



BELGIAN HERITAGE CENTER

Belgian Characters

July 2024

SECOND QUARTER WINNER

Dr. Edward Kerscher

On Dr Ed Kerscher Day in Euren
June 18, 1950

Story by Pam (Renier) Alberts

Photo Courtesy of Arletta
Bertrand and Kewaunee
Historical Society

Dr. Edward Kerscher was a renowned physician from Euren, WI in Kewaunee County. His office there was also his home.



Though he was of German descent, he learned to speak Walloon to communicate with his many Belgian patients. He was a caring, compassionate man who delivered well over 5,000 babies in his long career--supposedly being the oldest practicing physician in the state, and likely in the country.

He routinely made house calls. Often, when my sisters and I saw his old black sedan pull in the yard, it meant a penicillin shot, the cure-all at the time. Another time, though, his visit was welcomed as I had a bad nosebleed that wouldn't stop no matter what my family tried. Doc twisted a small piece of newspaper and tucked it under my lip. Within a minute, the bleeding had stopped, proof that old fashioned remedies do work and that country doctors are invaluable.

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Another story we were told many times dates back to August 17, 1937. Doc delivered two babies that day in the Brussels area--my father Larry Renier and Theresa Alexander. Supposedly, he traveled back and forth between the homes several times. Others recount stories from those early days when he would rest by the fire at one house before traveling to the next to continue his outreach. His entire life was dedicated to caring for the local community. Because of that, I'm certain that most people from the area either have their own Dr. Kerscher memories or have heard stories from their parents and grandparents.
--Pam (Renier) Alberts

June 18, 1950 was declared Dr. E. J. Kerscher Day at Lincoln by St. Peter's Congregation. The day started with Mass, then a banquet meal, a parade, and went into evening with a dance. It was all to honor the man who had been born in the town of Lincoln and spent his entire life there, save the years he went off to school.

He started practicing in 1919 and didn't retire until age 94! In the early days, he did house calls by horse and buggy.

His daughter Helen LeFevre said that "her father was the oldest practicing physician in the United States. But the American Medical Association can't be sure."

He treated everything from minor illnesses to major problems, including farm accidents and traumatic injuries. He stopped delivering babies at the age of 88, keeping meticulous records that show 5,115 deliveries.

It was also said that if he had collected on all the bills that patients owed, he would have been a rich man; but, he continued caring for his patients even if they couldn't pay in cash.

George & Agnes Bottkol

Parents of Dr. Kerscher's wife Helen

George and his brother, Matthew, owned businesses in Euren and Brussels. They were German immigrants but provided essential services in the early Belgian communities.

Photos submitted by Arletta Bertrand





Eugene Alexander & Louse Martin Wedding Party, October 10, 1933

From left (standing): George Alexander, Lucy Renard Baumgart, Ralph Alexander, Norma Virlee Berger, George Jauquet, Verna Conard Jauquet. Gene and Louise owned taverns in Namur.
Submitted by Joe Alexander

Grayce Chaudoir



Grayce with her horse, Little Grayce

Submitted by Lisa Colombo

My great aunt Grayce Chaudoir (daughter of Justin and Leona (Delfosse) Chaudoir) worked as a maid on the SS Madison out of Milwaukee. It was a car ferry to Muskegan, Michigan. While working on the ferry she met some friends who were into Sulky racing. Grayce loved to go watch the races and then ended up buying her own horse called Little Grayce. Sulky racing involved one horse with a small cart for just one rider. Grayce would help with training, but did hire a driver for the actual races. Grayce never married, but she was like a second grandma to us. She would sail on Lake Michigan and be gone for a few months and then would come and stay at our house for a week or so.



The S.S. MADISON was one of six ships built to the same design by the Manitowoc Shipbuilding Company. Built in 1927, she entered service for the Grand Trunk just before the start of the Great Depression. The S.S. MADISON has the distinction of having been christened with a bottle of Wisconsin milk, instead of the traditional champagne. Courtesy: The Carferries of the Great Lakes (carferries.com)



“Horsing Around” in 1944

Juliana “Julie” Vandenhouten Lorita (left) and Glory Vandenhouten Wautlet
Submitted by Gary Vandenhouten (their baby brother)



After WWI

Standing: Wilbert Dart, Frank Hermans

Seated: Unidentified, Eli Dart

Eli and Wilbert were WWI veterans.

Submitted by Gary Vandenhouten



Margaret (Lampereur) Draize, School Teacher for 44 Years

Margaret is also the author of *Belgian American Customs and Cookbook*. First published in 1996 and reprinted in 2019, the book remains popular today for its lively stories, old-fashioned recipes, home remedies, and nostalgia from Wisconsin and Belgium.

Photo courtesy of Paula Charles Gatlin

Pearl Harbor Survivor

Firman Balza memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor from the Green Bay Press-Gazette dated December 7, 2005

Submitted by Steve Lampereur



'I'm telling this for the guys that can't'



Firman Balza holds pieces of shrapnel he recovered from the attack and has a piece of the decking from the USS Maryland.

