



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

1608 Seventh Street, Moline, Illinois 61265

(309) 762-0167

www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



August, 2022

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

August 6th	Waffle Breakfast	8:00 to 11:00 a.m.
August 10th	Board Meeting	5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
August 13th	Belgian Lacemakers	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

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

News of the Membership

Thank You to: Sander Glas for sponsoring a newsletter and to **Paul Callens** for his kind donation.

Condolences are offered to the family of **Patrick and Karen VandeKerckhove** on the passing of **Patrick**, 79, who died June 18th at Hope Creek Care Center, Moline.

"Spey" starts the Happy Belgians

As noted in the previous "Spey" article, Omer quit "the road" in 1936 and settled in East Moline, working in his parents' clothing store. With two children already born, a third, James, was born in 1938. James married Rosalie Seiter and had three children; Chris and twins Mike and John.

With James' youngest sons approaching their teens, Omer took out his sax after nearly forty years and taught the boys to play saxophone. That was in 1965.

In 1976, the group performed at a St. Mary's School's spaghetti supper. The original idea was to play a few songs during the supper, but it became a nearly three hour performance. The audience heard Belgian songs, Polish polkas, Irish folk music, and American dance tunes. That music would become the band's repertoire.

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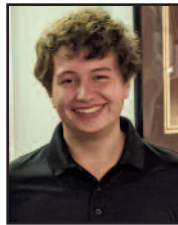
OPEN Wednesday and Saturday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Waffle Breakfast 1st Saturday of the month.

Scholarship Essay

Our first heritage essay is by Ephraim Young. He attended Living Word Lutheran High School and graduated third in his class. He is an Eagle Scout, was part of the soccer and golf teams, is a member of the National Honor Society, and winner of the Presidential Scholarship at Concordia University. Ephraim will attend Concordia University in Wisconsin, majoring in Computer Science.

My Belgian Heritage

by Ephraim Young



Since I am one quarter Belgian, my Belgian heritage is a significant part of who I am. No one has taught me more about this part of my family’s history than my grandmother. She has always been interested in genealogy and has tried to foster a similar fascination in me about my own heritage. While my personal experiences with my Belgian relatives are limited, I have gotten to know many of them through the stories told about them.

My grandmother is Rose Marie August Alphonsia Lootens. She was born in Ghent, Belgium in 1946 to Joris (George) Lootens of Hansbeke and Elisabeth Van De Wiele of Tielt. After living in Belgium for five years, my grandmother immigrated to the United States in August of 1951. When she had been in America for only a week, Rose began kindergarten. Although school was supposed to help her make new American friends, Rose had trouble getting to know her classmates without being able to speak English. My grandmother remembers sitting quietly in the back of the room, watching other children learn and listening to them speak in an unfamiliar language. Although she could not speak or understand anyone else in her kindergarten class, she was given a job of tying the other children’s shoe laces, the only task her teachers knew she could do. In fact, her teachers were so unsure about what she understood, she received straight C’s in both kindergarten and first grade.

I found my grandmother’s story of her childhood and coming to the United States fascinating because of the many differences between her experiences and my own. As I grew older, understanding more about her family’s history became of greater interest to me. When I was eight years old, my grandparents took my family to Belgium for a family reunion. This gave my grandmother the opportunity to speak her first language, Flemish, with native speakers. We visited my grandmother’s hometown of Ghent, as well as the surrounding cities including Brussels, Antwerp, Oostende, and Bruges. We tried some of my grandmother’s favorite traditional foods, including mussels, frites, and Belgian waffles. At the family reunion, she introduced me to many

cousins, uncles, aunts, and other relatives that I never knew I had. Throughout the trip, my grandmother spoke her first language, Flemish. This experience reminded me of the importance of learning more about my family’s history.

My great-grandfather, Joris (George) Lootens, never told me personally about his life in Belgium, but through stories told by my grandmother and great uncle, I have learned more about him. When my great-grandfather was young, all young men in Belgium were required to serve in the military. Standing at over six feet tall, George was qualified to serve as part of the King’s Regiment, whose duty was to protect the king and the royal family. Despite only having good vision in his shooting eye, George was accepted into the Belgian King’s Guard and was eventually promoted to corporal.

