Determinants of Ethnic Retention
As See Through
Walloon Immigrants to Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT

Determinants of Ethnic Retention
As Seen In Belgian Immigrants Settling in Wisconsin

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This dissertation examines the unusually enduring retention of ethnic culture of the Walloon Belgian immigrants who settled in northeastern Wisconsin between 1853 and 1857, as well as the combination of circumstances which enabled this ethnic island to form and continue, well into the twenty-first century. A review of the historiography focusing on European immigrants to the United States from the post-revolutionary period to the present reveals an emphasis on urban settlement and the assumed inevitability of the weakening of ethnic identity. Less attention has been given those immigrants settling in rural areas and even less to those few rural immigrant groups who were able to retain their ethnic culture and identity for several generations. A more complete understanding of the immigrant experience requires closer research into the circumstances experienced by unusual groups such as the Walloons.

Data used have come from a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. Primary sources include letters from Walloon immigrants to relatives still in Wallonia, letters from

missionary priests working in the settlement area, Belgian Consul reports, newspaper articles, census data, ownership maps, school records, and the firsthand accounts written by immigrants themselves. Secondary sources include not only the work of historians, but also that of cultural geographers, social scientists, anthropologists, and theologians resulting in a variation of focus and perspective.

Research shows a specific combination of circumstances, not often occurring together, resulted in the successful continuation of the ethnic island formed by the Walloons. The addition of these research results to the study of immigration adds new insight to the understanding the immigrant experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

The approximately thirty million immigrants who came to America between 1820 and 1920 have been the subject of research and analysis by scholars working in a number of disciplines—history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural geography to name a few. Most immigrant groups coming to the United States wanted to preserve their culture, their language, and their institutions, and to pass this heritage on to their children and grandchildren. Whether settling in urban areas and forming ethnic neighborhoods or establishing themselves in unsettled areas and creating rural ethnic communities, they were often comforted by the familiar practices of their homeland. And yet, few of these ethnic enclaves remained intact past the second or third generation. The Belgian migrants known as the Walloons, originating in south-central Belgium, and migrating between 1853 and 1857 to north-eastern Wisconsin, were among the exceptions and have maintained their ethnic identity into the 21st century.

The term ethnicity is rather imprecise and should be examined before proceeding. According to ethnologist Werner Sollors the development of the concept of ethnicity is a relatively recent one. The first time the word appeared in print was not until1941, although the concept had been developing since the later part of the eighteenth century.[1] Ever since the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution so profoundly affected European thinking, the acceptance of "divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic" rule gradually lost authority.[2] Rather than being unified by directly related ruling families, the concept of nation-states and national cohesion began to develop in peoples' minds as a

[1] Werner Sollars, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xiii.
[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 7.

means of connection. Cultural symbols, whether authentic or invented, became important as a way to reinforce a feeling of cohesion among the inhabitants of a nation-state. People began to perceive themselves as connected by a shared history, language, religious faith, cultural heritage, and manner of dress, and distinct from other groups who maintained their own identifying connections. This group cohesiveness, or ethnicity, may or may not coincide with created nation-state boundaries, and is always changing. It is possible for more than one ethnic group to exist within the political boundaries of a state or to spill over those boundaries into the territory of another nation-state. What is important to keep in mind is that the cohesiveness of the ethnic group is not a static situation, is constantly evolving, and is dependent on members' self-perceptions and attachments.

While agreeing that ethnicity originates in a group's cultural origins, American sociologists have debated just how enduring ethnicity is over generations when subjected to modernization. Assimilationists support the theory that successive generations experience less and less ethnic identity and that therefore ethnic identity is apt to decline or disappear. A conflicting school of thought, supported by the pluralist position, posits that ethnic retention to a great degree is dependent on the conditions the migrants encounter in their new location after migration.[3] The cohesiveness of some migrant groups is reinforced in their new settlement locations by such conditions as "common occupations, residential stability and concentration, and dependence on common institutions and services."[4] An interesting phenomenon has been forwarded by a third

[3]William L. Yancey, Eugene P. Ericksen, and Richard N. Juliani, "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation," *American Sociological Review* 41, no. 3 (June 1976) 391-403.
[4]Ibid., 392.

school of sociological thought, and describes a resurgence of interest in ethnicity after several generations of declining identification with ancestral groups. This usually occurred with the fourth or fifth generation and was seen in the 1960s and 1970s. Ethnicity is fluid and variable and a white American could usually choose any one of a number of ancestries with which to identify.

What is of particular interest here are those conditions or circumstances encountered by the Belgian migrants settling in northeastern Wisconsin that encouraged the retention of their ethnicity for more than one hundred and fifty years. Settling in a strange new environment, the Belgian migrants found comfort and security in being near other Belgians from their home villages, or at least their home region and with whom they shared the bond of language and religion. In many cases they already knew these Wallons. In this way the migrants could depend on their neighbors to have not only the same language but the same values, the same beliefs, and the same modes of behavior as they did, and if necessary a willingness to render mutual aid.[5] Members of an ethnic group self-identify as part of their particular cohesive group and see people who do not consider themselves of that ethnicity as others or outsiders.

This process of self-identifying as a member of a particular ethnic group is also stressed by anthropologists, who say that it results in being perceived as being a certain kind of person by members of that group. The determining characteristics might be obvious and include such features as clothing, language, architectural design, religion, and general lifestyle or may include more subtle basic values such as standards of

[5] Andrew M. Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us? America's White Ethnic Groups* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1971), 38-39.

morality.[6] The continued viability of the ethnic group necessitates the maintenance of cultural and social boundaries to distinguish the members of the group from outsiders. Of the many ethnic groups migrating to North America, there were a few such as the Walloon Belgians who did not adhere to the expected pattern of Americanization, or adaption to the Anglo core culture, and, as such, require much closer study than has previously been given them.

An ethnic island, sometimes referred to as a folk island by cultural geographers, is usually not composed of more than several thousand people.[7] Forming a close-knit, cohesive, nearly self-sufficient ethnic group, maintaining its religion, language, and customs for many generations, the Walloon Belgians, who initially settled in the wilderness of northeastern Wisconsin between 1853 and 1857, are one such group, who reached a population estimated to be between 15,000 and 20,000 by 1860. Continuing their strong family or clan structure and rituals developed in Wallonia, they have maintained their ethnic identity to the present day, participating in the cultural traditions their ancestors brought with them more than a century and a half ago, with some still speaking the Walloon dialect. After Indian reservations and the Amish communities, the settlement of Walloon Belgians in northeast Wisconsin is the most enduring ethnic island in the United States.[8] In the case of Indian reservations, their establishment and continued existence, due in part to Native Americans' desire to stay separate, was mandated by federal law. The Amish separation from the culture around them is by

[6]Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 14.
[7] Terry Jordan and Lester Rowntree, *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography, 3rd ed.* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982)
[8]William Laatch, PhD., Professor Emeritus, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, interviewed by author, Green Bay, Wisconsin, August 7, 2012.

choice and is maintained by their decision to be "different and separate from the world around them."[9] Their decision is reinforced by a complex set of rules geared toward the preservation of their unique society based on their religious beliefs. Harsh consequences result for those individuals departing from their traditions. Neither set of circumstances applies to the Walloon Belgians, who have remained in the settlement area by choice, generation after generation without legal or religious compulsion. This immigrant group, and the unique circumstances which have enabled its members to maintain their ethnicity, have been largely overlooked by researchers, leaving a void in our understanding of the circumstances required for ethnic preservation.

For most immigrants who remained in America, the process of acculturation and eventual (if partial) assimilation occurred, if not immediately, then within the second or third generation, as the children of immigrants yearned for acceptance. As increasing numbers of migrants arrived in 19th century United Stated, community policy makers and social workers assumed the desirability of maintaining Anglo-Saxon institutions, the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as the standard and the core-culture in American life. The Anglo-Saxon conformity model "has been the most prevalent ideology of assimilation goals in America throughout the nation's history."[10] While immigrants strove to maintain their familiar culture and community structures, most subsequent generations were willing participants in the "Americanization" process, working to learn English and adopting American culture, behavior, and values in order to fit in and achieve upward mobility. By the later part of the nineteenth century, this became

[9]Alice Theodora Merten Rechlin, *Spatial Behavior of the Old Order Amish of Nappanee, Indiana* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Geographical Publication No. 18, 1976), 27.
[10]Milton M Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," *Daedalus* no. 2, Ethnic Groups in American Life (Spring 1961): 266.

a process of coercion when necessary as the native middle class pressed conservative WASP values on immigrants.[11] To fit in, the newcomers had to change cultures. "Assimilation required unconditional surrender of pre-migration ways of life."[12]

Milton Gordon, one of the leading mid-twentieth century analysts of assimilation, systemized the process into two categories. Behavioral assimilation involved adopting cultural patterns such as learning English, participating in communal worship, and developing more intimate primary relationships with the dominant culture such as patterns of friendship and intermarriage. Structural assimilation involved more impersonal, public aspects of an immigrant's life such as his means of earning a living, his civic involvement, and organizations of which he became a member.[13] The underlying assumption is that the immigrants settled in urban areas where a dominant Anglo-American culture existed and into which the immigrant would eventually and willingly blend.

Another prevalent theory providing a framework for the study of immigration involves the idea of America being a melting pot wherein various ethnic groups blend together to form an "American." From the eighteenth century onward, there were those who viewed the influx of immigrants from non-English homelands, and their effect on existing institutions and on each other, as creating a totally new "American."[14] Other scholars saw the development of three melting pots forming along religious lines—Protestant, Catholic, and Jew—with ethnicity fading in importance within each religious group. Again, there was the assumption of urban settlement where the intermingling of ethnic groups would

[11] James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 Discovering America: A Special Issue (December 1992): 996-1020.
[12]Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, *What Is Migration History?* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2009), 43.
[13]Gordon, 279.
[14]Ibid., 270.

occur, as well as a willingness on the part of immigrants to abandon their ethnic heritage.[15] Concurrent with these theories of assimilation was one of cultural pluralism, wherein the culture of an immigrant group would be retained, but within the larger political framework of the United States.

In the 1960s, as the idea of a predominant Anglo-American core lost credibility, there was a movement away from analyzing immigration in terms of assimilation. A major shift in thinking occurred with the publication of Rudolph Vecoli's work, in which he disagreed with the idea of immigrants being alienated, disorganized, and almost helpless against the pressures of a dominant culture and instead stressed the tenacity of ethnic groups in maintaining an identity in urban settings.[16] Vecoli also took issue with the practice of generalizing about immigrant groups based on country of origin. He stressed the importance of studying individual groups based on region of origin, economic base, or social characteristics.[17] This approach was supported by other immigration historians who further developed the idea that immigrant groups were not homogeneous, but rather were often divided by religion and politics.[18] Belgian migrants are excellent examples as Walloons of southern Belgium did not even speak the same language as the Flemish Belgians of northern Belgium. Vecoli's approach fostered additional research pertaining to ethnic groups and a renewed awareness of the diversity of immigrants existing together

[15]Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1950," *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1944) 332,338. Also see Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 45-51.
[16]Rudolph Vecoli. "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*," *Journal of American History*, no.3 (December 1964): 408.
[17] Rudolph Vecoli, "The Formation of Chicago's 'Little Italies'," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 16, 18.
[18]Kathleen Neils Conzen, et. al.,"The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History,* no.1 (Fall, 1992): 4.

in American cities.[19] A research perspective developed by one group of historians, focusing on immigrant adjustment, advanced the theory that ethnic identity was a constantly evolving process prompted by accommodation to other immigrant groups as well as to the dominant culture.[20] However, the Walloon Belgians who settled in the isolation of the northeastern Wisconsin wilderness were not subjected to significant outside influences. This was a major factor toward the retention of their ethnic culture into the twenty-first century.

Additionally, increased research on ethnic identity was done in the field of labor history as well as the field of racial identity. John Bodnar's landmark book, *The Transplanted, A History of Immigrants in Urban America,* was published in 1985. Focusing on the period from approximately 1820 to 1940, Bodnar's work presented a synthesis of new ways to consider the European immigrant experience. While recognizing that the immigrants' primary concern was maintaining the family unit, Bodnar's focus was the process by which immigrants confronted and accommodated to capitalism, first in their native country with the disruption of the cottage industries that many rural families had developed as a way of supplementing their meager farming production, and eventually in their new urban environments where they sought wage labor in the capitalist system. As with other historians, Bodnar focused on the everyday life experiences of urban immigrants. While he acknowledged that millions of immigrants settled in rural areas, and that their story is

[19]Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History." *American Historical Review*, no. 2 (April, 1995) 452-453.
[20]Conzen, et. al., 5.

important and should be told, he then returned to his study of the retention of ethnicity among urban immigrants.[21]

Some research has been done on the experiences of rural immigrants, but more attention needs to be directed to that segment of immigration history.[22] Additional work has been done on the influence of various ethnic groups on each other, and between the ethnic group and the dominant culture. This scholarship explores how immigrants have been required to develop an ability to function in more than one culture and posits that consequently, ethnic groups constantly reinvent themselves.[23] Ethnic groups, living in close proximity to each other frequently develop ways to communicate. They often develop a liking for each other's food, music, and past times. In doing so, each group has reinvented itself.

Little attention has been given to ethnic groups that were unique in their enduring successful resistance to dominant patterns of settlement and to accommodation in their new lives after migration. The Walloons, one such group, did not participate in even the initial stages of acculturation for several generations after immigration, and when they did, it was only in limited areas of their choosing. The fact that the Walloons did not fall into the general patterns established by immigration historians, and did not lose their distinctive ethnicity, makes them especially important for study.

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[21] John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), xvi. Also see Mark Wyman, *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[22] See Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee 1836-1860* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976). Also John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press*, 1986)* and *Ethnicity on the Great Plains*, edited by Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980).
[23] Ibid., 5.

The volume of immigration to the United States was relatively low before the early nineteenth century but dramatically increased as the century progressed. Between 1815 and 1860 alone, more than five million immigrants arrived in the United States.[24] Despite the enduring myth that most European immigrants were fleeing oppressive European governments in search of religious and political freedom, most immigrants traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to North America came primarily for economic reasons. As early as the sixteenth century the English colonizers along the mid-Atlantic coast originally pursued 'get-rich-quick schemes'" such as searching for gold mines, and by the seventeenth century began the development of tobacco plantations. [25] The myth that New England settlers were seeking religious or political freedom, sometimes referred to as the myth of Plymouth Rock, does not bear close scrutiny. Without doubt, religion was the dominant factor for the Pilgrims and Puritans who immigrated in the seventeenth century, but they were always in the minority of those settling New England.[26] The majority of voluntary immigrants to the United States came for economic reasons, either looking for land upon which to establish agricultural estates or family farms or, after the mid-1860s, for jobs in industrial centers. "Labor rather than liberty, remained the overriding concern in the decision to move to the United States."[27] A minority of migrants planned to stay only long enough to find work, save as much of their earnings as possible, and then upon reaching their monetary goal, return to their home country with their carefully saved wages to buy land or establish a business, ultimately achieving a better life there. This

[24]Donna R. Gabacia, *Immigration and American Diversity: A Social and Cultural History* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), 75.
[25] Roger Daniels, Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 17, 42-43.
[26] John Bodnar, 53. Also see Friedman, 56.
[27] Ibid. 56.

was particularly true among immigrants coming to the United States coming after 1860. Others, after experiencing life in the United States, were disappointed for various reasons and moved on--either trying their luck in another host country or returning to their homeland.

Typical of immigrants from northwestern Europe prior to 1860, the first Wallonian Belgians to leave their homeland were primarily artisans and small independent farmers who were threatened by new industrial processes and labor-saving machinery which was becoming more and more widespread. Characteristic of this wave of immigration, and unlike the larger wave of European migrants to follow after 1860, they left in family groups, had money to finance their trip and get a start in the United States, and did not plan ever to return to Belgium.[28] However, once in the United States, their experiences set them apart from most other contemporary immigrant groups.

Uniqueness of the Belgian Walloons

Walloon emigration resulted from the classic combination of difficult conditions in the sending society which propelled them toward emigration and appealing opportunities available in the receiving society. Once in this country, the Walloons experienced circumstances that enabled them to maintain their unusual ethnic cohesiveness and continuity. This combination of circumstances warrants further study. A shared region of origin, a shared religion, and a shared dialect greatly affected the development of the Belgian settlement area. Once in this country, virtually all Walloons proceeded to the same destination in northeast Wisconsin, determined to maintain the rural village life-style

[28]Ibid. 56.

which, due to the combination of overpopulation and industrialization, had proven increasingly difficult to maintain in their homeland.

The Walloons chose to settle in a wilderness that was located in the southern part of the Door Peninsula extending north-east from the main body of the state, into Lake Michigan. There were few other settlers on the peninsula when the Walloons chose their land and, because they located on a peninsula, there was little reason for outsiders to travel through the area. Reinforcing their isolation was the fact that the level land they chose was primarily inland, resulting in their having little contact with the water traffic that went on along the peninsula's coasts. While showing great resourcefulness and adaptability in the face of environmental challenges, isolation, and natural disasters, the Walloons were able to preserve the cultural patterns which provided them with the comfort of their familiar ethnic traditions. Retaining a strong feeling of group identity, this small, cohesive, and homogeneous group has remained a viable ethnic island into the twenty-first century. Understanding the unique set of circumstances which reinforced their ethnic cohesiveness in Wisconsin is an important and necessary challenge for achieving a more complete understanding of the history of immigrant experiences in the United States.

Chapter 1

Establishment of the Belgian Settlement in Wisconsin, 1853-1857

Why Go to Wisconsin

In 1830, the small region of Belgium, which had been made a part of the Netherlands under the Congress of Vienna in 1815, staged a revolution against its Dutch rulers. Conflict went on for another nine years as King William I, ruler of the Netherlands, refused to recognize Belgian independence. Finally, in 1839, at the First Treaty of London, the major European nations agreed that Belgium was to be recognized as an independent and perpetually neutral nation. The Belgians formed a constitutional monarchy, established a parliamentary system of government, and made the government ministers responsible to parliament.[1] Although Belgium became an independent nation, it was made up of two distinct and different peoples, separated by a language boundary dating back to the days of the Roman Empire and persisting to today. Found primarily in the north are the Flemish who speak a Dutch dialect. The Walloons are found in the southern part of Belgium, speak a French patois, and are further differentiated by regional dialects. Culturally they are very similar to the French. However, it is something of an anachronism to apply the label Walloon to the nineteenth century migrants originating in southern Belgium. From the sixteenth century the term Walloon was in occasional use to denote areas whose borders were undefined.[2] The first writer to have used the term "Wallonie" to indicate people of this region was the poet Francois-Joseph Grandgagnage in his work

[1]Robert Ergang, *Europe Since Waterloo* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1967), 48.
[2] Sebastien Dubois, "Wallonia Through the Ages," in *A Cultural History of Wallonia, e*d. Bruno Demoulin`(Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 13-14.

Wallonnades, which appeared in *Revue de Liege* of 1844. In it, he implored other regional writers not to imitate French styles of writing.[3] This work was intended for the other writers and literary elite of southern Belgium and it is unlikely to have been familiar to the farmers who migrated in the 1850s. It was not until 1913 that the people of Wallonia developed a sense of identity strong enough to adopt an official Wallonian flag and an annual holiday celebrating Walloon identity. In 1986 Namur officially became the capital of Wallonia and in 1998 *Li Chant des Walloon* became the official anthem of the region.[4]

Even with the establishment of their own independent government in the 1840s, the Belgians faced great challenges. Although they enjoyed freedom of religion, a liberal government, and good schools for their children, most Belgians lived in poverty and struggled to meet their most basic needs. Belgium encompassed some of the richest farmland in Europe, but also contained the highest population density. Land holders had divided their farms so many times over the generations that few families farmed enough land to support themselves. In 1846, eighty-five percent of Belgian farms were less that twelve acres and sixty-six percent were less than two and a half acres. These "farms" were little more than garden plots. Even families not yet living in poverty saw a bleak future for their children. Adding to the difficulty inherent in the diminishing size of the farms upon which a family attempted to sustain itself, from 1845 to 1850 the same potato blight that devastated Ireland destroyed the potato crop in Western Europe.[5] In 1845, potato production in Belgium fell from 850,000 tons to 111,000 tons, an eighty-seven

[3]Philippe Roxhon, "The Dotted Outline of a Search for Identity," in *A Cultural History of Wallonia*, ed. Bruno Demoulin (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 113.
[4] Ibid., 123-124.
[5]Francoise Lempereur, *The Walloons in Wisconsin* (Jambes, Belgium: Centre d'Archeologia, d'Art et Histoire de Jambes, 2012), 30.

percent reduction compared to normal years. The crop in 1846 was slightly better but there was still a forty-three percent decline in productivity compared to normal years. Exacerbating the potato shortage was a concurrent severe decline in cereal yields. Rye crop production in 1846 represented a fifty percent reduction from normal production and wheat production was also well below normal levels.[6] This combination of crop failures resulted in severe food shortages in Western Europe and particularly in Belgium.

In response to the declining size of family farms, rural Belgians had developed various cottage industries over the years such as weaving, straw plaiting, nail making, cutlery production, distilling, and sugar milling to supplement their agricultural income. As the industrial revolution gained momentum and transportation networks developed, less expensive manufactured goods became available in rural areas and marked the end of the home industries which could not compete, creating greater economic challenges for the rural population.[7] Some rural inhabitants left the countryside looking for work in Belgium's developing industrial centers, but working conditions in the factories were generally appalling. Children as young as eight or nine were working from 5 a.m. until 8 p.m. Adult male workers were paid an average salary of one franc a day (roughly the equivalent of $5.25 in today's terms). Women were paid half that amount.[8] Clearly, an alternative was desperately needed.

This was also a period of great change on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean. Following the War of 1812, the boundaries as well as the population of the original

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[6]Eric Vanhaute, Richard Paping, and Cormac O'Grada, "European Subsistence Crisis of 1845-1850: A Comparative Perspective," paper presented at the XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki, Finland, August 21-25, 2006.
[7]"1852:Emigration of the Farmers from Brabant and Hesbayne," Wisconsin French Connections, http://www.uwgb.edu/wisfrench/library/history/belges/wibelges.htm [accessed January 27, 2013].
[8]Jan-Albert Goris, "Oppressed Flanders to the Most Beautiful Country in the World," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History,* Summer, 1959, 275-281.

Northwest Territory increased dramatically. By 1835, the population of the western area of the Michigan Territory had increased enough to warrant the creation of a new territory and on July 4, 1836, an act of Congress created the Wisconsin Territory. The first territorial census was taken in August of that year and the results showed there to be only 11,683 non-Indians residing in the entire area between Lake Michigan and the Dakotas. Westward migration gained momentum and by 1847 the territory had a population of 210,456 settlers with community leaders desiring statehood. A state constitution was written and adopted in March 1848, and by May of that year President Polk approved an act of Congress whereby Wisconsin was admitted to statehood.[9]

The challenge then became attracting settlers, and especially farmers, to populate the new state. One step toward attracting settlers was Wisconsin's establishment of the position of State Immigration Official. This person was to live in New York City and help new arrivals to a final destination in Wisconsin, to protect them from being victimized once they arrived, and to report on the nationalities and occupations of the incoming immigrants. An immigration agency was established in New York City with G. W. Steenwyck employed as the first Wisconsin State Commissioner of Immigration.[10] Equally important, he was to advertise extensively in the foreign language press of Europe, praising the virtues of Wisconsin and encouraging settlement. Apparently, Mr. Steenwyck was diligent in the performance of his work. In 1855 alone, records indicate he handed out 22,000 pamphlets in New York City alone.[11] In addition, Steenwyck was

[9]Deborah B. Martin, *History of Brown County Wisconsin Past and Present* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1913), 162.
[10]Jeanne Rentmeesterand and LesRentmeester, *The Flemish in Wisconsin*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 24.
[11]Francis Favill Bowman, *Why Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 40.

responsible for sending pamphlets, posters and booklets to various countries in Europe, all printed in the appropriate languages. One such poster distributed in Belgium read:

> Come! In Wisconsin all men are free and equal before the law. Religion is free and equal between church and state. Opportunities are unlimited for those who want to work. Good land can be purchased from the generous American government for $1.25 an acre. The soil is adapted to raising corn, wheat, rye, oats, barley, and vegetables—all products with which the Belgian husbandman is familiar.[12]

The state government's recruitment policy was aided by various privately published pamphlets extolling the desirability of settlement in Wisconsin, available for free or for a very low price. The *Guide 'al'Emigrant Walloon* by Eugene-Felix Roussel sold for one franc (approximately $5.50 in today's currency). By the middle of the nineteenth century, Wisconsin was the foremost destination of Walloon emigrants to the United States.[13]

A second factor influencing potential immigrants was aggressive recruiting done by the Antwerp shipping companies operating the trans-Atlantic routes. On the eastbound trip from America to Europe, the ships were loaded with cargo such as timber, cotton, or tobacco. To maximize profits the shipowners sought to load the westbound ships with passengers, and they paid agents who traveled through the countryside bent on recruiting passengers and collecting a generous amount for each ticket sold. The Antwerp

[12]Math S. Tlachac, *The History of the Belgian Settlements in Door, Kewanee, and Brown Counties* (Belgian-American Club: Algoma, Wisconsin, 1974), 6.
[13]Lempereur, *Walloons in Wisconsin,* 40.

shipowners obtained the support of the Belgian government and began a campaign to attract immigrants to depart from their port. Belgian railroads also participated and offered free transport of luggage to Antwerp.

