

Articles give Belgian Walloon view of '75 visit to Wisconsin

TRANSLATED
By JOSIE WAUTLET

A voyage to the home of the Walloons in Wisconsin...first article in a series of five sent to me by Mm. J.P. Gerard. These articles were published in the paper in Namur, Belgium, after the return of the group who spent some time here last summer. I offer my translation to the best of my meager ability.

1. Une flame rallumee 1. (A flame rekindled)

In the past 20 odd years the ties of communication have been reestablished between the Wallonie peoples and the region of Wisconsin where the descendants of the immigrant Belgians have lived and progressed since the voyage made by the settlers some 200 years ago.

We recall the warm reception which the land of Namur gave to our American friends in 1974. That same year a delegation of Belgians went to the United States also. They were received there with much good will and friendship.

We have discussed with Colonel Leonard, the president and organizer of the "Wallonie- Wisconsin Club" his voyage to America. We are offering a series of articles which we hope our readers will enjoy and appreciate....

Does it serve any good purpose for us to return again to this subject? I conclude that it does. It is the only way to introduce into the recorded history of the Belgian Wallons the affront brought on by a people's disdain and scorn.

When the descendants of the Flemish heard of our plans they took advantage of our idea of repatriation. After taking credit for our painters and musicians, and disputing the subject of our art museum and having it moved to Rhin, is it not our duty to put the points in order and to restore to each his due?

And so, for the sake of accuracy about our history and to open the doors to justice and also as a tribute and recognition to the Wallons of yesterday and today, I write this.

The Wallons in America....It was in 1864 that some thirty families, for the most part Wallons, founded on the presque isle of Manhattan a colony named "La Nouvelle Belgique" (the New Belgium). The name was given in homage to the courage of the emigrants

who wanted to forge a new homeland which they had not found in Holland in spite of dozens and dozens of years in exile there.

And so, all the official acts, religious and civil during those early years were established in the French language. In 1865 the East India Company which had brought the Wallons, sent a governor, Pierre Minuit, of a family also exiled to Wesel, Palatinat, but which came from Ohain, in Brabant Wallon. It was he who bought Manhattan from the Indians for the sum of \$24.

Several years later, in 1629, the colony was seized by the Hollanders who renamed it "Nouvelle Amsterdam" (New Amsterdam.) From this the seal of the city was engraved equally with "Amstelladensis in Novo Belgio" in the facade of the museum of New York City.

The English with their sharp appetites, some years later, swept away all the old titles and imposed upon it the title of New York.

To perpetuate this historical fact an official monument was raised in Battery Park in New York City in 1924 on the tricentenary of the founding of the city. At the same time a series of three U.S. postage stamps was printed honoring the Belgian immigrants. The stamps were printed in one, two, and three cent denominations. This was the only special series printed that year. This should be proof for anyone who has contested this fact. Now is the time to clinch this matter once and for all.

The Wallons in America...that is another eventuality. We arrived in Wisconsin a century after our counterparts. The truth is incontestable; they are the perfect descendants of our emigrants in every way. How can this be? The Wallonie language is preserved and also the customs of their ancestors.

Some three years ago a group from Wisconsin came to Belgium thinking to find the land of their ancestry. They had been led to believe that Belgium was one nation pure and simple. They were taken to the Flemish area and promenaded under the Flemish colors (black letters on an orange background) in the "American Flemish Caravan.

Grace of God, they had returned to the land of their fathers and been given a triumphal reception; but that was far from the end for them. They walked the streets asking, "Where do we speak Belgian here?" (Note: They returned to Wisconsin and told everyone that they could not understand a word of the language spoken in Belgium. No wonder; they were among the Flemish spoken people and not their familiar Wallon....Josie Wautlet..)

Among all the volunteers who labored to reestablish contact, we must mention Marcel Copay, a journalist from Namur, who for 25 years had led an organized search to rediscovered the Wallons of Wallonie in their new land across the sea.

What emotion for us to hear in 1951 a tape made in Namur, Wisconsin, of our old song of the Namuroise by Charles

Werotte entitled, "Cest l' Cafeu Cafeu."

And in 1968 we saw a gala televised offering by two persons of Namur discussing the excellent dialect of the Wallon center of culture in Canada and the Couyon game.

Several times in 1951 and 1955 we tried to make contact by sending letters and tapes but met with no success. We could not write the Wallon or the English. The Wallon language used here was not a written or a read language.

