



## PROMOTERS, PLANTERS, AND PIONEERS: THE COURSE AND CONTEXT OF BELGIAN SETTLEMENT IN WESTERN CANADA

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## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND MILITARY ACTIVITY

In the economic domain Belgians were promoters and pioneers but in the political domain they were participants for the most part. Belgium played a major role in economic and industrial development and diversification in Western Canada through investment in capital and technology and the creation of jobs for thousands of Canadians beyond the wheat economy. Investment played an important role in nation-building in the region as Belgians became involved in land speculation, construction, resource exploitation, mining operations, commercial agriculture, and research. Their role in dairying, market gardening, fruit-growing and sugar-beet culture have been examined in earlier chapters. In manufacturing, the transformation of raw materials into other goods, they operated or worked in flour mills, sugar refineries, brickworks, lumber mills and cheese factories. Oil and gas discoveries in Alberta and the beginning of uranium and potash mining in Saskatchewan broadened the economic base and invited investment. These developments stimulated the service sector, trucking, marketing and manufacturing. Agriculture was no longer the main underpinning of the local economy and began to develop into agro-business.

The growing pains of a new economy spawned regional political parties that Belgians were reluctant to support. The drought and depression of the inter-war years underscored not only the weaknesses of the capitalist system but also the vulnerability of immigrant agriculturalists. Thus they were willing to consider government intervention in the economy and some

central planning of production and distribution. It was easier to accept the health care and social services of a welfare state that eventually evolved than controls in agricultural production and marketing. Two world wars resulted in an image of a “brave little Belgium,” war relief campaigns, and close military ties.

Belgians in Western Canada participated modestly in political activity and organization out of their own class and occupational interests. Miners and beet workers were accustomed to union activities, the former in particular having a strong political legacy. All Belgians were somewhat acquainted with monarchy, parliamentary institutions, political parties and elections before coming to Canada. Office-holding was not a priority for newcomers but most were involved in neighbourhood organizing and community activity. They did not participate visibly in the political elite. However, they played an important, but less conspicuous, role at the local and regional levels. A few were elected to the federal parliament and provincial legislatures, where careers are usually brief and their decision-making powers are greatly curtailed by party solidarity and the caucus.

### *Commercial and Industrial Investment*

Commercial interest in Canada predated Confederation. In August 1848 Arthur Hart of Montreal wrote to the Belgian ambassador in London offering to serve as consul in Canada. The Chamber of Commerce in Antwerp contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels suggesting that it would be useful to have a consular official either in Montreal or Quebec “to enlighten Belgian traders about the unknown resources” of Canada with a view to both import and export trade. Two years later, Jesse Joseph, a frequent visitor to Belgium with European business contacts and involvement in immigration projects, was named honorary consul in Montreal.<sup>1</sup> There was a problem, however, in establishing direct commercial ties because article XV of the Anglo-Belgian Treaty of 1862 subjected the British North American colonies to British control of commercial and diplomatic affairs. After Confederation, Sir Alexander Galt opined that no further treaties should restrict Canadian commerce without the consent of the colonial authorities.<sup>2</sup> Still, good commercial exchanges were not forthcoming, partly because Britain expressed considerable concern about Belgian exploitation of the Congo up to 1914.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the Métallurgie of Tubize built a public building in Ottawa

for the Dominion government in 1886 and the following year the S.A. Internationale de Construction entered into a number of public works contracts with the government of Quebec. The Grand Trunk Railway bought its steel rails from Cockerill of Liège. These activities marked the beginning of Belgian investment.

