



BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER

www.BelgianHeritageCenter.org

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920-825-7319

MAY 2026

BHC 2026 Event Calendar - Save the Dates!

22 MAY	BHC opens on weekends (Fri thru Sun, 10-3)
6 JUN	Ivo Abraham WWII Belgian Resistance in Antwerp Talk
18 JUN	Door County History Days
28 JUN	Waffle Breakfast
11 JUL	Belgian Days Bus Tours and Presentations
16 AUG	Kermis
12 SEPT	Grandparents Day/Luke's Lost Arts Wooden Shoe Carving
3 OCT	Great Fire Remembrance
8 OCT	Great Fire Remembrance at National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion
9 OCT	Hunters Raffle
17 OCT	Lynda Drews on her book "Disposable Wives"
20-21 NOV	Kewaunee Christkindlmarkt
27 NOV	Thanksgiving Sale / Family Glass Workshop
5 DEC	Christmas Spirits Adult Glass Workshop

BHC Opening May 22 for 2026 Season

BHC will open for regular hours starting Friday, May 22. Hours are 10:00 until 3:00 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday through October 26. Tour guides will be on hand to walk you through our exhibits and historic buildings or you can explore on your own. Driving by outside these hours? Stop and see our outdoor displays!



Belgian Waffle Breakfast Sunday, June 28 9:00 to Noon

BHC will host a Belgian Waffle Breakfast on Sunday, June 28 from 9:00 until noon. Breakfast includes waffles, tripe, eggs and a beverage. Proceeds support the Belgian Heritage Center's mission to preserve and promote Belgian heritage. Price is \$12 for adults, \$7 for children 4-12, free for children 3 and under.



BHC for Private Events

BHC is a great place to host meetings, reunions, weddings, celebration of life and other private events. For more information call Julie at 920-619-6363 or email contact@belgianheritagecenter.org.

Belgian Days Special Events at BHC Saturday, July 11



Celebrating the Traditions and Belgian Heritage
of Southern Door County, WI USA



Belgian Settlement Bus Tours – departing from BHC at 8:30-10:00

Join BHC's Historian, Barb (Englebert) Chisholm, for a 90 minute narrated bus tour in the Belgian settlements. See roadside chapels, traditional Belgian houses, summer kitchens, cemeteries and where the first Kermis was held. Hear stories about the lives and challenges faced by the early settlers. Tours are \$25 per person. The bus leaves from the Belgian Heritage Center at 8:30 am on Saturday, July 11. Reservations are strongly encouraged as seating is limited. BHC will open at 8:00 for check in and visitors. Transportation will be via standard school bus.*

To reserve your seat call Julie at 920-619-6363, email contact@belgianheritagecenter.org or stop in at BHC during our weekend hours. Payment by cash, check and credit card is accepted. The tour is offered in cooperation with the Brussels Lions Club as part of their annual Belgian Days celebration on July 10-12. Tour proceeds benefit the Brussels Lions Club and BHC.

*Please note: the school bus is not air conditioned and is accessible only by steps.

BHC Campus Walking History Tour – 9:30-10:00

Learn about Belgian traditions and legacy during a walking tour of BHC's campus lead by BHC storytellers. See examples of Belgian brick houses, a roadside chapel and many artifacts used by Belgian settlers. Hear about early Belgians who still impact our communities today and the neighboring buildings that date back to the earliest days of the settlement.

Belgian Life on the Door Peninsula / Great Fire of 1871 – 10:30-noon

A series of speakers will share the history and stories of the Belgian settlers. Sandy (Lampereur) Orsted will explain the history and development of the Belgian Settlements. Barb (Englebert) Chisholm will share stories of the challenges, successes and light-hearted moments of the early days. At 11:30, Captain David Siegel of the Green Bay Metro Fire Department will explain why the Great Fire was so deadly and how it compares to more recent fires, followed by a site visit to Tornado Park to show you why the fire devastated what was once Williamsonville.

The Belgian Settlements in 1776 and 1876 – 1:00-2:00

BHC will repeat the History Days presentation covering the history of the Belgian settlement area between 1776 and 1900 and how local history was intertwined with state and national events.

Bring Your Children and Grandchildren!