At last, by the grace of God, the flame has been rekindled. In 1972 we began to sketch a project to renew the acquaintance. So we began to correspond to make plans for a new voyage, planned for the Wallonie kermis festival in 1974.

It was in the heart of this festival during the international couyon tournament at Meux the 12 of September, 1974, that they proposed that we "come and get our revenge." This told us that we were invited to return the visit. Meantime, several persons passed through Wisconsin, returning with tales of the cordial reception they had received and the happiness at renewing family ties.

On their return from America the idea of a voyage from here to there first began to take shape. We wished to keep the assemblage free from trouble and friendly in atmosphere, and so we decided to keep it free of strangers.

It is understandable that they were taken by exploiters who took advantage of their easy friendly manner to benefit a commercial organization which is what it is.

Here, a film was presented on television by R.T.B. showing those people, so friendly, so congenial, that the reports resounded through the entire Belgian area. How could this be? Existing 6000 kilometers from our Wallonie a community so vibrantly alive and speaking so? Their principal thought seemed to be to research their family histories in the villages of the old country.

In October of 1974, in response to the Peninsula Belgian American club, and in accord with them, we founded the Wallonie-Wisconsin club starting with the list of persons who had contacted us in 1972.

From that time on, the contacts by letter were frequent between us and our friends. We began to feel that perhaps now we might begin to aspire to degree of success.

At the request of some of our friends from Wisconsin, we proposed to the Cofelis De Jambe group, and the chorale La Psalette of Brussels that they accompany us. I also especially wanted the Aime Courtois Players to go because I remembered how much the Americans had enjoyed their presentation of a play in the Wallon dialect when they were here in September of 1974.

In February following that, we received word that they would be happy to accompany us. It would be their pleasure to entertain us on the voyage.

Next article: Premiere Discouvertes — (First Discoveries).

Belgian writer marvels at American motorization

(Second in a series of articles from a Belgian newspaper about the trip of Walloons to Wisconsin in the summer of 1975 and translated by Josie Wautlet).
PART 2....First discoveries

Firstly, the point of view which was revealed to us at the start of our visit was that we were the first convoy of such importance to arrive in Wisconsin since the arrivals of the preceding century.

After that was the success of the reception given us by the authorities of the state, the county, and the city of Green Bay; the documents and joint declarations given to the assemblage of officials on the part of the governor of Wisconsin, declaring the 6th day of July as Belgian day in Wisconsin. This was also instituted as the same feast day for the city of Green Bay by O. Monfils, the mayor.

That day there were parades, exchanges of gifts, and honors conferred. We were given a flag of the stars and stripes which had flown over the White House (this attested to by the officials).

It was a pleasure for us to meet all the Americans, but especially the Americans who are our little sons of Wallon.

The patriotism of the Americans reminds us of that which we knew in our childhood in Belgium. It was so profound as to be almost childlike perhaps. We cannot forget the two wars which tore our country apart and the time after the two wars in which we were not spared. These experiences seem to have been enough to dull our most noble sentiments.

Over there, what a response they gave to the "hymn America" (our national anthem). It is a worship which we cannot criticize.

And what language do they speak? It is American everywhere. Even for the Wallons who have preserved so many characteristics of their origins and preserved their dignity among the Germans, the Bohemians, the Polish, etc. who have forgotten their language. Like the states, the citizens too are united and American.

Because of their citizenship, The Wallons have adopted English throughout, but meanwhile they have preserved their Wallon. It is a Wallon so pure; it is similar to the dialect of the Wallon center spoken from Jadoigne to Meux. But in the meantime, they have adapted English words when referring to modern inventions as, "calling" on the telephone, "broadcaster" on the radio, "locking the car" etc.

Technically, they are Americanized, and provided with multiple engines and motors for the farm and home.

The automobiles of large cylinder are the natural thing there. Some people even own three of them. For sure the essence of things there is as the pace of a good march. The autos are equipped with multiple commodities which you cannot

forget; but they do not have the right to exceed the set speed limit.

During our stay of ten days in Wisconsin we saw only a dozen to the most of the small or medium cylindered autos. But the golfers and the caddies have motorized carts to make their sport more enjoyable. The large bodied cars of high caliber are the more numerous automobiles, and they are in frequent use in Wisconsin.

