



Ellis Island, 1930 © Library of Congress

on various occasions, and Irving Berlin, the well-known composer of *White Christmas* and *There's no Business Like Show Business*, who emigrated from White Russia as a five-year old and sailed to America on the *SS Rhyndland*. His family donated one of his pianos to the museum. He is an example of one of those emigrants who did make their American Dream come true via Antwerp. But the museum also looks at migration in general and shows that this is a story from all times and all places.

Whether Arthur Rousseau made his American Dream come true, I know not. I only have twenty or so of his letters that bear witness to his life in America in increasingly deteriorating Dutch. Maybe I should donate them to the Red Star Line Museum. Then his tale will become part of the extensive collection of stories that the museum staff have been able to assemble in recent years.

DIRK VAN ASSCHE

Translated by Sheila M. Dale

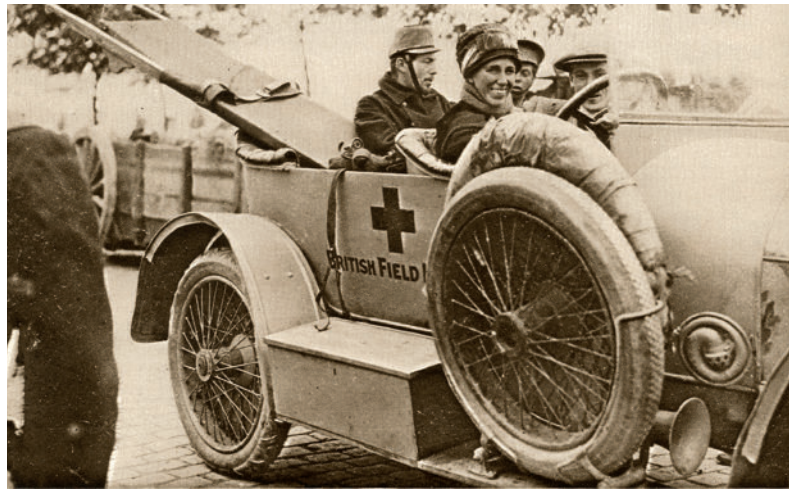
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Americans in Occupied Belgium 1914-1918

Americans in Belgium witnessed the German invasion, occupation and retreat. They described what they saw in letters, memoirs, newspaper reports and magazine articles. Prior to America's entry into the war, these accounts from Belgium were of wide interest in the United States. However, once America joined the war on April 7, 1917, interest in Belgium waned. Battles fought by the American Army in France became the primary focus, which is understandable. Today, the experiences of Americans in Belgium during the war warrant barely a mention in histories of the First World War. We sought to correct that omission in *Americans in Occupied Belgium 1914-1918*. As the following excerpts illustrate, Americans were in Belgium from the first hours of the invasion until the final liberation.

On August 4, 1914, the Imperial German Army crossed the German border and invaded Belgium, a country about the size of the state of Vermont. The Army's first major objective was the Belgian city of Liège. A major railway hub, Liège was the key to the Belgian rail system. Miss Glenna Lindsley Bigelow from New Haven, Connecticut, was a guest at Château Nagelmackers near Liège, literally in the path of the invading army. Monsieur Nagelmackers was very well connected; his cousin was the wife of a member of the Kaiser's Imperial Court. Consequently, General von Moltke, the Chief of the General Staff, issued written orders protecting the château and its owners during the invasion and occupation. In her memoir, Glenna Bigelow described tending Belgian wounded in a nearby church: 'August 13 . . . charred bodies with no suggestion of faces - just a flat, swollen, black surface, with no eyes, nose nor mouth. Some of the wounded lay on beds, others in the middle of the floor or wherever there was space, and each was holding up hands burned to the bone'⁽¹⁾. That evening Glenna met the invaders. After nursing the wounded all

Mrs. Winterbottom, née Gladys H. Appleton of Massachusetts, in her Rolls Royce driving to one of the outer Antwerp forts to retrieve wounded. The thirty-three-year-old Boston socialite served with a British hospital group during the Siege of Antwerp (1914), *Le Miroir*, 1914



day, she was required to dine and make small talk with the officers responsible for the horrors. Château Nagelmackers, where Voltaire had once stayed, where Liszt had composed, now hosted the masters of the new 'German *Kultur*'.

In Brussels, Brand Whitlock awaited the invaders at his post as head of the American Legation. The forty-five-year-old American Minister and his wife, Nell Brainerd Whitlock, arrived in Brussels in February 1914 and would remain until April 2, 1917. He was a former mayor of Toledo, Ohio where, as a progressive, he fought corruption, big business, political bosses and other special interests. He was against prohibition, advocated decriminalizing prostitution, and was against capital punishment. For these "radical" views, he often incurred attacks from Toledo's pulpits. Mayor Whitlock, defender of the underdog, saw the Brussels appointment as a European sabbatical during which he would have time for his two hobbies: golf and writing fiction. The sabbatical ended when the German Army invaded Belgium. However, before the German Army marched into Brussels, an invasion of American journalists, writers, and war tourists arrived to see the action. After dealing with the Americans and the Germans, there was hardly time for golf.

In 1914, Belgium was home to a large American colony, e.g. people working for U.S. corporations, diplomats with the American Legation and Americans in the arts - Brussels was cheaper than Paris. One of those in the arts was the Amer-

ican novelist Julia Helen Twells. She resided in Brussels throughout the war. Even though in her seventies, Ms. Twells pedaled around the city on her bicycle, sporting a small American flag. She witnessed the entrance of the Imperial German Army into Brussels on August 20, 1914, and she watched its retreat four years later. It was only on November 18, 1918, that the last German troops left the city. On the outskirts of Brussels, the departing soldiers held open-air bazaars to turn loot into cash. Julia Twells described the shopping: 'At Forest and other suburban parts of the city, great car-loads of material, looted from shops and private houses probably months or years ago, - for the dry-goods shops of Brussels had been cleaned out quite two years before, - were offered at absurdly trivial prices. Silk-velvet, which could not be had in Brussels for less than two hundred francs, went at a mark a yard; warm woolen stuffs, which the shivering population, thinly clad in dyed cotton, could not obtain at any price in the shops, were sold - to such as deigned to buy - for an equally small sum. . . . all manner of other things, as if from some pirates' cave, were bartered back to those who had been robbed of them'^[2].

Americans were present at all the major battles fought by the Belgian Army. They were present during the siege of Antwerp and at the Yser Front. As the most industrialized country in Europe, Belgium depended upon trade and food imports. The war isolated Belgium and wholesale starvation was imminent in the fall of 1914.

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.

ED KLEKOWSKI & LIBBY KLEKOWSKI

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