Antwerp and Brussels investment firms became interested in Canada largely through the efforts of Ferdinand Van Bruyssel (Consul-General, 1885–94), who enjoyed the favour of the Prince of Chimay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who consorted with the economic elite of the day. Members of the Belgian royal family, cabinet ministers, the nobility and notables involved in the exploitation of the Congo and investments in Egypt were among those speculating on the profits to be reaped in Canada. In February 1888, a Comptoir Belgo-Canadien, presided jointly by P.S. Stevenson of the Grand Trunk Railway and Clarence de Sola, was organized in Montreal to attract Belgian capital and to facilitate the importation of Belgian glass, cement and rails.<sup>4</sup> This initial initiative was marred somewhat by the personal involvement of Van Bruyssel in secret business deals, using government funds for personal gain and lobbying inconsistent with his diplomatic status.<sup>5</sup> In 1891, Van Bruyssel informed Premier Greenway of Manitoba that three engineers from the Belgian State Corps of Mining Engineers associated with the University of Liège were prepared to undertake a two-year survey “to call attention of capitalists and metallurgists in Belgium ... to investments ... mining property and establishing metallurgical industries in Canada.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, the *Recueil Financier* in 1893 drew attention to the Canadian Pacific Railway and the agricultural promise of Western Canada.<sup>7</sup> A network of honorary consuls involved in business was set in place: Victoria 1892; Vancouver 1897; Winnipeg 1901; Prince Albert 1906; Regina 1908; Edmonton 1908; Forget 1903; and Manor 1915. Consul Robert de Vos advised offering “advances on crops, mortgages, loans for buying building material, livestock or horses, savings and other banking services, even arrange agricultural real estate and possessions, create agricultural industries or contribute to their creation.”<sup>8</sup> It was known in Europe that “high officials of the Department of the Interior” favoured speculator friends by manipulating the submissions so that “certain important people, partisans of those in power, had every opportunity to make off with the best lands at the lowest price.”<sup>9</sup>

Belgium, as a country of heavy industrialization, developed a model based on linking heavy industry and the banking system that motivated financiers and industrialists to seek foreign markets.<sup>10</sup> Three periods of investment activity can be discerned, originating in Brussels and Antwerp respectively. In the period prior to World War I, the Brussels groups concentrated on the eastern provinces, while Antwerp entrepreneurs turned their attention to the West, after Ferdinand de Jardin's visit in 1906. The Banque d'Outre-Mer, the Banque de Bruxelles, Paribas, in conjunction with the Emile Francqui group that included Ernest and Edmond Solvay, Jules and Jean Jadot, formed the Société Minière du Canada in 1910. Its objective was to expand activities in Western Canada, including the construction of a railway link in Alberta to the Brazeau mines and investment in two silver mines in British Columbia.<sup>11</sup> In 1912, the Société La Canadienne [Belprise] was formed by Baron Maurice Fallon, John de Marnix, Charles de Burlet, Mme Capelle-Henry, Maurice de Laminne and Baron Pierre Verhaegen for construction projects in Calgary.

The Antwerp investors belonged to the Frédéric Jacobs group, which included Jean Berchmann, André Gouzée, Xavier Bareel, and Frédéric Jacobs, and formed the Alberta S.A. Belge du Nord-Ouest Canadien in 1905 which bought 70,000 hectares of land along the projected Canadian Northern Railway line between Battleford and Edmonton.<sup>12</sup> Also involved in this venture were Ludovic De Dekker, Emile de Bontridder, Albert Peeters and Albert de Bary. The influential director of its business affairs was André Gouzée, who had come initially to the Montmartre area to engage in cattle-raising. He became intimately involved with another of the Jacobs group enterprises, the Belgo-Canadian Fruitlands Company organized in 1908 in the Okanagan valley. Land speculating could be risky, and this prompted the Belgian consul in Calgary to warn about "wild catting," the sale of worthless lands at exorbitant prices.<sup>13</sup> In 1906, the Frédéric Jacobs group set up the Land and Agriculture Company of Canada [Compagnie Immobilière et Agricole du Canada] with offices in Winnipeg, where Ferdinand de Jardin was in charge. The company bought up 65,000 hectares of prime farmland along the Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Pacific Railways, and another seven thousand hectares in the Vernon area of British Columbia. Shareholders included Baron Edmond Van Eetvelde, Louis Van de Put, and André Gouzée "a member of the local board of directors."<sup>14</sup> Closely related to this investment

company was the General Financial Corporation of Canada which dealt in loans, mortgages, investments, securities, stocks and bonds. Once again the interlocking directorate was noted: "Mr André Gouzée is one of the managing directors and in charge of the company's affairs in Canada. The head office of the company is in Antwerp, and the Canadian head quarters are at Winnipeg."<sup>15</sup>