About Pearl Harbor

The Dec. 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and other military bases on Oahu, Hawaii, lasted two hours, leaving 21 U.S. ships heavily damaged and 323 aircraft damaged or destroyed.

It killed 2,390 people and wounded 1,178.

— The Associated Press

Pearl Harbor vet shares memories of 1941 attack

BY NATHAN PHELPS

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On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Firman Balza was standing on the USS Maryland with two buddies discussing what would happen if a ship sank and blocked the channel at Pearl Harbor.

That almost happened a short time later when the Japanese launched a surprise attack on military installations in and around Pearl Harbor 64 years ago today.

"We were talking about that and I was going to go ... to Catholic Mass on the quarterdeck of the Oklahoma," Balza said. "But the Japs came at 7:57 a.m., and Firman didn't go anywhere but to his battle station."

Veterans remember Dec. 7 as a quiet Sunday morning that was

shattered just before 8 a.m. when Japanese planes began attacking U.S. military facilities at Pearl Harbor, including airfields on land and ships in the harbor.

More than 2,400 servicemen and civilians were killed in the attack and 21 ships were damaged or sunk. Among the battleships sunk or capsized were the Arizona, Oklahoma, California and West Virginia.

The carrier fleet was not in port, leaving the United States a platform to take the war back to the Japanese.

Unlike some Hollywood depictions of the attack, Balza said he and others didn't panic, but they did their jobs while under fire.

He was 18 at the time of the attack.

"I didn't see any panic," Balza said about the sailors he saw that day. Sailors were "either fighting a fire or he was trying to help somebody get aboard or finding someplace he could be useful."

► See Telling, B-2

Pearl Harbor Survivor

"When the people in charge of getting the ship under way realized we weren't going anywhere, those people went out and helped where they could," he said.

The battleship next to the Maryland, the Oklahoma, capsized during the attack.

"When we brought all those guys aboard from the Oklahoma ... they helped wherever they could. They either fought fires on their own ship or fought fires around the ship," he said. "There was fire all over the place. The West Virginia was behind us and it was burning."

Balza's comment about a ship blocking the exit from the harbor almost became a reality when the USS Nevada got under way but was hit by bombs and a torpedo and forced to beach without blocking the channel.

Balza, who was assigned to one of the Maryland's 5-inch broadside guns, spent the day passing ammo to gun crews on the ship. That left little time to think about what was happening around him, including the fact that the USS Oklahoma had capsized.

"You don't have time to wonder if you're going to live or die ... Come to think of it, it's almost like it's a blank. It's like you just had a bad dream and somebody poked you and woke you up," he said. "Every time the Okie took a torpedo you



Firman Balza was a young man stationed in Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked on Dec. 7, 1941, drawing the United States into World War II. Patrick Ferron/Press-Gazette

could feel that like the deck was coming up. When she'd take a torpedo she'd bang up against the bow and make the Maryland feel like the deck was coming up through your feet."

The Maryland also took a few hits but remained afloat and continued firing at the attackers.

It's been 64 years since the attack, and the number of the men who survived it is steadily declining.

Julius Finnern, a Pearl Harbor survivor and former national secretary for the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, said



Poplaski

vivors passing away each day.

But people want to hear their stories.

"There's seemingly a lot more interest ... I get a lot more calls to talk," the Menomonee Falls resident said.

Finnern, who served on the USS Monaghan, said there are about 89 survivors in the state and 5,800 around the nation. In 1950 he said that number was closer to 18,000.

Stanley Poplaski, who was assigned to the 72nd Bombardment Squadron at Hickham Field during the attack, said he knows of four or five survivors living in Brown County.

Today he'll go to AMVETS Post 11 that holds an annual remembrance of the attack.

"You never forget those things, especially when you run outside and there's a plane strafing and there's people running around all over the parade grounds trying to head for cover," said Poplaski, who lives in Green Bay. "You see that and this wasn't the movies, this was real."

Balza, who grew up in Humboldt, said it wasn't until recently that he began to tell other people about his experience at Pearl Harbor. Today he's the keynote speaker at the Pearl Harbor memorial ceremony at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in King.

"I'm talking for every one of those kids that's under a cross," he said. "I'm telling this for the guys that can't."

World War II Casualties

Ferdinand Haevers

Ferdinand Phillip Haevers was born in Green Bay on February 24, 1917. During World War II Ferdinand was a bombardier on a B 17. On November 26, 1994 during a mission his plane caught on fire and the entire crew bailed out. He was captured and was a P.O.W. in Stalag 4 until May of 1945 when they were liberated by a British patrol. Mr. Haevers was awarded two Purple Hearts and the V.E. Medal. A book was also written about this mission called NOT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS, A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE MIGHTY EIGHTH, BY John Meurs. Mr. Haevers later worked 40 years for the U.S. Post Office in Green Bay.

