

Herbert Hoover and his Commission for Relief in Belgium raised funds to purchase and import foods to sustain Belgium. Idealistic American volunteers (including a number of Rhodes scholars) supervised food distribution in the occupation zone assuring foodstuffs went to Belgians and not to the German Army. At the front in Belgium, hundreds of Americans served (illegally, at peril to their citizenship) in the British and Canadian Armies. Even after America entered the war on April 7, 1917, the German Army permitted some Americans to remain in Belgium. When the United States finally did enter the war, there was considerable concern at home about the country's 'preparedness'. To gain battlefield experience, American medical schools sent teams of physicians and nurses to work with the Royal Army Medical Corps. The R.A.M.C. assigned them to field hospitals and postes de secours during the Third Battle of Ypres. However, not all Americans were with the Allies; some were journalists embedded with the German Army and not a few were soldiers serving the Kaiser. At the time, German-Americans accounted for one of the largest ethnic groups in the United States.

The American experience in Belgium was very multifaceted and complicated. Consequently, the writings of these American men and women are a unique record of Belgium during the seminal event of the twentieth century, the First World War.

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ED KLEKOWSKI & LIBBY KLEKOWSKI, *Americans in Occupied Belgium 1914-1918*, Jefferson / McFarland Press, N. C. / London, available spring / summer 2014 (ISBN 978 0 7864 7255-0).

NOTES:

1. GLENNA LINDSLEY BIGELOW, *Liège - On the Line of March*, John Lane, New York / London, 1918, p. 46.
2. J. H. J.H. TWELLS, *In the Prison City*, Andrew Melrose, London, 1919, p. 270.

The Gazette van Detroit Celebrates its 100th Anniversary

The *Gazette van Detroit* is the only remaining Flemish-American newspaper in the United States. It is an unaffiliated, apolitical, non-profit publication written by and for North Americans of Flemish descent and Dutch-speaking Belgians. Its goal is to serve as a cultural bridge between North America and the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. It will reach the hundred-year mark on August 13, 2014.

The *Gazette van Detroit* was the brainchild of Camille Cools, a Flemish immigrant from West-Flanders. He moved to Detroit, Michigan, with his family as a fifteen-year old boy in 1889. Camille Cools was very active in many organizations, from the archery club to the theatre. News from Flanders was scarce, and Camille Cools turned to existing Flemish newspapers in America such as *De Gazette van Moline* (Moline, Illinois) and *De Volksstem* (De Pere, Wisconsin). He took his first steps as a publisher in 1913, when he printed his *Vlaamsche Almanak*. Encouraged by other Flemish-Americans who shared his passion and recognized his leadership, Camille Cools published the first edition of the *Gazette van Detroit*. He was its founder, editor, and publisher. The newspaper provided information about the activities of various organizations, about new immigrants, and announced upcoming social and sporting events. Significantly it contained news from Flanders about World War I in Dutch for Flemish immigrants. The articles in the weekly publication were aimed mostly at craftsmen and farmers with no more than an elementary education, hence they were written in simple Dutch. Camille Cools died unexpectedly, age 43, in 1916.

In 1920, Peter Corteville (1881-1966) and his brother-in-law Leo Leplae acquired control of the *Gazette van Detroit*. They changed the company's name to The Belgian Press and later in 1940 to Corteville Printing Co. Ms. Hortense Leplae (1879-1963), Leo Leplae's niece, became

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the driving force behind the *Gazette* in the early 1920's and would remain editor for thirty-five years. She expanded the *Gazette* into a full-size eight-page weekly with more than twenty correspondents in the US, Canada and South America. The newspaper stayed true to its origins: the language remained simple and sprinkled with dialect. It was criticized as 'archaic' by some, but despite such criticisms the *Gazette van Detroit* continued to grow. The *Gazette* also grew by absorbing another weekly, *De Detroitenaar*, just after World War I and by taking over *De Gazette van Moline* in 1940.

Richard Corteville's death in 1974 marked the beginning of a difficult period for the *Gazette*. René de Seranno, a native of Moline, Illinois, grew up in Tielt (West Flanders), reorganized the *Gazette* under a new moniker 'Belgian Publishing Company' as a non-profit corporation. This new entity was born in 1974 with the donation of \$5,000 from 18 Flemish Americans.

In 1977, the *Gazette* became a biweekly. Articles in English were added to attract younger generations, as many no longer knew their parents' language. Unfortunately with René de Seranno's death in 1983 the *Gazette* went through another difficult period of declining subscribers and increased costs. The *Gazette* navigated through this period with the support of a donation from the *Nederlandse Taalunie* and a dedicated group of volunteers. Father Karel Denys, a Flemish priest ministering in the Detroit area, led the *Gazette* from the 1980s until well into the 2000s. After Denys, the *Gazette* found itself for the first time without a Dutch-speaking, Flemish-born editor.

To appeal to a younger audience, the paper moved from a black-and-white Flemish front page to a more English-centric format.

In the mid-2000s the *Gazette van Detroit* received a new lease on life through the efforts of Ms. Leen de Donker, an expat from Antwerp, who brought her energy and bilingual skills to the *Gazette*. She recruited new volunteers, among them Elisabeth Kahn (née van den Hove), and introduced a number of innovations. The paper moved from an 8-page *boterblad* in black and white to a 24-page full color production and introduced the e-Edition. Importantly Elisabeth Kahn secured formal recognition from the IRS of the tax-free status of Belgian Publishing, Inc. These innovations generated new hope and interest in *De Gazette van Detroit* on both sides of the Atlantic.

Boosted by the leadership of David Baeckelandt since 2012, the *Gazette* proactively reached out to many Flemings in the US and Belgium to support the *Gazette* and ensure its future. The *Gazette* is now a monthly twenty-four-page periodical with articles and features in both English and Dutch. Inspired by their Flemish roots, the new wave of volunteers works hard to make the *Gazette* the hub for the Belgian community in the US and Canada. The *Gazette* is not immune to the economic challenges of print media. In 2014 it has started the transition from print to digital, while staying true to the spirit of Camille Cools and the mission of the paper.

JEROEN VAN CAUWELAERT

www.gazettevandetroit.com