The four major shipping companies were A. Strauss Shipping Company, Serigiers & Company, Leroy & Steinmen, and Strecker, Klein & Stock. These four companies competed for the lucrative passenger business by placing large advertisements in local newspapers showing departure schedules, and hiring local agents to persuade potential passengers to migrate. Adolphe Strauss, owner of the shipping line with whom the first group of Walloons chose to book passage, went so far as to publish sworn affidavits allegedly from Belgians who had already made the trip to the United States and were very happy with their experience. These statements were read in the public spaces in villages and often on the church steps after mass. In reality, many of these testimonies were fabricated.[14] Strauss and his agents scoured the countryside searching for immigrants to fill his departing ships in Antwerp. The Belgian government did what it could to caution potential immigrants. On May 7, 1856, the government issued a warning to prospective migrants against making prepayments to shipping companies and to deal only with the Office for Emigration at Antwerp. A notice from the Leuven Court of Justice dated November 6, 1856, requested police to watch for agents of shipping companies using fraudulent practices.[15]

The Belgian government, seeing emigration as a possible way to alleviate the overpopulation and underemployment crisis with which it was struggling, went so far as to organize the forced emigration of ex-prisoners, mentally impaired citizens, and the poor

[14]Lempereur, *Walloons in Wisconsin,* 32.
[15]Renteester and Renteester, *Flemish in Wisconsin,* 399.

who were receiving government assistance. An estimated 650 forced emigrants actually made the journey but the government discontinued the program in 1855 when protests developed in the American press.[16] The *New York Daily Times* reported that city officials arrested one shipload of Belgians when they disembarked at the port and "for their poverty and their suspicious manners they were consigned to jail." Three days later a judge ordered they be released on a writ of habeas corpus.[17] In the same issue, the newspaper published a scathing letter written by New York Mayor Fernando Wood denouncing the court's actions. "They are now at large, whether for weal or woe, remains to be seen." The mayor objected to the expense these Belgian paupers would be for the city, advocated that in the future they not be allowed to come ashore, and that they instead be forced to return to Antwerp.[18]

There was one more factor, often overlooked, that influenced a small number of the Belgians to immigrate and undoubtedly had a bearing on the initial group that came to Wisconsin in 1853. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Western Europe experienced a religious revival which challenged the humanistic ideas of the Enlightenment. This movement, known as Le Reveil—The Awakening—attracted followers in America as well as Europe and impacted many Catholic clergy as well as lay members of the Catholic Church. After the Belgian Revolution in 1830, religious tolerance was established and those liberal Catholic clergy, who had questioned church teachings and been consequently defrocked, were now free to preach the new, reformed ideology. Protestant groups began to form throughout Belgium, especially in the Walloon Brabant

[16]Lempereur, *Walloons in Wisconsin,* 30.
[17]"Dismissal of the Belgian Prisoners,." *New York Daily Times*, February 27, 1855.
[18]"The Imprisoned Belgians," *New York Daily Times,* February 27, 1855.

region. In 1842 the Belgian Evangelical Society, later known as the Christian Missionary Church of Belgium, formed and by 1847 built a small Protestant church near Grez-Doiceau, the home canton of the first group of Walloons to come to Wisconsin. (A canton, also known as a commune, was the local level of governmental organization in Belgium, consisting of units as small as a village or as large as a city)[19] The now defrocked, former Catholic priest M. J. B. Vleugels was the Protestant pastor of this small congregation and actually encouraged members of his church to emigrate—perhaps out of concern regarding their bleak economic situation. Also, he may have mistrusted the 1831 Belgian Edict of Toleration in light of his own experience with the Catholic Church's intolerance and mindful of the ever changing European political. Whatever his reasons, enough of his parishioners left Belgium that by 1854 the Belgian Evangelical Society ceased to exist. Although they communicated by letter, Vleugels never saw his former parishioners again, as when he emigrated, he chose to go to Toronto.[20]

Just how the information encouraging immigration to Wisconsin actually reached the Brabant Walloons is not known, but the often repeated and generally accepted account involves a small farmer from Grez-Doiceau by the name of Francois Petinoit who in March 1853 had made a trip to Antwerp for business. While in Antwerp, he came across one of Steenwyck's pamphlets praising the possibilities of life in Wisconsin. The pamphlet was printed in Dutch, but Petinoit read enough Dutch to make out the almost unbelievable

[19]Myron P. Gutmann and Etienne van de Walle, "New Sources for Social and Demographic History: The Belgian Population Registers," *Social Science History* no. 2 (Winter, 1978): 123.
[20]The account of The Awakening and its effect on the Belgians of the Brabant region can be found in several works. See Judith Carlsen, "Amazing Grace," *Voyageur Historical Review of Brown County and Northeast Wisconsin* 28, no. 1 (2001): 35-43 as well as Lempereur, 34-36. An account from a Catholic perspective can be found in the work of Antoine de Smet, Assistant Librarian of the Royal Belgian Library, published in 1953 found in "Antoine de Smet," vertical file, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay.

description—limitless fertile land available for between sixty cents and $1.25 an acre (the equivalent amount in 2010 would be $17.28 to $36.00 an acre, meaning a forty-acre tract of the finest land could be purchased for the 2010 equivalent of $1,440). It was this perceived opportunity, impossible in Wallonia, which motivated emigration from the Brabant and Hesbaye areas.

Few individuals made the decision to migrate without lengthy discussions with their families. Historians agree that the family was the fundamental unit in which such momentous decisions were made.[21] Especially among northern Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century, the nuclear family was the primary unit, in which husbands and wives depended on each other economically.[22] A decision as important as migration would surely have been discussed at length and required the support of the entire family. Besides the kinship network, neighborhood relations and access to information also played an important part in the decision.[23] For the thousands of Walloon immigrants who followed, the letters from friends who migrated before them had a great impact on their own decision to emigrate. But this first desperate yet brave group had only their faith in the validity of the information contained in a Dutch-language pamphlet upon which to base their decision.

There were a few individuals who had emigrated in the preceding years, but they were rare. Charles-Louis Desmedt, accompanied by his wife and daughter, immigrated to Wisconsin in 1845 and bought land north of Milwaukee to farm. In a long letter to his

[21]Adam McKeown, "Global Migration," *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (June 2004): 178. Also see Donna Gabaccia, "The Transplanted: Women and the Family in Immigrant America," *Social Science History* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 44.
[22]Ibid., 181.
[23]Dirk Hoerder, "From Immigration to Migration Systems: New Concepts in Migration History," *OAH Magazine of History* 14, no.1 (Fall, 1999): 6.

brother, which was published several times in Belgian newspapers, Desmedt gave a detailed account of the challenges of their trip, the beauty of the land, the price of everything from livestock to food to equipment, and reassurance of the kindheartedness and gentleness of the few remaining "savages" on the frontier. However, he went on to say, "Although I write this truly, I would not have as my purpose to entice you to come. It is up to you to scrutinize my letter and to see if you could make a living here. Money is not enough. One has to have good hands." However, he then immediately returned to praising his new life, saying "I live in freedom, in harmony with Mother Earth."[24] As informative as Desmedt's letter is, however, due to his origin in the Flemish area of Belgium, there is no reason to assume the French speaking Walloons would have had knowledge of it.

Once at home, with his pamphlet in hand, Francois Petinoit spoke with his family and neighbors and together, a small group of eighty-one people made the decision to sell their little farms and most of their personal property and make the trip to the United States. With the money from the sale of their few acres of land and other property, they would be able to buy large tracts of fertile, virgin land in Wisconsin. The ticket price was 185 francs for each adult (the equivalent of more than $1,000 in today's dollars) and with the sale of their property most of the original group had enough to pay the expenses of the trip and still have money left with which to start their new life once they reached their destination.[25] By May of 1853, unaccustomed to travel and most never having seen a ship or large body of water, the group was ready to leave for Antwerp.

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[24]The letter, translated by Jan-Albert Goris, is kept in his family archives. It was published under the title "Oppressed Flanders to the Most Beautiful Country in the World," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Summer, 1959, 275-281.

[25]Lempereur, *Walloons in* Wisconsin, 48. Also see Defnet, et. al., 19.

Only one mid-nineteenth century passenger register record for the Port of Antwerp survived the First World War, that one being from 1855. This passenger register listed approximately 5,000 people departing Europe from that location. Examination shows that the same pattern established by the original group of migrants, that of leaving together in groups from a village or area, continued. There were 434 who travelled with passports issued in Brussels. Of these, 279 were distributed between only seven ships, indicating an average group size of almost forty migrants per vessel.[26] These migrants seem to have originated from Wallonia and although the destination is not listed in the port records, we can assume the migrants in 1855 were following those who departed during the two preceding years. Records kept by officials at the port of New York show that fifty-nine immigrants that year came from Grez-Doiceau, the former home of the original group of migrants.[27]

Trip to the United States

Conditions on the ships bringing immigrants to the United States were deplorable. As early as 1849 the United States government passed An Act to Provide the Ventilation of Passenger Vessels and for Other Purposes, which specified amounts of water and food a passenger ship was required to carry depending on the number of passengers.[28] The Belgian government also responded to the inhumane treatment of emigrants and in 1850 issued a royal decree specifying the minimum amount of space each passenger should

[26] Charles M. Hall, *The Antwerp Emigration Index* (Logan, Utah: The Everton Publishers, Inc., 1979).
[27] Guy Gallez. "Port of New York, 1855 Arrivals." The Belgian Researchers, Inc. www.rootswebancestry.com/~inbr/EmigrantShips/ArrivalByYearPage29.html [accessed April 19, 2017].
[28] "Act to Provide for the Ventilation of Passenger Vessels, and for Other Purposes," Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild, http://immigrantships.net/v3/1800v3/oldengland18540904.html [accessed February 23, 2013].

have to sleep, wash, and prepare food. Additionally, unmarried adults of different genders could not be required to share a sleeping space. Each passenger was required to submit to a health inspection, present a passport and ticket, and have a baptism or marriage certificate.[29] Unfortunately, these requirements were often overlooked.

As time passed and the number of immigrants seeking passage increased, abuses also increased, as shipping companies developed ways to exploit unsophisticated Belgian immigrants. Originally, the shipping companies instructed passengers to bring their own food, water, and bedding. These instructions were usually printed on the steamship ticket. One company's ticket stated the following:

> Each passenger will be furnished the following rations weekly: Seven pounds of ship's bread, two pounds of salt pork, two and one-quarter pounds of flour, one pound of salt herring, and a daily ration of one can of water for drinking, cooking, and washing purposes. These rations are furnished from the ship's supplies, but each passenger must furnish his own butter, sugar, mustard, syrup, pepper, and vinegar. Each passenger is responsible for bringing his own bed clothing and tin dishes for eating, drinking, and washing purposes.

The further note was added: "The ship's master has the right to withhold water rations until the promenade deck has been swept and cleaned each day by the passengers."[30]

[29]Rentmeester, *Flemish in Wisconsin,* 25.
[30]Lee W. Metzner, "Belgians in the North Country," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, March, 1943, 285.

Ship owners soon realized it would be more profitable for them to raise the ticket price and have it include food and water for the passage, rather than have the travelers bring their own provisions. However, this proved to be another way passengers were exploited. In letters back to friends and family members in Belgium, immigrants communicated numerous complaints regarding the poor quality of the food given to the passengers—some even stating the food was inedible.[31] Water was also limited and there were instances of fresh water being given to the crew while the immigrants were given bilge water.

Some shipping companies went so far as to publish specific instructions for the travelers pertaining to baggage.

> Personal effects should be packed in boxes three-feet long, three feet high, and two feet wide, and not in barrels, with a maximum weight of two-hundred pounds. The trunk must have solid handles and the name of the owner. You will not have access to this trunk during the voyage as it will be stored down in the hold.[32]

Many emigrants brought tools of their trade, seeds for planting once they had obtained their land, and items for cooking and sewing. There is a record of one farsighted emigrant who managed to bring a millstone so heavy it required the help of several men to load on to the ship. Suspecting there were few gristmills in the entire state of Wisconsin, and knowing they would be going to an unsettled area, this migrant realized there would be a

[31]Lempereur, *Walloons in Wisconsin,* 45.
[32]Rentmeester, *Flemish in Wisconsin,* 29.

need for the millstone to grind the wheat and other grain they would raise into a useable form.[33]

Shipowners soon found an additional way to defraud the emigrants. This involved the second leg of their journey—transit from their debarkation port to their eventual inland destination. Agents in Belgium would sell a "combination ticket" that was to include the entire trip, all the way to Milwaukee or Green Bay. Unfortunately, when the immigrants arrived in New York City, or sometimes Chicago, they learned their tickets were not going to take them any farther. For example, in March, 1856, five family heads, Joseph Janquet, Joseph Brice, Pet Joseph Lalunne, Henry Destree, and John Joseph Jandrin lodged official complaints at the New York Office of the Commissioners of Emigration against the "misconduct on the part of one Adolphus Strauss." The emigrants were assured by Strauss that he had agents at all the inland stops between New York City and Green Bay, who would transport their baggage, and provide them with lodging and meals along the way. Their affidavits stated they had paid 1060 francs, 900 francs, 850 francs, 720 francs, and 975 francs respectively, to transport themselves and various family members to Green Bay.[34] The Commissioner informed the Belgian Consul that when this group found the named contact person in New York, he denied that he had any business dealings with Strauss or any arrangement with him for the forwarding of these people to their final destination.[35] They then had to pay for the remaining part of the voyage—again! In addition to illustrating the fraudulent activities to which many Belgium emigrants were

[33]Ibid., 31.
[34] This would be the equivalent of $6,015, $5,184, $4,896, $4,147, and $5,616 in 2010. "Passenger Complaints, 1855-1856," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay,.Letter and affidavits from Secretary H.W.R. Mali, Esquire, Consul for Belgium.
[35] Ibid.

subjected, the incident reinforces the fact that these first migrants were not poverty stricken people. They were families who managed to make a living but had the foresight to realize the situation in Belgium offered them little hope of sustaining a decent lifestyle and certainly even less opportunity to pass that to their children.

As noted above, during the brief years of Walloon emigration numerous reports were made against Adolphus Strauss, the ship owning magnate, complaining of the treatment the passengers received, particularly citing the poor quality and shortages of food and the undrinkable water. However, Strauss, knowing he had the backing of the Antwerp port officials and also knowing that he was not being closely watched by authorities, continued to operate for several more years.[36] As late as 1870 he published notices in *Les Petites Affiches de Jogoigne*, a weekly advertising newspaper, giving a list of destinations, claiming the lowest prices, and inviting potential travelers to contact him for further information.[37]

In a letter addressed to the Belgian Department of Foreign Affairs, dated May 12, 1856, Adolph Poncelet, Belgian Consul to Chicago, outlined the numerous complaints he received regarding both the poor treatment of the passengers onboard ships and the worthless tickets sold to emigrants before they left Belgium. Eventually notices were posted in public places throughout Belgium with the following warning:

> Travelers having the intention to emigrate to the transatlantic countries cannot distrust too much the contracts or commitments that people want them to sign, concerning paying in advance in Europe their transportation and that of the

[36]Lempereur, 32.
[37]*Les Petites Affiches de Jodogne,* 1870.

destination to which they plan to move.[38]

The group from Grez-Doiceau boarded an old, American three-masted ship named the *Quinnebaugh* and on May 17, 1853, set sail. There were a total of 180 passengers onboard, eighty-one being Walloon and the remaining ninety-nine being Dutch. All of the Walloon men were farmers but, in addition to tending their farms, many of the family heads listed their occupation as some type of artisan. There were several stonecutters, two joiners, a barber, a locksmith, a baker, a bricklayer and a shoemaker.[39] This was the typical profile of the first groups to emigrate in the nineteenth century from northern Europe. These were men who were already struggling with the effects of industrialization but were not yet impoverished—and wanted to avoid that eventuality.[40]

Once they left port, the travelers were at the mercy of the weather, and in the case of the *Quinnebaug,* the crossing was not a pleasant one. Storms caused the crossing to take fifty days, resulting in shortages of food and water. Since the voyage took a full week longer than the passengers had been instructed to prepare for, there was actual hunger during the last week as well as a serious shortage of drinking water. Jean Francois Maricoq, a five-month-old Walloon infant, died, as did a Dutch boy. When the ship reached port, several passengers were too weak to walk and had to be carried from the ship.[41] In letters home, early emigrants warned prospective followers not to depend on provisions provided by the shipping company. In a letter from Cordellie Jacqumot, who

[38]Ibid., 46.
[39] Paul Burton and Francis Burton, *Door County Stories and Stories from the Belgian Settlement* (Ephriam, Wisconsin: Stonehill Publishing, 2003), 11.
[40]Bodnar, 52.
[41]Burton, 20.

settled near Green Bay, to her sister and brother-in-law, she advised them to "take sufficient food for the trip, some grain and a pot of butter and some tea for purging: and take some eggs and some juniper because all other liquor spoils on the sea and a bottle or two of good wine in case there is someone sick."[42] Louis Houbrecks, a Walloon living in Kewaunee County, offered the same advice to his brother and sister. "If you set out on the voyage, don't be afraid to take provisions along, because on the ship you'll only have all dry food such as peas, beans and __, and in very little amount. Also it would be better to take some wine."[43] It is interesting to note that both correspondents advise coming to Wisconsin through Quebec rather than New York. Louis Houbrcks elaborated by writing that by coming through Quebec one may bring as many trunks as desired at no additional charge but through New York one must pay extra. He also added, "In arriving in American cities, one must wait in waiting-rooms and not run to the inns because there are so many pickpockets, especially to the immigrants."[44]

Upon landing, immigrants had to contend with the multitude of unscrupulous people waiting to overcharge or rob them. American currency was confusing and immigrants had been warned to avoid paper money as its value fluctuated. One immigrant told of a friendly person who offered him a cup of coffee and then made him pay an enormous amount for it.[45] In 1855 the New York State Emigration Commission opened Castle Garden on the southern tip of Manhattan, thus protecting them from a great deal of abuse. The new arrivals were given a cursory medical inspection, were registered, and then were

[42] Letter dated February 3, 1863, from Codellie Jacqmotto sister Josephine Jacqmot and brother-in-law Desire Lhost, "Jacqmot Family" Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[43] Letter dated February 8, 1864 from Louis Houbrecks to his sister Josephine Jacqmot, "Jacqmot Family," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[44] Ibid.
[45]Rentmeester, 38.

free to obtain food, collect letters, change money, book accommodations at local boarding houses, buy rail and steamboat tickets to inland destinations, and arrange for luggage to be forwarded. In 1856 alone, 20,000 immigrants came through Castle Garden on their way to Wisconsin.[46]

Unfortunately for the first Walloon immigrants, this facility was not yet in operation when they arrived in 1853, and even this government facility did not guarantee fair treatment of immigrants once they set out for their ultimate destination. An article appearing in the *Green Bay Advocate* in 1856 reports the arrival of a lake steamer carrying 260 Belgians from Chicago. "These emigrants are cheated and gouged in every possible shape, on their way from N. York to this city, with perhaps, the exception of the Chicago line. We learn that Capt. Lark generously refunded them money unjustly taken by Milwaukee agents."[47]

Subsequent groups of immigrants came in response to information received through a network of family and community relationships. They based their decisions on information received from previous immigrants as to where to settle in the United States, who to contact, what kind of work to expect, and how to find it. Few immigrants came without knowing where they were going and what to expect when they got there.[48]

Establishing the Settlement in Wisconsin

The destination chosen by the Walloons represented a major departure from the majority of immigrants coming to America after the mid-nineteenth century. Before 1850,

[46]Ibid., 41.
[47] "More Belgians," *Green Bay Advocate*, May 15, 1856.
[48]Bodnar, 57. Also see Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 68-80, 86-88, 96-117.

only a third of European immigrants chose to travel to urban destinations, but after mid-century an urban location with the promise of work was the overwhelming immigrant destination. By 1890, ninety-five percent of immigrants came looking for industrial work.[49] These urban immigrants faced the challenge of creating a place for themselves in an already established culture and making the accommodations within their own culture that would enable them to survive and support their families. As the population density was much lower in the unsettled rural areas, those going to rural destinations faced a minimum of pressure from the Anglo core culture.

During the ocean voyage, the original group of Brabant Walloons became acquainted with their fellow passengers, Dutch immigrants planning to join friends and family already established in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. After discussing it, the Walloons decided they would continue with the Dutch to Sheboygan, approximately sixty miles north of Milwaukee. Unlike many peasant immigrants who gravitated to urban areas seeking factory jobs but bringing no experience and therefore having to settle for the lowest wages, the Walloons already had farming skills and planned to use their skills in their new homes. They came to Wisconsin to acquire and farm their own land and did not deviate from their goal, even when they learned the inland leg of their journey from New York involved an additional expenditure of 100 to l50 francs and took approximately three additional weeks of travel.[50] This added expense most likely explains why two large families, the Martins and the Paques, together totaling sixteen people, decided to go instead to Philadelphia until they could earn additional money for the trip to Wisconsin. There was no mention of the Martin family's expenditures on the *Quinnebaugh*, but Xavier

[49]Harzig and Hoerder, 36.
[50] This would be the equivalent of $600 to $800 in 2010.

Martin writes in his account of the voyage that the Paques family had spent an additional 26 francs for food from the ship's supplies, depleting their funds.[51] Ambroise Degodt, a weaver from Grez, had immigrated to Philadelphia with his family eight months earlier. Apparently there had been communication between Degodt and the villagers before they left Grez, as the Martins and the Paques knew Degodt was in Philadelphia and where to find him. After working in Philadelphia for only a few months, and receiving encouraging words from the Walloons who had continued to Wisconsin, they were able to rejoin their fellow Belgians. The Degodt family relocated to Wisconsin with them. Xavier Martin remained in Philadelphia until 1857 to learn English, the American way of life, and the American political system.[52] Martin was not interested in farming and was considering a career in law.

The route the first group chose when leaving New York was the most economical way to reach Wisconsin and was used by many subsequent immigrants prior to the completion of the Chicago-Milwaukee Railroad in 1863. The group took the Albany-Buffalo road, crossed Lake Erie to Detroit by lake-streamer, and then took a train to St. Joseph or New Buffalo on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. They then again boarded a lake-streamer to cross Lake Michigan to Milwaukee.[53] In the 1850s, Green Bay was a major port, with several sailing vessels and steam powered boats arriving and departing daily. As early as 1853 the *Green Bay Advocate* carried the May to November schedule for weekly trips between Buffalo and Green Bay as well as for travel between Chicago and Green Bay.[54]

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[51]Xavier Martin, "The Belgians of North Eastern Wisconsin," *Journal of Wisconsin Historical Collection,* 31 (1895), http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/compoundobjective/collection/wch/id/6128/show/5980/3 [accessed February 7, 2013] 360.
[52] Martin, 380, Defnet, et. al., 20-21.
[53]Ibid., 21.
[54]*Green Bay Advocate,* August 25, 1853.

However, the Walloons, perhaps in consideration of their dwindling finances, travelled the last fifty-nine miles to the Sheboygan area on foot, carrying their small children and dragging their baggage behind them. Unfortunately, once they reached Sheboygan they found the good land already claimed by Dutch settlers and only inferior land still available. They were also frustrated by the fact that they had difficulty communicating with the Dutch, not knowing their language. While the Walloons were trying to decide their next step they met a French Canadian trapper who assured them that in the Green Bay area, fifty-six miles further north, they would find equally fertile soil, a similar climate, and a large population of French-speaking settlers. In mid-August, the group once again started out.[55]

When they reached Green Bay they found that, just as the French trapper predicted, they had no trouble finding settlers with whom they could communicate in French. Temporarily settling their families in Green Bay, the men set out to find suitable land to purchase. After several days they decided on an area along the Fox River, about twenty miles south of Green Bay, and once going to the government land office for that area, paid deposits on their claims.[56] However, upon returning to Green Bay for their families and belongings, they learned that one of the children of Philippe Hannon, probably Marie Barbe who was born in Grez-Doiceau in 1852 and was the youngest, had died. The departure to their newly claimed land was delayed until the child could be buried. The ceremony took place at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Green Bay with the French priest Father Perrod officiating.[57] The immigrants had no church of their own,

[55]Defnet, et. al., Tlachac, 9.
[56]deSmet, 12.
[57]deSmet, 12, Defnet, et. al.,22.

were familiar and comfortable with the Catholic burial service, and placed great importance on the service being in French.[58] It is also possible that after spending their lives embracing the importance of being buried in consecrated land, they wanted this for the dead child.

It happened that the Belgian missionary Father Edouard Daems, who was in charge of the Bay Settlement parish approximately fifteen miles northeast of Green Bay, was visiting Father Perrod at this same time and after exchanging news and advice, persuaded the group of Walloons to forfeit their deposits on the land south of Green Bay and settle instead in the area where he was building his church. The first settlers in that area had been French fishermen who constructed a log church in the 1840s. In 1852 Father Daems, who was originally from Belgium, came to Bay Settlement, and ministered to the French congregants as well as a few Native Americans still in the area. The Walloon immigrants were delighted to find a minister who spoke their language and decided to follow Father Daems.[59]

The land they chose lay ten miles northeast of the mission, deep into virgin forest of hickory, maple, ash, beech, cedar, birch, and pine. In the entire area, there were no other dwellings. With the help of a surveyor, the original group chose land that turned out to be three sections in Township 24 and three sections in Township 25. In Wisconsin, a Township is a surveyed area six miles by six miles, with the exterior boundaries running due east-west and north-south in accordance with the Public Land Survey System established in 1785. The thirty-six miles within a township were then surveyed and

[58] Judith Carlsen, "Amazing Grace," *Voyageur; Historical Review of Brown County and Northeast Wisconsin* 28, no. 1 (Summer/Fall, 2011): 37.
[59] Sylvia Hall.ed., *Farewell to the Homeland: European Immigration to N.E. Wisconsin-1840 to 1900* (Green Bay, Wisconsin: Brown County Historical Society, 1984) 21.

divided into thirty-six sections, each being one mile square or 160 acres. A Township eventually contained several towns or villages, although in the Belgian settlement area these were unincorporated.

The six contiguous sections of land extended to the county lines of Brown and Kewaunee Counties.[60] Of course, there were no roads, or even trails, through the dense forest and the men had to devise ways to find their land when they returned with their families. One method they used was to strip bark off of trees to mark the "trail" leading to their destination. They then returned to Bay Settlement where they met a civil servant who allocated the selected acreage by writing down the names of those who paid the registration fee.

They named their first settlement Aux Premiers Belges (The First Belgians).[61] By 1858, settlement by subsequent Walloon immigrants reached a sufficient level that Township 26 was established as the Township of Brussels, and southern Door County became part of the Belgian community as well.[62]

But what of the Native Americans that once occupied this peninsula? In 1830 President Jackson had signed into law the Indian Removal Act designed to relocate Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river. At that time, in the area eventually settled by the Walloons, there were Menominee, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi villages, but with the end of the Black Hawk War in 1832, the United States military firmly established its supremacy in the area west of the Great Lakes. By 1836,

[60]deSmet, 13.
[61]Holand, 200.
[62]deSmet. 13.

the Native Americans of northeast Wisconsin had ceded their lands and left the Belgian settlement area. This occurred almost twenty years before the migrants arrived.[63]

Although the Native Americans had officially been removed, there were isolated Indian populations remaining and the Walloons reported limited contact with them. As late as 1851, Simon Kahquados, last known Chief of the Wisconsin Potawatomi, was born in Kewaunee County.[64] In a letter to his brother, Charles Louis Desmedt wrote,

> These savages are still here, but they are not like they are depicted. They are modest, kind-hearted, and civilized, and they invent works of art. When one meets them, they always travel in groups. They greet you, smile and continue on their way without making the slightest noise. They are smart people; many know French and tell stories more than 300 years old.[65]

Other Walloons related similar experiences. The settlers found the Potawatomi Indians to be friendly and, by smiles and gestures, they assured each other of their cordial feelings.[66] Another immigrant, Constant Delveaux, described the "savages" as honest because "they would leave their guns at the door before entering our homes" and "ask us for food by pointing to their mouths."[67] As the Walloons had chosen to settle in such an isolated location, the Native Americans were the only other human contacts they had for quite some time—in some cases, two or three years. It was the Native Americans who

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[63] Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed.,*Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) 156.
[64] Forest County Potawatomi, http://www.fcpotawatomi.com/ [accessed January 21, 2013.
[65] Goris, 278-279.
[66]Tlachc, 12.
[67] Lempereur,66.Burton, 17.

taught them to trap wild animals and to smoke the meat to preserve it. They also taught the immigrants to tap maple trees and to make sugar from the sap. Ice fishing during the winter months was another new survival skill which the Belgians learned from the remaining Indians.[68]

There also was communication and cooperation between the women of the two groups; they engaged in blackberry picking and then, making the long walk to Green Bay, selling their berries together.[69] If any movement toward acculturation was done by the Belgian immigrants, a case might be made that it was to the local Native American culture rather than to the "Anglo-American core."

Upon reaching their newly purchased land in the fall of 1853, the first task was to erect some sort of shelter—usually not more than a hut or a lean-to that provided very little protection. Considering the severity of the Wisconsin winters and the abundance of wild animals in the area, the settlers soon realized they would need something more substantial and replaced these first shelters with log cabins with roofs of cedar bark or, later, shingles. There were no nails or hardware of any kind used in the construction and, leather strips often served as hinges. Openings between the logs were chinked with clay mud and the floor, if there was one, was made of split logs.[70] They survived that first winter mainly by hunting, trapping, and fishing and spent their days clearing what land they could, often contending with trees five or six feet in diameter. Once they felled a tree, they had no way to move it and so had to burn it where it fell. In the spring, after planting their little cleared patches of land, it was necessary for the men to walk to Green

[68]Lempereur, 60.
[69] "Blackberries,"*Green Bay Adocate,* September 2, 1858.
[70] Tlachac,16.