Tours and events at BHC for History Days (June 18) and Belgian Days (July 11) are especially great times to bring young people to BHC to learn about local history and their heritage. Presentations are suitable for ages 10 and up. Preservation of Belgian pride in the next generation is our responsibility today!

Door County History Days at BHC – Thursday, June 18

Heritage Alliance of Door County will again sponsor History Days from June 15 through 20 featuring a variety of history themed events throughout the county. This year's events will focus on the 250th anniversary of the United States. BHC's event will start at 1:00 on Thursday, June 18.



Presenters will cover the history of the Belgian settlement area between 1776 and 1900 and how local history was intertwined with state and national events. This period in history covers a wide range of historical events ranging from devastating events like war and the Great Fire to the incredible success of the Belgian settlements as they build, rebuilt and expand the communities we know today. BHC will open for visitors at 11:00. Docents will be on hand to share information and conduct tours of the campus before and after the presentation.

Watch the Peninsula Pulse for detailed information about all Door County History Days events.

BHC's presentation will be repeated during Belgian Days on Saturday, July 11 at 1:00.

WWII Belgian Resistance in Antwerp Talk – June 6

Ivo Abraham will share the amazing story of his family's work in the resistance during World War II at BHC at 10:00 on Saturday, June 6. Ivo's family traces back to Piétrebais, just below the language border in Belgium and Korbeek-Lo, right above the language border in a bilingual family. Ivo's grandfather, Fernand Abraham, went to Antwerp to work in the port's petroleum industry. Antwerp had a large Jewish community. Early during World War II, despite his Brabant-Wallon origin, Fernand had to prove to the occupier that there was no Jewish ancestry three generations back. He was quite a character – not always for the good – and joined the resistance in Antwerp, which made him the greatest polluter of the Schelde river. Ivo will share his memories – as a 10-year old – of Fernand, especially as Fernand was dying of Hodgkins disease in the hospital in Leuven, and Ivo's secret hops on his bike to go visit him.



Our Nation at 250

In recognition of the 250th anniversary of the United States, BHC will feature a series of articles looking at the state of

the Belgian settlements at 100 year intervals, starting with 1776. In our last newsletter, we covered the time of the revolution. Here, we look at the situation 100 years later.

If you missed the 1776 article, it can be found in the March newsletter on the Events tab at belgianheritagecenter.org

The Belgian Settlements in 1876

US Celebrates Centennial as Belgians Recover from Adversity

Much transpired between the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the nation's Centennial.

- 1783 – American Revolutionary War ends with the Treaty of Paris recognizing U.S. independence.
- 1830 – Our ancestors in Belgium live in the country as we know it today following the Belgian revolution.
- 1836 – Native Americans cede land to the federal government in what would become Belgian settlements.
- 1848 – Wisconsin enters the United States as its 30th state.
- 1852 – Fr. Eduard Daems, originally from Belgium, arrives in Bay Settlement.
- 1853 – The first Belgian settlers arrive near what is now Champion; 10,000 more follow over the next 10 years.
- 1857 – Xavier Martin arrives and teaches fellow Belgian immigrants to speak English, apply for citizenship and participate in government.
- 1858 – The first Kermis is held in Rosiere.
- 1859 – Adele Brice reports her apparitions of the Blessed Virgin near Champion.
- 1861 – The Civil War begins, lasting four years. Many Belgians volunteer or are drafted to serve.
- 1871 – The Great Fire devastates wide swaths of the Belgian settlements leaving 200-300 dead and many more homeless from New Franken to Little Sturgeon.

In 1876, the country is moving beyond the Civil War, the assassination of President Lincoln and reconstruction of the south into a period of invention and economic development. Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone. The transcontinental railroad connects east and west coasts. The U.S. emerges from an economic depression (Panic of 1873) and a disputed presidential election (Rutherford Hayes vs. Samuel Tilden). The Centennial coincides with the first world's fair held in the U.S. in Philadelphia, celebrating the achievements of the

developing nation. Nearly 10 million people from 37 countries attend.