In 1907, the Société Hypothécaire du Canada [Mortgage Company of Canada] with 10 million francs capital from the Société Générale, Banque Commerciale d'Anvers and Banque J. LeGrelle, and private funds from Baron Delbeke, Baron Van Eetvelde, Robert De Decker, Ernest Goethals and the Jacobs brothers among others, entered the Western Canadian market. Once again the extent of this investment drew attention: "The company controls large sums of European capital, which is invested in first-class mortgages on properties accepted as safe risks only after the very closest inspection."<sup>16</sup> In 1911, the Antwerp investors of the de Bary group launched the Belgian Estate Company of Canada [Société Foncière Belgo-Canadienne] with a capital of 12.5 million francs to undertake housing developments in Winnipeg and Edmonton. Its activities continued until May 1976. Crédit Général du Canada, capitalized by Oscar Vandermalen, Paul Lambert-Mandron, Thomas Moreau de Bellaing, Remacle Bonjeon, Jules de Borchgrave, Fernand Dauwe and Florent Lambert, invested in Winnipeg and Vancouver. This also represented investment from the Walloon cities of Namur and Liège.

Of more than passing interest was the corporate linkages as Ferdinand de Jardin and E. de Grelle of the Land and Agriculture Company of Canada, and André Gouzée of the Mortgage Company of Canada figured prominently among the directors of the Crédit Général du Canada and the Belgian Estate Company, both chartered in 1911. Ferdinand de Jardin was appointed chief administrator by the Jacobs group of all these companies, along with Louis Van de Put. Xavier Bareel was involved in the Jacobs Group and he was connected also with the Banque Belgo-Luxembourgeoise and its manifold investments. Baron van Eetvelde, renowned secretary of state for the Congo Free State under Leopold II, chaired the over-arching board of directors. The Lille bank of Henry Devilder, which was involved in the Trochu settlement in Alberta, was also a shareholder.

Several smaller projects merit attention. In 1910, the Banque Josse Allard of Brussels obtained a 15 per cent share in the Nordegg and



Brazeau Collieries. In 1914 Raoul Pirmez<sup>17</sup> and George Roels, with a couple friends in Calgary, inspired by a rumour started by a Scottish geologist that the properties along the Elbow River were sitting on a sea of oil, formed Petrol Limited. The capital was to be raised in Belgium but the outbreak of war and the German invasion of Belgium put an end to the project.<sup>18</sup> In 1913, fifteen small entrepreneurs in Brussels banded together to launch the Belgo-Canadian Co-operative Society, which bought up 250 lots of land in the Moose Jaw area for resale.<sup>19</sup> It proceeded to sell, at “exorbitant prices,” some lots in subdivisions of Moose Jaw called Fairmont and Glenora.<sup>20</sup> The company was dissolved by 1919 and purchasers were left with undeveloped and unserviced lots of farmland five kilometres beyond the city limits that were then offered for sale for payment of arrears of taxes. The acting consul in Calgary observed: “this company was directed by a band of rogues and the whole affair was a massive swindle.”<sup>21</sup>

The non-payment of taxes on property during World War I created a problem for some Belgians. Baron Maurice Fallon, for example, owned properties in Prince Albert and Vancouver for which he was unable to pay taxes because he spent the war years confined to his estate in Namur, except for two brief periods in jail in Germany. Belgian authorities interceded to stop the sale of these properties for tax arrears on the ground that it was unreasonable to deal unjustly with a citizen of an allied nation under German occupation who was anxious to pay the arrears to retain his possessory rights.<sup>22</sup> The consul in Calgary explained, to the newly appointed Consul in Vancouver, the injustice that Baron Fallon faced in the projected sale of valuable Point Grey properties purchased in 1911: “Belgians have invested a very considerable amount of money in Canada before the war in real estate, loans, etc. and the conditions in which they have found their investments after the war is anything but encouraging. The exchange is so high against Belgium and the payment of these taxes will cost Baron Fallon 100% more than it would have cost him before the war.”<sup>23</sup>