Bay, Milwaukee, or even Chicago seeking work. For weeks and sometimes months at a time the women and children were left to tend their small farms, contend with loneliness, and stave off the terror brought on by hearing wolves, bears, and other wild animals prowling around their cabins at night.[71]

Emigration to Wisconsin continued in 1854—probably before the promised letters from the first group began arriving in Grez. When they did arrive, the letters were read and reread, passed around from village to village, and some published in the newspapers. Historian Dirk Hoerder notes that even when emigrants had reliable information about several destinations, they preferred destinations where previous migrants, relatives or friends, already lived.[72] Considering the continuing emigration came primarily from the eastern part of Brabant (the cantons Jodoigne, Perwez, and Wavre) and the Namur region of Hesbaye (the cantons of Eghezze and Gemblous), both relatively small regions located in the south central part of Belgium, it is likely the emigrants knew each other or at least knew of one another's families. Undoubtedly this contributed to the cohesiveness of the group. It is estimated that from 1853 to 1857, between 5,000 and 7,500 emigrants left this area of Belgium for America.[73] Other estimates are much higher. Xavier Martin, in his account, stated that when he arrived in Wisconsin in 1857 there were 15,000 Belgians in the settlement area.[74] However, the next year the *Green Bay Advocate*

[71] Hjalmar R. Holand,*Old Peninsula Days: The Making of an American Community* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1959), 225. Also Holand, *Wisconsin's Belgian Community* (Door County Historical Society: Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, 1933), 48.
[72] Dirk Hoerder, "Immigration to Migration Systems: New Concepts in Migration History,"*OAH Magazine of History* 14, no. 1, Migrations (Fall, 1999): 6.
[73]*Wisconsin French Connections*, "1852: Emigration of the Farmers from Brabant and Hesbaye," reprinted with permission from a brochure of the Ministere de la Region Wallone, Brussels, Belgium. http://www.uwgb.du/wisfrench/library/history/belges/wibelges.htm [accessed February 8, 2013].
[74] Martin, 379-380.

reported a rural population living in the area between Bay Settlement and Sturgeon Bay of 10,000, which is probably more accurate.[75]

It was also in 1854 that cholera, most likely brought by recent immigrants to America, grew to epidemic proportions. First appearing in Milwaukee during the summer of 1849, the disease spread north along the Lake Michigan coast and had devastating results among the newly settled Belgians of Door, Brown, and Kewaunee Counties, where it struck nearly every family.[76] At that time both the cause and treatment for cholera were unknown. Even if there had been a treatment, the Belgians were far too isolated to obtain medical help as, once stricken, the victim usually died within a few days, sometimes a few hours. "Not a few families lost as many as five of their members in a single week; most of them were buried on their own land, and in great haste."[77]

No doubt, when news of the cholera epidemic reached Belgium, some potential emigrants decided against going to America. However, there is reason to believe the vested shipping interests in Antwerp were able to keep the reports secret, at least through 1856.[78] Apparently most Belgians either did not know of the epidemic or were not dissuaded and thousands continued to depart for Wisconsin.

Between 1855 and 1856, emigration continued at a rate sufficient to cause local Belgian authorities to become concerned about the "disastrous depopulation" which was causing a drop in land prices and an increase in wages due to shortages of workers.[79] Some inhabitants of Brabant addressed a petition to the Belgian government dated

[75]"Something Which Is Needed," *Green Bay Advocate*, March 4, 1858.
[76] Peter T. Harstad, "Disease and Sickness on the Wisconsin Frontier: Cholera,"*The Wisconsin Magazine of History,* Spring, 1960, 216.
[77] Martin, 379-380.
[78]deSmet, 24.
[79]Defnet, et. al., 26.

February 27, 1856, asking authorities to take measures to stop the emigration.[80] Letters home, while not portraying America as a "promised land," did give a positive report of conditions. Possible tendencies by an immigrant to exaggerate his success would have been tempered by the knowledge that there existed the very real possibility that the recipient of the letter would soon appear as the author's neighbor. In an 1855 letter to his mother, Charles Lhost, who left Grez-Doiceau in April of that year, writes that after working in Wisconsin only a month and a half he has been able to "buy a quarter of land" and that "my house is already built." He goes on to assure her "Right now my health is good; for him who has money to live for a year in America, he has his fortune made." In closing he reassures her, "I will have my land cleared here in 3 or 4 years."[81]

Not all Walloon immigrants fared this well. The winter of 1855-1856 was particularly harsh and the G*reen Bay Advocate* reported on the sufferings of the Belgians who settled north of Green Bay. Local citizens donated food but the men who volunteered to distribute the supplies reported the settlers' huts were "entirely unfit to protect them from the cold,…so that besides the horrors of starvation they have to face the danger of death by freezing. Many of the men had already frozen their hands and feet."[82] In July of 1855 M. John C. Perrodin, a Belgian priest living and working near the area of Belgian settlement, wrote in response to a request from a priest in Wallonia on the condition of his former parishioners. M. Perrodin wrote that conditions would improve for the groups just arriving as the ones who came earlier will help them "to acquire land and to maintain their health." However, he went on to warn "you must not think that we can find farms in the United States that

[80]deSmet, 24.
[81] Letter dated October 1, 1855 from Charles Lhost to his mother, "Lhost Family," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[82] "Suffering Among the Belgians," *Green Bay Advocate,* January 17, 1856.

are cultivated or near cities or villages. You have to go a long distance in the middle of a big forest, where there is no church, nor school, to enjoy the privilege of cheap lands. You must open roads, cut down the trees, burn it and clear the land before getting a harvest." Later in the letter he emphasized the effort required to succeed in Wisconsin. "The New World is not paradise, no more than the Old World. Those that, and those that don't like to work, is badly mistaken if he thinks that we find fortunes all made here."[83]

In 1856, the Belgian newspaper *Les Petites Affiches* published parts of two letters from Wisconsin including one from M. Perrodin. He wrote:

> There are more than 2,000 Belgians in the area now. While the first of them had some money, they could buy pretty good soil; but they who arrived last autumn have a lack of everything. Many died of cold, hunger, and homesickness. A great number of them had their hands and feet frozen. If they are sick they have no doctor, even if they have a doctor, they cannot understand him; if they are searching for a job, they cannot find some, because they don't understand the language of the country, which is English.[84]

However, the information did not discourage those in Wallonia who had made the decision to emigrate. Through the spring of 1856, several issues of the *Green Bay Advocate* published announcements of more Belgians arriving. On May 8, 1856, the

[83]Letter dated July 5, 1855 from John C. Perrodin to Charles Vanerum, "Correspondence—U.S. to Belgium," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[84] "Poverty in America, "*Les Petites Affiches de Jondoigne,* undated newspaper article, "Les Petites Affiches," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

paper reported that two ships, the *Cleveland* and the *Huron*, arrived with "immense loads of passengers. The *Cleveland* brought about 175 Belgians and the *Huron* about 240. This makes about 900 Belgians who have arrived in our city so far this spring, by land and water, and we learn that there are from 3,000 to 4,000 on the way here."[85] Indicating no prejudice against the new arrivals, the article was quite positive, stating, "They are as strong and healthy looking emigrants as we have seen in years, and we learn that the greater part of them have abundant means to maintain them while 'opening up' their farms."[86] The next issue, published one week later, reports "the steamer *Cleveland* arrived again from Chicago, this time carrying 260 more Belgians."[87]

The next year, 1857, was the high point of the Belgian emigration and the *Green Bay Advocate* continued to report the group's progress in glowing terms. One article, reprinted in the *Milwaukee Sentinel,* acknowledged most citizens were accustomed to regarding the area of Belgian settlement as unbroken wilderness, but went on to say they "would be astonished to see the change which has been wrought within a year or two." After making reference to the many houses appearing among the trees along the Green Bay shore, the article reports that further inland there is a constant succession of substantial farms of from five to forty acres, with excellent crops growing, and points out that Green Bay will benefit from the produce bought to market.[88] The Belgian settlement extended along the eastern shore of Green Bay from Bay Settlement north to Sturgeon Bay. Eventually the southern settlement area extended east almost to Lake Michigan and then

[85] "Chicago Steamers," *Green Bay Advocate*, May 8, 1856.
[86] Ibid.
[87] "More Belgians,"*Green Bay Advocate*, May 15, 1856.
[88] "The Belgian Settlement,"*Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 12, 1857.

angled northwest to Sturgeon Bay forming a somewhat triangular area. This interior land was relatively level, uninhabited, and contained fertile soil.

Beginning with the first group in 1853 and not coming to an end until 1857, the flow of Belgian immigrants continued and the *Green Bay Advocate* continued its complimentary descriptions. Two weeks later, reporting again on the *Huron*, the paper stated there were "sixty Belgians who we are informed will settle in the northern part of our county. Many more are on the way. Success to them."[89]

Emigrant's letters show a deep need among individuals to communicate with their home villages and maintain ties to family and friends still in Wallonia. In his October 1, 1855 letter to his mother in Belgium, Charles Lhost writes, "I am writing to you, dear Mother, for the third time but I have not received any news from you. I am patiently waiting for your answer as soon as possible." After assuring her of his good health and his success in buying a farm, he returned to his original subject. "I would like very much to know how you are dear Mother, and brother and sister; give my greetings to my aunt, my uncle Blagelot and to my cousins. I hug you all."[90] He then included greetings offered from several other settlers to their family members still in Belgium. In another letter dated approximately eighteen months later, he again pleaded for news, "…dear brother and dear mother don't forget then to write to me and let me know how everything is with the whole family and to tell me all the news of the village and of all our old country. Dear brother, someone told me that Lambert Pytes my brother-in-law, was no longer in Grez; have the goodness to tell me what has become of him." Again he included communication

[89] Lee W. Metzner, "The Belgians in the North Country," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, March 1943, 286-287.
[90] Letter dated October 1, 1855 from Charles Lhost to his mother, "Lhost Family."Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

from other immigrants writing, “Antoinette Lose asks if it is true that her father had died, what has become of her mother, who stays in the house and how all the family is behaving.” He then pleaded again, “Dear brother, don’t forget to write to me as soon as possible. Dear brother, I send my greetings to the whole family and especially to my dear mama and my whole family does as much.”[91]

A letter from Cordelle Jacqmot to her “Dearest Father” wished him a happy new year, also “making the same wishes to my sister and to the whole family.” That previous letters had been exchanged is evident when she continued by saying,

> Dear sister, I pray to God every day that He’ll give me the grace that you have had in your bed to be so happily delivered and that you have been so soon in good health. If only God would grant me the same grace. Dear Papa, have patience…[92]

While there is no indication that the immigrants entertained any thoughts of ever returning to Wallonia, they maintained close ties to their loved ones left behind.

Worth noting is that in the available correspondence, there is no inquiry regarding the country of Belgium or the political climate in their former home. It is unlikely that the Walloons even thought of themselves as “Belgian” for two reasons. First, the country they left was divided into two distinct regions: the Flemish north and the Walloon south. It is doubtful the emigrants had developed a conviction of their home country being the

[91] Letter dated May 1, 1857 from Charles Lhost to his brother, “Lhost Family.”Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[92] Letter dated December 30, 1856 from CordelleJacmot to her father, “Jacqmot Family.” Vertical File, Belgian Collection, the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

nation of Belgium. Second, as primarily illiterate rural inhabitants, they would identify strongly with their home villages and the networks of family and friends of which they had once been a part, rather than the nation of Belgium.[93] Their letters are filled with inquiries relating to family friends, and village news. There is no indication that their self-identity involved nationalist feelings for Belgium, which was a newly created political entity.

At the height of Walloon immigration in 1857, the United States suffered an economic depression triggered by the failure of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company. Telegraph lines quickly spread the news that investors had lost all their money, leaving many destitute, and worried investors nationwide began withdrawing their funds from other companies as well as banks. The result was the failure of numerous businesses nationwide.[94] The Walloon settlers, who depended on the wages earned in Green Bay and Milwaukee during the winter months, had to find some other means to support their families. The pine trees surrounding their cabins were valuable, with pine selling for $1.50 a thousand board feet, but they had no way of getting felled trees to saw mills.[95] However, someone thought of making shingles from the cut trees and the idea quickly caught on. This was an enterprise in which every family member could participate and soon, reinforced by their existing familiarity with cottage industries from their experience in Wallonia, every hut became a shingle-making business. The men, usually accompanied by their wives, went into the surrounding forest and felled trees which they then cut into eighteen inch logs called bolts. The children split the bolts and, joined by the older

[93] "Belgian Americans," www.everycultre.com/multi/A-Br/Belian-Americans.html [accessed October 10, 2017].
[94] Ohio Historical Society, "Panic of 1857," Ohio Historical Society, http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org.entry.php?rec=537 [accessed June 17, 2012].
[95]Tlachac, 18.

Belgians, eventually arrived at the finished shingle which measured eighteen inches long by six inches wide by a half inch thick. These were then tied into bundles of 250 shingles and carried the several miles to the Bay shore where once a week a schooner would pick them up and take them to Green Bay where shingles were selling for $1.50 per thousand.[96] Eventually, virtually every Belgian settler was involved in shingle making. Family participation in a cottage industry was an activity with which they would have been comfortable. In 1860, more than four million handmade shingles were shipped out of Brussels, Wisconsin alone. The Civil War caused a decline in shingle making in the United States but by 1870, J.B.S. Masse, Belgian Consul in Chicago, reported twenty million hand-made shingles, valued at seventy-five thousand dollars, had been sold in Green Bay the previous year.[97]

The isolation of the Walloon settlement significantly impacted and reinforced the lack of acculturation by this ethnic group. In the dense wilderness where they settled, there was no dominant culture to acculturate into and no pressure from outside sources to stimulate any changes. In addition to the Walloons, Northeastern Wisconsin was settled by Germans, Dutch, Bohemians, Polish, Irish, English, Scots, and Scandinavians during the middle of the nineteenth century.[98] But the Walloons, laboring in the wilderness of a peninsula to establish their homes and farms, had minimal contact with these other ethnic groups. During the short period that Walloon immigration continued, newcomers were

[96]Holand, 201-202, Lempereur, 78, Tlachac, 18.
[97] J. B. A. Masse, 3.
[98] Anton Jarstad, "Melting Pot in Northeastern Wisconsin," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* (June, 1943): 427. A prevailing idea among early immigration historians was that immigrants from different countries or origin were unable to communicate due to language barriers. However, further study in the 1980s dispelled this idea, citing contact in the marketplace, mixed settlement patterns, and mixed contact at the workplace which fostered multilingualism. See Dirk Hoerder, "'The Transplanted': International Dimensions," *Social Science History* 12, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 257.

almost universally relatives or friends of the Belgian families who had already immigrated, reinforcing the Walloon culture and the community's cohesiveness. With rare exceptions, such as when marketing their shingles, during these first four years the settlers were essentially shut off from contact with the outside world by the lack even of trails through the dense forest surrounding them, as well as by their absorption in their struggle to establish a new life.

Arrival of Xavier Martin

The immigration rate dropped dramatically after 1857, due in large part to Vilain XIII, Minister of Foreign Affairs', decision no longer to finance the emigration of the nation's begger-poor, ex-convicts, and convicts. The Belgian government, responding to falling land values and increasing wage demands in the east part of Walloon-Brabant and north Namur, and a multitude of reports of abuses emigrants suffered at the hands of Antwerp shipping companies and port officials, decided on a policy of non-intervention.[99] They did however, post warnings to potential migrants regarding fraud on the part of shipping companies. These governmental actions, along with discouraging letters from some of the previous emigrants, brought the movement to an end after less than four years.[100]

Notwithstanding the diminishing immigration, one particular immigrant newcomer, Xavier Martin, had significant influence on the development of the community after arriving in 1857. Martin, the young man who had been part of the first group emigrating

[99]TorstenFeys, "The Emigration Policy of the Belgian Government from Belgium to U.S. through the Port of Antwerp 1842-1914" (master's thesis, Ghent University, 2002-2003), 93, 98.
[100] William G. Laatsch and Charles F. Calkins, "Belgians in Wisconsin," in *To Build In a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America*, ed. Allen G. Noble (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 195.

from Grez, stayed behind in Philadelphia to learn English, the American political process, legal system, and American way of life, thus becoming what is known as a "cultural broker," a person who understands and can function in more than one culture. One can only speculate as to his reasons for staying in Philadelphia. Perhaps he was not interested in farming and realized his need for the new skills. He seems to have been receptive to other cultures and possibly was motivated by a desire to learn, realizing this new culture offered something of value.[101] When he came to Wisconsin to visit his family in 1857, he was the only person in the entire three county Belgian community, now numbering an estimated 15,000 Walloons according to him, who possessed knowledge of English and American politics and, subjected to pressure from 300 head of households including his parents, as well as becoming cognizant of his fellow Belgians' need for the knowledge he had gained, agreed to stay. In his memoirs Martin describes an active, industrious settlement with people clearing land, making shingles, bringing in the harvest, and generally making progress. In the three to four years they had been in Wisconsin, several had been able to purchase cattle and others were raising pigs. Martin writes that the Walloons had accomplished all this progress by relying entirely on their own efforts. "The Belgians had not been able to obtain any help, either for the building of churches or schools or teachers—not even help for opening highways leading to their settlements."[102]

One of the roles a cultural broker may assume is that of a catalyst for change.[103] By this time, almost all adult, white males in the United States had the right to vote. All that

[101] Margaret Connell Szasz, *Between Indian and White Worlds, The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).
[102] X. Martin, 383.
[103] Jacqueline Robinson, "Cultural Broker," in *Encyclopedia of Human Services and Diversity*, ed. Linwood H. Cousins, 302-304.

Wisconsin state law required was that he be at least 21 years of age. After one year's residency in the state and the declaration of intent to become a citizen, a European immigrant could vote.[104] The Walloons most likely did not know about their right to vote and certainly did not know how to exercise this right. In Belgium only five percent of the population enjoyed suffrage, and Wisconsin's former peasants had no experience voting.[105] Xavier Martin, taking the role of a cultural broker, explained to the immigrants how to apply for citizenship, how the American system of local government operated, and how powerful their vote could be. Within a year, the men of the Belgian community participated in their first election. In 1858 the remote and isolated Walloon community lay largely forgotten by most of the French and Anglo inhabitants of Bay Settlement, the mission founded by Father Deams, where the election box was located. The mission was several miles southwest of the Belgian settlement area and other voters were shocked when they saw two hundred and thirty Belgian voters marching in double file from their remote farms, most more than ten miles away. They all carried ballots printed especially for them and the entire slate of Belgian candidates on those ballots was elected.[106] Historian Kathleen Neils Conzen states that "political participation marked a relatively late state in the accommodation process."[107] Obviously this was not the situation in the Walloon community which essentially had not begun the acculturation process—another example of the uniqueness of the Walloons. For them voting was not a sign of a desire to assimilate, but rather a way to have their need for roads and schools met. These

[104] *Legislative Manuel of the State of Wisconsin, Volume 1868.* Smith and Cullaton, State Printers, 221. https://books.google.com/books?id=qfpOAQAAIAAN
[105] Holand,199.
[106] X. Martin, 383.
[107] Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee 1836-1860: Accomodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 192-193.

settlers were politically “Americanized” when there was a reason to be, but then returned to their rural Walloon culture with which they were satisfied.

After the election the settlers organized themselves into localities according to the Wisconsin State laws and chose for themselves Justices of the Peace and other needed municipal officials. All of these local officials were chosen from within the Belgian community. Martin accepted the offices of Justice of the Peace, Town Clerk, and School Superintendent for Robinsonville, a small village created by the early settlers. The latter position is interesting in light of the fact that no schools yet existed, but apparently the settlers were optimistic that the situation would soon improve.

An inspection of the U.S. Census of 1900 shows that among the 561 respondents for The Township of Brussels, of the 380 claiming to be able to read in any language) and 377 claiming to be able to write (again, in any language), only 127 stated they had ever been to school.[108] This would indicate that the majority who claimed literacy had been taught at home, probably in French, by a family member or neighbor.

This would also explain why, according to that same census roughly one-third stated they spoke no English. Those who spoke English had been forced to learn it in school and still spoke Walloon when away from their teachers. By this time, the Walloons had been in Wisconsin nearly half century and, in many cases, represented the third generation. A letter written in 1864 by Louis Houbrecks of Kewaunee County to his brother in Wallonia addresses the question of what the brother could do if he were to immigrate to Wisconsin. Houbrecks responds that his brother could not do anything but

[108] U.S. Bureau of Census. 1900, Door County, Brussels Township, Brown County Library, Green Bay, Wisconson.

farm, as he did not know English.[109] This reveals two interesting underlying concepts. First, if one were to farm in the Belgian settlement area, there was no need for English, reemphasizing that everyone there continued to speak Walloon. Also interesting is that Houbrecks did not offer the suggestion that his brother attempt to learn English. Contributing to the lack of interest in learning English was the fact that the members of the settlement not only spoke the same language but, coming from the same region in south central Belgium, they all spoke the same dialect, called "Namurois" by linguists.[110] This common language was an important element for maintaining the ethnicityand cohesion of the settlement.

Martin also helped establish Robinsonville's first post office and became Postmaster. The person holding this position usually discharged his duties from his home by picking up the mail for his area from the appropriate post office and distributing it. A few families received a monthly newspaper from Belgium and an occasional letter indicating their continuing connection to Belgium.[111] In 1862, Martin was elected Register of Deeds for Brown County and, as such, was compelled to relocate to Green Bay. During the five years he lived in the Walloon settlement, his efforts did a great deal to improve conditions for the communities there and the period seems to represent something of a turning point for the settlers. Martin helped the migrants complete their citizenship process and experience voting. Many of the original huts were replaced by substantial cabins and agricultural efforts were so successful that on some farms large barns were required to

[109] Letter drafted February 8, 1864 from Louis Houbrecks to his brother, "Jacqmot Family," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[110] Fred L. Holmes, *Old World Wisconsin Around Europe in the Badger State* (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: E.M. Hale and Company, 1944) 166.
[111] "Bosman Family."

store the surplus. By the fall of 1859, Xavier Martin had established what was most likely the first school in the settlement area in which to hold classes. Two taverns were in operation, and the settlement had its first store.[112] However, it is important to remember that in no way did the improving conditions dilute the cohesiveness of the Belgian community. In fact, the contrary is the case. Establishments such as taverns and stores served an important social function, providing a place where the immigrants could see their friends and family members, exchange news and gossip, and continually strengthen ties within the group.[113]

Importance of Religious Activities

The deep spirituality and devotion to Catholicism of the Walloons provided another important cohesive factor. Overwhelmingly Catholic, the Walloon settlers held the same beliefs, practiced the same rituals, and together, longed for churches in which to worship and priests to lead them. As Father Deams, the Belgian missionary who originally convinced the settlers to come to northeast Wisconsin, had a large area for which he was responsible, he was not able to minister to their needs on a regular basis. Many settlers walked the ten or more miles into Bay Settlement weekly so that they might participate in the service there. Others worshipped together in each others' cabins, with one of the laymen conducting the service when no priest was available. In an 1855 letter to Catholic officials in Belgium, Father John Perrodin, the missionary who replaced Father Deams, reported having given communion to sixty-five people at the home of Philippe Hannon

[112] "Belgians Prospering," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* September 23, 1859, reprint of article from *Green Bay Advocate.*
[113] John H. Kolb, *Emerging Rural Communities: Group Relations in Rural Society, A Review of Wisconsin Research in Action* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 58-61.

from Grez.[114] Hannon was one of the original emigrants from that village and, at the time of his departure from Grez, had left the Catholic Church and joined the Christian Missionary Church of Belgium. It is interesting that he hosted the Catholic priest and congregants for the communion service. Recall that it was the Hannon family who lost a child in Green Bay soon after the group's arrival. The child was buried at a Catholic church in Green Bay. It is possible that this was the only established denomination with an ordained clergyman in the area and, after leaving Green Bay and establishing their farm, the Hannons fully returned to Catholicism. Another explanation might be that membership in a church community was so important to immigrant Belgians, that the specifics of the ritual and dogma were secondary. Their experience of church participation was essentially an extension of family and local community, and therefore had less to do with the doctrines distant church officials endorsed.

Later in this letter, Father Perrodin goes on to complain that in the United States the government has nothing to do with religion. Apparently this was such an unusual concept for Belgians that he reemphasizes the situation. "I've received nothing from the government. Everything must be done by individual subscription."[115] Although a departure from what they were accustomed to, the Walloons seem to have accepted the fact that if they were to have churches in which to worship, they would have to build them. Within a few years, as settlers contributed land, building supplies, and labor, churches appeared throughout the settlement area.

The circumstances leading to the construction of the first chapel were quite unusual. In 1859 a young Belgian girl named Adele Brice reported seeing a series of three visions

[114]Perrodin, 3.
[115]Perrodin, 3.

of the Holy Virgin, all at the same place in the wilderness. The Brice family lived about eight miles from Bay Settlement and Adele reported seeing the first vision as she was carrying wheat through the forest to the grist mill at Robinsonville. She reported two more appearances of the Holy Virgin, these occurring as she was walking to mass in Bay Settlement, the subsequent visions occurring in exactly the same spot as the first. Adele stated the vision commissioned her to teach the Catholic faith to the children of the settlement, which she did for the rest of her life. Of course, there were those among the Walloons who did not believe Adele's story, but most saw the vision as a sign that their settlement efforts were blessed by God. Among the believers was Adele's father, who built a small chapel in the forest where the vision appeared to his daughter. As news traveled many immigrants visited the chapel and by 1861 the original structure was replaced by a larger chapel. On August 15, Assumption Day, thousands of Belgian settlers made the trip to the site. Adele's account gained credibility when the great fire of 1871, which burned everything for miles around, spared the chapel. It was estimated that on Assumption Day 1879, there were a thousand horse drawn wagons on the chapel grounds.[116] In 2010 the Catholic Church formally recognized the site as the only authentic Marian sighting in the United States. Consequently, busloads of "outsiders" now visit the site, and a restaurant and gift shop has been added. To many of the Walloons living in the Belgian area who have supported and cared for their chapel for so many years, this feels somewhat like a violation. They have always felt that the original vision and consequent chapel was theirs. The Belgian community replaced the original chapel with

[116]Tlachac, 26-29, Holand, 202-205, Burton, 58-64.

a larger one when necessary and maintained the building and grounds all these years, reemphasizing the cohesiveness of the community still existing.[117]

In 1860 settlers living in the Namur area of southern Door County constructed a small log church on three acres of donated land. They named the church St. Mary of the Snows and it became the first officially recognized Catholic Church in the Walloon settlement area, although it was considered a mission church, meaning there was not a full-time priest assigned to it. There existed a scarcity of French-speaking priests in northeastern Wisconsin at that time, and the congregation was served intermittently by traveling Holy Cross Fathers. The structure was destroyed by the great fire of 1871 but within three years the parishioners replaced the original church with a much larger frame structure that seated one hundred families. They also built a brick rectory, perhaps hoping this would entice a priest to relocate there. Unfortunately, in 1892 the church, along with a one-room schoolhouse they had built, was completely destroyed by fire, but within a year the determined settlers had constructed yet another church and, a year later, finally were assigned a priest.[118]

By 1865, the settlers in the Brussels area constructed the first Catholic Church for that township, naming it St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church. The timing is somewhat surprising considering the families of the area were still recovering from the effects of the Civil War and were working to re-establish their farms. This church, too, was destroyed in the great fire of 1871. When rebuilding, the congregants could not agree on a site, some favoring a location to the north end of the township and others the south end. Consequently, two churches were built, St. Hubert's and St. Michael's, one in each

[117]Linda Jardin, interview with the author, January 10, 2017.
[118] Burton, 48-51.

location.[119] The Brussels church was closely followed in 1866 by St. John the Baptist Catholic Church constructed in Gardner Township, again on donated land.[120] The cemetery of St. John's has a particularly interesting history. John Joseph Robin donated the land for a cemetery and a priest traveled there for the purpose of consecrating the the thirty by sixty foot plot.[121] However, when the first burial was attempted, the parishioners discovered that under only a few inches of top soil was solid rock. Feeling that they should use the site for the intended purpose, the settlers, after completing their day's work on their farms, dragged rocks from the surrounding fields and enclosed the area to a height of four feet. They then hauled enough dirt to fill the enclosure and used this "cemetery" until 1895 when the church burned for the second time and was not rebuilt.[122]

Kewaunee County constructed a Catholic church just north of Duval, located on the county line. Father Deams, so instrumental in the Walloon's settlement in the area, organized the group and in 1860 one of his parishioners, Alexander Evard, donated the land. However, most likely due to the outbreak of the Civil War, the parishioners did not build the church, named St. Francis de Paul, until 1869.[123]

Nothing is known of the religious activities of the original Protestant immigrants during their first years in Wisconsin, other than that the Philippe Hannon family returned to Catholicism. However, with the arrival of Xavier Martin in 1857, the Protestants seemed to regroup and by 1861 founded the Robinsonville Presbyterian Church with twenty-one

[119]Tlachac, *History of Belgian Settlements,* 25.
[120] John Kahlert, *Pioneer Cemeteries: Door County Wisconsin* (Bailey's Harbor, Wisconsin: Meadow Lane Publishers, 1981), 77.
[121]Burton, 45.
[122] Burton, 45-46, Kahlert, 77-78.
[123]Ibid., 87.

founding members, all of whom, with one exception, were from the Grez-Doiceau area in Wallonia.[124] Although Walloon was the common language, the services were conducted in classical French until 1913, with ministers supplied by the French Presbyterian Theological Seminaries of Canada.[125] There is no record of any conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. In his writings regarding the relationship between Catholics and the much smaller Protestant worshippers, Martin cites incidents of Protestants contributing material and labor towards the building of a Catholic church, and vice versa.[126] Apparently the ethnic bond uniting these immigrants was more important than differing spiritual beliefs.

