



Telling the story of the Belgian Settlement in Wisconsin and working to preserve unique elements of Belgian culture

www.BelgianHeritageCenter.org

September 2021

The Belgian Heritage Center is Open!
Friday-Sunday 10 am - 4 pm and
by appointment

2021 Events

8-10
OCT

The Great Fire Remembrance

16
OCT

Hunter's Raffle

26
NOV

Thanksgiving Friday Merchandise Sale

Watch for more events, as they are scheduled. Remember to check out and "Like" our Facebook page to learn about events and other BHC info.

October 8 is the 150th anniversary of the Great Fire of 1871 that transformed our Belgian communities. BHC is working to increase awareness of the devastating fires endured by our ancestors. We honor the perseverance of the Belgians who fought the fires, survived the aftermath and built the communities we know today. Please see inside for more information about the fire and our special remembrance events.

This month also marks the beginning of a new school year. We are taking this opportunity to feature a wonderful look back at school days past. If you have pictures of schools and school children to share, please let us know so we can add them to our collection.

Tickets are on sale now for our Hunter's Raffle on October 16. Thanks to generous sponsors, the prize list is an outdoors person's dream. See inside for more information.

Consider the Heritage Center for your Next Event

The Belgian Heritage Center is a perfect church-like setting for weddings and wakes/funerals. The BHC is also available for rental for private events such as meetings, conferences and family reunions. Traditional Belgian food and a Belgian heritage presentation are available on request. For more information call Sue Havel at 920-493-2789 or email: events@belgianheritagecenter.org



The Great Fire of 1871

150 Years Since Fire Transformed the Belgian Settlements



BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER

This year marks 150 years since the Great Fire devastated northeast Wisconsin. Often called the Peshtigo Fire where the loss of life was greatest, the fire affected both sides of the bay of Green Bay. In the Belgian settlements, it is estimated that 200-300 people died but no one knows for sure because it was still newly settled and records were not available of everyone in the area. Many people have heard about the Chicago Fire but don't know that on the same day, fire damage in Wisconsin was far worse. The fires in Wisconsin took 5 times as many lives, left thousands more homeless and destroyed almost 1.3 million acres. The Great Fire of 1871 in Wisconsin is still the single deadliest fire in US History.

Belgians began immigrating to Brown, Door and Kewaunee counties in 1853 and by 1871, several growing communities had been established. Many Belgians came here hoping to farm, but the massive trees covering their land led to an early economy of logging and shingle making. Much of what the Belgians built was made of wood – buildings, fences, roads, furniture, etc. They even used saw dust to make mattresses.

The year 1871 was hot and dry across the US. In the Belgian settlements, there was no rain to speak of after July. As October approached, falling leaves added to the accumulation of sawdust, slashings and other flammable material. The dry conditions also meant that everything built of wood had dried out and would burn even more quickly. For months, fires broke out throughout the Belgian settlement and were increasingly hard to fight as wells and creeks ran dry. Smoke was everywhere making it difficult to see and breathe. Even ships in Green Bay and Lake Michigan experienced poor visibility for navigation. But this was just the beginning.

On October 8, a weather pattern brought high winds to the area, starting a vicious cycle. Wind fed the fires, and as the fires grew, they consumed oxygen and created more winds up to 90 mph and temperatures of 2,000 degrees. Survivors described "tornadoes of fire." There was no sure way to survive. Some people went into their wells or a creek – some of them survived and others did not. The same was true of people who went to open land where they didn't think there was anything around them to burn. That worked for some but not others. Death was not necessarily from burning. Many people suffocated as the fire consumed the oxygen around them. Others were reduced instantly to ashes by the intense heat. Also lost were homes, farms, livestock, businesses, churches, roads, food supplies for people and animals – whatever was in the fire's path.



©Bay Maps, 2020 used with permission courtesy of J.J. and Sara Wagner

Thank you for your interest in Belgian Heritage!

The Great Fire of 1871



BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER

Recovery funds came from across Wisconsin, the US, and around the world, including the Belgian government and its citizens. Donations of clothing, farm implements, bedding, medical assistance and food, came in. Relief committees were formed. For the great majority, however, Belgian neighbors would provide shelter for people and livestock as farms and homes were rebuilt. The fire transformed the landscape – the massive trees were gone and the area was made easier to farm. The landscape today of farms, fields and red brick houses is a reflection of this terrible event of 150 years ago.