During a second period of activity from 1919 to 1939, only four of the early Belgian companies flourished – the Land and Agriculture Company, the Mortgage Company of Canada, the Belgian Estate Company of Canada, and the General Credit of Canada, all part of the umbrella Jacobs group based in Antwerp.<sup>24</sup> In these inter-war years, much of the early optimism about the future prosperity of Western Canada



evaporated. Belgians were primarily concerned with reconstructing their own economy which had been shattered by war. Nevertheless, the Antwerp-based investors launched two new trading companies – the Belgo-Canadian Trading Company in 1919, and the Canadian Pacific Ocean Services Agency in 1921. The Canadian Block Coal Company, financed by Brussels bankers and chartered with Belgian managers at Taber to exploit concessions in Alberta, appears to have ceased operations by 1925.<sup>25</sup> When a certain Gaston Pootmans proposed to set up a sales outlet for Belgian products in Regina in 1922, the consul advised him to consider Winnipeg instead of Regina because the small city did not serve a sufficient Belgian clientele for such a venture.<sup>26</sup>

Investment and trade were expected to rebound significantly with the granting of “most favoured nation” status to Belgium by the Commercial Treaty of 1924. In this context, Captain Léon Dupuis in Vancouver campaigned with some success for increased imports of glass, structural steel, etc. via the Hudson Bay route to Western Canada. He had arrived in Vancouver in 1920 as the Official Delegate of Belgian Industries on a mission to establish commercial and industrial exchanges. As founder of L.J. Dupuis & Company Limited he was also the agent for the Union Commerciale Belge de Metallurgie S.A., exporter of structural steel. In 1928, a Chambre de Commerce Belgo-Canadienne, supported by the Banque Bunge and the Banque d’Anvers, was organized in Brussels, and, in November of the same year, Dupuis invited members of the Vancouver business and commercial elite to form a parallel organization. On 22 February 1929, the first meeting of the Canadian-Belgian Chamber of Commerce was held at Hotel Vancouver with its objective “to encourage trade between Canada and Belgium.”<sup>27</sup> Leon J. Ladner MP was elected president from among the twenty-two charter members from such important organizations as the Canadian Manufacturing Association, the CPR, the CNR, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Montreal, the Canada Grain Exporting Company, Pacific Coast Terminals and the H. R. MacMillan Export Company. The charter specified among its objectives: “to investigate questions pertaining to their commercial and industrial relations, to collect and distribute statistics and information relating to the object of the Chamber... to encourage and facilitate the transactions of business.”<sup>28</sup> *Lloyd Anverso* published a notice in 1931 stating that “in manufactured goods the West buys abroad more than the East, proportionately speaking, and it seems that it is there that the future of

Belgian trade in Canada lies.” Consul Van Rickstal was sent west from the eastern provinces as director of the Office Commercial de l’Etat and wrote a series of pertinent articles in the *Bulletin Commercial*.<sup>29</sup> Baron Louis Empain drew the attention of the Solvay group to the western provinces.<sup>30</sup>

A third period of investment began after World War II, chronologically beyond the general bounds of this study yet indispensable for an understanding of the extent of Belgian participation in the economy of the West. Belgian companies made a rapid recovery after 1945 because of the Galopin doctrine: to avoid the pillaging of Belgian factories during the German occupation by continuing to produce. Belgian companies such as Petrofina, Canadian Hydrocarbons, and Sogémines/Genstar installed themselves in Canada in order to gain access to the American market. Foreign investors were attracted because of a number of favourable conditions: a stable democratic government favourable to capitalists, exceptional urban growth, untapped mineral and other resources awaiting exploitation, an expanding consumer market, and the discovery of large reserves of oil and gas. Belgian investments abroad were characterized by multi-industrial interests of multinational dimensions in metallurgy and mining, energy, transportation and construction.<sup>31</sup>

The real estate market became so attractive in the 1960s and 1970s that Belgians organized two other companies in Canada – the Union Financière, engaged in consulting activities for the creation and management of capital, and the Mutualité Anversoise. The Belgo-Canadian Real Estate Company continued to be active at this time. Henry Vandernoot of Ghent, chairman of Franki Canada Limited, which specialized in foundation and piling construction, expanded his activities as chairman of Caisson Drilling Services with headquarters in Edmonton.<sup>32</sup>