Belgians have the reputation of being very social people and, as with most immigrant groups, their social structure evolved around their church community. But these immigrant Walloons were unusual in the extent to which they were dedicated to the social aspect of being part of a church community. Social contact was such an integral part of their Sunday fellowship that as churches were built, saloons appeared nearby—usually right next to the church. The immigrants enjoyed being part of a group through gossiping, exchanging news, and sharing a joke, but did not believe the church to be an appropriate place in which to do so. Consequently, after the service, the congregation, often including the priest, would go next door to the saloon for an extended visit. Sometimes a separate room would be provided for the women and children, and in other situations the entire

[124]deSmet, 40-41.
[125] Judith Carlsen, "Amazing Grace,"*Voyageur: Historical Review of Brown County and Northeast Wisconsin* 28, issue 1 (Summer/Fall, 2011): 41-42.
[126] X. Martin, 384.

group socialized together.[127] This weekly religious sharing and socializing was an important element for maintaining the interconnectedness of the community.

A unique religious custom the Belgians brought with them was the construction of small family roadside chapels, or prayer-houses, located on their farms but somewhat removed from their homes (Figure 2.1). Just as in Belgium, as the families were able, they constructed the windowless frame chapels, usually nine feet in length and seven and a half feet in width, with an altar against the wall opposite the door. Easily mistaken for tool sheds were it not for the cross above the door or at the roof peak, these chapels were traditionally left unlocked and open for anyone's use at any time. The chapels were built adjacent to section line roads for easy access and were considered community property. In Belgium they were constructed of brick or stone but in the Belgian settlement area, where wood was so readily available, they usually used wood.[128]

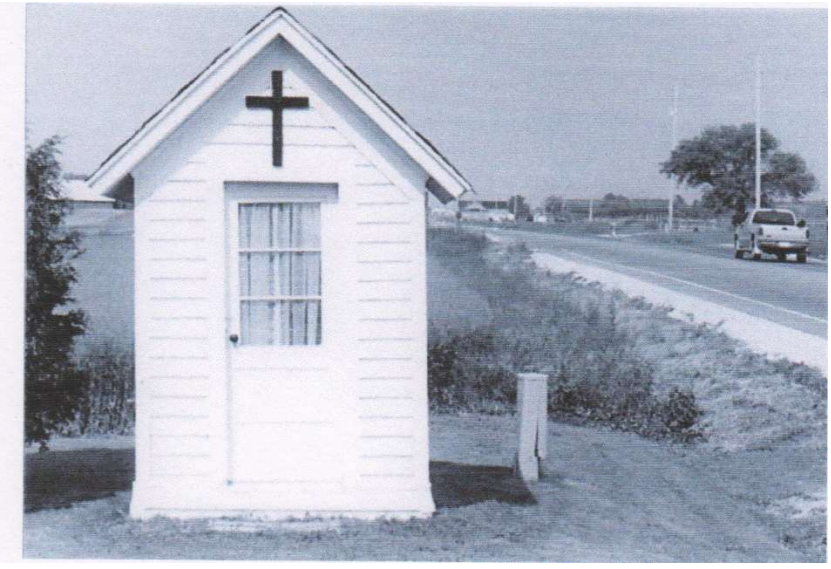

Figure 2.1

Walloon Roadside Chapel
Source: Paul and Francis Burtons, *Door County Stories and Stories from the Belgium Settlement.*

[127]H.R.Holand, *History of Door County: The County Beautiful, Volume I* (Ellison Bay, Wisconsin: Wm. Caxton Ltd., 1993), 418.
[128] William G. Laatsch and Charles F. Calkings, "Belgian Roadside Chapels of the Door Peninsula," *Voyageur* 20, no.1 (2003): 49-52.

Figure 2.2 Typical Chapel interior

Another religious custom still evident today is the Sacramental Box or Sick Call Set found hanging on the walls of many Belgian homes. These ornamental boxes contain everything that would be necessary to conduct the Last Rites. These are quite beautiful and are handed down from generation to generation within families.

Figure 2.3

Sacramental Box as found in many Belgium homes.

Figure 2.4

Sacramental Box open showing necessary items to administer Last Rights.

By the fall of 1858 conditions had improved to the extent that the Belgians, who brought their love for their traditional Walloon celebrations and festivals with them, held the first Kermis in their new Settlement. This first Kermis was held in Rosiere on the third Sunday of September. This was the same day that Kermis was occurring in their home village of Rosiere in Belgium. Kermis is the biggest and most important celebration of the year for Belgians and is meant to give thanks to God for the harvest—as well as provide an occasion to have a rousing good time. Continuing established tradition, mass on Sunday morning is followed by the first dance, held in the road in front of the church. Known as the Dance of the Dust, it is recognition of the soil from which the harvest grew.[129] The music for this first Kermis was supplied by a band consisting of a cornet, slide trombone, violin, clarinet, and bass drum.[130] A day of dancing, eating, drinking, and competing in such traditional activities as climbing a greased pole, foot races, and playing the popular Belgian card game "couyon" followed. One competition that was eventually discontinued involved burying a goose so that only his head was above ground. In turn, the blindfolded contestants would attempt to decapitate the goose with a scythe. These festivities traditionally continued over three day weekends for six consecutive weeks, each weekend at a different location. By the end of each weekend even the pigs would be drunk from the stale beer the celebrants would give them.[131]

The custom was continued in the settlement area as it developed and clusters of settlers were able to host the three day celebration.[132] As churches were built, each

[129] Fred L. Holmes, *Old World Wisconsin: Around Europe in the Badger State* (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: E.M. Hale and Company, 1944) 164.
[130]Tlachac, 35.
[131]*Green Bay Press Gazette,* December 3, 1961.
[132]Holand, *History of Door County,* 206.

parish would take its turn hosting the entire Belgian community for three days of eating, drinking, and merry making. Into the twentieth century, the settlers, both men and women, still wore the handmade, wooden shoes typical of their homeland. However, for such an important occasion as Kermis, they dug out their leather shoes, as well as the wide trousers and loose fitting saurot or blouse of the men and the tight bodice and voluminous skirts, topped with snow white aprons, of the women, all part of their traditional dress.[133] The fact that for so many generations they continued the tradition, cooperating and agreeing to the set schedule for hosting the event underlines the prevailing sense of community that continued over this three county area. Into the 1990s (almost 150 years after the first Kermis in Wisconsin) the agreed upon schedule called for the Kermises to begin on the fourth weekend of August at Lincoln. The first weekend of September Kermises were hosted by Brussels and Namur and the second weekend of September by Rosiere and Champion. The next weekend the celebrating was at Dykesville and Walhain and then moved on to Tonet and Gardner for the fourth weekend of September. October found the celebrating Belgians in Duval and Thiry Daemes on the first weekend and in Misere and Casco on the second weekend. This represents a one weekend addition to the original six weeks of Kermis.[134]

Other holidays important to the Walloons in Wisconsin included St. Nicholas Day on December 6, which was similar to present-day Christmas, with St. Nicholas bringing gifts, and especially peanuts, for good children; Christmas, which was observed by attending church services and visiting friends or family; New Year's Day, when families went to church and then spent the day eating traditional foods such as the gallette, a traditional

[133] Lee Metzner, "The Belgian Kermis," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* June, 1931, 347.
[134]Margaret Draize, *Belgian American Heritage Customs and Cookbook* (Margaret Draize, 1996), 73.

New Year's Day cookie. Rogation Day, occurred in May and involved petitions for the blessings of abundant crops. Just as in Wallonia, the first Sunday of Lent was observed by the lighting of a huge bonfire meant to ward off the Devil and remind the Belgians that Lent, a time of personal sacrifice, had begun; Easter, again involving churchgoing and family visits as well as a search in the garden for colored eggs and sweets, a custom brought from Wallonia; and Assumption Day, observed on August 15, involving specific church rituals.

A strictly secular tradition brought from Belgium and continued by the Walloons in Wisconsin was the planting of the Maypole. On May 1 the men would strip a felled balsam tree of all its branches except for a small tuft at the tip, which would be embellished with ribbons. Soon after the spring elections, they would march to the home of the newly elected town official, set the tree up in front of his house, and after jokes and speeches, the honored man would furnish beer, drinks, and food for the crowd. The Maypole was a symbol of authority and represented a pledge of allegiance, not only to the laws of the state but to a custom that required even family disputes to be submitted to these elected officials.[135] Additionally, the Walloons made every wedding, christening, family anniversary, and even funeral an occasion to be together and socialize. These gatherings not only helped ease homesickness but also maintained cohesion among the Belgian settlers.

Need for Roads

[135]"Belgians—Social Life and Customs," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay. Also see Holmes, 151-152.

One of the Belgian settlers' most pressing needs continued to be roads. Although the first immigrants did not have the means to purchase horses or even oxen to pull harvested wheat to a grist mill, within a few years conditions improved enough that there were some who were able to acquire livestock. However, there were no roads to support wheeled vehicles. What roads that did exist were hastily constructed by the settlers and were corduroy roads, meaning they were composed of logs laid horizontally across the path cut through the forest. Soil was then spread over the logs in an attempt to create a smoother surface. These roads were little more than twenty feet wide and, full of stumps, rocks, and waterholes, were in terrible condition most of the time.[136] Even trails were scarce and made travel by foot difficult and dangerous. There were numerous reports of people lost, or nearly lost, due to wandering in the forest or being pursued by wild animals when walking to a destination. Typical was the ordeal of a man who lost his way when attempting to walk from Green Bay to Sturgeon Bay. After three days of wandering in the wilderness, and suffering through a snow storm, he stumbled into the Belgian settlement approximately twenty miles northeast of Green Bay and was revived. The newspaper account optimistically predicts, "This is probably the last of these harrowing cases we shall hear of on the Peninsula as the wagon road between the two Bays is now being prosecuted with vigor and will certainly be finished through by the first week in January."[137]

Apparently the road project did not go forward, as a year later the newspaper was still advocating for a road through the Belgian settlement. In an article reprinted in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, the Green Bay paper acknowledged that most citizens regarded the region as unbroken wilderness and were unaware of the population cultivating farms

[136]Holand, 414.
[137] "Narrow Escape," *Door County Advocate*, January 17, 1856.

throughout the area. Making a case for the potential advantages for Green Bay, another article appeared in 1858 stating that a good plank or gravel road would be more of a positive benefit to the city than any other project of similar cost. Acknowledging that the settlement arose so quietly that many were unaware of the thousands of Belgians who were successfully farming the area, the author makes the point that by the time a road could be built, there would certainly be an "important surplus" to be brought to markets in Green Bay.[138] Later in 1858, the Green Bay paper again spoke well of the value of the products being produced by the settlers of northeast Brown County and Kewaunee County. Bemoaning the fact that there was still barely a passable road in the entire district, the paper warned that Green Bay would lose out if something was not done to bring the Belgians' trade in their direction.[139]

The state had assigned responsibility for laying out, constructing, and maintaining roads to the counties. The townships in the county levied road taxes on the local taxpayers who were given the option of paying the tax, or working on road construction to satisfy their obligation. The result was an extremely unsuccessful system. The great majority of farmers chose to work on the roads rather than come up with cash to pay their road tax. However, the "work day" became a kind of annual picnic. Farmers began looking forward to spending the day with friends and neighbors; their wives prepared a picnic style meal of their best recipes and everyone enjoyed the day. Very little was accomplished toward road building.[140]

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[138] "Something Which Is Needed," *Green Bay Advocate,* March 4, 1858.
[139] "A Turnpike Road Wanted," *Green Bay Advocate,* November 18, 1858.
[165] M. Marvin Lotz, *Discovering Door County's Past: A Comprehensive History of the Door Peninsula, Volume I, From the Beginning to 1930* (Fish Creek, Wisconsin: Holly House Press, 1994) 279.

In addition to inaccessibility to markets, the lack of roads caused the Belgians great difficulty when getting their wheat ground into flour, once it had been harvested. Exacerbating the hardship created by the lack of roads was the fact that the nearest gristmills in the area were in Wolf River (now Algoma) and Bay Settlement. The responsibility of getting the wheat to the mill fell to the women who would carry a bushel at a time through the woods to the mill several miles away, and then walk home carrying the flour. One Belgian woman recalled that as a young woman she walked from her settlement in what is now Lincoln, Kewaunee County, to the mill at De Pere, Brown County, thirty miles away, carrying a sixty pound sack of wheat. She had to leave before dawn, usually by three o'clock, and would not reach the mill until six that evening. After spending the night sleeping on sacks, she walked back home, this time carrying the flour.[141]

As was the established pattern, relief, when it came, originated from within the Belgian community itself. In the early 1850s, Freeman Gardner, originally born in New York, settled in Door County and built a saw mill in Little Sturgeon, on the northern end of the Belgian settlement area which in a few years became a commercial and industrial center.[142] This was soon followed by a gristmill, the first in Door County. At harvest time as many as forty or fifty customers at a time would come through the woods from the farms of southern Door County and wait their turn to have their harvested wheat ground into flour. Gardner next built a rooming house where the farmers could cook and sleep. Before long he began stocking supplies the Belgians needed and for which he was willing

[141] Lillian Krueger, "Motherhood on the Wisconsin Frontier."*The Wisconsin Magazine of History,* December, 1945, 157.
[142] Jean Ducat, Thierry Eggerickx, Dominique Tombeur. *The Walloons in the U.S.A.* (Biesme-Mettet, Belgium: Belgian American Heritage, 1988)

to barter, thus creating a market for the farmers' produce. Not only was this a great convenience for the rural community, but Gardner was able to provide employment for the immigrants during the winter months, saving them the much longer walk to Green Bay or Milwaukee. Gardner's establishment became the largest business in the county.[143] To accommodate his growing businesses, Gardner needed a road through the Belgian community, from Sturgeon Bay to Bay Settlement, which would enable him to transport some of his products overland, as an alternative to shipping by water. With Gardner's motivation to supply the momentum, along with some funds that were now being supplied by the county, the much sought after road was completed. However, it closely followed the Green Bay shoreline, skirting the edge of the settlement area. Since the Walloon immigrants had located their farms inland, the road did not directly impact their lives. The road was occasionally useful to the Walloons for getting products to the Green Bay and Sturgeon Bay markets, and for bringing in supplies, but there remained a lack of roads within the Walloon's settlement area, thus continuing their isolation from other immigrant groups. Not only did the Walloons have little reason to leave their settlement area, the lack of interior roads made it difficult to do so. At the same time, the continued isolation was an important element of their group cohesiveness and success in maintaining their ethnicity.

[143]Tlachac, 19-21.

Chapter 2

New Challenges

Successfully accomplishing migration across the Atlantic Ocean and an additional thousand miles across North America, finding land to buy, clear, and eventually to farm, and creating a substantial Walloon community in the wilderness, did not always go smoothly for the Belgian migrants and they were forced by circumstances to cope with set-backs over which they had no control. However, through all that was ahead nothing threatened their close ethnic cohesion as they faced the challenges together.

Walloon emigration to Wisconsin reached its peak in the year 1857 and dropped dramatically in 1858. By then news of the cholera epidemic in Wisconsin had circulated throughout Belgium. Also news of the financial crisis in America, and the resulting difficulty in finding work, provided further discouragement to continued migration. Finally, many of the families emigrating in 1856 and 1857 did not have the financial resources enjoyed by the earlier groups and consequently had a much harder time surviving the first year or two. Those migrants who arrived with enough money to support themselves and their families for two years could put all their efforts into clearing a portion of their land the first year and by the second year enjoy a small harvest. However, those who arrived with no resources had to work at whatever they could find, often at low wages, in order to provide for themselves and their families. As a result, in 1855 hundreds of families suffered from a real lack of food and shelter.[1] When word of their situation reached Green

[1]Holand, *History of Door County,* 413-414.

Bay, donations of food and other supplies were assembled and volunteers transported the goods north to the Belgians' location.

The report upon their return was worse than anticipated. The Belgians' houses were made of logs and brush and wholly unfit for the Wisconsin winter. There were multiple reports of frozen hands or feet, particularly of the men. In addition to the possibility of freezing, the migrants were facing starvation.[2] When news of their hardships and struggles reached their home villages in Wallonia, emigration all but stopped.

By 1861, the lives of the Walloon immigrants had begun to stabilize and their conditions began improving. Most had cleared enough of their land to be able to raise sufficient crops to meet their own needs as well as a small surplus for market. Some were able to buy oxen and a few of the more successful settlers bought a horse or two. Schools as well as businesses, usually incorporating a general store and tavern, appeared in most settlements.[3] Numerous saw mills were constructed around the settlement area, providing both work for the men in the winter months and a place where they could haul felled trees and realize a profit from the hard work of clearing their land. Philippe Hannon even constructed a small brewery in which he made Belgian beer.[4] However, the next decade would bring significant setbacks for the Walloon community.

Effects of Civil War

The conflict over the continuation and spread of slavery in North America had been building since before the formal formation of the United States, and continued after the

[2] *Green Bay Advocate,* January 17, 1856.
[3] X. Martin, 386.
[4] X. Martin, 387.

ratification of the Constitution. This conflict came to a head with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. By the time of his inauguration in February 1861, seven states had succeeded to form the Confederated States of America—these were South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. The United States had a military base, Fort Sumter technically a part of South Carolina, and when Lincoln attempted to supply it in April, Southern forces fired on it, forcing its surrender. This was followed by the succession of Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

With the outbreak of armed hostilities between the Union and the Confederacy, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for an enlistment period of three months, to put down the rebellion. Wisconsin's quota was one regiment of 743 men, which was filled with volunteers. However, the fighting continued and in 1862 the President called for an additional 300,000 volunteers to serve for nine months unless discharged sooner. Wisconsin's Governor Edward Salomon was notified that if Wisconsin's quota of 11,904 volunteers was not voluntarily met by August 15, the balance should be attained using a draft.[5] The Governor passed the responsibility of filling the quota to the sheriffs of the various counties. Similar to other foreign-born groups in Wisconsin, the Belgians had not yet developed feelings of being "American." However, in order to buy land they had each signed a "Declaration of Intention" which stated that they intended to become American citizens. With the passing of the Civil War Law on Conscription in 1862, this Declaration of Intention made a person eligible to be drafted into the Union Army.

[5] David Ellison, "The Civil War Draft in Plover and Stevens Point: A Study in Efforts, Attitudes, Frustrations, and Results," Portage County Historical Society of Wisconsin, http://pchswi.org/archives/misc/cwdraft.html [accessed February 6, 2013].

An active recruiting campaign was carried out by the *Green Bay Advocate*, with every issue throughout the month of August carrying articles urging men to volunteer. One issue even insinuated that if there were not enough volunteers to put down the rebellion soon, "the Holy Alliance of European tyrannies" would intervene and overthrow the federal government. Americans would be robbed of their "liberties and cast back into the vassal condition of the down trodden people of Europe."[6] Several issues stated federal bounties of $100 and state bounties of $50 would be paid to those who voluntarily enlisted, plus $13 a month, and assistance for their families while they were away. If an individual were drafted, his monthly pay would drop to $11 and there would be no bounties.[7]

Despite these enticements to enlist, the state's quota was not reached by volunteer enlistment, and officials planned to begin the draft November 10, 1862. The Walloons of Brown County were bitterly opposed to leaving their families and developing farms, and refused to comply. These men had migrated to Wisconsin to become farmers, not soldiers. On November 5, what became known as the "Belgian Riot" occurred. Several hundred men, armed with farm implements, guns, and clubs, marched into Green Bay and to the home of Senator Timothy O. Howe, Draft Commissioner for Brown County. Howe attempted to speak to the crowd but could not make himself understood, speaking only English. However, when French speaking citizens were found to address the crowd and explain the war and the necessity of the draft, the "rioters" seemed satisfied and dispersed without violence.[8] Two subsequent issues of the Green Bay newspaper defended the Belgians, arguing that "to a man they are Republican."[9]

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[6] "Do Not Wait To Be Drafted," *Green Bay Advocate*, August 2, 1862.
[7] "The Difference Between Volunteering and Drafting," *Green Bay Advocate*, August 9, 1862
[8] "A Wee Bit of Excitement," *Green Bay Advocate*, November 20, 1862.
[9] "The Draft in Door and Neighboring Counties," *Green Bay Advocate*, November 27, 1862.

A similar incident occurred in Kewaunee when the Walloon farmers learned of the draft. Again, language and the lack of understanding as to why they were expected to leave their families and go to fight contributed to their anger. Armed with tree branches and pitchforks they marched to Kewaunee in search of the county's Draft Commissioner, W. S. Finley, who, learning of their approach, boarded the steamer *Sunbeam* which was about to cast off. The mob marched around Kewaunee until they found a fellow Belgian who explained the conflict to them. Mrs. Finley served the men crackers and cheese and persuaded other businesses to feed the men as well. Eventually the "mob" calmed down and went home without further incident. Meanwhile, Finley sailed to Milwaukee and, with exaggerated accounts of the Belgian threat, convinced military authorities there that he was in danger if he should return to Kewaunee. Consequently, Captain Cunningham and Company A escorted him back to Kewaunee and marched through the now empty streets.[10]

Perhaps as a way to help defuse additional trouble, John B. A. Masse, head of the Belgian Consulate in Green Bay, published notice that any man who was drafted, but claimed to be a Belgian subject, should contact the Consulate for assistance.[11] Presumably M. Masse would help the draftee who had not signed a Declaration of Intent, prove his Belgian citizenship and thus avoid having to serve in the war.

One group of twenty-six men, all immigrants from the village of Grez, Belgium who had settled in Brown, Kewaunee, and Door Counties, served in the military and of those, only two were drafted—the others volunteered. One of these two draftees was Philippe

[10] Arletta Bertrand, "Belgians Riot in Kewaunee," *Historical Notes,* Kewaunee County Historical Society 26, 2 (April 2014): 1-2.
[11] Masse, "Consulate of Belgium," *Green Bay Advocate*, November 26, 1862.

Hannon of the original 1853 group who, by the time of his induction in 1864, was 54 years old! Originally from the same village in Brabant, the men who volunteered undoubtedly knew each other and, with several having the same enlistment date, one can conclude that, after discussing the situation, they made the decision to enlist together. Although the possibility of eventually being drafted must have given an air of inevitability to serving, the generous compensation surely was an incentive for many to volunteer, even if they did not consider themselves to be Americans.

A high percentage of the immigrants settling in the counties of Door, Kewaunee, and Brown Counties were Walloons resulting in the appearance of an unfair proportion of the draftees being Belgian. For example, in the town of Brussels, forty men were drafted—thirty-six of whom were Belgian. In Door County well over half of the draftees were Belgian.[12] This was true for the entire peninsula. Almost every Belgian family had a husband, a father, or a son serving in the Union Army. The largest number of Belgians serving together in a single regiment was the ninety-five drafted in November 1862. These men formed the 34th Wisconsin Infantry and came from Brown, Door, and Kewaunee Counties. Beside the Belgians, the 34th Infantry was composed of men from Germany and Luxembourg and served in Tennessee and Kentucky.[13]

Once drafted, a man had the option of paying $300 commutation fee to avoid active duty. However, the Belgian migrants, most in the country only a few years, were struggling to establish their farms and keep their families alive and seldom were able to raise that amount. Enterprising businessmen devised a plan to profit from this situation. For the fee of $100 they issued draft insurance. If a man were drafted, he would go to

[12]Mertens, *The Second Battle,* 9-11.
[13] Ibid., 59-60.

the insurer, cash in his policy, and collect $300 which he would then use to pay his commutation fee.[14] Some Belgian settlers were able to take advantage of this ploy and avoid serving.

By the end of the war, Belgians serving together in the 17th Wisconsin Infantry since 1861 had seen action together at Vicksburg and Atlanta, and as participants in General Sherman's march to the sea. Very few of them spoke any English. Other Belgians served under General Grant in the Army of the Potomac. For re-enlisting, they were to receive a bonus of $402 each, but most of the Walloon soldiers did not receive the bonus. To a large extent this was due to company clerks, whose job it was to record company musters, but who did not speak the language of the Belgian soldiers. Consequently, many names were misspelled. For example, Louis Pues appears on the muster as Lewis Penes, Francois Boucher as Frank Busha, Michael Dalebroux as Michael Dellahe, and Dieudonne' Hansis as Dim Donne Ausis. Further complicating matters was the fact that most of the Belgian soldiers were illiterate and therefore unaware of the error.[15]

The development of the Belgian settlement suffered a considerable setback due to the departure of the most capable workers—most of the men being in camp or at the front.[16] Their wives and children, sisters, and sometimes mothers were left to cultivate the fields and tend the livestock as best they could in order to support themselves and keep the farms going. During those years it was common to see Belgian women driving the oxen to plow or harvest a field.[17] A report in the *Green Bay Advocate* reprinted in a Milwaukee paper stated, "The sturdy German and Belgian women plough and sow and reap with all

[14]Ibid., 18.
[15] Ibid., 120, 139-140.
[16] de Smet, 34.
[17] X. Martin, 388.

the skill and activity of the men, and we believe are fully their equals in strength."[18] Unfortunately, little time was then available to manufacture the shingles which had become an important source of income for the Walloon families before the men left for duty.

With the return of the men at the end of the conflict, the Belgians resumed their activities and over the next six years enjoyed a period of prosperity not previously achieved. Eight new sawmills were constructed in the settlement area, as well as two grist mills.[19] In 1870 John Masse, the Belgian consul in Green Bay, reported there were 20,000,000 hand-made shingles marketed in Green Bay the previous year.[20] The market for shingles continued to grow and with the advent of machine made shingles, production increased dramatically. Of the eight new sawmills operating in the Belgian settlement area after the Civil War, five produced machine made shingles.[21] In 1868, Freeman Gardner added a lathe and machine made shingle mill with the capacity to produce eighty thousand shingles a day.[22] By 1870, Brown County was regarded as the leading shingle producer of the world, as the number marketed in Green Bay that year reached 500,000,000.[23] Not only were the Belgians able to profit from the sale of their trees, but those who were seeking wage labor found work at the sawmills. The era of hand-made shingles was ending but the Belgians were still able to benefit financially from the shingle market without going far from home. By 1870, most farmers had cleared ten to twenty

[18] "Wisconsin Women in the Field," *The Daily Milwaukee News*, Friday, June 10, 1864.
[19] X. Martin, 388.
[20] Masse, 3.
[21] X. Martin, 388. Flora Jacobs, "Gardner Town History Reviewed by Wm. Gilson," *Door County News,* November 21, 1961.
[22] Flora Jacobs, "Gardner Town History Reviewed by Wm. Gilson," *Door County News* November 21, 1961.
[23] Deborah Beaumont Martin, *The History of Brown County Wisconsin: Past and Present* (Chicago: The S. J. Clark Publishing Company, 1913), 191.

acres for crops. The future appeared bright and many thought the worst years were behind them. However, 1871 brought a disaster far more profound than the Civil War.