Submitted by Phyllis Haevers/Peninsula Belgian American Club

Corporal Charles Marcelle

Luxemburg's first War casualty was reported when a telegram was received by Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Marcelle from the War Department late Thursday afternoon stating their son Charles, 36, was reported missing in action over Holland since September 19. Charles, a member of the 101st Airborne Division took part in the invasion of France on D-Day. Before entering service Charles assisted his father on a 190 acre farm in the town of Luxemburg.

(per 11-2-1944 Luxemburg News)

An impressive memorial service was held at St. Mary's Catholic church Thursday morning for Corporal Charles Marcelle who died of wounds in a German War Prison on September 28. A solemn requiem high Mass was celebrated with Rev. John Huhn as celebrant, assisted by M.P. Smits of Champion and Rev. Herman Schmitz of New Franken.

(per 4-27-1945 Luxemburg News)

Submitted by Peninsula Belgian American Club

Frank Evrard - Namur Postman

Frank (1884-1944) was the postmaster in Namur. The post office was at the Evrard tavern next to St. Mary of the Snows church
Below – with nieces Lema Delwiche Charles and Palmy Chaudoir Jeanquart
Right – delivering mail



Photos courtesy of Donna Zellner/Kathy Daul,
Theresa Alexander, Christine Chaudoir





Rose (Conard) Chaudoir

The story I was told by my mom, Gayle Chaudoir, was that Justin and Rose (Conard) Chaudoir's granddaughter had a tumor on her leg. The doctors were all set to amputate her leg. Justin (who was a notorious bad driver at this age) drove his second wife Rose to Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupre Shrine in Quebec City, Canada where Grandma Rose climbed the stairs on her knees in prayer for their young granddaughter. When Justin's granddaughter got to the doctor's her tumor was gone and her leg was saved. The power of prayer and a grandparents love!!

Submitted by Lisa Columbo

ALEXANDER SR HERLACHE

Door County Advocate Mar. 24, 1888

In driving over a bad place in the road to-day, Alex. Herlache was tipped out of the cutter and dislocated his shoulder. It was immediately set but he is an old man and it will probably be some time before he can again use the arm.

Alexander and Florentine had four more children after arrival in the US. Alex Jr was the first Herlache born in the US and was our great grandfather. Florentine died age 53 in 1881 when youngest son Alfred was only 9. Alexander Sr died in 1911, living 30 years after his wife passed and never remarried. Alexander and Florentine are buried in St. Mary's of the Snow cemetery in Namur, WI. There are no gravestones remaining for them.

Alex Sr and Florentine Herlache

- Joseph (1852-)
- Eliza (1856-)
- **Alexander Jr (1858-1942)**
- Mary Malvina (1864-1944)
- Denis (1866-1929)
- Alfred (1872-1955)

The Herlache farmstead summer kitchen is listed in the registry of historic buildings by the Wisconsin Historical Society. It was still standing as of 2007.



Alexander Herlache, Sr.

Submitted by Greg Herlache

Fr. Jerome Gloudemans & the Grotto at St. Francis Xavier Church

Photos courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, Peninsula Belgian American Club, Christine Chaudoir

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THE BRUSSELS CEMETERY GROTTO

The Belgian immigrants who settled this region, beginning in the 1850s, built many churches and roadside chapels, reflecting the value of their Catholic faith. Brussels and its surrounding communities form the largest Belgian settlement in North America. The first Mass at St. Francis Xavier was in 1878. In 1909, a new brick church was constructed. Fr. Jerome Gloudemans, a Dutch Norbertine priest, was named pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church in 1919, serving for 31 years. Fr. Gloudemans, as a devotion to the Blessed Mother, designed and built a rock structure resembling a freestanding cave, topped with a large crucifixion scene. The grotto was built with field stones selected for their beauty by local parishioners. The Brussels Grotto includes similar features of the natural Grotto of our Lady of Lourdes in France, including statues of the Blessed Mother and St. Bernadette Soubirous, a cave like setting and flowing water. The Grotto was dedicated on October 29, 1935. Fr. Gloudemans wanted to be buried among his faithful and built a crypt within the Grotto. He died at the age of 80, and was called back to De Pere, WI to be buried with his Norbertine Brothers.

Erected 2020
Wisconsin Historical Society

Fr. Jerome Gloudemans (1876-1956) was born in Holland and immigrated to the US in 1899. As a Norbertine priest, he served as the pastor of St. Mary of the Snows Parish in Namur from 1908 until 1919. The mission at St. Francis Xavier in Brussels was made a parish in 1919 and Fr. Gloudemans became the pastor there where he served for 31 years. He is buried at the St. Norbert Abby Cemetery in DePere.



Below left: In his car in front of St. Mary of the Snows, circa 1910.

Below right: With visiting priests and brother-in-law (3rd from left), sister (5th), Fr. Melchoir (6th), Fr. Melchoir's housekeeper Anna Derenne (7th)