Multinational corporations organized holding companies to provide managerial and financial services to other companies, the majority of whose equity or shares it owned. Sogémines Development Corporation, for example, expanded from construction, through Inland Cement throughout the Prairies and through BACM construction in Winnipeg, to the oil and gas boom through corporations such as Canadian Petrofina, Canadian Hydrocarbons and Genestar Limited.<sup>33</sup> They relied on supplies from their own subsidiaries such as Iroquois Glass, Eastern Electric Casting, Rothesay Paper and Brockville Chemicals. They proceeded to buy Ocean Cement, then Seaspan International, the largest marine

transportation company, and also drydock operations in Vancouver. By 1976 they also controlled Abbey Glen Property Corporation, the sixth largest publicly owned real estate development company in Canada.<sup>34</sup>

In 1953, a group of Antwerp businessmen with the Banque Lambert group and Sogémines set up Canadian Petrofina, a subsidiary of Petrofina S.A., for gas and oil exploration in Alberta and a refinery in Montreal.<sup>35</sup> After the OPEC energy crisis, Petrofina invested in Syncrude and the oil sands project. With the introduction of the National Energy Policy and the creation of a national company called Petro-Canada, Canadian Petrofina was bought out for \$1.7 billion in 1981. According to a Belgian economist this was a bonanza for the shareholders: "In other words, the government paid 120 dollars a share for stock that had been selling on the market shortly before for 60 dollars even taking inflation into account."<sup>36</sup> In 1968 Sogémines changed its name to Genestar Limited to reflect a broad-based conglomerate in a large number and variety of industries of a general nature. It expanded into the port of Vancouver, took control of Canada Permanent Mortgage Corporation and of Canadian Trusco in 1985. The giant glass multinational Glaverbel by the end of the 1970s controlled the lion's share of all distribution of glass in Western Canada.<sup>37</sup>

Canadian Hydrocarbons Limited and Great Northern Gas Utilities were part of Baron Edouard Empain's energy empire, the chief supplier of natural gas and propane in Western Canada. Soon Canadian Hydrocarbons was producing and distributing diesel fuel, electricity, and oil derivatives such as asphalt throughout Canada. Through its subsidiaries, Baron Edouard Empain took personal charge of the Empain-Schneider Corporation and acquired an important interest in Canadian Homestead Oils Limited. The OPEC crisis enabled it to prosper, its shares rising by 87 per cent in value in a single year. By 1976 it owned all the shares in Homestead Oils but government restrictions on foreign-owned companies forced it to sell its assets to Intercity Gas Company just when it was beginning exploration in the Beaufort Sea.<sup>38</sup>

From 1960 to the early 1970s, Belgium ranked third largest foreign investor in Canada, after the United Kingdom and the United States, and thirty years later it was still ninth. This reflected important economic shifts in Belgium and Canada. Belgians had correctly gauged the fact that in Canada industrial capital moved westwards after 1970 with Calgary and Vancouver emerging as corporate command centres, a shift that reflected the massive concentration of capital in oil and gas, forestry and

mining sectors in Alberta and British Columbia.<sup>39</sup> Investors bought into the myth of development, an exploitative attitude toward nature, unaware of a possible environmental crisis overtaking the region.<sup>40</sup>

The success of Belgian investment continues with expansion to every sector of modern technology. Pauwels has made Winnipeg its Canadian headquarters. Agfa-Gevaert, Bekaert, Interbrew, Solvay, Imasco, Umicore, Mestdagh, Puratos and Symfo are not household names, yet they played a significant role in the marketplace. Interbrew, formed when Flemish brewers of Stella Artois merged with Walloon-based brewer Piedboeuf, merged with the Brazilian company AmBev to form InBev and acquired John Labatt Limited in July 1995 to become the leading global brewer. The financial ties with Belgium remain strong to the present as Paul Desmarais Sr. of Power Corporation of Canada, for example, is a business partner of Albert Frère of Groupe Bruxelles Lambert, a Brussels holding company. Together they have merged Suez and Gaz de France to create the world's third largest energy company.

Four Canadian Investment Awards went to Belgian firms in May 2003: to Union Minière of the Umicore Group for research with the University of Alberta and innovative production at Leduc and Fort Saskatchewan; to Solvay S.A. for its advanced work in pharmaceuticals and plastics; to Katven Natil N.V. in Edmonton for its logistical services to the petroleum industry; and to Arinso International in Vancouver for comprehensive business consultation services. In 2005, Belron became the major glass operation by acquiring Autostock, which included Speedy, Apple, Lebeau and Novus. GSK acquired ID Biochemicals. The following year, the Belgo-Luxembourg Arcela-Mittal integrated with Dofasco to become the world's largest steel company.