The Great Fire of 1871

The summer of 1871 was unusually dry, with no rainfall from July 5 until mid-October. Swamps, streams, and wells dried up. By September, people were becoming uneasy as forest fires sprang up throughout northeastern Wisconsin. Corduroy roads and fences burned and the Belgian immigrants, having built their log cabins with wood shingle roofs, had to be constantly vigilant against falling cinders. The city of Green Bay was threatened by fires in the surrounding forests and for several days prior to the "great fire" inhabitants suffered from burning eyes and breathing became painful due to the smoke and ash filling the air.[24] Numerous buildings caught fire and only the combined efforts of local inhabitants prevented total loss. Ships sailing the Bay had to use compasses to navigate and frequently blow their fog horns as the air was so thick with smoke.[25]

On October 8, a southerly wind that had prevailed that afternoon reached gale force in the evening and, on the east side of the waters of Green Bay, drove the fire over most of Brown County, Kewaunee County, and into southern Door County.[26] So rapidly did the fire travel that witnesses referred to it as a "fire tornado," with many of the survivors reporting that balls of fire were blown across the tops of the trees which then enveloped everything.

[24] "The Great Fire," *Green Bay Advocate,* October 12, 1871.
[25] D. Martin, 3.
[26] *Green Bay Advocate,* October 12, 1871.

Sometimes referred to by meteorologists as the sirocco wind, this continental scale weather phenomena is caused by barometric pressure differences and, once started, blows with great force, sometimes attaining hurricane power.

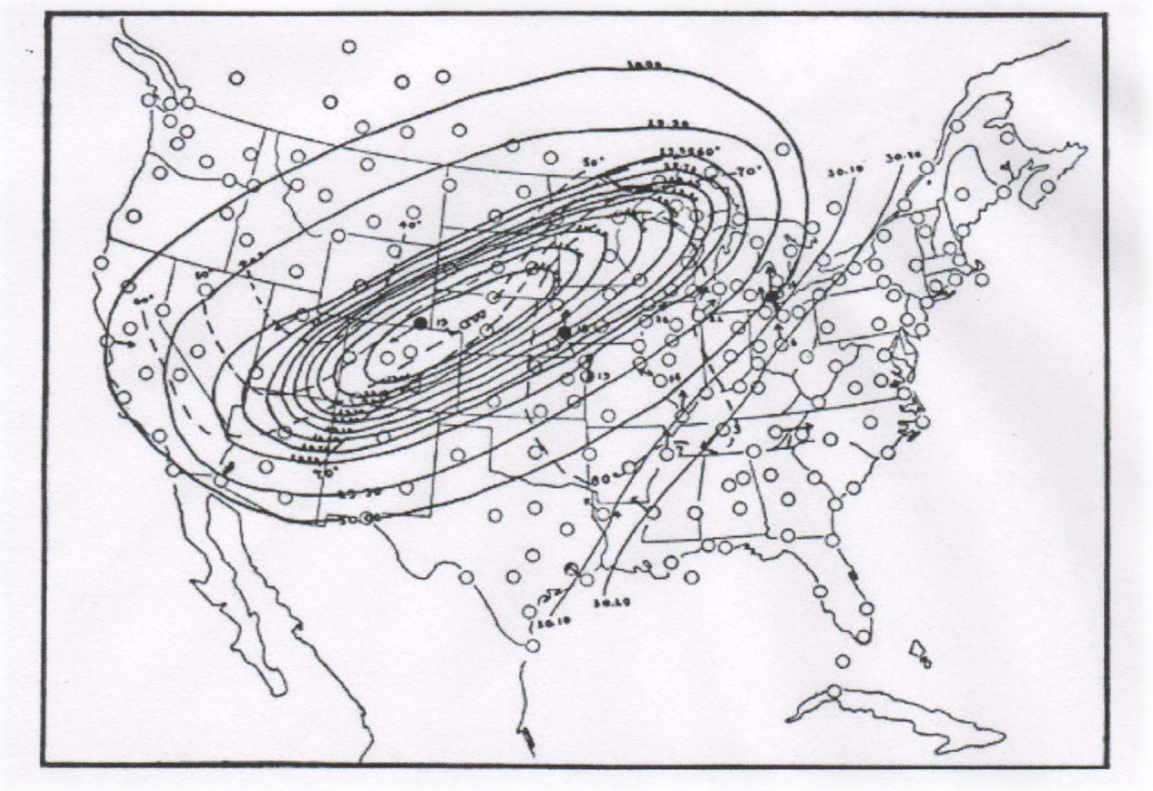

Figure 3.1

US Weather Bureau Map – Showing cyclonic storm that prevailed on the day of Chicago and Peshtigo Fires Made by US Army Signal Service observers at 5:30pm central time October 8th of 1871

A fire burning under these conditions travels with frightening speed, and the intense heat produces a strong upward current which carries burning cinders great distances resulting in a “crown fire” that, unlike a common ground fire, travels rapidly across the

tree tops.[27] In a matter of two hours the fire had burned a swath through the Belgian settlement area six to twelve miles wide and sixty miles long (Figure 3.2), destroying almost everything in its path.

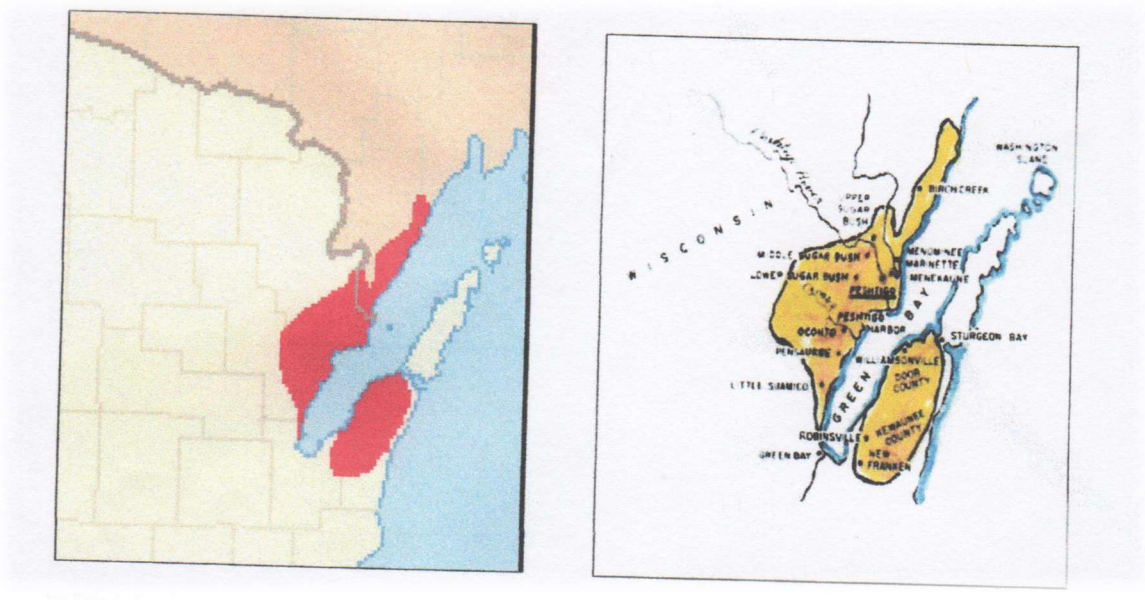

Figure 3.2

Area destroyed by forest fire October 8, 1871.

The hardest hit was the village of Williamsonville, a few miles south of Little Sturgeon. The settlement had centered around the sawmill run by the Belgian brothers Tom and Fred Williamson and included a store, boarding house, large barn, blacksmith shop, eight homes, and various outbuildings. There were seventy-seven residents, all either members of the Williamson family or mill employees. Aware of the potential for fire, they

[27] Joseph Schafer, "Great Fires of Seventy-one," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, September, 1927, 108.

had earlier attempted to protect their settlement by carefully burning out the woods to the distance of a mile around their clearing.[28] Unfortunately, with the force of intense wind driving them, crown fires jumped much greater distances, especially when occurring at the time of a drought. The entire village was destroyed and of the seventy-seven residents, sixty died.[29] In addition to the human loss, sixteen out of seventeen horses, five out of six oxen, and forty swine burned to death. A few miles southeast was Brussels, where twenty-two lost their lives and every settler lost most, if not all, of his belongings.[30] Just west of Brussels was located the settlement of Forestville. Of the six families who had been living there, only one escaped. All the buildings were burned and thirty-four bodies were found and buried.[31] In Door County alone, two mills, two boarding houses, three churches, six schoolhouses, three stores, two saloons, one hundred forty-eight homes, and an equal number of barns were totally consumed.[32]

In Brown County, the Belgian settlements of Casco, Humbolt, Robinsonville, Harrison's Pier, Thiry Daems, and Dycksville were all but destroyed. The northeastern section of Green Bay Township was almost entirely Belgian, and it was also badly burned. In just the towns of Green Bay, Casco, and Red River, the fire resulted in 1,128 people becoming destitute.

New Frankin, Kewaunee County, on the southern end of the Belgian settlement, was populated by a mixture of Belgians and Germans. It was a prosperous village which contained a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, the district school and a post office. After the

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[28] Ibid., 108.
[29] Deana C, Hipke, *The Great Peshtigo Fire of 1871,* http://peshtigofire.info/ (accessed February 2, 2013).
[30] "Fire of Fifty Years Ago," *Sturgeon Bay Advocate,* October 12, 1871.
[31] "Another Hamlet Burned—Great Loss of Life!" *Green Bay Advocate*, October 12, 1871.
[32] Holand, 421.

fire passed through the area, nothing remained of the village and the twenty families who had lived there were homeless.[33] Any livestock in the area not burned to death by the fire had to be destroyed as there was no feed, or even grass for them. The next day, October 9, a drenching rain fell for several hours.

Green Bay's mayor Alonzo Kimball organized committees of relief for each ward and established relief depots.[34] The *Green Bay Advocate* stated they had from "the most reliable sources" that not less than 3,000 men, women, and children were rendered entirely destitute, and went on to point out that, although immediate needs had been met by generous donations, the survivors of the disaster had to be provided for during the upcoming winter.[35] As the news spread, donations came not only from all over America but from friends and relatives in Belgium, after letters from settlers carried the news to their former villages. One letter dated October 15, 1871 from Louis Lamarre lists the names of those victims originally from Grez. He goes on to describe the village of Rosiere which had been located near his farm and made up of one hundred twenty houses, only three of which survived the fire.[36]

Xavier Martin was actively involved with the relief effort and supervised the distribution of provisions sent by tug to Dycksville to be distributed to Red River and Robinsonville.[37] However, any survivors who were any distance inland were very difficult to reach. One volunteer told of starting out with a group from Sturgeon Bay heading south with the plan of reaching Williamsonville. They were bringing a wagon load of provisions, clothing, and

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[33] Jarstad, 429.
[34] D. Martin, 231.
[35] "An Appeal," *Green Bay Advocate*, October 19, 1871.
[36] "Lettres D'Amerique 1855-1909," Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[37] X. Martin, 390.

tools but after a full day of attempting to get through, had only progressed four miles as the roads, not easy to travel in the best conditions, were now blocked by burned and still burning timber. With six miles still to go, the men loaded themselves with all they could carry and the wagon, with most of the supplies, turned back.[38]

The fire burned more than 280,000 acres, consisting of areas in Door, Kewaunee, and Brown Counties and additional counties on the western side of the waters of Green Bay. There were 1,152 people known dead, 350 believed dead, 1,500 seriously injured, and more than 3,000 made homeless.[39]

Often the stress of experiencing a shared disaster brings people together, and this was the case with the Belgian settlers. Showing almost unbelievable resolve and resilience, the Walloons quickly began the process of rebuilding their communities. Dealing with the grief of losing family members and close friends, as well as all the material goods they had worked so long and hard to accumulate, and with many carrying lifelong emotional or physical scars, they faced the work ahead. A few families chose to move into Green Bay, unable to undertake the work of rebuilding their farms, but nowhere was there any indication of a desire to give up and return to Belgium. As thousands of acres of timberland had been destroyed, the lumber and shingle mills were not rebuilt, and the Belgians lost an important source of revenue as the lumber companies moved their operations west of Green Bay. The loss of the maple trees also meant the end of maple syrup and maple sugar revenues. However, these resourceful settlers, perhaps remembering why they had originally immigrated to northeast Wisconsin, turned their

[38] Holland, 421.
[39] *Dictionary of Wisconsin History, "Peshtigo Fire,"* Wisconsin Historical Society, http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=451&search_type_id=3&term_type_text=Things&letter=P [accessed March 1, 2013].

entire attention to the business of agriculture. Of the seventy-nine Belgian head of household respondents to the 1870 Census for the Township of Brussels, all but four stated their occupation to be farmer. There was one blacksmith and three men who listed their occupation as laborer.[40] Most likely the latter three were farm laborers. After 1871, growing their crops, raising livestock, marketing wool, and producing cheese and butter became the Walloons' primary enterprises.[41]

Recovery

They first addressed the challenge of constructing new houses, barns, churches and schools, and enlarging their farms.[42] Finding that some timber from burned houses and barns could be salvaged and some trees which appeared burned beyond usefulness actually contained undamaged centers, the building progressed at surprising speed with the wood cutting being done over the winter so as to be ready for construction in the spring. Contributions continued to come in from many sources. The *Green Bay Weekly Gazette* announced "A fund of $4,500 was contributed in New York for the relief of Belgian sufferers by fire, is now becoming available, and something over $3,000 will be paid out during March."[43] These contributions were disbursed by the office of the Belgian Consul in Green Bay. The King of Belgium, King Leopold II, contributed $5,000 for the relief of his former subjects.[44] A few months later, in June, it was announced that an additional $1,000 had been contributed in Belgium and the chairman of the Relief Committee, who

[40] 1870 Federal Census Door County, Brussels Township, Brown County Library, Green Bay, Wisconsin.
[41] X. Martin, 392.
[42] Ibid., 391.
[43] *Green Bay Weekly Gazette,* March 2, 1872.
[44] John Henry Mertens, *The Second Battle, A Story of Our Belgian Ancestors in the American Civil War, 1861-1865* (John H. Mertens: 1987), 125.

had received the money, was awaiting instructions from the Belgian Ambassador in Washington as to how the funds were to be disbursed.[45] This represents a sizable amount and shows the close ties that still existed between the immigrants and their home country. In addition, relief organizations in Belgium solicited for supplies which could be sent to the burnt-out settlers and shiploads of clothing, bedding, and simple farm tools were to go to America to be distributed among the fire victims.[46]

It was at this time that the Walloons abandoned the log construction methods used before the fire, and instead returned to another ethnic tradition brought from Belgium whereby houses were constructed from brick or stone.[47] Whether from a longing to recreate the appearance of their home villages or because they were now mindful of the vulnerability of wood, the new homes built by the Walloons were veneered with red brick and the architecture reproduced the style prevalent in Belgium. The houses were uniform in size, scale, detail, and floor plan and lent character and distinctiveness to the area. Almost universal is the "bulls-eye" window under the roof peak of the front gable. These decorative windows could be circular or semi-circular.[48]

There was a brickyard one mile south of Brussels where, operating at maximum capacity, the facility made bricks from red clay.[49] Other brickyards operating in Algoma, Sturgeon Bay, and Forestville flourished with a good supply of clay and a ready market. In 1898, the brickyard in Algoma produced four hundred thousand machine-made bricks, while one in Champion, producing hand-shaped bricks, turned out two hundred thousand.

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[45]*Green Bay Press-Gazette,* June 27, 1872.
[46] Math S. Tlachac, *The History of the Belgian Settlements in Door, Kewaunee and Brown Counties* (Belgian-American Club: Brussels, Wisconsin, 1976), 32.
[47] "Red Brick Homes Mark of Belgian Settlement," *Milwaukee Journal,* May 9, 1926.
[48]Laatsch and Calkins, 198-199.
[49]Tlachac, 33.

The clay throughout the area fired into an attractive red brick and the countryside was soon dotted with the traditional, red brick Belgian homes.[50]

Another structure appearing at this time and exactly replicating the ones in the homeland was the Belgian bake oven. A separate structure from the ever-present summer kitchen, the bake oven is attached to and accessed from the summer kitchen. Construction was precise and uniform—baking was done by radiant heat so the dimensions of the oven were critical. The only departure from the ones found in Belgium was that in Europe it is common for the ovens to be free standing, as they are often used communally. Due to the extremely cold winter weather and the distances between farms, this was not practical in Wisconsin.[51]

Within four years of the fire, the villagers of Brussels had recovered enough to begin work on their church. Until this time, church gatherings and the occasional mass were said in private residences. Three acres of land was donated by Alexis Franc and the work of hauling material began. As was typical throughout the Belgian area, most of the labor was furnished by the future congregation's men who, after completing a day of working on their farms, traveled to the construction site and volunteered their skills for the construction of the church. The formal opening of St. Francis took place in August, 1878, but until 1919 it was considered by the Catholic hierarchy to be a mission church, meaning it did not have a full-time priest assigned to it.[52]

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[50]Burton, 26.
[51] William G. Laatsch and Charles F. Calkis, "Belgians in Wisconsin" in *To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America*, edited by Allen G. Noble (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 198-199, 202-204.
[52] "Brussels Church Observes 50th Year," *Sturgeon Bay News*, September 20, 1928.

Since their land was now cleared, the farmers turned to increased production of wheat, oats, barley, rye, buckwheat, and other grains with which they were familiar before emigration. In particular, they planted much more wheat as that grain did well in the soil and climate conditions found in Wisconsin. By the 1880s steam-powered threshing machines made their appearance but individual farmers were not able to make this significant investment. Instead, as many as twenty farmers would work together forming "threshing rings." One entrepreneur in the group would buy the thresher and, when the grain ripened, would move the thresher from farm to farm and thresh the grain for a few cents a bushel. This required cooperation and careful timing as once the grain was ripened; the work had to be completed quickly. All members of the group would move from farm to farm with the thresher and work together to complete the job. The farm wives would prepare the noon meal for the entire crew.[53] This is one more example of the cohesive, communal environment that existed in the area. Rather than competing over who could produce the best crop, these Belgian farmers, working together, found a solution that benefited everyone.

The Walloons experimented with production of another crop reminiscent of their homeland. The growth of flax had a long history in Belgium and that country was one of the world's leading producers of linen. In 1887 a group of immigrant men organized an association, the purpose of which was the cultivation of flax and the manufacture of linen. A Mr. Bosse, one of the leaders of the group, had twenty years' experience in Belgium and was familiar with all aspects of linen production. In addition, many of the Belgian farmers were experienced in the cultivation of flax.[54] That there was a market for linen,

[53] Lotz, 264.
[54] "Flax Culture Proposed," *Green Bay Advocate*, January 27, 1887.

at least among the fifteen to twenty thousand Walloons living in Wisconsin, is evidenced by an 1864 letter sent to Belgium requesting family members to send linen.[55] Apparently the cultivation of flax in the settlement was successful. By 1929 the counties of Door, Brown and Kewaunee together reported 586 acres under flax cultivation producing 6,268 bushels of flax that year.[56]

With the availability of more cleared land for grazing and raising hay crops, the Walloons also expended more effort in the raising of livestock and particularly dairy cattle. In 1872 the Wisconsin Dairymen Association formed in Jefferson County for the purpose of improving dairy products within Wisconsin, as well as securing the best methods for shipment and sale. Because milk spoiled in a relatively short time, making the surplus milk into cheese was an obvious option. Within ten years there were a dozen cheese factories in the Belgian settlement area and with the increasing size of their herds, in another four years that number had doubled. These cheese manufacturers were producing from one thousand to two thousand pounds of cheese a week.[57] The Belgians are very sociable people and work well together. They formed cooperatives and supplied milk and rennet to the cheese factories. The typical cheese factory was built at the intersection of two roads, making it accessible for more farmers. Most farm families were still quite isolated and delivering the milk to the factory every morning was a welcomed way for the Belgian farmers to have social contact with one another on a daily basis.

[55] Letter dated February 8, 1864 from Louis Houbrecks to his brother and sister, "Jacqmot Family" Vertical File, Belgian Collection, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[56] U. S. Bureau of Census, 1929
[57] *Wisconsin French Connections*, 3.

Cheese factories became social centers. As farmers waited each morning to unload their milk, they visited and swapped stories.[58]

Pigs had been raised on a small scale before the fire, but afterwards their production increased. This could be done cheaply since during the summer and fall, the pigs were left to wander the meadows and fend for themselves, eating various plants, acorns, and roots. In the late fall, after harvesting crops, the Belgians rounded them up for slaughter. Pork was considered a staple meat for which there was always a market. The Walloons also added sheep to their inventory of livestock, again because sheep could forage in the available grasses and undergrowth, and there was no longer significant danger from wolves and other wild animals. There was a good market for mutton, and in the cold northern climate there was also a market for wool.[59] In 1898 alone, 25,000 pounds of wool were produced just in Door County.[60] In the late 1870s and 1880s these Belgian farms slowly changed from being a way of sustaining a family to productive units that were able to market their products for cash.

At the same time, the Walloons met their responsibilities as members of their communities by serving as members of school boards, town supervisors, clerks, treasurers, assessors, and justices of the peace. As early as 1860 two Belgian farmers were elected to the Kewaunee County Board, Thiry Daems from Red River and John Strickman from Casco. Neither man spoke or understood English but they were intelligent and somehow managed to follow everything that was going on.[61] By 1893, forty years

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[58] Jerry Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture, A History* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015) 122.
[59] Charles I. Martin, *History of Door County, Wisconsin Together with Biographies of Nearly 700 Families and Mention of 4,000 Persons,* (Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin: 1881), 13-14.
[60] Lotz, 130.
[61] *Algoma Record Herald,* April 2, 1915.

after the first Belgian immigrants arrived, there were Walloons serving as Sheriff of Kewaunee County, Superintendent of Schools for Kewaunee County, County Clerk of Brown County, and Clerk of the Circuit Court in Brown County.[62] As they did not form the majority on a countywide basis in any of these three counties, their election to these offices shows there existed some intermingling with other ethnic groups, and reflects the respect afforded them by fellow settlers of different origins. This also quells any question of their being victims of discrimination by other settlers. Apparently, the segregation of the Walloon community was voluntary. All this was achieved without sacrificing their ethnic identity, language, or customs. The 1900 census indicates that of the 561 respondents for the Township of Brussels, roughly one-third stated they spoke no English.[63] Those who spoke English had been forced to learn it in school and still spoke Walloon when away from their teachers. As late as 1901 the *Green Bay Press Gazette* printed want ads placed by Green Bay businesses seeking to hire men and women employees who could speak Walloon.[64]

Culturally the Walloons are known to be very social people, enjoying getting together to visit, gossip, exchange news, and tell jokes any time an occasion presented itself. However, they showed no inclination to form actual clubs, preferring to socialize in a less formal fashion. Their primary identification and loyalty was the family, second the church, and finally their community, and nothing conflicted with that. At the beginning of the twentieth century an exception to this appeared and continued for more than twenty years. The Peninsula Belgian-American Club, organized in 1913, operated much like a

[62] X. Martin, 393.
[63] U. S. Bureau of Census
[64] "Wanted," *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, September 14, 1901. Also see "Wanted," *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, November 18, 1901.

mutual aid society although its activities included social events as well as service activities. Originally they kept the minutes of meetings in French but in 1916 changed to English. Membership was restricted to men who paid annual dues. There was a Sick Committee whose job it was to bring food to the family of any member unable to work due to illness or injury. It also reimbursed the family the equivalent of the lost wages. In the case of the death of a member, within three days the Club gave the widow $100. All members were expected to attend the funeral and those who failed to do so were fined $.50. The club also paid for a band to accompany the funeral and, if there was no music, gave the widow an additional $40.[65]

With the outbreak of World War I the club appropriated funds to be used for relief work in Belgium. The members sent letters of congratulations and support to American men of Belgian descent who volunteered to fight against the Germans. In December 1917, it also appropriated funds to buy tobacco for soldiers in the Belgian army. By March, 1918, it had formed a band and performed a benefit concert to rise funds for the American Red Cross. In that year alone it raised $3,000 for the benefit of Belgian children. By 1919, it approved and formed a Ladies Auxiliary who joined in the work.[66]

One other exception, which was actually a group founded by the Catholic Church, was The Knights of Columbus. This secret men's organization became active in Wisconsin in 1900 and by 1901 had an active council in Green Bay. Algoma founded its council in 1920 and Kewaunee in 1946. Their activities included acts of charity, distribution of Christmas baskets, hosting Christmas parties, collecting toys for unfortunate children,

[65]Wisconsin Belgian American Club 1913-1934, Green Bay MSS 58 Vol. 1, Minutes of Belgian American Club, 1913-1919, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, Cofrin Library.
[66] Minutes of Peninsula Belgian American Club, 1913-1919, Green Bay MSS 58, Box 1, vol. 1, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

visiting shut-ins, and entertaining at hospitals. The members received sick benefits and life insurance. In 1950, the Golden Anniversary, the Wisconsin Knights of Columbus had 28,691 members and 85 functioning councils. Of course, not all of these members were Walloon, but those located in the Walloon settlement area were.

In spite of all the harrowing challenges these immigrants faced and overcame, their ethnic cohesion was never threatened. They were still united in their religious faith and continued to celebrate religious events just as their ancestors had. They spoke the regional dialect of their ancestors with only a minority of them learning what little English was required to get by in business or at school. They ate the same foods, practiced their religion, continued the same naming patterns for their children, played the same games, and most of all, retained the same deep love of agriculture and their land that had defined their ancestors in the early settlement years.

Chapter 3

Walloons and the Wider World

During the first two decades of the twentieth century important national and international events occurred that had consequences for thousands of people world-wide. However, isolated as Wisconsin Belgians were—dealing with their own challenges, raising their families, and working their farms—these events had surprisingly little effect on them and certainly did nothing to dilute their ethnic community. The National Prohibition Movement, which had been growing in support for several decades, came to a head with the passage of the 18th Amendment in 1919 but had very little effect on the activities of the Walloons. Women's Suffrage was not a cause in which Walloon women showed interest. And while World War I was an event in which the Walloons had a keen interest, most of them had deferments as they were engaged in work considered vital to winning the war. If anything, this experience brought their community closer together and closer to the Walloon homeland.

Prohibition

One of the major movements of the era centered on the growing concern with the increasing amount of alcohol being consumed by Americans. Excessive consumption of alcohol had become a concern in North America long before the Walloons migrated to Wisconsin, and drinking had become a badge of masculine identity early in the nineteenth century.[1] This was an activity in which men were the primary participants while, due to

[1]Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domestic Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870—1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 4.

wages spent in the saloons, their families were often the victims of hunger, domestic violence, and abandonment. The earliest temperance movements were considered much like missionary activities and were originally supported by Protestant churches that claimed responsibility for the morals of the community. As local temperance groups gained community support, they often held dry activities on traditionally wet holidays such as the Fourth of July.[2] The Catholic Church had no doctrinal objections to drinking alcohol and, believing the government should not define morality, was not active in the Temperance Movement.

Eventually these reform activities gained broader secular support from beyond the churches. Led by women, Daughters of Temperance was founded in 1843 and quickly became one of the largest women's groups in the United States.[3] This group campaigned for stronger liquor laws, going so far as to advocate prohibition in the homes, and sought to bring attention to the consequences of male drunkenness on the family. By 1848 the Daughters of Temperance claimed 30,000 members, many from the working classes.[4] Men were also concerned with excessive consumption of liquor and in 1842 founded the Sons of Temperance. This organization, created by men for men, grew rapidly, and within a few years developed a female auxiliary with a large membership.[5]

Drinking, whether temperate or excessive, was centered in the saloon, an all-male bastion frequented in large part by the working class. The saloon was laboring men's "club" enabling them to build community, socialize, catch up on the news, and enjoy the

[2] W.J.Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic, An American Tradition* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1979) 193.
[3]Ian Tyrrell, "Women and Temperance in Antebellum America, 1830-1860," *Civil War History* 28 (1982): 135.
[4] Murdock, *Domesticating Drink,* 17.
[5] Ibid, 17.

entertainment they provided for each other after their day of working the fields or completing their shifts. Unions and mutual aid societies met there as well as the local politicians.[6] The saloon was the working man's social outlet.