Wisconsin's population explodes by the 1850's with the arrival of immigrants from places such as Germany, Ireland, Scandinavia and, of course, Belgium; more than a third of the population was foreign born, many retaining their native languages. Wisconsin is developing agricultural and industrial capability, with dairy soon to be the state's primary agricultural activity and the University of Wisconsin a leader in dairy science. Logging and mining are prominent, especially in Northern Wisconsin, and the brewing industry is growing.

The Belgians are rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1871 which occurred just six years after the Civil War. Some are moving from rural areas to cities like Green Bay or further west, to the Dakotas and Oregon. Rural areas are moving rapidly toward agriculture, as logging and shingle making begin a slow decline. In addition to rebuilding homes, farms and livelihoods, Belgians recover from the collective trauma of losing loved ones to war and the fire.

Eugene Honore Delwiche of Rosiere is one Belgian immigrant affected by both. Serving in the Civil War with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, he was taken prisoner when he stopped to help a wounded comrade. He returned to his Rosiere farm after the war and was burned out by the Great Fire. His discharge papers were lost in the fire so his next challenge would be the bureaucracy to claim his benefits.

Rebuilding gives rise to distinctive Belgian architecture including brick houses, summer kitchens, roadside chapels and vernacular barns, many still standing today. Belgian entrepreneurs emerge as well. In 1874, Chaudoir brothers Justin, Antoine and Alexander are granted permission from the State to build a dock and pier on Green Bay in the Town of Union. Chaudoir's Dock facilitates export of lumber and agricultural products, transportation to the city of Green Bay and water access for commercial fishing and recreation. The business continues for decades and the dock later becomes a county park.

Tonet is one example of the thriving Belgian villages. St. Martin church opens in 1877 near an existing sawmill. By 1900, the area has a cheese factory, butcher shop, post office, Garfield and Martinville schools and the Paque and Hobreckx general stores. Some would continue for almost 100 years.

For other businesses however, the fire is the end. The Williamsonville Mill near Brussels is one of many completely destroyed by the Great Fire and 60 of their workers die. For other businesses, trouble lies ahead. One such business is the F.B. Gardner Company in the Town of Gardner which employed about 400 workers at the height of its operations.

"The period between the 1850s and 1870s was the golden age of shipbuilding at Little Sturgeon Bay. Around 1855, Freeland B. Gardner moved to Little Sturgeon Bay and founded a sawmill. His operation grew to include a warehouse, limekiln, shipyard, and docks. ...Financial and fire losses in 1877 led to the end of shipbuilding in Little Sturgeon Bay."

Continued...

Our Nation at 250 The Belgian Settlements in 1876

By the Centennial, churches and schools flourish throughout the settlements.

Fr. Daems and the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross are building a religious foundation among immigrant communities. Sister Adele Brice is fulfilling her mission to teach children as Our Lady of Good Help Chapel provides a place of hope and healing. The first recognized church in the Belgian Settlements is built in Namur; St. Mary of the Snows Parish serves the

faithful for over 140 years, eventually becoming the Belgian Heritage Center. White Star Spiritualist Church in Gardner attracts members desperate to connect with those they lost in the war and fire. Robinsonville Presbyterian Church opens in 1861. Taverns are often near churches allowing Belgians to congregate socially after attending services, maintaining the cohesiveness of the communities.

The first educational classes are held in private homes but are sporadically attended. Even after 1879 when Wisconsin law made school attendance compulsory, it is not enforced locally because children are needed on the farm and due to the difficulty attracting teachers. But by 1900, schoolhouses are common, with 14 schools in the in Door County Belgian settlements alone.

The Belgians of the era experience remarkable changes and challenges. As the turn of the century approaches, their success is evident, as the Consul General of Belgium to the U.S. reported in 1894:

"The Belgian colony near Green Bay, founded by Belgians in a foreign land is the only settlement of this type which has prospered. In the city of Green Bay the Belgians were distinguishing themselves in important positions... Most of the Belgians had nothing when they came to the United States. It is due to their untiring industry that they have succeeded."



