. Sizes small through 2XL are available and the cost is \$30 plus tax. Why not show your heritage and support with a great sweatshirt!



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

## Let's Learn Again About Belgian Chocolate

*February and Valentine's Day is a time for flowers and candy, preferably chocolate. This article was run five years ago, but I thought this would be a good time to refresh everyone's knowledge of that great treat – chocolate.*

When you think about chocolate, Belgium is probably the first place that comes to mind. If so, you are not alone. In a recent article in the Huffington Post - "16 Ways Europeans are Just Better at Life"- the one ranked number eight was Belgian chocolate.

Belgium is well known for its chocolate history and its chocolate is, nowadays, a gold standard for the world. High-street brands such as Leonidas, Neuhaus and Godiva are excellent, but even those you find in supermarkets, such as Galler, are very good too.

The first trace of chocolate in Belgium dates back to 1635, when records show that some chocolate was bought by the Abbot of Baudeloo in Ghent. Towards the end of the 17th century Emmanuel Soares de Rinero (who was from Portugal or Spain) was issued a license to manufacture chocolate in Brabant.

Chocolate making was not considered a profession at the time but more of a side-line for apothecaries and merchants. As in the rest of Europe, chocolate making really took hold in Belgium in the 18th century, when several manufacturing centers sprang up in all the major cities. At that time, chocolate was worth 15 loaves of bread, so naturally only the upper classes could afford chocolate drinks (then the most common form of consuming chocolate). Chocolate appeared in the kitchen in the late 18th century in all kinds of desserts (cream dessert, cakes, biscuits, etc.). And when the industrialisation process got underway in the 19th century, the price of chocolate began to fall, making it more accessible.



For Belgian chocolate, 1912 was a very significant milestone: that year Jean Neuhaus (often referred to as Belgium's most famous chocolatier although he was actually born in Switzerland) invented the "Praline" (a filled chocolate bonbon and a Belgian specialty) in Brussels. Three years later, his wife invented "the Ballotin", the typical chocolate box in Belgium.

Fast forward to the present and, with over 2,000 chocolate shops throughout the country, the reputation of Belgian chocolate remains as high as ever. Belgium has the world's largest chocolate factory, and Brussels Airport is said to retail the most chocolate of any airport in the world. The country also supplies 20% of the world's industrial chocolate.

Latest research has found that chocolate is good for the brain. According to Nature Neuroscience, chocolate has also been found to reduce blood pressure and the risk of stroke. Dark chocolate, with 70% cocoa solids, is the healthiest, since it has less sugar. Who wouldn't want to devour chocolate to keep their brain working as well as it did 20 years ago, especially if the chocolate is made in Belgium! But remember . . . everything in moderation!

(Special thanks to Martin Banks via the *Brussels Times*)

*Happy Valentine's Day*



## Cancelled Again

We're sorry to say that the Exploring Belgium with the CBC tour has again been cancelled. No doubt Covid and the constantly changing travel rules, both here and overseas, contributed to a lack of participation. It's really too bad, as this tour was geared towards where our travelers' families came from, along with the top tourist sites.

We can't thank Bonnie Newman enough for her hard work and efforts in putting together and promoting this tour.

## Have You Heard About This?

Unesco has officially registered the Namur tradition of stilt jousting on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Stilt jousting? I'd never heard of that.

According to legend, the tradition dates back to the time when the city was regularly flooded by the Meuse and Sambre rivers and in order to stay dry, the inhabitants walked around on stilts. The first official record of stilts was formally identified in an archive from December 8, 1411, in a reference to the Count of Namur forbidding the practice of anyone over the age of 13.

Every year, during the weekend of the Walloon Festivals, the still walkers compete in a joust organized in the shadow of Saint Aubain Cathedral, often dressed as characters from history or folklore.

The Unesco designation lends the celebration a prestigious level of recognition for its cultural importance.

(Thanks to writer Helen Lyons. Photo by Maxime Asselberghs/Belga)



## The Belgian Who Inspired the U.S. Dollar

Not many people in Bruges stop to look at the statue of Simon Stevin. Perhaps they should. It celebrates a brilliant mathematician born in Bruges about 1548. Simon Stevin was the first to apply the use of the decimal point in mathematics.

Stevin worked briefly as a bookkeeper in Antwerp before setting off on a six-year tour of Europe. Back in Bruges in 1577, he worked four years as a tax inspector, then moved to Leiden to study science at the prestigious Dutch university.

While in the Netherlands, Stevin began publishing books on geometry, hydrostatics, and math. Not only the first to use the decimal point, but he also proved that the downward pressure of a liquid depended on the height and base of the liquid and not on the shape of the container.

Stevin was virtually forgotten after he died in 1620 and nobody knows whether he is buried in The Hague or Leiden. His reputation was restored in the 19th century when the city of Bruges commissioned a statue of him. It shows Stevin holding a pair of compasses and a roll of paper with a diagram taken from the title page of his *Elements of the Art of Weighing*.



How did Stevin inspire our money? When Thomas Jefferson launched the U.S. dollar in 1792, he based the currency on Stevin's decimal system, which the scientist from Bruges had outlined in his 1585 booklet *De Thiende* (The Tenth).

(Thanks to Derek Blyth and *The Belgian Times*)



### Please Check Ahead

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



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## CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE

*February, 2022*

### Skippy is Safely Back Home

Skippy, the Belgian wallaby that escaped from his enclosure at a recreation park in the province of Antwerp and spent several days on the lam, was caught and safely returned home. He had been the subject of a massive search, but catching a wallaby is no easy feat. Many reported seeing Skippy, but he managed to get away on every occasion.



While the wallaby is very timid and wouldn't hurt anyone, the biggest fear was that he would be run over while crossing a road.

Although he was spotted several times a few kilometers from his home, he was eventually caught near the park from which he escaped when a veterinarian was able to sedate him. He was quietly eating grass and appeared no worse for wear. He'll get a new enclosure in the spring.

### A World First

Hermien and Imani, two hippopotamuses at the Antwerp Zoo, tested positive for coronavirus in early December. The Belgian science health institute Sciensano confirmed the positive tests. It's believed to be the first time anywhere in the world that hippopotamuses came down with Covid. The animals were suffering from runny noses. The animals were isolated and had no contact with zoo visitors. An attentive caregiver sounded the alarm after he noticed the hippos were producing an awful lot of mucus.