The motorcycles which circulate are also very impressive, but their noise is almost unbearable. We observed that the vehicle which is in front, while in motion, gives signals to the other vehicles day and night with its headlights.

As for the motorcycles and other velometers, at times we could not see the shadows of the riders between them in the countryside or in the villages. This is one fault of the importation of utilization; it seems to be a sign of maturity among the young people that they do not measure their intelligence by the ardor of their pleasure or by the decibels with which they disturb the tranquility of others.

The motor is the king of society in America. Vehicles are important to the players of golf and also for the carriers of the clubs (Caddies) because they have such immense golf courses. They even have machines with motors for picking cherries. In winter, they have personal motors to ride over the frozen snow and lakes.

In remembering the "New Belgium" we must mention a first edict, in 1862, we believe, which had to do with the speed of travel for carts and wagons in the new state.

Must we believe that the folly of abusive speed gives less gratification? The name of "cowboy" which they apply makes us think of a nation of madcaps, so undisciplined as to be a culture of noisemakers. But it is well established that before they enter the beaten path, as we witnessed, they are disciplined to following the limitations of speed and of the times to stop which are imposed. In moving from a secondary road in the open country, even when both sides are visibly unoccupied, the large vehicles, before moving forward observe without faltering the times to stop by the sign which says "STOP."

In the disciplines which we have observed on the roads, the American set an example for us.

In the Empire State Building, after one climbs to the 69th floor, we observe many American visitors on the platform waiting to take one after the other a new elevator to reach the 102 floor.

When in transportation, we remarked many times about the behavior of Americans taking their places sensibly at the end of the line, whereas the Belgians were guilty as usual of being distraught in trying to gain the best places possible in the crowd. In the same way, we also observed the respect for the passage of pedestrians.

Next article: Customs of The Savages.

Wallonie visitors appreciated preservation of customs here

Part 3 of a series of Belgian newspaper articles on the visit to America last year. Translated by Josie Wautlet.

In crossing over, we travelled with the speed as of a helicopter over New York city and she showed herself to us with her enormous suburbs wooded and airy.

Happily we were to spend ten days in the beautiful countryside of Wisconsin. It is a lovely region quite similar to our own Wallonie. The lands are flat and divided into square fields along the roads. Their grandparents have left to their descendants a multitude of workable lands.

All the area, as far as Green Bay, the entire region is verdant, a tapestry ever fresh even along the roadsides. In the cemeteries which are usually situated at the foot of the church as they are in our older churches and everywhere there are lawns, many even without fences. The cemeteries have names like "Pleasant Hill" and appear to welcome, as though to assure of peaceful repose to the thousands of the living. The dead and the living blend as naturally as do the sun, the air, and the water to complement each other.

The properties are orderly throughout; there is no rubbish along the roadsides. We were told that an infraction of these rules is punishable.

In the region of Green Bay which counts some 80,000 inhabitants, it is already not so meticulous. And when in New York, we were horrified. How is it possible in such a metropolis to see such an example; to find filthy heaps overflowing the containers provided. A way should be found to relieve such a situation.

In truth though, we had ten days of fresh air. The lives of the people are rustic and healthful. Their good natural simplicity and hard work have brought the race of inhabitants to exuberant health. The farmers in their masculinity go about their work with such gusto.

In the cold months the models of the young people play football to the point of being equipped like the "Packers," the champions of that specialty, which was started by the way by a Belgian by the name of Lambeau. Their stadium in Green Bay bears his name.

Another trait of their character is their hospitality. How they enjoy sharing anecdotes with us. The voyagers arrived at their destinations and disposed of their baggage. As soon as they were comfortable their friends took pleasure in showing them around and taking them shopping in the local stores.

We passed many impressive looking buildings, many with bars and facilities for serving food. Also places for recreation of the youth with rooms for dancing and individual recreation. There were also vast parks of large acreage with lawns and shrubs for the enjoyment of all ages.

There were unexpected receptions by families and organizations. We were invited to join the families of Gauthier and Binon for a family reunion.

There was also a celebration at the ballroom where a local orchestra played

American dance music and everyone danced, even the eight and ten year olds. The relatives at the reunion had reassembled the old family photos and documents for everyone to see.

We believe that their family spirit has no equal. They have a great desire to repair the break in family ties with their origins. Their work in genealogical research contributes to the truth of their sincerity.