### *Regional Political Action*

In Western Canada, the labour movement did not benefit from Gustave Francq's numerous initiatives in Quebec on behalf of the working class. His views were clearly expressed in *Le Monde Ouvrier/The Labor World*, which had no fewer than eight thousand subscribers. In the street railway troubles in Winnipeg in 1907, and again in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the Flemish community of St. Boniface/Winnipeg saw the general strike as a left-wing plot to overthrow legitimate authority.<sup>41</sup> The Walloons, recruited mostly by colonizing priests and settled in rural communities, were

generally conservative and practising Catholics, unlike their compatriots engaged in mining. Even the Depression failed to arouse much support for the protest movements apart from mining in the Estevan and Drumheller districts and beet culture in southern Alberta. The few Belgian women that worked in the Winnipeg garment industry sweat shops to supplement or provide family income in the 1930s were not militant protesters but as newcomers they were anxious to retain what employment they could get. Similarly, in the work camps, organized across Canada by the federal Conservative government to meet the unemployment crisis, Belgians were among the number who decided to protest peacefully.<sup>42</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the Walloon coal miners who played a prominent role in both Alberta and Vancouver Island.

Belgians were reluctant to support prohibition because the coercion advocated by evangelical Protestants was often intemperate, xenophobic, a violation of individual rights and frequently anti-Catholic.<sup>43</sup> During World War I there was an effort to link prohibition with patriotism. The local paper in Cypress River, where a number of Belgians were settled, observed just before voting day that “anyone who will vote in favour of liquor might as well enlist under the Kaiser as far as patriotism goes.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the “beer parlours” that were created in “wet” towns and villages throughout Western Canada through provincial legislation violated Belgian social customs by removing consumption of beer from the family setting and parochial functions. Belgians, like most European immigrants, remained quite perplexed by the liquor legislation and did what they could to circumvent it.<sup>45</sup> As one observer commented, the problem with beer parlours was that only drinking was allowed and so there was neither food nor women as “waiters emptied barrels of beer into bored customers.”<sup>46</sup> Prohibition ran into more opposition when widespread bootlegging undermined respect for the law. In 1920 the Manitoba Moderation League was formed, strongly supported by the Belgian Club, and three years later the brewers and hotel-keepers formed a Beer and Wine League to promote responsible use of alcohol.<sup>47</sup> A liberalization of government restrictions ensued as cultural norms changed after World War II. Still, Belgians did not find quite the same congenial atmosphere of their “old country *estaminets*” even when their traditional brews like Stella Artois and Leffe appeared in bars and restaurants.

When Belgians arrived as newcomers in the West, they felt somewhat marginalized and alienated from the politics of the region, especially as

these were very much a perpetuation of the issues of eastern Canada. Thus, there was a time lag, typically into the second and third generation, from newcomer arrival to integration and full political participation. Only in St. Boniface was there significant political participation which may be explained by the presence of a civic community with common interests. In most rural communities the established host society, composed largely of Ontario and British Isles settlers, monopolized political activity. Many Belgians distrusted the emerging CCF party not only because of its alleged socialistic philosophy but also because of its Anglo-Protestant leadership and its fusion of the social gospel with politics. Tommy C. Douglas, its leader now remembered as the “father of medicare,” embraced the eugenics movement and one of his advisors had been a Ku Klux Klan organizer. From 1933 to 1942, the Church viewed the CCF as a socialist movement opposed to the principles and tenets of Christianity. The few Belgians who achieved political office did not exhibit any behaviour or pursue policies that favoured their ethnic group but acted as representatives of the community. In general, the Belgians voted Liberal until the 1920s, and in Saskatchewan until the 1940s. Electoral success was attributable to its effective political machine that included even the highway and road inspectors, as well as the provincial liquor store operators.<sup>48</sup> The Conservatives, whose organs such as the *Winnipeg Tribune* and the *Calgary Herald* opposed immigration from non-British sources, were perceived as linking Canadian identity to British ideals and values, including Protestantism. A popular treatise on immigration expressed surprise that immigrants from Belgium “come in the lower half of the table” of percentage of persons naturalized.<sup>49</sup>