There is much more to know about this tragic event than we can share in this newsletter. Other sources include:

- Tornado Memorial Park, County DK at Stevenson Pier Road, Brussels
- Peshtigo Fire Museum, Peshtigo
- Destination Door County Unearthed – The Great Williamsonville Fire; video available at youtube.com
- The Great Fires in Wisconsin of 1871, including Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin, Truthful Incidents of the Eyewitnesses, Frank Tilton 1871; book available soon at BHC or through Brown County Historical Society
- When the Night Rained Fire: October 8, 1871, Kewaunee County and the Great Fire, Virginia Feld Johnson; book available at BHC
- Firestorm at Peshtigo, Denise Gess and William Lutz
- Embers of October, Robert W. Wells

Did you know?

Traditional brick homes were influenced by the fire. When the Belgians rebuilt their homes, they still used wood, but wanted the fire resistance provided by a brick veneer exterior. The brick also resembles homes in Belgium. The distinctive gable windows were meant to provide a lookout for future fires on the horizon.

The fire did NOT “jump the bay.” The dry conditions, prevalence of wood and frequent fires leading up to October 8 were the same on both sides of the bay. The weather system that triggered the conflagration also affected both sides. The Great Fire was actually multiple fires occurring at the same time due to the same conditions.

There really were tornadoes of fire. The intensity of the fire and wind resulted in a vortex sucking fire and debris miles into the air. This would have looked like tornadoes of fire.



JEANQUART HOME & FAMILY

Great Fire of 1871 Video

The impact of the fire in the Belgian settlements has been somewhat overshadowed by the fires in more populated areas. A video being produced by the Belgian Heritage Center will explain the causes of the fire, the immediate impact on the Belgians, and the transformation of the Belgian communities that occurred through rebuilding. BHC will make the video available free to schools and historical organizations. It will be shown to the public at the Great Fire Remembrance on October 9 and 10. The video is made possible by grants, in kind donations and many hours of volunteer labor.



Thank you for your interest in Belgian Heritage!

The Great Fire of 1871



Great Fire 150th Anniversary Remembrance Information

The Great Fire Remembrance at the Belgian Heritage Center will be special this year to recognize the 150th anniversary. It will include a special vigil on Friday evening.

Friday, October 8 6:00 to 6:30 pm Remembrance Vigil will include a prayer of remembrance by Fr. Edward Looney, a reading by Door County Poet Laureate Mike Orlock and a candle lighting accompanied by prayers in Walloon as they would have been said by many in the path of the fire. Church bells will toll at conclusion.

Saturday, October 9 9:00 am to 1:00 pm Brussels-Union-Gardner (BUG) Fire Department fire trucks will be on site. At 10:00am, Barb Englebert Chisholm will present a reenactment of her great-grandmother's story of surviving the Great Fire. At 10:45, BUG Color Guard will lead visitors into BHC. At 11:00am, BHC's new Great Fire video will be shown; also shown until 3:00pm on request. Following the video, David Siegel, Captain with the Green Bay Metro Fire Department, will present "Understanding the Realities of the Great Fires of 1871." Author Virginia Field Johnson will be on hand to discuss her new book, "When the Night Rained Fire: October 8, 1871, Kewaunee County and the Great Fire."

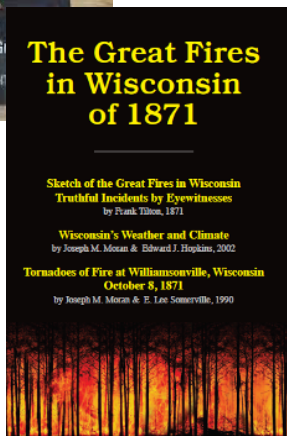
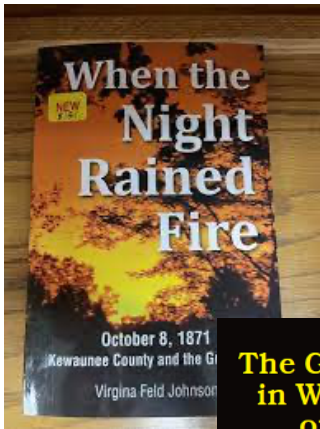
Sunday, October 10 At 10:00 am, Barb Englebert Chisholm will present a reenactment of her great-grandmother's story of surviving the Great Fire. BHC's new Great Fire video will be shown at 10:45 and until 3:00 pm on request.

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion will also hold a special remembrance on Friday evening starting at 7:00. BHC's vigil will conclude in time for those interested in attending both events.

