

# Algoma Man To Sing Walloon at Festival

By **AMY SILVERS**

Press-Gazette Staff Writer

Al Vandertie of Algoma will probably be the only one who isn't from Belgium singing Walloon songs at the "Old Ways in the New World" Festival of American Folklife at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

The Institute was searching for someone to sing the old Walloon songs as part of the festival. Francois Lemperuer and a television film crew from Belgium, touring the United States in 1975, stopped in Algoma. Lemperuer had mentioned Vandertie's name at the Smithsonian before leaving the country.

The group had heard recordings of Vandertie singing two years before in Belgium. The voice of "the American who could sing the old songs" was broadcast over radio in Belgium then.

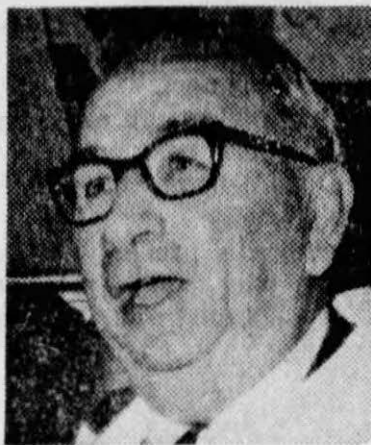
So when he finally got to the country, people were waiting for him and wanted him to sing.

He'll be on his way to the Smithsonian July 19 for two days of rehearsal and five days performance.

"I hope I'll see some of the same groups there I met in

Belgium," he said. Both Walloon and Flemish Belgian groups will be attending.

Some 30 nationalities from Europe and the United States will be represented. The festi-



**AL VANDERTIE**

val, the 10th annual and a special Bicentennial one, features musicians, dancers, singers, craftsmen and cooks from the Old Country and those Americans who have kept alive the traditions in their home communities here.

"It's to compare the old and the new. When I went to Belgium and sang, they were amazed. They said, 'Ah, my grandfather spoke like that.'" The old Walloon has mixed

with the French in Belgium, I speak the real old Walloon my great-grandfather spoke when he came to America in 1856."

"They were really surprised that the songs would be remembered and kept for so long," he said. "I guess I am, too."

It was from his father that he learned the old songs. Passed on from generation to generation, none have ever been written down. Vandertie can trace his family back to the 1700's and is "100 per cent" Belgian.

Vandertie, who sings a cappella, finds the music a challenge.

"I'm all by myself with no backup to help get me through. I'm not too worried. Things can happen, though."

"They're not looking for professionals from here or from Belgium. Just people who have kept the traditions alive," he said.

Mr. and Mrs. Vandertie will be traveling to Belgium with the Wisconsin Belgian American Club, headquartered in Namur, this September. About 184 of the club's 500 members will be going.

The purpose of the group, he explained, is to carry on Walloon conversation.