When the Germans captured and occupied Belgium in 1940, George returned to his previous training as a printer and was forced to print German propaganda. During this time, George sold ink illegally on the black market to non-German groups such as the underground resistance. For this reason, he was taken into German custody and sent to a work camp. On the way to the work camp, the train stopped every night, and prisoners were placed in an area surrounded by barbed wire. One night, a British plane bombed the facility where George’s train had stopped for the night. Taking advantage of the commotion, George, along with a group of five or six deserting German guards, ran out through a part of the fence that had been damaged by the bombings. Traveling by night, George eventually made it back to Belgium and worked as a printer for the remainder of the war.

As George continued working as a printer in Belgium, my great-grandmother, Elisabeth Van De Wiele of Tielt, was experiencing health problems. She had begun to develop rheumatoid arthritis during the war, and her condition continued to worsen. The doctors in Belgium tried all the treatments they had available, but were unable to improve her condition. Desperate for new medications and treatments, George and his family moved to America, where doctors suggested that newer treatments were available. Anxious to find a way to get to America, George found a job opening at the *Belgian Gazette of Detroit*, where a printer fluent in Flemish was needed. He interviewed in Belgium and accepted the position. With the sponsorship of the DeKonicks, a Belgian family in Detroit, George and his family traveled across the Atlantic to America.

My grandmother continues to talk about her relatives living in Belgium often. She tells stories about being on the

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“Spey”

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Omer Van Speybroeck continued to perform with his son and grandsons until his death in 1991. The Happy Belgians mainly play at retirement homes, church ceremonies, during Belgian-American festivities, and for non-profit groups. They’ve also been featured at Moline’s annual Belgian Fest.

Grandson John’s daughter Lauren has now joined the band. Together they keep the memory of their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather alive in the Quad-Cities Belgian-American community.



The Happy Belgians rehearse. Back row: Omer w/sax, Jim w/banjo, and Rosalie at the piano. In front, John w/sax, Mike w/sax, and Chris on drums.



New Member/Membership Renewal



Member *Lid* Membre Mitglied

It is time to renew your CBC membership. Membership runs August 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023

Please send your member information along with your payment as soon as possible. Membership funds help to support a communal story. A story of shared cultural pasts and presents. A story of cherished family heirlooms, literature, photographs, traditional cooking, and cultural events. A story that invites others to experience the Belgian community heritage. We encourage you to continue joining in the preservation and education of our area’s Belgian heritage. Also, we encourage and invite all members to volunteer their time, efforts, and talents – or even volunteer to learn new talents.

The Center for Belgian Culture cannot continue without the support of its members.

Please complete the information below and return the form with membership fees (one per household) to: Membership, Center for Belgian Culture, 1608 - 7th Street, Moline, IL 61265.

----- Detach and Return This Form -----

New Member (\$35) Renewal (\$35) Donation \$ _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone Number (____) _____ Recruited by (if applicable): _____

Email (for newsletters and mailing lists): _____

Check all that apply: Please add me to waffle breakfast notification email list

Please contact me if volunteers are needed Best time to call: _____

Waffles Fest Museum Other

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boat on the way to America and all the interesting things that happened to her when she finally arrived. Each year, we make Belgian waffle cookies and potato croquettes with her. My grandmother continues to remind me of her heritage because it is my heritage as well. Hearing the stories of her family and of her own personal experiences ensures that I will never forget that one quarter of my heritage is Belgian.

Got Rolle Bolles?

Do you have unwanted rolle bolles around your house or garage? Want to get rid of them? The Center will gladly take them off your hands if you would like to donate them.



Still Finding WWII Danger

A Dutch magnet fisher retrieved ten shells from the River Zenne in Anderlecht (Brussels). The army bomb squad attended the scene and carried out a controlled explosion to ensure there was no longer any threat to life or limb.

Magnet fisher John Vleers found the shells dating from the Second World War and believes dozens of shells are still waiting to be discovered in Brussels waterways. He stated the undisturbed shells are still live and potentially dangerous. He further stated: "I hope they set to work on a large-scale clean-up of the River Zenne because it's full of the stuff. If one shell explodes, it could trigger a chain reaction and the consequences are impossible to predict."

In 2009, divers also discovered six shells dating from the Great War at the exact same spot.