Respectable middle-class women saw the saloon as an affront to all they valued—particularly their ideal of a tranquil home life. Although women could not vote or participate in the legislative process, they could make their voices heard and in the 1850s began to express actively their righteous objection. Beginning as a grassroots movement, they gathered in front of saloons to participate in singing hymns and praying, and in this way closed saloons throughout the upper midwest and east. These activities continued and in 1873 and 1874 the Women's Temperance Crusade, involving hundreds of thousands of women, closed an estimated thirty thousand saloons.[7] These demonstrations required a great deal of free time and, after reaching a high point in 1874, participation declined. However, the activities of the Crusaders led to the formation of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1874, which became one of the largest and most influential women's groups. These groups of religious women, which were successful in closing thousands of saloons, at least temporarily, came to realize the power of public pressure, and in the 1890s broadened their goals to include women's suffrage. This inclusion of suffrage with prohibition enabled it to become a cause that "respectable" men and women could support.[8]

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[6]Garrett Peck, *The Prohibition Hangover, Alcohol in America from Demon Rum to Cult Cabernet* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 10.
[7]Murdock, *Domesticating Drink,* 18.
[8]Ross Evans Paulson, *Women's Suffrage and Prohibition: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973), 113-115.

The effectiveness of the women was limited, and in the 1890s the Anti-Saloon League took over the leadership of what now became the heart of the Prohibition Movement. Not interested in working for temperance or suffrage, at its founding the Prohibition Movement had a single goal: the total elimination of all liquor traffic. Its base was among the Protestant Churches that were dedicated to imposing the values of the white, Protestant middle class on the nation and especially on the working class, mostly Catholic, immigrant population that was much more inclined to support moderation and oppose prohibition. For most working class immigrants, drinking was part of their culture—particularly a drink as innocuous as beer or wine.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the Anti-Saloon League seized this opportunity to push forward its agenda, lobbying for wartime prohibition, as grains used to produce alcoholic beverages were needed for the war effort. The Anti-Saloon League worked throughout this period for local option laws. Once a community voted itself dry, the campaign then became the expansion of prohibition to the state level. In 1913, the Anti-Saloon League extended its goal from local-option and statewide prohibition to include national prohibition through a constitutional amendment. Prohibition became a popular cause in the pre-war years. In 1914, five states adopted prohibition on a state-wide basis. In 1915, five more joined the dry column, and in 1916, four more states voted themselves dry.[9]

Wisconsin was not one of the states to do so, and it did not even ratify the Eighteenth Amendment until January 1919, becoming the thirty-ninth state to ratify. Despite the fact that a large percentage of the population of Wisconsin was rural, which was a primary

[9]Ibid. 158.

source of support for prohibition in many states, it was also largely composed of immigrants and Catholics, a source of anti-prohibition sentiment. In 1918, Archbishop Messmer of Milwaukee sent out a circular letter banning prohibitionist sermons, or any prohibition speeches in Roman Catholic schools or halls.[10]

Among the Belgians of Wisconsin, the reaction to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment appears to have been to ignore the whole thing. They saw nothing inconsistent with drinking, as they always had, and either decent living or church teaching. These migrants had been making beer and wine on their homesteads from their earliest settlement and regarded both as little more than water. Some farmers would begin their day with a beer, have another with their lunch, have beer breaks with a snack during the morning and afternoon, and finish the day with a beer. Various hard fruit ciders and wine were also common. Belgian women even created recipes for making dandelion wine, clover wine, and beet, carrot, and celery wine.[11] An article appearing in a California newspaper advocating the encouragement of Belgian settlement in that state in spite of their reputation for drinking, advised: "The Belgians do drink. They consume three times as much beer and twice as much wine per capita as the people of the United States, but the percentage of drunkenness there is lower than any other country in Europe. Let us take a chance on the Belgians."[12] Saloons were quite common and popular throughout the Belgian settlement area, where stronger liquor was also enjoyed.

Green Bay's northeastern section was almost entirely Belgian, and saloons in that area, some offering free lunches and most featuring a fish fry every Friday night, were

[10]Paul Glad, "When John Barleycorn Went Into Hiding in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 68 (Winter 1984-1985) 119-136.
[11]Draize, *Belgian American Heritage,* 107-108; Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 90.
[12]*Oakland Tribune,* October 22, 1914.

plentiful. In the month of June 1918 alone, there were fifty-eight saloon licenses issued by the City Council of Green Bay. Apparently, these potential proprietors were not concerned with the effects of prohibition, passed by Congress but not yet ratified by the required number of states, on their future customers. Thirty of the granted licenses were for addresses on Main Street, which begins in the downtown area and runs through the east side of Green Bay. This is the part of Green Bay which was settled predominantly by the Belgians. At the July 2, 1918 meeting, the Council issued another thirteen licenses for locations on Main Street.[13]

The Eighteenth Amendment was ratified in January 1919. This was followed by the Volstead Act in October 1919, which actually laid out what prohibition was to include. The Act made illegal the production, transportation, and sale of alcohol and went into effect in January 1920. It also defined "intoxicating liquor" as any beverage containing more than .05 percent alcohol. Interestingly, the Act did not make illegal the possession or consumption of alcohol within the home by the homeowner, his family, or guests. Many homeowners set up small stills, and barrel manufacturers sold "family size" containers for aging liquor.[14]

The federal government did not have the resources to enforce the law, so state and local law authorities were largely responsible. The degree of success they achieved depended heavily on the local support for prohibition and varied greatly from one area of the state to another. Without question, public opinion among the Belgians, and throughout much of the state, was against prohibition. In its January 16, 1920 edition, one

[13]Proceedings of the Council of the City of Green Bay, Wisconsin, City Clerk's Office, filed August 7, 1918.
[14]Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 90.

Sturgeon Bay newspaper announced prohibition would go into effect the next day and remain in effect "until the eighteenth amendment was repealed." Apparently the writer did not believe prohibition would last long. Further evidence of the attitude in this area toward prohibition can be seen when, further into the article, the reader finds the following: "Rev. A.H. Zechiel, district superintendent of the Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League, presented evidence that a local saloonkeeper kept open and sold liquor on Sunday. The jury acquitted the saloonkeeper and fined the preacher $5 and costs for working on Sunday."[15]

In 1921 the Wisconsin legislature passed the Severson Act in support of the Eighteenth Amendment, and added a requirement for persons desiring to sell soft drinks and ice cream for on-premises consumption to have a Class A permit which was valid for one year. The act also prohibited these soft drink shops from having standing bars, stalls, or booths, and prohibited hanging curtains in the windows.[16] Green Bay City Council records for 1921 show that by May of that year Class A Permits were being issued. At the City Council meeting held on June 29, 1921, the Council issued thirteen Class A permits. One week later, at the July 5 meeting, the Council issued twenty-four more Class A permits. This trend continued to escalate and by July 1, 1924, eighty Class A permits were issued at a single City Council meeting. Apparently, ice cream parlors were quite popular among the Belgians. Thirty of these "ice cream parlors" were located on Main Street, less than a mile from each other, and many were in the same locations as the forty-three saloons that had operated just four years earlier. The population of the city at

[15]*Door County Advocate*, January 16, 1920.
[16]Frank Buckley, *Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws, Official Records of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. A Prohibition Survey of the State of Wisconsin, Vol.* 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 1098-1099.

this time was barely 31,000. The city collected a fee for each ice cream and soda shop permit, just as it had for saloon permits, and for the quarter ending October 1, 1923, records show the city collected $1,150 for Class A Permits.[17]

An example of the perseverance of the Belgian saloon can be seen in the John Zilles Brown County Union Hall, found at Main Street at Three Corners. This impressive three story building, displaying typical Belgian architecture, was constructed in 1894 as a union hall and saloon, operating as such until 1919. It does not appear in city records again until 1925 when it was licensed as a soft drink parlor. By 1935 it had returned to its original function and continues as a tavern to the present.[18]

By the late 1920s, the Federal Government realized prohibition was not being uniformly enforced in all the states and formed the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, popularly known as the Wickersham Commission after its chairman, George Wickersham. Frank Buckley of the Bureau of Prohibition was assigned to survey conditions in Wisconsin. Buckley submitted his report in 1929 describing prohibition conditions in every county of the state. He began his report by saying, "Wisconsin is commonly regarded as a Gibraltar of the wets—sort of a Utopia where everyone drinks their fill and John Barleycorn still holds forth in splendor."[19] Although this did not describe conditions throughout the state, it was certainly accurate when applied to the Belgian settlement area. The report on Brown County stated that the county sheriff

[17] Proceedings of the Council of the City of Green Bay, Wisconsin, City Clerk's Office, filed December 1923.
[18] Wisconsin Historical Society Historical Building Inventory.
[19]Frank Buckley, "Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws: Official Records of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement: A Prohibition Survey of the State of Wisconsin," in *Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws*, Official Records of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. vol 4.(Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931); http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1273 (accessed May 7, 2017).

was not co-operative and the county should be considered "wet." In Door County the sheriff was reported to be uncooperative and the condition in that county was described as "very wet." The third county heavily populated by Belgians settlers, Kewaunee County, received a similar report with the sheriff again described as "not cooperative" and the county as "wet."[20] By the time of the Buckley Report in 1929, records indicate that most towns throughout the state contained their allotment of duly licensed ice cream parlors. Beer, whiskey, or "shine" could be obtained in practically any of these establishments. In 1928, fifty-nine out of sixty-two soft drink parlors in Green Bay that were raided by federal authorities had been padlocked for violating prohibition laws. When a saloon was padlocked, the proprietor would simply go to court, pay a fine (usually $200), and reopen the next day.

Many breweries, rather than going out of business, converted their operations to manufacturing soda, using bottles very similar to those they had previously used to contain beer. One contemporary Walloon man living in the Namur area recounted his grandfather's saloon. When asked what the family did during prohibition, he shrugged and stated they had to sell moonshine. He also said that the authorities, when they did appear, removed the slot machines and were more concerned with preventing new ones from being installed than they were about any liquor being sold.[21] Aside from these minor annoyances, life went on much as it always had for the Walloons.

Steady resistance to the Severson Act by otherwise law-abiding citizens eventually brought about its repeal. In 1926 Wisconsin voters approved a referendum amending the Volstead Act to allow the manufacture and sale of beer containing 2.75 percent alcohol

[20]Buckley, *Enforcement of Prohibition,* 1101-1102.
[21]Allen Anderson, interview with the author, August 2, 2017.

and in 1929 approved a state referendum which repealed Wisconsin's prohibition enforcement law entirely—four years before federal prohibition ended in 1933.[22] Wisconsin Senator John J. Blaine proposed a constitutional amendment for the national repeal of prohibition. By December 5, 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment was ratified, with Wisconsin being the second state to vote in favor of repeal.[23]

The entire experience did nothing to lessen the ethnic closeness of the Walloons. This may have been because their churches were united against prohibition. Also their cultural history involved the consumption of alcohol, which they had always enjoyed together on so many occasions. The Walloons were generally conservative and since they began voting, were dependably Republican. However, in the fall of 1932 they cast an overwhelming vote for Democratic candidate Franklin Roosevelt because of their united opposition to the prohibition amendment. They firmly believed the amendment was an infringement of their private liberty. The town of Union, located in Door County, gained wide publicity as being the most populous precinct in Wisconsin to cast a unanimous vote for Roosevelt.[24]

Women' Suffrage

The ratification of the nineteenth amendment, women's suffrage, was another event of national importance that appeared to have little effect on the Walloons. A Woman's Rights movement was well founded by 1852 but supporters did not share a common goal

[22]Joseph Ranney, "Wisconsin Court System; History of the Courts," https://www.wicourts.gov/courts/history/article23.htm (accessed May 19, 2017).
[23]Turning Points in Wisconsin History, "Brewing and Prohibition," http://www.wisonsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-051/?action=more_essay (accessed May 19, 2017).
[24]Holand, *Wisconsin's Belgian Community,* 96-97.

as various leaders advocated differing causes as their main focus. Some supported prohibition but not women's suffrage, feeling it threatened the traditional family. Some favored local ballots for women that included local issues of concern to women. Others supported women's empowerment but not prohibition. When the Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874, it did not endorse woman suffrage.[25] Many male prohibition supporters favored woman's suffrage, assuming that, given the vote, women would vote for prohibition. Brewing and distilling interests did all they could to defeat suffrage for women. Suffragists produced evidence of anti-suffragist campaigning and ballot tampering by brewers in Wisconsin, as well as in other states, in 1912.[26]

The various factions came together after 1912 and became more effective. When the U.S. entered WWI in 1917, women effectively exploited the contradiction of the country involved in a war to make the world safe for democracy while denying democracy to so many female citizens at home. On June 4, 1919, the proposed nineteenth amendment to the Constitution, granting to women the right to vote, was passed by Congress and was submitted to the states for ratification. A few days later, Wisconsin became the first state to ratify it. All members in the state legislature from Green Bay voted for the amendment and it was passed with very little opposition.[27] Slightly more than a year later, on August 18, 1920, it was ratified by the required number of states and became part of the U.S. Constitution, in time for women to vote in the 1920 elections.

The election data for the three Belgian counties shows a surprisingly small increase in the number of voters going to the polls. The election prior to the passage of the

[25]Murdock, *Domesticating Drink,* 27.
[26]Ibid., 29.
[27] *Green Bay Press-Gazette,* August 19, 1920.

amendment, 1916, shows the total number of votes cast for President as follows: in Brown County, 10,334, in Door County, 2,944, and in Kewaunee County 3,148.[28] The next national election, which took place in 1920 and was the first one in which women could vote, resulted in the following total votes cast: in Brown County 14,345, in Door County 4,821, and in Kewaunee County, the most Belgian of the three counties, the total voters increased by only 178 voters to 3,326.[29] There is no way of knowing the gender of the voters, but when comparing the small increase in voters, one must also take into account four years of population increase. From this data one can surmise that the Walloon women were not deeply vested in suffrage. Many issues forwarded by the women's rights movement were not ones affecting Walloon women. Besides the right to vote, the woman's movement advocated the right for women to serve in government, to own and control their own property, the retention of legal and civil rights as married women, and access to better jobs—in short, independence in making life decisions. These were not issues of concern for the Belgian women and had little effect on their lives or their sense of ethnic community. Belgian women had always shared equally in the work of managing the farm and in the decisions regarding the family. As equal participants in the family unit, they were apparently content.

World War I

At the outbreak of World War I the United States population figures showed the continuation of mass immigration from Europe, particularly eastern and southern Europe.

[28]Compiled and Published under the Direction of Industrial Commission of Wisconsin, *Wisconsin Blue Book, 1916* (Madison: Democratic Printing Company State Printer, 1917).
[29]Wisconsin Blue Book, 1920.

Following the established pattern, these newer arrivals tended to settle in urban areas close to previous emigrants from their home countries, forming ethnic pockets. However, originating from the same country did not mean these migrants were homogeneous. Most likely they claimed a region, or even a city, as their "homeland." They frequently spoke different languages or dialects and were of varying religions or sects. Biases and grudges were carried with them from the old country and continued to manifest in their new locations. And while they found employment, created homes, and began adapting to their new environment they remained, to a large extent due to prejudices against them, on the edge of the Anglo core culture created by most native-born Americans.

When war broke out in Europe, there existed a wide diversity of opinion among various immigrant groups with a great many being strongly opposed to America's becoming involved. Other immigrant groups saw the war as an opportunity to become more Americanized by supporting the war effort and fighting for their newly adopted country. The opinions regarding America's involvement in the war found among the Jewish immigrant population of New York, for example, was as varied as their regions of origin. However, by 1918 opinion changed dramatically as events in Europe and in the United States pulled more and more immigrant Jews into support for the Allied cause. By the end of the war, the Jews of New York were solidly united Americans.[30]

The Italian migrants who settled in Hartford, Connecticut, were another migrant group who became united and Americanized by the war. Although from various regions of Italy and embracing differing folkways, these migrants settled together in the Italian section of Hartford. In spite of differences and grudges transported from the old country, they

[30] Christopher M. Sterba, *Good American; Italia and Jewish Immigrants During the First World War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003),* 153-174.

formed a vibrant ethnic community, building Italian churches and markets, forming mutual aid societies, publishing Italian newspapers, and establishing roots. Due to their lack of formal education, they were relegated primarily to low-paying, unskilled labor jobs in construction or manufacturing, and with few speaking English, these migrants had only themselves to rely on. Hence, they tended to remain on the edges of the Anglo culture. Only a very few were able to achieve positions in Hartford's business community or local government.[31]

Many saw the war as an opportunity to prove their patriotism and loyalty to their adopted country. With this as their goal, these immigrants now learned enough English to apply for citizenship and, with their documents in hand, were able to volunteer for military service.[32] As the war continued and Italy suffered defeats at the hands of the Germans, the Italian-American soldiers were drawn together by the common cause of saving Italy. The Italian immigrants in America reacted in the same way; coming together to do all they could to raise money and aid to send to Italian refugees and to their "homeland." In the process, they reached beyond their ethnic neighborhoods and interacted with other Hartford inhabitants who were also engaged in contributing to the war effort.

The Walloons remained separate from the Anglo culture as well, but in their case it was by choice. An unusually homogeneous, close community, they maintained their rural ethnic island, enjoying the agrarian life-style their ancestors had immigrated to Wisconsin to establish. The Walloons were very aware of what was happening in Europe, and to some extent were involved, but their close community was not threatened. If anything,

[28]Ibid. 10-17,
[32] Ibid. 45.

going through this experience together strengthened their ethnic awareness and enduring connection with their mother country.

Although in July 1914, Belgium reiterated its status as a neutral nation, Germany invaded that country on August 4. The Belgian military was no match for the Germans. As the Germans advanced through Belgium they engaged in a policy of terror against civilian resistance in which massacres, executions, hostage-taking, and the burning of towns and villages took place, known as the Rape of Belgium.[33] When word of this reached the Wisconsin Belgians, there was an outpouring of financial contributions to their beleaguered homeland. In 1915, well before the U.S. entry into the war, the Belgian Relief Fund of Brussels, located in Door County, collected almost seven hundred dollars for the relief of Belgian civilians, which it forwarded to the Belgian minister in Washington, D.C.[34]

The Belgian American Club immediately responded and contributed to the Belgian Relief Fund. Later, in 1917 when the United States officially entered the war, the club appropriated additional funds to be used for relief work in Belgium. It sent letters of congratulations and encouragement to American men of Belgian descent who volunteered to fight against the Germans. In December of 1917, it allocated funds to buy tobacco for soldiers in the Belgian army. The club members formed a band and in March 1918 performed a benefit concert for the American Red Cross. In 1918, this club alone raised almost three thousand dollars for the benefit of Belgian children.[35] They were so

[33]Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium, the Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 22-36. Also see Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007), 6-24.
[34]"Belgian's Relief from this Section," *Algoma Record Herald,* April 2, 1915.
[35]Wisconsin Belgian American Club 1913-1934, Box 1, MSS 58, vol. 1.

generous in donating money and supplies that the Belgian government sent a deputation to Green Bay to thank them. On July 3, 1917, thousands of Wisconsin Walloons went to Green Bay to meet the Belgian officials, who brought greetings from the old country.[36] By 1919, the Belgian American Club approved and formed a Ladies Auxiliary that joined in the work.[37]

Belgian churches in the settlement area became involved and encouraged parishioners to do all they could. From St. Mary's Church in Humboldt, are records of war activities undertaken by parishioners, such as sewing clothing and other articles to be sent to Belgium. There too is found a service flag with twelve blue stars and three gold stars representing three from that parish who died fighting in the war. The parishioners of St. Mary's Church bought approximately $65,800 in Liberty Bonds, $5224 of War Savings Stamps, and contributed an additional $718 to Red Cross work. The St. Louis Congregation at Dykesville, which included Dykesville, Marchant, and Thiry, purchased $101,600 of Liberty Bonds, $12,995 in War Savings Stamps, and contributed an additional $1,113 dollars to Red Cross work. This parish reported "Red Cross work by practically every family" and a membership of three hundred fifty in the Junior Red Cross.[38]

Kewaunee County organized a Council of Defense. The Council divided the population of the county into small groups of eight or ten families, each group headed by a member of the Women's Committee. These women were in charge of keeping census cards of the contributions of each family to the war effort. In the year 1918 these farming wives of

[36]Hjalmar Holand, W*isconsin's Belgian Community*, 97.
[37]Minutes of Peninsula Belgian American Club, 1913-1919, Green Bay MSS 58, Box 1, vol. 1, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[38]Archives, Diocese of Green Bay, Lincoln-St. Peter File.

Kewaunee County donated $36 dollars to the Red Cross, although there was no active chapter in the area. They donated an additional $60 to the Salvation Army and another $66.25 to the Nurses Fund, often in amounts of ten or twenty-five cents. Perhaps more significant is the long list of items they knit, such as socks, scarves, gloves, sweaters, and wristlets, donated along with home-sewn items such as hospital shirts and wash cloths.[39] Each Belgian household appeared ready to do all it could to help the destitute Belgian non-combatants, as well as their own troops.

These activities illustrate that not only had the Walloons maintained their close community cohesiveness and spirit of working together for the war effort, they maintained their ties to the "old country" as well. Never interested in acculturating into America's Anglo-Saxon core culture, they maintained the self-identity of Belgian-Walloons and were deeply concerned with events in their home country.

Since the beginning of the war, the United States had been aiding the Allies with supplies of food and munitions, and in 1917 the U.S. officially entered the war. The Selective Service Act was passed on May 18, 1917, and authorized military conscription. It was the states, territories, and the District of Columbia which actually conducted the drafting of men for military service, and this in turn was accomplished by local boards established for each county. These local boards were responsible for registering all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five and classifying them, taking into consideration needs for manpower in certain industries and in agriculture. The production of food for export, both for the troops and for the civilian populations of European allies, had become as important to the war effort as the manufacture of war materials. Those

[39]Kewaunee County Clerk War Activities Records, 1918, Kewaunee Series 61, Box 4. Archives, the University of Wisconsin Green Bay.

employed in agriculture, as were the great majority of Belgians, were therefore exempt from the draft as their work was considered vital to the war effort. Nevertheless, those who were drafted from the Belgian farms, as in the case of families having multiple sons in that age category, responded and did their part to win the war. By the end of the war there were seven Army casualties from Brown County, four from Door County, and five from Kewaunee County as well as two Navy casualties from Brown County and one from Kewaunee County.[40]

Civilians were encouraged to plant Victory Gardens to feed their families and young people were encouraged to participate in Pig Clubs or Cow Clubs to produce more meat. Between May and November 1918, the Kewaunee Council of Defense went so far as to organize the men who were not drafted but were willing to volunteer their labor to farmers who needed help to harvest their crops. They also developed lists of those who owned cars and were willing to provide transportation for these volunteer farm workers. The city of Kewaunee furnished thirty-seven men who worked a total of 162 days; the village of Luxemburg furnished twenty-seven men who worked 152 days; Algoma furnished twelve volunteer workers who worked 102 days; and so on through the county.[41]

The Woman's Committee of the Council of Defense formed a Food Conservation Committee dedicated to educating women in ways to conserve food. Women spoke at meetings held in forty school houses in the county advocating war gardens, and introducing the use of wheat, sugar, and meat substitutes. They even encouraged the

[40] John Goadby Gregory, *Wisconsin's Gold Star List (*Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1925).
[41]Report of the Kewaunee County Council of Defense, May 6, 1918 to November 1, 1918, Cofrin Library, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

saving of peach, cherry, and plum pits for producing carbon to be used in gas masks.[42] The newspapers further encouraged conservation. Under the headline "Good New Year Resolution," one article began by stating: "Food will win the war; don't waste it," and went on to propose one wheatless day each week, as well as one meatless day each week.[43]

Wisconsin's Food Administrator, Magnus Swenson, gave out daily press releases regarding shortages of various foods and ways to deal with shortages in the future. He strongly urged farmers to increase their acreage under cultivation, especially with sugar beets and corn. In his April 17, 1918 release, Swenson stated that although Wisconsin was not a great wheat producing state, it could do its share by abstaining from eating food made from this grain and by sending to the market every pound that could be spared for the government's.[44]

When American troops deployed to Europe, many of them from the Belgian area in Wisconsin, who could speak Walloon better than English, had a chance to visit their relatives in Belgium, and to provide them with food and clothes. Just as General Pershing said, "Lafayette, we are here" when he brought U.S. troops to France, Belgian-Americans could say, "Belgium, we are here to repay the help you gave us after the 1871 Great Fire and to pay tribute to our Mother Country."[45]

Through the early decades of the twentieth century, events with far-reaching consequences were occurring in the United States and in the world, but the ethnicity of the close knit Belgian community was not affected. While aware of what was going on

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[42]Ibid.
[43]"Good New Year Resolution," *Door County Democrat,* January 4, 1918.
[44]Magnus Swenson, United States Food Administration, Wisconsin Division. Release, March 1-April 21, 1918. Content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/tp/id/59047 [accessed April 9, 2018].
[45]Rentmeester, *Our Marchant Relatives* (Green Bay, Wisconsin: Howard-Suamico Historical Society, 1995) 198.

around them, these Belgians continued to enjoy the lives they had created, farming their land, raising their families, practicing their religion, and socializing together. They celebrated birthdays, weddings, religious holidays, and perhaps most important, continued to drink and dance their way through Kermis just as they always had.[46]

[46] Numerous announcements for Kermiss appear in the newspapers: "Our Country News," *Appleton Crescent,* October 8, 1904; *Green Bay Press Gazette,* October 16, 1907; "To Attend Kermiss," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, 1911; "Brussels Notes," *Green Bay Press Gazette,* October 13, 1923.

Chapter 4

The School Consolidation Battle

While the first generations of Belgians were establishing their farms and villages in Brown, Door, and Kewanee Counties, a statewide conflict was developing that would eventually have a substantial effect on the Walloons and constitute a significant threat to their strong ethnicity community.

Wisconsin's free public school system was established in the state constitution in 1849 and led to a statewide debate that lasted through the next century. This debate centered on the degree to which the state should regulate these schools and the extent to which schools should be used by the state to assimilate immigrant children into mainstream American culture. Article X of the State Constitution provided for tuition-free education for all residents between the age of four and twenty years old but specified little more than that. The language in which school was to be taught was not addressed and became an extremely contentious issue in the years ahead.

Development of Wisconsin Schools

The school law actually gave almost total responsibility for administering schools to township school committees. The public school ideal envisioned by the state officials who wrote the law involved homogeneous communities controlling schools with a minimum of state regulation. Public schools would be based on an English-language interdenominational Protestantism.[1] However, the locally controlled early schools were

[1]Joan Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 265.

convened according to the schedule most convenient for the families involved. The majority of Wisconsin's settlers lived in rural environments, where they developed their own form of educational organization—the local school district. When a group of families with school-age children decided they needed a school, they took it upon themselves to elect, or volunteer for, a school committee (later known as a school board) and raised funds from a combination of land, property taxes, state aid, and tuition (when necessary), to build and maintain a school.[2] Parochial schools operated independently of the state, considering part of their mission to be the preservation of their mother tongue and culture. The local school committee had the responsibility of organizing the public school districts and almost total authority for administering them. These local committees would decide on the language in which students were taught as well as whether religious instruction would be included as part of the curriculum. The school committees met in the summer to set the tax levy, hire the teacher, buy books and supplies, arrange for repairs and maintenance, keep a census, and make reports. They also examined and certified the teachers.[3]

The Walloons had no history of privately supported schools, as in Belgium the government bore the cost of building and maintaining schools through tax revenue and, as Belgium was an overwhelmingly Catholic country, education included instruction in the Catholic faith. Since its inception in 1848, the state of Wisconsin stipulated that section sixteen of each Township was allocated for public schools. The residents of the township could use the land for a school or, as happened more commonly, sell the section and use

[2]Jonathan Zimmerman, *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 19.
[3] Jensen, *Calling this Place Home,* 256.

the proceeds to build schools close to population concentrations.[4] For example, the Township of Brussels contained the villages of Brussels, Union, and Gardner, located many miles apart, and eventually each needed a school. Local communities attempted to keep schools no more than two miles from any home.[5] The state underwrote a portion of the cost of conducting schools from the state School Fund, but there was also a system in place to provide local tax revenue for the maintenance of the schools, although private funding was often needed to supplement the public revenue. Unlike the immigrants who settled in urban areas, the early Walloon migrants had no way to know about the state's provision or how to access the funds, but Xavier Martin, who came from Wallonia with the first immigrant group, learned about the provision while still living in Philadelphia. After moving to the Belgian area in Wisconsin in 1858, and as newly elected Superintendent of Schools for Robinsonville, Kewaunee County, Martin was in a position to implement it.[6] This paved the way for other Belgian settlement townships to partially finance their schools through state aid.