Fourth of July Parade, Ahnapee 1886



States and Territories of the United States of America
July 29 1868 to August 1 1876

US map at the Centennial courtesy Golbez via Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic license

What Was and Wasn't in 1876

- The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the US in 1803, adding land west of the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains and Gulf of Mexico. The California Gold Rush drew many west to seek their fortune starting in 1849.
- By the end of the century, Ahnapee and Western Railway would connect the Belgian settlements to Green Bay via routes to Sturgeon Bay and Algoma, further enhancing access to markets.
- The Great War (WWI) in 1914 would be the beginning of a 30 year period of war, the rise of communism and fascism, and economic depression reshaping the global order. Wisconsin would send about 120,000 soldiers to WWI; 4,000 would not return. In WWII, over 330,000 would serve (including 9,000 women); 8,000 would not return.
- In 1919, Wisconsin would be the first state to ratify the 19th amendment to give women the right to vote in the U.S.

Sources: Wikipedia, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Blue Book, Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross, Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men of Chicago (Carbutt/Merideth), History of the Belgian Settlements (Matt Tlachac), Walloon Immigrants of Northeast Wisconsin (Jacqueline Tinker), Tell Me Again Stories (Harold Heidmann), Peninsula Pulse, The Second Battle (John Mertens).



Wisconsin Walloon

Wisconsin Walloon Website Launch

BHC is thrilled to announce the launch of WisconsinWalloon.org, a new website dedicated to preservation of the Walloon language as spoken in Wisconsin.

[Explore Now](#)

The website offers a variety of ways to hear, learn and appreciate the language and the role it plays in Belgian culture. Through a series of short videos, visitors can choose to hear songs and stories, learn about the history of Walloon in Wisconsin and share their own stories about their experience with Walloon. You can even honor friends and family on our Tributes page, dedicated to the people who spoke and preserved Walloon for future generations.

WisconsinWalloon.org is an ongoing project to collect and share Walloon in various forms. Videos will continue to be added in the months and years ahead. We would love to feature YOUR Walloon story! Contributors of all ages are encouraged to submit stories by Walloon speakers as well of the memories of those who grew up hearing Walloon. Go to the website or email contact@belgianheritagecenter.org for more information.

WisconsinWalloon.org was made possible by grants from the David L. and Rita E. Nelson Family Fund of the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley Region, Raibrook Foundation, and the following funds of the Door County Community Foundation: Anne and Richard Egan Charitable Fund, Carol Coryell Charitable Fund and Clifford and Clara Herlache Heritage Foundation.

These are just a few examples of the experience at WisconsinWalloon.org

- Learn how Walloon got to Wisconsin
- Learn to count in Walloon
- Sing along with Al Vandertie's "It's Coffee!"
- Hear oral histories in English and Walloon
- Listen to Cletus Bellin sing "How Great Thou Art" in Walloon
- More to come!

Colors / Kaulure



Content Creators Needed

BHC's mission is to share the history and legacy of Belgian settlers in Northeast Wisconsin. In addition to our campus, we do this through our newsletter, website features, Facebook and now, WisconsinWalloon.org. There are countless stories, traditions and people (past and present) that make interesting topics. **BHC is looking for volunteers to help us tell these.** Here's how you can help:

- Generate ideas or locate information on Belgian related topics -- anything from historical events, celebrations, local life and culture, past and present. Family histories, photo albums, old news articles, online research and any other sources of reliable information. **This is the most important step and the easiest for anyone to do.**
- Draft articles for publication in our newsletter or for general press releases.
- Record oral histories and remembrances, including your own! This is easily done with a smart phone.
- Compile photo galleries from BHC's archive (select photos and create captions) to post on our websites or display in exhibits at BHC.
- Create videos using the above materials for YouTube, WisconsinWalloon.org or BelgianHeritageCenter.org and display in BHC's media gallery.
- Encourage younger people with technology skills to help. They learn about their heritage while helping BHC! Students can earn community service or intern credit.