Belgians generally stood aloof of right-wing political and social movements such as the merger of the United Farmers of Alberta and the Non-Partisan League in 1919, with its concept of “group government,” later expressed under the Social Credit and then the Reform Party labels. When by 1933 many saw the Depression as a product of systemic failure, rather than personal defeat, and they turned to fringe political parties – the CCF and Social Credit – Belgians remained more intent on toppling the Conservatives. Not until 1943 did the bishops concede that “the faithful are free to support any political party upholding the basic Christian traditions of Canada, and favouring needed reforms in the social and economic order.”<sup>50</sup> Belgians in Bellegarde continued to vote Liberal, while Antler and Redvers, its neighbouring communities,

voted for the CCF party. Belgians voted as they did, probably not because they followed the directions of their traditionalist parish priest, but more likely because they were not involved in the urban labour movement, were repelled by the Protestant social gospel, and were unable to perceive the CCF as a viable response to their agrarian problems. Nor was the new party's attempt to appeal to the women entirely successful.<sup>51</sup> The feminist movement came to realize that political activity tended perhaps to draw attention to gender similarities that their rhetoric had discounted.

Social Credit in Alberta, and as it spread into neighbouring provinces, did not appeal to Belgians because its strong religious character, rooted in pre-millennial fundamentalist Protestantism, had little relevance to them. The emphasis on sovereignty of the people did not accord well with their concepts of collective rights and traditional hierarchical authority structures. The monetary and financial philosophy of the movement was barely understood by the farmer, small businessmen and blue-collar workers. On the other hand, Belgians did become involved in one regional political revolt. They shared the political and economic complaints of their neighbours in the Peace River Valley regarding the Alberta provincial and federal governments. A quarrel between the federal and provincial governments over a proposed winter road from Grimshaw to Yellowknife resulted in a popular secessionist movement in 1938 to create a new province out of the Peace River region, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. It was a resurrection of a similar but less popular demand in 1917–18 for the creation of a similar province.<sup>52</sup>

More recently, there is less reason to believe that Belgians remain attached to a traditional old-line political party. They share a feeling of western alienation like their neighbours and believe the federal system in the past benefited the eastern region of the country more than their own. Now they feel part of the prosperous and dynamic elements of society – those who have acquired wealth and success in oil, ranching, farming, and construction, who believe in themselves, their region, and the potential of the West.

Not many Belgians aspired to or attained high political office. Jules Pynoo, a popular alderman from St. Boniface, ran in the federal election of 1949 as a Labour-Progressive candidate but his left-wing affiliation resulted in a crushing defeat. Marcel Lambert, whose mother was Belgian, served as a member of parliament from 1957 to 1984, became Minister of Veterans' Affairs in the Diefenbaker cabinet and Speaker of the House



of Commons in 1962–63.<sup>53</sup> From St. Boniface, Robert Bockstael sat in the House as a Liberal from May 1979 to October 1984 and served as a parliamentary secretary to various ministers from 1980 to 1984. He had the support of the church and the business community as well as his ethnic community. Walter Van de Walle sat as a Progressive-Conservative member of parliament for Pembina constituency in 1986, and he was re-elected for St. Albert in 1988.

At the provincial level, only Joseph Van Belleghem was successful as a Liberal, in November 1949, because he had the “necessary connections” in St. Boniface. He had served on city council for many years and had won the support of the French Canadian population and his own Flemish group through leadership in a wide range of community organizations. He felt restricted in caucus and was convinced that Premier Douglas Campbell was a Francophobe, so in the election of 1953 he decided to run as an Independent Liberal Progressive. He was defeated, the archbishop having given his blessing to a grand nephew of Louis Riel as a more suitable representative of the community.<sup>54</sup> In Saskatchewan, John Cuelenaere, mayor of Prince Albert, was elected to the provincial legislature for Shelbrook constituency in 1964 and was appointed Minister of Natural Resources, a portfolio he held until 1966. In Alberta, Arthur Soetaert of St. Albert broke the family tradition of voting Conservative and sat as a Liberal member of the legislature from 1955 to 1959.