Although the first Walloon schools were usually convened in someone's home, by the end of the nineteenth century, the townships of Brussels, Union, and Gardner, all in southern Door County, contained fourteen schools, only one of which was a parochial school connected to St. Mary's Church in Union.[7] However, as the settlement area was almost one hundred percent Catholic, and the Walloons were living in a remote and isolated area where they were accustomed to making their own decisions as to how

[4] Wisconsin Mosaic, "A Brief History of Wisconsin," The Wisconsin Mosaic, http://cominfo.rutgers.edu/~dalbello/FLAV/background/education.html [accessed February 1, 2013].
[5]Jensen, *Calling this Place Home,* 259.
[6]WI Mosaic.
[7]Gerry Strey, *Land Ownership Maps and Atlases of Wisconsin, 1836-1960* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1995).

activities would be conducted, it would be safe to assume that there was a generous amount of religious education involved in the public school curriculum. The Walloons were deeply religious and the instruction of the Catholic faith to their children was very important to them.[8]

Attendance

On a statewide basis, school attendance was poor. According to an 1873 report on truancy and attendance laws by the State Superintendent, between forty and fifty thousand Wisconsin children did not attend school at all in 1870.[9] Particularly, rural school attendance was sporadic, and the school schedule was arranged around the need for the students' labor on their families' farms. A large percentage of the Walloon immigrants were illiterate and, even though they wanted their children to have access to an education, the needs of the family would always come first. Supporting this attitude was the belief held by this rural population that the success of the next generation would be determined, not by their ability to read and write, but by their skill in farming as taught to them by their parents, on the family farm. Inadequate school houses, poor teachers, the long distances some students had to travel, bad roads (and in some cases total lack of roads), and severe winter weather were additional reasons for poor attendance.

Until 1916 state law only required 120 days of school for rural children seven to fourteen years old. However, at the Annual School Meeting of Door County in 1873, board members made the decision to conduct school five months of the year, beginning

[8]Fred L. Holmes, *Old World Wisconsin: Around Europe in the Badger State* (Eau Clair, Wisconsin: E.M. Hale & Company, 1944) 165.
[9]WI Mosaic.

"sometime in May, 1874," when the first three months would be offered, and completing the remaining two months "in the fall."[10] The lack of specific beginning and ending dates probably indicates their casual attitude toward attendance, which was primarily determined by the weather. The school officials were themselves part of the farming community and, as such, understood and were sympathetic to the need for the children's labor on family farms. The first compulsory attendance law of any kind was not passed in the state until 1879 and was difficult to enforce, especially in rural areas, as enforcement was left to local officials.[11] Belgians did not bring a tradition of compulsory school attendance from Belgium, where conservative Catholics were opposed to the idea, insisting on the right of parents to keep young people out of school when the need arose. Compulsory attendance for elementary school was not passed in Belgium until 1914.[12]

Conditions in District Schools

An ongoing challenge for school committees was the job of finding teachers willing to come to isolated, one room schools where they frequently did not even speak the language of the area. These jobs presented difficult circumstances and offered poor pay and uncertain periods of employment. The school boards offered higher salaries to teach the winter/spring term and sought male teachers to fill these places, anticipating larger classes and that many of the challenging older boys would be in attendance. The husky farm boys of seventeen or eighteen could be spared from farm work until planting time. In late summer and fall, teachers' salaries were lower as the older boys would remain on

[10] State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Door County, Rural School District Records, Door County, Series 37, Vol. 1, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay, Archives.
[11] WI Mosaic.
[12] Bernard A. Cook, *Belgium, A History* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004), 80.

the family farms to help with harvest. The school boards assumed women could handle these smaller classes and younger, more compliant students, and offered lower salaries for teaching during the summer/fall period. A special meeting of one district's school board in October 1881 agreed they could hire either a man or a woman to teach that winter.[13] Apparently, they had not had any male teachers apply.

Teachers of either gender were typically in their teens and not well-qualified, as their knowledge was usually limited to what they had learned in their own one room country school. Local school committees required no teacher training or experience. These new instructors were to teach a group of often more than twenty students, ranging in age from four or five years of age to, in some cases, seventeen or eighteen years old. The teacher and students performed the chores required to keep the school useable. Arriving early in the morning, the teacher usually started the fire in the wood stove. Students carried in cut wood (in 1885 one school district estimated it took eleven and a half cords of wood to heat its schoolhouse for one winter), heated water for the wash stand, washed the blackboards, and dusted erasers. Older students would sometimes build teeter-totters and swings in the school yards.[14]

Similar to the community's homes, the early schools were cheaply built of log construction, usually with dirt floors. The school itself was often without the most basic teaching tools such as blackboards, maps, and textbooks. As they were able, villages replaced the log structures with small, frame buildings but maintained the one-room floor plan. Some schools had a privy (or even two) but others simply made use of the forest

[13] State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Door County, Rural School District Records, Town of Forestville, Door Series 37, Vol. 1.
[14]Jensen, *Calling This Place Home,* 259.

surrounding the school, teachers sending first the girls out and then, when they returned, the boys. The 1869 annual report of the Kewaunee County Superintendent stated that in the Casco area there were eight schools and three privies. Kewaunee had six schools and five privies, while Red River had four schools but no privies at all.[15] Most privies were filthy, being cleaned only annually—if that. In 1913 a study conducted in Wisconsin of 131 one room-schools, showed that school employees or students in just half of the schools cleaned the outhouses even once a year.[16]

Challenge from Professional Educators

As Wisconsin's professional educators gained recognition and influence, they brought more attention to what they considered the inferior education provided to rural students in these one-room, ungraded schools. They advocated for consolidation of the numerous, locally-controlled school districts operating as one room schools into larger, graded schools similar to those developed in urban areas, with better qualified teachers and a more efficient use of resources. Even more important was the question of control. Professional educators were deeply troubled by the fact that farmers in overalls, most barely literate themselves, were controlling the education of Wisconsin's rural children. And yet, well into the 1940s, due to strong rural resistance, administering schools in rural areas was achieved almost entirely at the local level.

Throughout the state, the concern of professional educators regarding the strength of ethnic enclaves such as that enjoyed by the Walloons, maintaining their foreign languages and cultures, continued to grow. The issue came to a head in the debate over

[15]Kewaunee Series 60, Box 1, Folder 1, Cofrin Library Archives, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.
[16]Zimmerman, *Small Wonder*, 27-28.

state regulation of public and private schools, and to what extent the schools would be used to assimilate school age children. In 1889, the Republican controlled state government passed the Bennett Law requiring school attendance for a minimum of twelve weeks a year and that certain courses be taught in English.[17] Bitter opposition to the bill centered primarily in the eastern part of the state, where the highest number of immigrant groups, including the Walloons, had settled. A coalition of Catholics and Lutherans, who saw the bill as an assault on their system of parochial schools, and German immigrants, who in 1890 constituted more than one-third of the population of the state, overwhelmingly supported Democratic candidates. As a result, in the election of 1890, the Wisconsin Republican Party suffered its worst defeat until 1932. The governor and most of the republican state representatives were voted out of office and the Bennett Law was repealed the following year.[18] In its place the state legislature passed a new law dealing only with attendance. The question of which language was to be used to conduct the schools was left for a later date. In areas settled by a mixture of more than one immigrant group, the children may not have spoken English when they began school, but they were anxious to learn it as this was the common language that would enable them to communicate with their classmates. Laws were not necessary. However, in ethnic islands such as the Walloons', other than the few hours a day students were exposed to English at school, they heard only the language they were raised with. It was not until

[17]WI Mosaic.
[18] Roger W. Wyman, "Wisconsin Ethnic Groups and the Election of 1890,"*The Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Summer, 1986): 269.

1955, more than fifty years later, that state law required that all instruction be in the English language.[19]

Within the Belgian settlement however, there was a surprisingly mild reaction against the Bennett Law of 1889. The Belgians were the only Catholic ethnic group in the state who historically voted Republican, and the majority did so again in the 1890 election. However, there was a split in their vote. In Red River, Kewaunee County, the Republican vote dropped between eighteen and thirty-four percent. Possibly a greater defection was avoided due to the Belgians' intention to continue their practice of ignoring compulsory language and attendance laws and sending their children to school only when their labor was not required on the family farm. The historic Belgian lack of support for parochial schools also kept them from being more influenced by the argument that the bill was an attack on parochial schools.

Creating Well Functioning Schools

The state constitution provided for a school system, but a great deal of time and work was required before this became a reality. A state supervising officer was needed to collect, analyze, and disseminate school statistics, furnish information to local school officials, travel through the state to visit and inspect schools, organize meetings to counsel teachers, act as a final authority to enforce schools laws, and in general be the authoritative head of its public schools.[20] The first report submitted by the State Supervisor of Education, Eleazer Root, in 1849, indicated the total state enrollment to be

[19]*Laws of Wisconsin Relating to Public Schools, 1955,* issued by G. E. Watson, State Superintendent, 649.
[20]Edgar G. Doudna, *The Making of Our Wisconsin Schools* (Madison: State Centennial Committee, 1948), 10.

46,136 students. Male teachers were paid an average of $15.22 a month and female teachers were paid an average of $6.92. Teachers were expected to have completed their education only to a level equivalent to the level they intended to teach. Compliant with this requirement, teachers in one-room elementary schools should have completed the eighth grade.[21]

Some counties established teacher summer training schools which originally lasted five days and led to teaching certificates, but enrollment was low, amounting to only approximately five percent of country teachers. It was not until 1920 that the state required even a high school diploma to teach.[22] As the consolidation movement continued, it created a conflict between dedicated urban reformers and stubborn rural communities who did not want to relinquish control of their children's education and who, for the most part, ignored or fought school consolidation. Unfortunately, it did not occur to reformers to seek a compromise or to consult rural parents about what they thought would be best for their children; instead they assumed the urban school model was the ideal learning environment for all of the state's children.

Rural District Schools

Rural ungraded schools were not as inadequate as professional educators, critics, and reformers thought. Teachers were usually not well educated, were inexperienced and underpaid, and were often forced to get by with inadequate textbooks and educational aids. However, despite these obstacles they managed at minimum to teach the basics of

[21]"Historical Timeline of Educational Licensing in Wisconsin," https://dpi.wi.gov/tepdl/licensing/history, accessed January 18, 2018.
[22]Jensen, *Calling This Place Home,* 300-302.

arithmetic, reading, and spelling. In addition, they created a supportive, family atmosphere, often enlisting the older students to help the younger ones with their lessons. Students learned and progressed at their own pace, enabling those students who were required periodically to be absent for farm duties to continue with their education where-ever they left off when they returned to school. Pupils of various ages intermingled, in the process learning the virtues of social cooperation and individual worth—children learned to share and care for one another.[23] Spending their childhood and teen years in this supportive, close environment further enhanced the sense of being part of a supportive community that remained with the Walloons throughout their adult lives.

Short-term teaching contracts, usually for a matter of months, and the practice of "boarding out" in local homes, often as a part of their pay, kept teachers accessible and accountable to the community.[24] Teachers had to be upstanding examples of good moral behavior and so were kept under close surveillance. In the early 1920s the standard teacher contract stipulated:

> A female teacher would not get married during the school year, would not keep company with men, would be at home between 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., would not loiter in town, would not leave town at any time without permission, would not smoke cigarettes or drink beer or whiskey, would not dress in bright colors, dye her hair, or wear face powder.[25]

[23]Zimmerman, *Small Wonder,* 7.
[24]Campbell F. Scribner, "Culture Wars in the Countryside; The Fight for Rural Schools," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 95 (Winter 2011-2012): 14-25.
[25]Lotz, *Door County's Past,* 360.

Farm children often came to school with health problems, and occasionally teachers had to initiate daily inspections and cleaning routines to combat head lice, scabies, and impetigo. An organized health service did not exist, so any health problems became the teacher's responsibility. "If a tooth needed to be pulled, a sticker removed, a broken fingernail cut, or a stomachache eased, the teacher had to rise to the occasion."[26] Each child was expected to bring his or her lunch from home. However, the 1922 report of the Door County Superintendent noted that several teachers served hot soup or stew which they made themselves and simmered all morning over the jacketed furnace. Also, farmers in the area frequently dropped off fresh milk.[27] Children learned in an environment of trust and confidence in their teacher and surrounding community.

Another role of the district one room school, extremely important to the community but ignored by professional educators and reformers, was that of civic center of the community. For the Walloons, their church filled this function to an extent, but there were many activities in which the Belgians engaged that were not considered appropriate for the church. Each community made its own decisions as to who could use the school building and for what purposes, but, as it was usually the only public building in the community, the school was used for numerous types of gatherings. Political rallies were held at schools, and when elections occurred the school served as the polling place. The school board held its meetings there, and community debates also took place at the school. It further served as a social center, housing card parties, sewing bees, and occasionally dances. Most important were the school programs, plays, and spelling bees organized by the teachers and children. Parents would crowd into the little school room

[26]Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), 74.
[27]Lotz, *Door County's Past,* 361.

to watch their children perform in plays, holiday programs, and to recite memorized passages. The school created a sense of place for both parents and students and proved to be one of the community's most stable, durable institutions.

In 1929, Wisconsin passed the state Equalization Law which made it financially possible for every rural district, through state and county aid, to meet the legal requirements for educating its children. At the same time, abandonment of the numerous district schools, many only two or three miles apart, in favor of consolidation was still strongly encouraged, as was a ten-month school year and more high schools that would offer grades nine through twelve.[28]

Resistance to consolidation can be seen by the fact that in 1936, in spite of ongoing pressure from professional educators and political Progressives, one-room schools still made up seventy-nine percent of the schools in Wisconsin.[29] In towns, even those found in the Belgian area, resistance was not as strong as in the rural districts. The village of Brussels, the chief Belgian rural center, was open to the idea of a graded high school. In 1923 it added a high school department to the school and in 1925 graduated its first high school class.[30] Nationally, school consolidation began in earnest in the late 1930s, and in most parts of the country was completed by the early 1950s.[31] However, resistance in Wisconsin was especially strong, particularly in organized rural areas such as the Belgian settlement area, and these communities were able to delay consolidation for another decade. In 1946 the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance conducted a survey which showed

[28]Lotz, *Door County's Past*, 359.
[29]Zimmerman, *Small Wonder*, 17.
[30]*Door County Advocate*, May 29, 1925.
[31]Campbell F. Scribner, "Culture Wars in the Countryside: The Fight for Rural Schools," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 95 (Winter 2011-2012), 14-25.

educational and financial inequality resulted in a low rate of rural high school attendance. It also found that four-fifths of the state was not included in any high school district.[32] The 1950 census illustrates that, as the one-room schools only went through eighth grade, the majority of the population ended its education at that point, presumably due to the distance of students from a graded high school or the lack of any high school at all. But even this meager education was not universal. In 1950, out of the Brown County rural population of 7,100 people twenty-five years or older, only 5,630 had completed the eighth grade. In rural Door County, of the 8,562 residents twenty-five years or older, only 3,460 had completed eighth grade, and of the 8,155 people twenty-five years or older in Kewaunee County, only 3,775 had done so.[33] As late as 1957, of the 3,848 school districts in Wisconsin, 3,346 offered only the elementary grades.[34] Forty-seven percent of public schools state-wide were still operating as one teacher schools.[35]

At this point the State became more aggressively involved and required that each county submit a master plan for district reorganization. The County of Kewaunee's plan, submitted in 1951, showed the county to have fifty-nine districts which potentially could be reorganized into four.[36] Rural Door County was particularly slow to comply with the suggestions made by the professional educators and politicians. In February 1960, an order was received by the Door County School Committee from the State Department of Instruction dissolving twenty-five district schools in Door County and replacing them with School District 1 to include all territory affected by the closures and to operate both

[32]*Green Bay Press Gazette,* June 4, 1946.
[33]1950 *Census of Population, volume II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 49, Wisconsin.*
[34]National Education Association of the United States, *One Teacher Schools Today* (National Education Association: Washington, D.C.: 1960) 14.
[35]Ibid 15.
[36] Kewaunee County Series 80, Box 2, Master Plan, Cofrin Library, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

elementary and high school grades. All the District Schools that were to be dissolved were located in townships populated primarily by Walloons—Brussels, Clay Banks, Forestville, Gardner, Nasewaupee, and Union. This reorganization was to be accomplished by July 25 of that year. At that time a meeting of the newly created district was to meet and elect a new seven-member school board. The notice was signed by the State Superintendent.[37]

Eventually the state legislature passed a ruling that all rural schools had to consolidate into the graded high school districts by July 1962, or lose their state funding. This legislation effectively ended locally controlled school boards and one-room schools in Wisconsin. Additionally, in 1962 the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed prayer in the schools, an aspect of their curriculum that was especially important to the Belgians. The tenacity with which the Belgians resisted giving up their local district schools can be seen in the fact that theirs was among the last areas in the state to do so. However, while most rural residents were upset with these developments, there was little they could do. They no longer controlled their children's schools, being unable to financially operate them without some state aid.

Interestingly, the 1950 Census also revealed that throughout the Belgian area, education had progressed at a uniform pace. Within the rural population of Door County, among those above the age of twenty-five years, the median years of education was 8.3, in Kewaunee County the median was 8.2 years, and in Brown County it was 8.2 years. This included the population born in 1930 or earlier.[38] Those Walloons born before 1930

[37]Southern Door District File, Order 15-19, The State of Wisconsin, Department of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin.
[38]1950 *Census*

grew up in an environment where only Walloon was spoken. It was not until they went to school that they were exposed to English at all, and often suffered discipline from the teachers if they spoke Walloon within their teachers' hearing.[39] By mid-century, as these students reached adulthood and had children of their own, they wanted to spare their children the same unpleasant experiences when they started school. Consequently, the use of Walloon was found less and less frequently and in fewer homes. While continuing to speak Walloon with their own generation, adults increasingly spoke English in their homes and encouraged their children to do the same. In the 1940 census, of the 1,217 respondents in the town of Brussels, only thirty reported Walloon was spoken in the home.

More than any other single factor, the loss of control over their children's education due to the state's closure of their local schools, created a slow but undeniable broadening of the close, ethnic community the Walloons had maintained for six or seven generations. This loss, and the state's enforcement of the use of English in school, ultimately affected their social environment. Rather than attending school with immediate neighbors, whose families and circumstances they knew well, they rode a school bus many miles to a town that was not familiar and attended school with a diverse student body of several hundred. They continued in their common religion, but rather than participating together on a daily basis, their spiritual unity was enjoyed only on Sundays. While no immediate or perceptible change occurred, over the course of years, the Walloons enlarged their self-identity to include American along with being part of the Walloon settlement area.

There is more to a culture than just the language and the Walloons continued to practice their customs as they always had. From Green Bay east to Casco and then north

[39]Lempereur, *Walloons in Wisconsin,* 134.

to Sturgeon Bay, the 1944 population of 30,000 was almost entirely of Belgian ancestry.[40] Field work done as late as 1992 shows that within the Belgian settlement area, seventy to eighty percent of the land was still owned and farmed by Belgians and their descendants.[41] Typical of ethnic islands, most land is inherited, insuring the survival of the group cohesion. A social stigma is often attached to the sale of land to outsiders.[42]

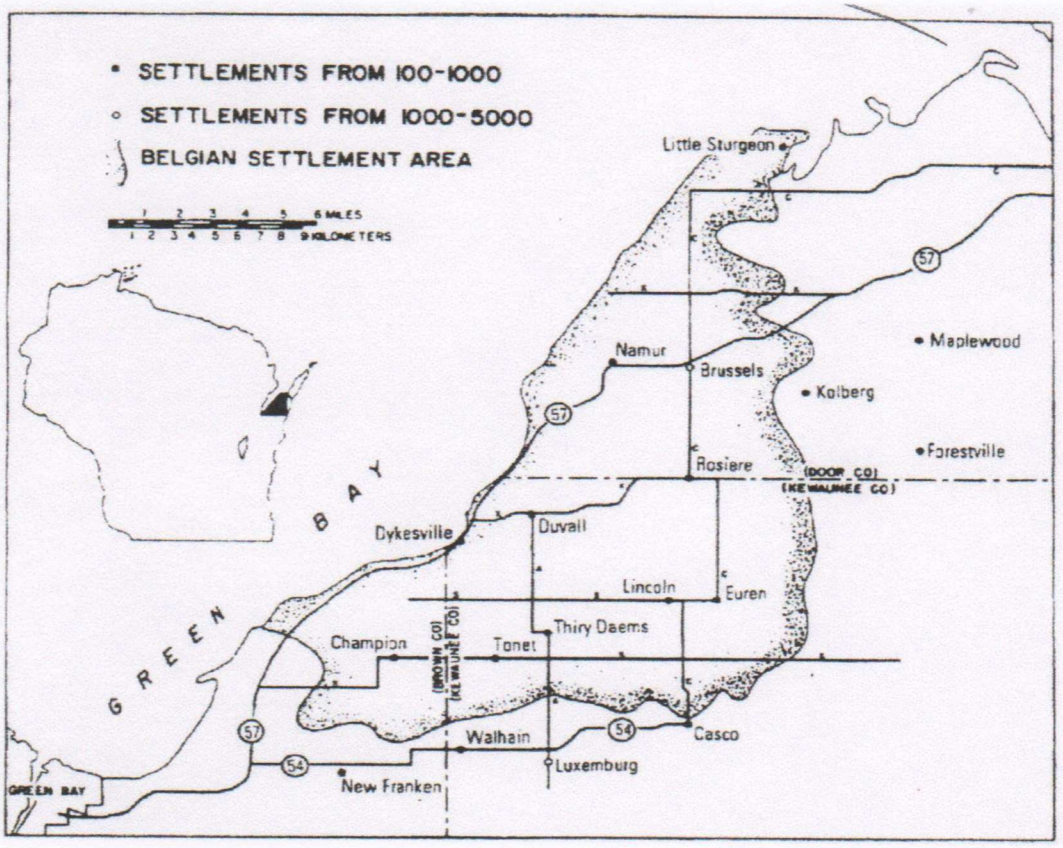

Figure 4.1 Belgium settlement in northeastern Wisconsin – Map by W. Laatsch

[40] Fred L. Holmes, *Old World Wisconsin: Around Europe in the Badger State* (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: E.M. Hale and Company, 1944), 153.
[41] Laatch, "Belgians in Wisconsin," 197.
[42] Jordan and Rowntree, 273.

An ethnic concentration of this strength, one hundred and fifty years after immigration, is highly unusual and has resulted from the specific combination of circumstances found in the Walloon settlement.

Chapter 5

The Walloons Advance with the Times While Remaining Walloon

As the twentieth century progressed, the Walloons were aware of events and changes taking place around them and voluntarily adopted those changes that would improve or simplify their lives. Other events such as the Great Depression had to be adapted to and the Walloons did so with no disruption to their cohesive ethnic community. Together they continued to engage in the agricultural life they so loved, displaying the same resilience that had served them so well in their past.

The Depression and Its Effects on the Walloons

In October 1929, the US stock market collapsed which in turn brought on the Great Depression. As consumer purchasing power dropped, businesses and manufacturing facilities slowed or stopped production, resulting in massive unemployment. This, in turn, intensified the drop in consumer purchasing power. As the spiral continued, millions of men who had always worked and provided for their families found themselves unemployed. As this continued the banking industry, which in the case of many of their institutions was already unsound, closed banks, leaving customers without access to any funds they might have had on deposit or in savings accounts. These events affected urban Americans working in factories, the business community, and those providing services more severely than those Americans involved in agriculture. In Wisconsin, of the

1,129,461 normally employed in manufacturing or mechanical jobs, 61,585 were unemployed in 1933.[1] Although not as severely as urban Americans, rural Americans were affected as well.

While Walloon farmers were able to maintain their farms and had food to eat, they faced a dramatic reduction in income. Nationally, between August 1929 and August 1932, the prices of all groups of farm commodities declined sixty percent. The state's gross farm income in 1929 was $438,000,000. By 1932, it had fallen to $186,000,000.[2] The farmers in Wisconsin were generally better off than those in other states as eighty-one percent of Wisconsin farm income by this time was derived from livestock and its products, which were more stable than grains.[3] Practically all Wisconsin agriculture centered on dairying. Milk cows were chosen for their ability to withstand the cold and produce milk and this, of course, continued. Statewide there were 181,767 operating farms. Of these, 125,000 were dairy farms and were operated by full owners. However, that being said, it is important to add that the Wisconsin farm prices in 1929 were fifty-five percent above the pre-World War I level. By June 1932, the farm index had fallen to a level that was just sixty percent of the pre-war level, representing a dramatic decline in Wisconsin farm income.[4]

Struggling urban consumers tried to reduce their expenses in part by cutting the amount spent on food purchases. An interesting example of this being done at the Walloon dairy producers' expense, can be seen in the rise in popularity of oleomargarine,

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[1] Edwin Witte, *Wisconsin Blue Book 1933* (Madison, Wisconsin: Democratic Printing Company, State Printer, 1933) 113.
[2] Paul W. Glad, *The History of Wisconsin Volume V: War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990) 198.
[3] Ibid, 134.
[4] Witte, *Wisconsin Blue Book*, 115, 133.

a butter substitute. Oleomargarine had been available for many years and, originally made of beef tallow mixed with various other ingredients, was consumed primarily by those who could not afford real butter. Eventually oleomargarine manufacturers began utilizing general animal fat to reduce their costs. They added yellow coloring so it would look like butter and marketed it at a much lower price than butter. As the Depression continued the consumption of oleomargarine increased. Wisconsin passed anti-oleomargarine taxes and laws making it illegal to sell the colored oleomargarine but consumers easily smuggled it across the border from neighboring states.[5] This law remained on the books in Wisconsin as a criminal offense until the 1960s.[6]

There were several circumstances that made the Depression more bearable for Walloons than for many other groups in the state. By 1930, the great majority of Belgian farmers, like other Wisconsin farmers, had converted their farming to dairy farms. Of the 3076 farms in Brown County, 82% were dairy farms; in Door County, of 2069 farms, 72% were dairy farms, and of Kewaunee County's 1972 farms, 82% were dairy farms. Another factor that reduced the impact of the depression for the Walloons is that 2,032 of Brown County's, 1,268 of Door County's, and 1,605 of Kewaunee County's dairy farms were operated by full owners who did not have to pay rent.[7] Of the land that was under cultivation, eighty percent was devoted to growing feed for livestock.