New Books Available about the Great Fire

BHC is pleased to offer "The Great Fires of Wisconsin of 1871", a new release of Frank Tilton's 1871 compilation of eyewitness accounts of fire survivors in Brown, Door and Kewaunee counties. The book also includes two contemporary articles explaining how fire influences culture, economic change and ecological disaster. The book is being published by the Brown County Historical Society and will be available soon at BHC and through our website for only \$10.

We are also pleased to offer "When the Night Rained Fire: October 8, 1871, Kewaunee County and the Great Fire" by Virginia Feld Johnson. This new release focuses on the impact of the fire and challenges of rebuilding in Kewaunee County. The book is available now at BHC and through our website for \$20.



Thank you for your interest in Belgian Heritage!

BHC EVENTS



Kermis

The Belgian Heritage Center was thrilled to welcome everyone back to our Kermis on August 15. And it seems like everyone was happy to be back – we had our biggest turnout yet for this traditional event. The weather was perfect, the food, drink and entertainment were terrific and the raffles and auction gave everyone a chance to win great prizes. We are truly grateful for the many donors and sponsors who made this event possible. You can see a complete list on our website and Facebook page. We are blessed to have many tireless volunteers who put in countless hours to make this event a huge success. Thank you all!!



Booyah Documentary Video Looking for Photos

The BHC, in conjunction with John Nelson from Door County Digital, is producing a documentary about Booyah and its Belgian roots. We filmed at the August 15th Kermis and will continue to record more stories about Booyah throughout northeast Wisconsin. Reminisce about the history and significance of Booyah to your family, your church, your community, and tell us about it.

We are also looking for photos and artifacts about Booyah, especially those from back in time. Share them with Bill Chaudoir who may be reached at bill.chaudoir@gmail.com or 920-559-3113.



Do You Have Photos of Schools



Back to School - Homework Time!

Yes, homework for you! In the course of sharing the Champion School photos in our last issue, we realized that in our overall digital collection of school pictures in the Belgian settlements, we only have about 25 pictures. We suspect there are many more pictures out there that should be preserved as part of our Belgian heritage. If you have any pictures of school buildings, classrooms/classes, or school programs that you or your Belgian ancestors attended, please feel free to stop by the Center during open hours to have them scanned. Or if you prefer to upload the images yourself, there is a feature on the Belgian Heritage Center website under the Belgian History tab to allow you to upload and describe the picture.

We'll be looking for pictures of the schools in Brown County (e.g. Town of Humboldt (Brick School "the Walloon school" and Water Division "the Flemish school") and Town of Green Bay and Scott (Mount May, Champion, Elm Grove, Dykesville), Kewaunee County (e.g. schools in Tonet, Walhain, Thiry Daems, Duvall, Dykesville/Red River, Rosiere, Lincoln) and Door County (e.g. schools in the Namur, Brussels, Misere, Gardner areas). Many of the original Belgian settlement schools no longer exist and if there are pictures out there, the Heritage Center would love to add them to the digital collection. Our goal is to dramatically increase from our collection of 25. Let's work together to make that happen.. Note: do not worry if you do not know much about the picture(s) you may have to share. The Heritage Center will work in collaboration with resources at the Brown, Kewaunee and Door County historical organizations to identify and place the images. The same goes for any other old photos you may find among an ancestor's possessions. Better to contact us versus throwing them out.. help us to preserve our heritage.



Mount May School
Hwy T - Town of Scott

BHC Hunter's Raffle Returns for 2021!



After having to cancel our 2020 events due to pandemic concerns, the Belgian Heritage Center is pleased to announce that the popular Hunter's Raffle will be returning this year. The list of prizes continues to grow, and 2021 sees a ticket packed with some outstanding gear for outdoors people, including not only hunting firearms, but also food plot packages, an ice fishing trip, a Yeti cooler, gift cards, optics, a tree stand, taxidermy work, handmade items, and more!

The Hunter's Raffle event date is set for Saturday, October 16th. We'll be serving homemade chili, which will be available for dining on-site or carry-out. The festivities will run from 12pm – 3pm, with the raffle drawing taking place at 2:30pm at the Belgian Heritage Center.

Ticket buyers need not be present to win. However, those who are lucky enough to be drawn as a firearm winner will need to complete a background check before taking possession of their prize. This can be done right at the BHC on the day of the drawing, though this process can be completed at a later date through our supporting FFL dealer, Rocky Ridge Shooter's Supply.

