

Woman teaches Waloon by tape

By LIZ HOWELL
Special to the Press-Gazette

ALGOMA — Josephine LeGrave Wautlet of Algoma has written and taped a 20-lesson course in phonetic Waloon for Belgian-Americans.

"It's a challenge, something no one has done," she said. "We're the last generation to speak it (Waloon). It will be gone if we don't do something about it."

Josie taught courses in Waloon for Northeast Wisconsin Technical Institute but became discouraged because her students could only get a smattering of the language in 10 classes.

"Then when I'd give another course, there'd only be three or four from the time before and I had to start all over. There was no continuity," she said.

She thought if she could develop a course with tapes people could learn while they were doing dishes or other chores, "they'd learn it in no time," she said.

In 1979 she contacted Conversaphone Institute in New York and was given permission to use its Conversational French as a guide.

Working on and off for the next few years, Josie finished writing and taping last December.

"I don't know quite what

to do with it," she said, "and will wait until I get a copy-right before I decide."

The course stresses four things: to listen to the recording, to repeat phrases while looking at the lesson, to keep repeating and not to go on until the lesson is memorized.

"It's basic Belgian meant for people going to Belgium. I've done it the way it sounds," Josie said about her "learn-today, travel-tomorrow" course.

If she finds a need or market for a more comprehensive course, she said she will develop one.

When Josie and her husband Ed were in Belgium, they learned the Waloon spoken there has been influenced by French.

"Here, we still speak the pure Waloon," she said.

Born and raised on a farm in Brussels, Josie LeGrave spoke Waloon before she spoke English but, unlike many children in the area, knew English by the time she went to school.

"But we always spoke Waloon at home because my grandfather lived with us and he never learned American," she said.

After eighth grade she was the only girl in her class to go to high school "because girls didn't need to be edu-

cated then," she recalled.

From high school in Brussels, she went to the County Normal School in Algoma for a year and then began teaching primary school when she was 17.

"They turned out good teachers," she said. "We learned how to teach."

She married Edward Wautlet, a farmer in Brussels, in 1937.

"In those days they (the school) picked up your contract if you got married so your job could be given to a man. They figured you had a man to support you," she said.

Farm work was nothing new to Josie. She milked cows by hand, fed the animals, drove the tractor and worked with "the smelly, old hay," she said. She was glad when they could afford automatic hay equipment and

modern milkers that took the milk from cow to cooler.

While Ed worked at the shipyard, Josie ran the farm and raised their five children, always finding time to write something each day between plowing and her other chores.

"Farm Wife News" bought many of her articles and continues to ask her to write for them. Two volumes of her poetry, "Homespun"

and "Meditations — Moments of Gold," were published.

A few years ago Josie and her sister, Grace Lemense of Rosiere, made tapes in Waloon for the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and donated pictures for the university's Belgian collection.

After selling their farm in 1975, the Wautlets retired to Algoma to enjoy a busy life.



Photo by Liz Howell

Josephine LeGrave Wautlet of Algoma reviews material for a 20-lesson course in phonetic Waloon she has written for Belgian-Americans who want to study the language.