The homogeneity of the area and their attachment to the culture of their nationality has safeguarded for our population the truth of their grand origins.

We had the occasion to study their traits and their way of speaking Wallon, spoken, but not written or read. How is it possible that we find our old Wallon so well preserved! It was astonishing. We cannot resist the desire to show you an example written by one of our singers. And what do you think of the translation of the "Temps d'raler" done in English and sung for the first time in Wisconsin? Wallonnie version:
Timps d'raler, timps d'raler!
Vos savor bien qu'les feumes sont droles
Timps d'raler, timps d'raler!
Pupont di liards a dispinser....

Wallonie American Version:

Time to go home, Time to go home!
They are strange, our wives you know.
Time to go home, time to go home
No more dollars to spend today....!

What pleasure also to find, thousands of kilometers from home the plaques announcing Champion, Brussels, Rosiere, Luxemburg, and to hear speak of Grand Lez.

Among our reminiscences we must mention the game of cards that is typically Wallon, the "cuyon" which they play on Sunday, at six partners after the services of the mass, the same as is the custom here still in our Wallon villages after coming from the high mass. The rules of the game have been faithfully preserved.

When we discussed the feasts of dedication they told us they had been held in the latter part of September and the first part of October for many years. Each village taking its turn in the same pattern for many years. (Referring to the kermesses)

After the war they started having a special day each year which they call "Belgian Day." We had the opportunity to share the warm atmosphere of this day and the particular enthusiasm of the 1975 one in our honor. There we digested the specialties of our country...Chicken boullion, tripe and jut, salad with croustons, Belgian pies and other delicacies of the area.

On the grounds where the reunion was held we discovered the "bibilolo" or as it is sometimes more simply called, "the cannon." The apparatus consists of a base with an extension on which is a weight. The player is able to raise the weight indirectly by wielding a sledge hammer which ricochets a cannon ball. The whole apparatus rises to a height of ten feet. If the force is sufficient the "cannon" makes a noise like that of

thunder. In case of failure, the divisions on the measure indicate the force applied by the player. Our strapping young men were not willing to take part with the young ladies of the area looking on. This brings back memories of the game "sele" in which a scythe is used to decapitate a goose.

I can explain this old custom at our earlier kermesses — Dad is 91 and he remembers. The goose was buried to the base of the neck. Blindfolded, the competitors tried to decapitate the goose — in turns. The winner got the goose! Gory!

I must say that the presentations of our dramatic Wallon artists were a great success.

On both Sundays we enjoyed the novel experience of masses in which the singing, the sermons and the services were entirely in the Wallon language. For those who had not come to Namur the preceding year it was a revelation. "Really, how can we say mass in Belgian? We wouldn't have believed it. But how beautiful it is!" It is the fashion of the peasants to manifest the profundity of their statements.

We must comment on the family spirit that exists there. It is proven in their desire to find again in Belgium the link to the origins of their grandparents. And what joy there is when the similarity of family names comes up in conversation as "My mama was a Jauquet." We even affirmed a Wallon with a Flemish name on the paternal side of the family. One of our travelers from Waterloo tells us that she was introduced to a woman of her same family name. No sooner done than they fell into each others arms saying, "I have found a cousin." The pleasure is visible and we all took part in it.

And meanwhile, what could we do to bring them together? Many times we were asked, "Are there some more 's in Belgium? Some Maugins in Namur? Some Denis at Mieux etc. etc. etc."

And every day we heard our patronyms pronounced in the strict Wallon which we have abandoned, Tchodere for Chadoir, Mauyin for Maillien, Lempereur, Djigot for Gigot, Belen for Belin, Lemsin for Lemense etc. It would be worthwhile to institute a study in this area.

One anecdote...We entered a winery (a place where they make wine from cherries and apples) by the back door. Astonished, they pointed out our intrusion. We were given a handclasp by a woman of middle age who said, "Are you Wallons? We were not expecting you by the back door."

We excused ourselves. She continued, "But I am the mother of the proprietor. My name is Mallien, and my parents were from Namur. Come in! Come in!"

We were given four kinds of wine, cherry and apple natural, and cherry and apple sweet, and wine cheese was graciously offered to all.

P.S. All the articles are signed with the initials L.L. I presume that they are the work of Colonel Lucien Leonard who traveled with the group to Wisconsin and who also hosted the Belgian tour by Wisconsinites in the fall of 1974.