Though the major focus of the event is the raffle ticket itself and all its amazing prizes, the event itself is well-worth visiting. Our chili proved quite popular in the past, selling out early. We'll also have local Belgian-owned craft beers, as well as traditional favorites. Hunters or not, all are welcome to attend!

In addition to food and drink, we'll have games and more outdoor-themed prizes available only on the day of the event. Join us for this wonderful Fall day of celebrating our rich outdoor-loving heritage. Our Belgian ancestors prided themselves on self-sufficiency, which included hunting the game-rich woodlands for meat and fishing our local waters for varied table fare. Even before they were able to clear the timberlands to grow crops or raise cattle, they survived by living off the land. At the BHC, we celebrate that tradition of self-reliance and come together again for this day of merriment, prizes, and preparation for Fall hunting and fishing seasons.

The Belgian Heritage Center is incredibly grateful to all Hunter's Raffle sponsors and supporters. We couldn't do this without them—and all of you—and we are proud to carry-on the outdoor tradition that sustained our ancestors. As with all our events, we encourage folks to support the businesses that continue to give so much of themselves to the BHC and the community.

Hunter's Raffle tickets sell for \$10 each; three for \$20; or twenty for \$100. Only a limited number of tickets are available, meaning better chances of winning, so get yours before they're gone. Raffle tickets are available for sale at the Belgian Heritage Center during open hours, Friday through Sunday 10am-4pm.

Tickets can also be purchased at the Steel Wheel Saloon in Namur, Rio Creek Feed Mill, and Rocky Ridge Shooter's Supply in Oconto Falls. If you're unable to get to one of these locations, feel free to contact any of the BHC Board Members, or reach out to us via the website or Facebook.

BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER HUNTER'S RAFFLE
Drawing Saturday, Oct. 16th, 2021 at 2:30pm • Belgian Heritage Center • 1255 County DK, Brussels, WI 54204

1st - Henry Repeating Arms Big Boy .44 Mag. (Belgian Heritage Center) 18th - Minnow Bucket Full of Fishing Supplies (AMA-Rick & Dee Clutts)
2nd - Browning BPS Hunter Camo 12ga. (Bruce, Pam & Kristin Alberts) 19th - Handmade Rustic Walking Stick (John & Barb Maskell)
3rd - Mossberg Patriot 6.5 Creedmoor (Joe Alexander & Kevin Moore) 20th - Frog Station Creations Wooden Duck Nesting Box (Al & Theresa Alexander)
4th - Weatherby PA-08 Camo 12ga. (Tim Buhr/Buhr Construction) 21-25th - Vortex Prize Pack (Vortex Optics)
5th - Ruger Wrangler Bronze .22LR (Joe Pagel/Drainage USA & Larry Renier)
6th - Yeti Tundra Extreme Cooler (John & Polly Alberts)
7th - Ruger Yukon Mag. .22 Cal. Scoped Air Rifle (Hanmann Milling & Tisch Mills Farm Center)
8th - River's Edge Two-Plex Ladder Tree Stand (River's Edge/Ardisam)
9th - Vortex Crossfire Red Dot Optic (Vortex Optics)
10th - \$200 GC for Ice Fishing with JJ's Guide Service (JJ Malvitz)
11th - Horny Buck Seed Co. Deer Hunting Prize Pack (Horny Buck Seed Co)
12th - \$100 GC for Food Plot Package/Game Feed (Rio Creek Feed Mill)
13th - GC for Whitetail Euro Mount @ Smokey Ridge Taxidermy (Dave Rady)
14th - Weber Smokey Joe Grill (Donna & Steve Bultman)
15-16th - \$25 Fleet Farm GC (Marty Baudhuin)
17th - \$25 Kwik Trip Card (Kwik Trip)

**\$10 Each
3 for \$20
20 for \$100**

Limited Number of Tickets
Need not be present to win!

2021

LIC.#R0036981-A-58422



Belgian Heritage Center
PO Box 173
Brussels, WI 54204

BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER DONATION/PLEDGE FORM

I/We are pleased to support your efforts with a gift of: \$ _____

Name(s): _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

- Paid in Full
- Annually: \$ _____/year, for _____ years, beginning _____/_____/20_____

Checks may be made payable to the Namur Belgian Heritage Foundation, P.O. Box 173, Brussels, WI 54204. Donations can be made at www.belgianheritagecenter.org (major credit cards accepted).

- Please check if you **DO NOT** wish to be recognized in publications under the names provided above.

Signature _____ **Date** _____