You can help us from anywhere at any time that works for you. Most of the work is done remotely so it's a great chance for people outside the area to participate. Best of all, it is a perfect way to involve the younger generations to assist with research and technology and learn about their heritage at the same time. *For more information, call Sandy at 920-493-2850 or email contact@belgianheritagecenter.org.*



Onh Bahtimanh
A Building



Kauk
Rooster

16 = seyss

Pennings Visit to BHC



L-R: Theresa Alexander, Koen Pennings, Arjan Pennings, Fr. Komatz

Almost every year, Fr. David Komatz, O. Praem brings a group of Norbertine priests to tour BHC and learn about the shared heritage of the Norbertines and BHC. In 1893, then Father Bernard Pennings arrived from Holland at St. Mary of the Snows Parish at the request of the Bishop in Green Bay. During that time, he oversaw the completion of today's brick church and the construction of the school/convent. Fr. Pennings served the parish for five years before moving to DePere where he founded St. Norbert Abbey and St. Norbert College and served as both Abbot and head of the college.

This year, Fr. Komatz brought very special guests to BHC. Arjan and Koen Pennings, visiting from Holland, are direct descendants of Abbot Pennings. Arjan is fourth generation and his son, Koen is fifth. Pictured are Theresa Alexander, Koen Pennings, Arjan Pennings and Fr. Komatz at the entrance of classroom of St. Mary of the Snows School. This is where Fr. Pennings said mass for the students on a small altar kept behind sliding doors with blackboards used while classes were in session.

It was a pleasure to host Abbot Penning's descendants almost 150 years after his service to the parish.



Fr. Abbott Pennings



Old School Altar



Yeti Cooler / Meat Raffle is Back!

Raffle tickets are now on sale for a Yeti roadie cooler and \$300 worth of meat. Tickets are just \$5 and only 500 will be sold. This popular raffle is sponsored by S&S Ag Enterprises/Jerseyland Dairy. Winner will be announced at the Kermis on Sunday, August 16. You do not need to be present to win. Get your tickets early, because this one will sell out quickly!

Booyah Battle Results

BHC returned to the Booyah Battle sponsored by Downtown Green Bay, Inc. A huge crowd gathered on Washington Street to sample booyah from 10 local chefs. Although BHC did not repeat as the prize winner this year, we served many happy visitors to our booth who loved our booyah. Many of these people joined us at BHC the next day for the Booyah and Bread lunch the following day. As you can see, it was a full house!



Thank you volunteers!

BHC kicked off the 2026 season with three events the weekend of April 25/26. It took a lot of time and talent to pull this off. We are lucky to have so many terrific volunteers!

Cooyah Tournament Winner

On April 26, BHC hosted a cooyah tournament for people of all skill levels. Players enjoyed booyah, beverages and a fun competition. The winning team was Brian Renard and Tim Buhr. Congratulations to Brian and Tim, and thanks to all players!



Our Shared Role to Preserve Belgian Heritage

Belgian heritage persisted in Wisconsin because artifacts, stories and photos from the first immigrants were shared with their descendants, who preserved their history and added to it. Many shared these memories through BHC and the Peninsula Belgian-American Club. This is a rare treasure. Now it's our turn to share our heritage with our children and grandchildren. Bring young people to our campus to learn their history. Encourage them to attend presentations to hear about the incredible fortitude of their ancestors. Share links to BHC's online content. Recommend volunteering at BHC for community service hours needed by students. Learn your family's story and pass it on. Many of us wish we had spent more time learning our ancestors' stories while we had the chance. Don't miss yours.

Belgian Heritage Center Donation Form

Name: _____ Donation: \$ _____
 Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please make checks payable to: **Belgian Heritage Center, PO Box 173, Brussels, WI 54204**. Donations may be made at www.belgianheritagecenter.org (PayPal and major credit cards accepted). BHC is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations to cover the cost of newsletter production and delivery (\$10 per year per person) are greatly appreciated. To receive BHC's newsletter via email, send request to contact@belgianheritagecenter.org.



BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER

Belgian Heritage Center
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Robinsonville Presbyterian Church

Robinsonville Presbyterian church was organized 165 years ago on February 18, 1861 shortly before the start of the Civil War. Originally known as the French Presbyterian Church, it was one of the first churches in the Belgian Settlements and served the congregation until 2021. Services were conducted exclusively in French until 1913. Today, the church building is a private residence. The peaceful, historic cemetery is the final resting place for some of the original Belgian immigrants, including Civil War veterans, and remains open to the public. Land for the church and cemetery was donated by Francois Petinoit after an exceptionally good wheat harvest in 1860, just seven years after arriving in 1853.