Perhaps one of the greatest fears of Walloon farmers, even those owning their land, was losing the farm because of an inability to pay taxes. But a review of real estate tax

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[5] Gerry Strey, "The 'Oleo Wars': Wisconsin's Fight over the Demon Spread" *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 85 (Autumn, 2001): 2-15.
[6] Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture,* 200-201.
[7] 1930 Census: Agriculture Volume 3, Type of Farm by States, Counties https://wwwcensus,gov/library/publications/1932d-vol-03-agriculture-html (accessed October 4, 2018).

delinquencies for the Belgian settlement area again shows the relative well-being of these farmers. One of the worst years during the Depression was 1933 and yet, the real estate tax delinquency rates were relatively low throughout the Walloon area. At the close of 1934 the tax delinquency rate for Kewaunee County was less than ten percent. Only eight other counties in the state achieved such a low percentage. Both Door County and Brown County had delinquency rates of only ten percent to twenty percent. Most of Wisconsin's counties had delinquency rates much higher, many as high as fifty percent.[8]

The fact that many farms in the Belgian settlement area were mortgage free was another important factor for the wellbeing of the Belgians living there. Their traditional adversity to appearing to try to get ahead of the others served them well. These frugal, hard-working farmers were content to work their land and not overextend themselves by trying to acquire more. Of course, they still had to worry about general operating expenses and money for taxes, but at least there was no worry regarding a mortgage payment. In 1940, when the worst years of the Depression were barely behind them, in Brown County 934 farms were mortgage free, in Door County 749 farms were, and in Kewaunee County 771 were.[9] Another Walloon custom that enhanced their well-being was the practice of not selling their farms, but instead passing them from one generation to the next generation. Statewide, between 1920 and 1932, there was a dramatic decline in the value of farm real estate. From a high of $69.32 an acre in 1920, farmland had sunk to an average of $36 an acre by 1932.[10] This had no effect on the Walloons who had no plans to sell their land, but continued to farm family land as they always had.

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[8] *Wisconsin 1934 First Annual Regional Plan Report* (Department of Commerce—Bureau of Census: Brown County Library, Green Bay, Wisconsin,1935) 501.
[9] 1940 Census: Agriculture-Wisconsin, Farm Mortgage Debt, April 1, 1940.
[10] Glad, *History of Wisconsin*, 358.

The Walloon love of social occasions was an important element that helped them through the Depression. In addition to participating together in the traditional church rituals that were so important to them, they continued celebrating Kermis for six consecutive weekends each autumn, even during the Depression. There was no expense involved—the food was grown on their farms, they made their own beer, and music was provided by local bands. The celebrations gave them something to look forward to, to see friends and family members, and to forget their worries.[11] This practice also continued to reinforce their ethnic tradition, even during the Great Depression.

The Effects of the New Deal

Roosevelt was sworn into office in 1933 and as implementation of his New Deal programs unfolded, some had a positive effect on the Walloons. In particular, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), begun in 1935, employed 43,000 people a year on Wisconsin projects such as constructing new roads and buildings, laying water pipes and sewers, building dams, airports, and schools, as well as the planting of sixty-three million trees.[12] Among these were several projects in Brown County. Since the WPS's policy was always to hire local workers when available, we can assume a great number of those employed were Belgians living in or around Green Bay. In Green Bay, Franklin Roosevelt Elementary School (1934), Tank Elementary School (1939), Elmore Elementary School (1939), Nicolet Elementary School (1939) as well as Washington Junior High (1939) were all completed by WPA workers and funds.[13] The WPA also built a new post office in east

[11] Barb Chism, Historian, Peninsula Belgian American Club. Interview with the author February 26, 2019.
[12] Work Projects Administration, Office of Wisconsin State Administration Project Card File Records, 1936-1942 (series 1688) (accessed 10/2/2018).
[13] *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, November 18, 1939; *Green Bay Press-Gazette,* February 15, 1940.

De Pere, a few miles south of Green Bay. Most of this work was made possible by the combination of local funding and federal WPA grants.

Other help for the poor and unemployed came in the form of volunteer workers. In 1933 the women of the Welfare Committee of the Child Welfare Department in Green Bay started to sew for the orphanage once a week. In addition to mending clothing items, they made pajamas, dresses, clothes for First Communion, little boy's suits, bed sheets and pillow cases, caps, socks, mittens, and booties. They also made sick calls when needed. In 1935 alone they made 387 sick calls, in many cases providing medicine as well.[14]

Roads have always been important to rural people for hauling their farm produce to market and milk to the cheese factories, for transportation to school, for mail delivery, and for fire protection among other functions--and yet, the lack of serviceable roads was something with which the Walloons historically grappled and of which they were still in desperate need in the 1930s. In 1917 the State Highway Commission passed a ruling that required the construction of a trunk highway system connecting all county seats and all cities with a population of 5,000 or more. However, in the Walloon settlement area, with the exception of Green Bay, there was not a single city with a population that exceeded 5,000, nor any incorporated village of any size, so other than connecting the three county seats, this state ruling had little benefit for the Walloons.[15]

Throughout the 1920s, one of the questions the counties debated was the best surfacing to use as they developed the extended road system. Most existing roads were

[14] State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Archives Division, Catholic Women's Club of Green Bay Records, 1908-2001, Green Bay MSS 177, Box 2.
[15] *Wisconsin* Blue *Book 1940,* 426-428. To the present day there still is not an incorporated village in Door or Kewaunee County.

simply earth surfacing, then gravel, then macadam, and only a small number were constructed of concrete. Another subject debated was the matter of snow removal in the winter. There were many who strongly opposed the plowing of snow off the roads as many still relied on horse-drawn sleighs and needed snow under the runners. These farmers routinely took to the fields and made their own roads if snow was removed from existing ones. In 1930, Door County had only thirty-three farms located on concrete roads, 607 located on macadam roads, 940 on gravel, and 425 on dirt roads--this in spite of reporting 2,475 automobiles or trucks in the county. A similar condition existed in Kewaunee County; with 2,824 cars or trucks in the county, they had only thirty-eight farms located on concrete roads, none on macadam roads, 1400 on gravel, and 381 farms still on dirt roads. Brown County was the oldest, most developed, and most densely settled of the three counties containing Walloon settlers. With 3,678 automobiles or trucks, the county recorded 619 farms located on concrete roads, 190 on macadam, 1,095 on gravel, and 305 on dirt roads.[16] Wisconsin averages 128 days a year with rainfall.[17] This does not include those days it snowed or days the temperature rises and the snow melts, further contributing to muddy conditions. Those Belgians farming the 5,434 farms located on dirt or gravel roads frequently had to contend with roads that were muddy, rutted, or completely impassable.

A provision of the New Deal that was extremely beneficial to the Walloon farmers involved rural electrification. By the 1930s, ninety percent of Wisconsin's city dwellers

[16] 15th Census 0f United States, Agriculture Vol. II Part 1—the Northern States, supervised by William Lane Austin (United States Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1932).
[17] U.S. Climate Data https://www.us climatedata.com/climate/wisconsin/united-states/3219 (accessed October 19, 2018)

enjoyed electricity, while only ten percent of rural Wisconsinites did.[18] Even Brown County, containing Green Bay, only had 957 houses with electricity in the entire county; Door County had 418, and Kewaunee County had 405.[19] Without electricity there were no pumps to provide running water or indoor bathrooms. Milking had to all be done by hand, which limited the size of the herds farmers could manage. In 1935 the Rural Electrification Administration was established by executive order, designed to bring electricity to all rural areas of the United States. Local electric cooperatives began organizing in the Belgian area but the process went slowly. Early uncertainty over how to organize and operate the co-ops slowed progress. Eventually the Walloon farmers moved forward but before the electrification of the Belgian settlement area could be completed, World War II made it impossible to obtain the required supplies such as copper wire, or to hire the necessary labor. Not until after the war was electrification of their counties completed.

Electricity influenced farm operations more than any other technological advancement. Once electrification was accomplished, Walloon farms became more productive as electric milking machines could more efficiently milk the cows, allowing the farmer to add several more dairy cows to his herd. Electricity also pumped water, sharpened tools, sawed wood, warmed hatching eggs, and accomplished many other farm tasks with the flip of a switch. As the barn was the source of income, improvements were initiated there before improvements were made in the house, often by many years.

[18] Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture*, 205.
[19] 15th Census of United States.

By 1940, eighty percent of Wisconsin's annual farm income came from livestock and livestock products.[20]

Due to cultural values held by the Walloons, the Depression did not affect them as negatively as it did some others who were engaged in agriculture. The high value the Walloons placed on owning and farming their own land put them in a more secure position than those who rented land or had mortgage payments. Their tradition of keeping the land in the family with the next generation eventually taking over the farm, protected the Walloons from fluctuating and generally falling land prices. And of course, facing the circumstances together, fortified by the strength of their common religion helped them immeasurably. Provisions of the New Deal were also helpful, and especially rural electrification. The Walloons became much more productive, more profitable, and enjoyed a higher standard of living when their farms became electrified.

Another War

FDR was re-elected on the promise to avoid becoming entangled in European conflicts, stating the United States would remain a neutral nation. The great majority of Americans supported this policy. However, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan on December 7, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan December 8, 1941. By December 11, the U.S. War Declaration included Germany and Italy. This created dramatic reversals in the problems of the Depression. Now, rather than unemployment, there was a shortage of both urban and rural labor as the country geared up for the

[20] *Wisconsin Blue Book, 1949*, 192.

production of war materials and men went into military service. Also, whereas during the Depression farm surpluses existed, there now was a call to increase food production.

Rationing went into effect on a variety of items: sugar, cars, tires, typewriters and, along the Eastern seaboard, gas.[21] The shortage of rubber became so acute that in 1942 Roosevelt appointed a special Senate committee to make recommendations. This committee recommended sharp restrictions on the use of motor vehicles, a national speed limit of thirty-five miles an hour, and immediate construction of synthetic rubber plants, all of which Roosevelt implemented.[22] Rubber was the first non-food item to be rationed as ninety percent of the United States' raw rubber came from the Dutch East Indies rubber plantations which Japan captured.[23] A full page announcement in the *Green Bay Press-Gazette* listed twenty-three businesses that in the future would make only two delivery runs a day in an effort to conserve motor vehicles and rubber tires. All special deliveries and immediate deliveries would stop and the businesses urged customers to carry small purchases home with them.[24] In June 1942 officials launched a two week scrap rubber drive stressing it would take two pounds of scrap rubber to produce one pound of useable reclaimed rubber.[25] Other non-food items such as gasoline were rationed but only on the heavily populated East Coast. The motivation behind this rationing was actually the concern over the scarcity of rubber. The government had to find a way to keep Americans from engaging in any unnecessary driving in order to conserve rubber tires. Gas rationing was instituted as the most effective way to

[21] "15 New Ration Programs Loom," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 29, 1942.
[22] T. Harry Williams, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel, *A History of the United States Since 1865* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 601.
[23] Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture*, 211.
[24] "Special Announcement to Our Patrons," *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, January 7, 1942.
[25] "Cites Military Rubber Needs," *Green Bay Press-Gazette,* June 16, 1942.

accomplish this. It was not until November 1942, that gasoline rationing became nationwide. The allowance was the once a week purchase of gasoline with the number of gallons allowed dependent on the Class listed on one's ration book. Class C rations went to essential war workers. The rural Walloons received these so that they were able to get their produce and milk to market. Class R was issued for non-highway use such as farm vehicles and Walloon farmers also received these.

Tires, cars, and even bicycles were very difficult to buy and one had to have a certificate from the County Rationing Board to purchase even a single retread tire.[26] The various County of Defense Boards appointed tire inspectors throughout the county and an application to buy a tire had to be submitted to the appropriate inspector. The tire inspector then had to certify that the tire to be replaced was beyond repair. This approved application was next submitted to the rationing board which would decide on the applicant's eligibility. No pleasure cars were granted permits nor were private cars which were used for business. Taxis were not exempted. An interesting situation arose in the town of Hobart, Brown County, when the only teacher of forty-six students experienced two blowouts during Thanksgiving vacation. Already retreads, the car's tires were beyond patching. The students enjoyed an extended vacation while the teacher went through the exhaustive process to obtain the required permit to replace them.[27] Even after obtaining a permit to buy a tire, the potential consumer often found there were none available to buy.[28]

[26] "Tire and Car Permits Approved in Kewaunee," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, June 5, 1942.
[27] "Teacher's Tires Blow So Students Extend Vacation," *Green Bay Press Gazette*, December 1, 1942.
[28] "Calls Deluge Ration Board," *Green Bay Press Gazette,* January 5, 1942.

Food was also closely monitored. In November 1942, each person over the age of fifteen was issued a monthly ration book which limited the quantity of coffee one could purchase. In March 1943 meat, cheese, fats, canned fish, and canned milk also became rationed.[29] All Americans were encouraged to plant "Victory Gardens," whether living in urban or rural areas, and grow as much of their own food as possible. Walloons, of course, were already participating in this. Block Plans were initiated whereby block leaders met periodically for lectures by county agricultural agents on growing victory gardens and home economics experts who spoke on rationing and nutrition. The block leaders would then take the information they had learned back to disseminate among people living in their areas.[30]

President Roosevelt signed the Selective Service Act in 1940, requiring all men from the ages of twenty-one to thirty-six to register for the military draft. However, the law was expanded in 1943 to include men from eighteen to thirty-eight. To expedite the induction process, clinics were arranged for high school students in Green Bay by the Selective Service Board. Local physicians donated their time to conduct preliminary blood tests and physical examinations.[31] Just as during World War I, food production was a critical priority. While many farm men were drafted during the early months of the war, by 1943 local draft boards, aware of the severe labor shortage, granted deferments for those involved in agriculture, stating food production was essential for the war effort.

The United States found an unusual way to solve part of its severe labor shortage and one which greatly benefited the Belgian farmers dealing with labor shortages. By 1942

[29] Food Rationing in Wartime America, http://www.history.com/news/food-rationing-in-wartime-america, "Important Dates," *Green Bay Press Gazette,* March 1, 1943.
[30] "Leaders of Block Plan Meet Friday," *Green Bay Press Gazette,* March 1, 1943.
[31] "Draft Board Schedules Clinic for Students," *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, May 30, 1943.

the war had been raging for three years in Europe. By this time Britain was already housing a vast number of POWs. Prior to the Allied attack in North Africa, the U.S. agreed to take all prisoners the British captured after November 1942. According to the Geneva Convention of 1929, prisoners of war could be used as labor with the following stipulations:

> Officers could not be forced to work; the work must not be directly related to the war effort; the work must not be dangerous to the safety or well-being of the prisoners; the work must not be demeaning; the workers must be paid for their labor.[32]

Since the POWs could be required to work, the military distributed the prisoners in work camps around Wisconsin, as well as other states, to fill the severe labor shortages, especially in areas where labor was needed on farms for food production. The POWs' labor prevented crop loss and increased production.[33] Newspapers honored the U.S. government's desire for as little publicity about these prisoners as possible and little was reported about the work camps scattered around the state. Also, as most were located in rural areas and kept direct contact with the prisoners to a minimum, most Wisconsin residents were not aware of their existence.

Eventually, the state established two base camps and thirty-eight branch camps in Wisconsin, one of which was located at the northwestern edge of the Belgian settlement

[32] International Committee of the Red Cross.
[33] George G. Lewis, Lieutenant Colonel, MPC, United Stated Army and John Mewha, Captain, Armor, United States Army, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by United States Army, 1776-1945,* Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-213 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955) 126.

area in Sturgeon Bay.[34] By 1945, Wisconsin was housing 20,000 POWs, many of whom remained until 1946 to help with the harvest and canning of corn, peas, potato, and sugar beet crops and to work on dairy farms, even though the war was over. Repatriation was postponed at the request of the Secretary of Agriculture as their labor was essential.[35] Particularly in Door and Kewaunee Counties, where farming was done on small, individually owned farms, the farmers needed day laborers whom were all but impossible to obtain. Once contracted, the farmer would pick up a POW from the camp and return him at night. None ever reported any problems.[36] The camp would send a sack lunch with each POW, which was often supplemented by the farmer's wife.

The government charged the farmer the same rate he would have had to pay for day labor if it were available—forty cents per hour. Since the Geneva Convention required POWs be paid for the work they did, the government paid each one eighty cents per nine-hour day. This was paid in camp script that could be used to purchase personal items at the camp canteen. The balance went to the government. In 1945, POWs working in Wisconsin, in addition to paying for their keep, made $3,300,000 for the United States.[37]

In addition to harvesting, POW labor was used to process the crops in local canning factories. Government purchases of canned food were not to be labeled, but had to be sprayed with a rust inhibiting olive drab paint so there would be no shiny reflective surfaces from dump heaps of empty cans which could be spotted from the air by enemy planes. Many Wisconsin canners were almost entirely dependent on POWs. Without

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[34] Betty Cowley, *Stalag Wisconsin: Inside WWII Prisoner-of-War Camps* (Oregon, Wisconsin: Badger Books Inc., 2002) 12-13.
[35] Lewis and Mehaw, 127.
[36] *Door County Pulse, "*The Harvest of 1945: German POW Camps Filled Door County's Labor Shortage" July 1, 2005 (accessed November 2, 2018).
[37] Ibid.

their labor a great deal of the harvest would have gone to waste. Approximately 3,259 former soldiers of Rommel's Afrika Korps were assigned to this work in Wisconsin.[38] More than 2,000 former Nazi soldiers worked just on the Door Peninsula among the Walloons. POWs also worked in the dairy industry, both on the dairy farms and in the production of powdered and canned milk.[39]

Just as in World War I, the Walloons' support of the World War II effort went beyond expectations. In 1943, Door County purchased more than double its war bond quota in four months. In October the purchases equaled 179 percent, in November, 152 percent, in December, 157 percent, and in January an impressive 309 percent of their quota. The community of Forestville led the way with the purchase of $12,150 of war bonds followed by Brussels purchasing $10,368 of war bonds.[40] The same support was found throughout the Belgian area. By the close of the war, eight War Bond drives were conducted in Brown County. Every one of these exceeded its goal, the average being by 158 percent of its quota. From December 1942 until December 1945, Brown County raised a total of $64,462,708 for the war effort.[41]

The Walloons also did their part contributing men to the military. In spite of the preponderance of deferments, Belgian families still suffered the loss of many young soldiers. The Army and Army Air Force reported that Kewaunee County, the most scantily populated of the Belgian counties with a population of only 1600, the loss of thirty-two

[38] Fred A. Stare, *The Story of Wisconsin's Great Canning Industry* (Baltimore: The Canning Trade, 1949)
[39] Ibid., 240.
[40] "County More Than Doubled Bond Sales Quota During Drive to Buy Naval Ship" *Door County Advocate,* February 5, 1943.
[41] "Final Results of the 8th Victory Loan for Brown County," *Green Bay Press Gazette,* January 23, 1946.

men. Door County lost forty men and from Brown County, the most heavily populated and least rural county, 185 men.[42]

At the close of the war, Wisconsin's farmers were economically quite stable and in a far better situation than they had been during the 1930s. Farm prices were up and farmers were respected for the part they played in winning the war. Now the work of bringing electricity to rural Americans continued in earnest. Electricity providers—private, municipal, and cooperative—found ways to run their lines and deliver electricity at a reasonable and competitive price. Once electric power was available, Walloon farmers were ready to embrace it and buy labor-saving devices as quickly as they could afford them. Electricity influenced farm operations and farm family life more than any other technological innovation—before or since.[43] However, it did nothing to weaken the cohesiveness of the Walloon cultural community. The entire Walloon community reaped the benefits of electricity and was able to achieve a more profitable and comfortable life as it experienced the benefits together.

As had happened so many times before, the Walloon ethnic core, while evolving and accommodating to the environmental changes surrounding it, remained unchanged. They still self-identified as Walloon, different from "the others." This cohesive community retained the same values, beliefs, modes of behavior, religion, and politics. They retained their deep love of farming and an almost clannish closeness to their families, enjoying a residential stability and concentration rarely found a hundred and fifty years after immigration.

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[42] WWII Army Casualties: Wisconsin, National Archives http://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/army-casualties/wisconsin.html (accessed June 23, 2018).
[43] Apps, *Wisconsin Agriculture*, 216.

This unusual ethnic retention is due to the particular set of circumstances experienced by the Walloons in their chosen settlement area.

Conclusion

As World War II ended, Walloon farmers, along with most of Wisconsin's laborers involved in agriculture found themselves in a secure financial position. In 1948, the cash income of Wisconsin farmers reached the highest level on record. The next five years, while experiencing some fluctuation, continued this prosperity.[1] This was due in large part to their ability to adjust to the changing circumstances around them. When the Walloon farmers realized the advantages to dairy farming over raising cash crops they made the change and by 1952, 66.9 percent of their income came from the sale of milk and cattle.[2] As dairy farming is a three hundred sixty-five day a year undertaking, some adjustment to the daily routines was required, but making these adjustments did nothing to weaken their ethnic cohesiveness. In 1950 the standard of living in the three Walloon counties was between forty and fifty-nine percent above the U.S. county average of 1945.[3] This is just one example of how well the Walloons were able to adjust to their changing environment and use it to their advantage without that change affecting their ethnic core.

Factors Aiding Retention of Ethnicity

Their choice of a settlement area that was located in an isolated wilderness was a very fortuitous decision. This location allowed the Walloons to establish an area eventually

[1] Wisconsin State Department of Agriculture, *Wisconsin Agriculture in Mid-Century, Bulletin No. 325* (Madison, Wisconsin: June 1954) 12.
[2] Ibid, 13.
[3] Ibid, 21.

encompassing parts of three counties, which contained few other inhabitants, freeing them from pressure to accommodate to any other culture. There was no dominant group other than themselves, which allowed them to continue to live much as they and their ancestors had in Wallonia with the great advantage of vast amounts of land.

The Walloons shared a region of origin in which most people already knew each other, or at least knew of their families, before migration and they brought these generations-old bonds with them. The Walloons, originally from Southern Belgium, spoke a French patois. These inhabitants not only spoke the same language but also the same regional dialect. The situation in Belgium clearly illustrates the fact that it is possible for more than one ethnic group to be located within the political boundaries of a state while maintaining their ethnicity. The inhabitants of Northern Belgium, the Flemish, speak a Dutch dialect and culturally they are close to the Dutch. The important determinant is how the inhabitants of an area self-identify. To this day, the Walloons living in the original settlement area of Wisconsin enthusiastically affirm the fact that they are Walloons and usually can trace their ancestry, generation by generation, to the mid-eighteen hundreds when their ancestors immigrated from Wallonia. Continuing their strong family or clan structure as well as rituals developed in Wallonia, they have maintained their ethnic identity to the present day, participating in the cultural traditions their ancestors brought with them more than a century and a half ago.

Never interested in acculturating into the Anglo-Saxon core culture in an attempt to be accepted as part of that culture or to get ahead financially, the Walloons wanted nothing more than to maintain their rural, agricultural life-style. Social mobility was not a part of Walloon culture. During their brief migration period, 1853 to 1857, subsequent immigrant

Walloons were drawn to the places where others of the same ethnic background were found. The Walloons enjoyed a surprisingly non-competitive, classless culture. Someone giving the impression of wanting to get ahead was looked down on as someone thinking they were better than others. As the next generation came of age, they took their place alongside their fathers and other family members working the family farm. Walloons never sold their land to outsiders, and a social stigma was attached to anyone who did so. Instead, the land was inherited, maintaining the closeness and homogeneity of their community. If land was sold, the sale was restricted to another Walloon farmer.

An especially strong factor in the continuance of their ethnicity is their shared religious beliefs and the important role the church has played in in their lives. Walloons were almost universally Catholic and were always quite involved in the life of their church. This strengthened the bonds between them as well as giving them similar morals, modes of behavior, and value systems. Their social lives revolved around their church community as together they participated in the rituals and celebrations of the Catholic Church. Their weekly religious sharing and socializing was an important element for maintaining the interconnectedness of the community and continues to be into the present. The roadside chapels, built since the early days of the Walloon settlement and open to anyone who felt the need for a quiet moment to meditate or pray, can still be seen dotting the settlement area. Special days, some religious and some secular, still practiced together by the Walloons include Rogation Day, the first Sunday of Lent, Easter, Assumption Day, St. Nicolas Day, May Pole Day, and Kermis. Year after year, as the Walloons gathered to participate in their traditional rituals and ceremonies, their ethnic bonds and group identity were reinforced.

The Walloons have continued the same foodways through the years, not only enjoying the traditional foods associated with various holidays, but in daily food preparation and consumption. Just as in Wallonia, a typical family meal begins with soup. This is followed by meat (usually pork), vegetables, and potatoes, and finally dessert. When available, the soup was made with tomatoes, peas, leaks, carrots, cabbage, and chicken broth—just as in Wallonia. Many of the ways of preparing meat were identical to the ways it had been done before emigration. Particularly popular has always been tripe, which is sausage containing pork and chopped cabbage, and boulettes, a kind of meatball. Walloons have also continued to eat the same vegetables as they always have: cabbage, carrots, beans, asparagus, potatoes, and salad greens. Another favorite is tarte a l'djote consisting of a raised dough crust filled with mixed vegetables, mostly Swiss chard and herbs. This is slowly baked and then spread with butter.

Recent Evidence of Continuing Ethnic Identity

In 1968, after a failed attempt a few years earlier, the Peninsula Belgian American Club reorganized and has successfully functioned to the present day, with the stated purpose of honoring their forefathers. By 1972 the club was well enough established to organize a trip of one hundred fifty Wisconsin Walloons to Wallonia Belgium and met with relatives there. They were warmly welcomed and made the decision to return to Wallonia on alternating years. The group that made the next trip, in 1974, increased in number to one hundred seventy. While in Belgium, in addition to visiting relatives, they enjoyed an official reception attended by both United States and Belgian dignitaries, an abundance of Belgian food, a couyon tournament, Belgian square dancing called in Walloon, and a

theatrical presentation in Walloon.[4] By the time of the next scheduled trip to Wallonia, membership in the Peninsula Belgian American Club had increased to five hundred and of those members, one hundred eighty-four travelled to Belgium.[5] In 1975, the Wallonie-Wisconsin Society made its first trip from Belgium to Wisconsin with two hundred Belgian Walloons. This tradition of the biennial visits continues to the present day.

In 1977, Belgium's King Baudouin conferred Chevalier de L'Ordre de Leopold II (the equivalent of Belgian knighthood) on Harry Chaudoir, a leader of the American Walloon community. This honor was in "recognition of the many unselfish services you have rendered to the Belgian community in the peninsula area and toward the furthering of close ties between Belgium and the United States."[6]

When the Belgian Walloons began their visits in the 1970s, there were many American Walloons who still spoke Walloon. Even today when speaking English, some incorporate remnants of Walloon. Not infrequently sentences will be constructed with the noun after the verb. An example of this would be the sentence "Mother, the house she cleaned, all day." Many sentences end with the expression "en so" or "don cha know" for "isn't that right." "Yoos guys" is also frequently heard. The language has evolved differently on each side of the Atlantic with the only written version being created in Belgium in 1900. In Wisconsin, where Walloon never existed as a written language, the Walloon Preservation Project was initiated in 2014 by the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire language

[4] *Door County Advocate,*June 26, 1975.
[5] *Green Bay Press-Gazette,* July 18, 1976.
[6] *Green Bay Press-Gazette,* June 15, 1977.

professor Kelly Biers and a team of University of Wisconsin students. They are being aided by Walloon speakers from the Belgian settlement area.[7]

For an ethnic island of this duration to occur, the particular elements discussed here must be present. Essential is a group of people with a common ancestry and cultural tradition, a shared history, and with a strong feeling of group identity. From this group is found friendships and marriage partners. The Walloon ethnic island is larger than most but that provides an ample gene pool for it to continue for multiple generations. In the summer of 2017, this author interviewed a woman who identified herself as the last of the pure Walloons. She was the first to marry a man who was not also pure Walloon.[8] This was 160 years after her ancestors migrated to Wisconsin. The common religion shared by most Walloons is an important factor enhancing their cohesiveness and group identity. This insures their shared modes of behavior and sense of morality. In addition to holding the same spiritual beliefs, their shared dedication to a rural life style and lack of any competitiveness creates an automatic understanding of others in their community. Also enhancing its survival is the stigma attached to the sale of land to outsiders. Land was inherited or, if the land had to be sold, the sale is customarily to other Walloons. Consequently, generation after generation, the feeling of being a part of the Walloon community farming this area without the intrusion of others who might have differing ethnic markers continues to be the norm.

[7] Alyssa K. Skiba, "Walloon: Door County's Endangered Language," *Door County Living,* November 14, 2017.
[8] Monica Thiry, interview with the author, August 2, 2017.

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