The Belgian clergy was not averse to publicly promoting community issues. Abbé Maurice Baudoux of Prud’homme joined a delegation of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool representatives in 1942 to petition the Mackenzie King cabinet to consider the plight of western farmers. Within a couple of years, he became the driving force in Radio-Ouest Française because the CBC station at Watrous gave little attention to French programming. By 1948, Baudoux had succeeded in winning a broadcasting permit and was named to the episcopacy. Bishop Remi De Roo was also an activist, founding member of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, chairman of the Human Rights Commission of British Columbia, an outspoken critic of capitalism and champion of Latin American liberation theology. Archbishop Antoine Haccault, during his brief episcopacy, was a forceful promoter of ecumenism, holding dialogues with Anglicans and Lutherans, while also working with the Canadian Council of Churches.

At the municipal level, the non-partisan Belgian Club in St. Boniface was where political issues were discussed and plans were laid to select

Belgian candidates for various offices. Nicolas Pirroton, a Liégeois, was elected alderman in 1929 for the ward including “Belgian Town,” where Victor Wyndels owned considerable property and thirty-two extended Belgian families resided. He chaired the local Belgian Relief Fund in 1914–18, served as president of the Belgian Club from 1926 to 1935, was bandmaster of the city band, and founded the Belgian Benefit Society. When Pirroton died suddenly in November 1943 he lay in state at city hall. It was then that Joseph Van Belleghem decided to take up political life more actively in order to perpetuate a Belgian presence. Van Belleghem served as an alderman from 1931 to 1938, and from 1943 until 1950, when he was elected to the provincial legislature. He was mayor of St. Boniface from 1954 to 1960, during which time he championed the historic role of St. Boniface and fiercely opposed amalgamation with Winnipeg, the “unicity” movement which would deprive St. Boniface of much of its historic identity. He served again as mayor from 1963 to 1955, when he was appointed Belgian consul for Manitoba. He was an outstanding native son, educated locally, spoke five languages and served his community honourably. St. Boniface at this time had four chief officers who were Belgians: Mgr Maurice Baudoux as archbishop; Joseph Van Belleghem as mayor; Joseph Bockstael as city engineer; and George de Cruyenaere as chairman of the school board.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout Western Canada the common career pattern was to become involved in community affairs before seeking political office. Jules Pynoo, for example, immigrated in 1929, built up Pynoo Construction Company, was a distinguished member of the St. Sebastien Archery Club and, beginning in 1950, served on city council for eighteen years. Although he was not a practising Catholic, he was widely respected by the electorate for his social activism. Similarly, Arthur Soetart served as mayor of Morinville for sixteen years and then as a Liberal member of the provincial legislature from 1955 to 1959. He also worked as farm manager, was director and treasurer of the Alexander Band Farm Trust and was greatly appreciated by the First Nations band.<sup>56</sup> Gordon Van Tighem was elected mayor of Yellowknife NWT after serving for twenty-four years in marketing management for the Bank of Montreal, the last eight years in the North West Territories. One of ten children in a family of modest means, he worked as a replacement for absentee workers at minimum wage in a Firestone tire plant during the summer months to finance his university studies. He rose to tire inspector in the plant and went into banking upon

graduation. Reminiscing, he wrote: "I realized if I wanted something I had to work hard to get it. No one gets something for nothing."<sup>57</sup> It was the work ethic that won Belgians the praise of early immigration officials. He was founding director of the Stanton Hospital Foundation and the Side Door Youth Centre. In 2006 he was elected chairman of the Northern Forum of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. A sibling, John Van Tighem, served as superintendent of the Calgary Catholic School for thirteen years. John Cuelenaere was elected to city council in Prince Albert in 1942 and was named chairman of the finance committee. He became a staunch supporter of Marion Gilroy's program to set up regional libraries throughout Saskatchewan. He campaigned against the popular concept of the time that such libraries would entail onerous levies used to indoctrinate young people in socialist philosophy. In 1948, he was elected mayor, an office he held until 1955, and the following year he was responsible in good measure for the creation of the North Central Saskatchewan Regional Library, a system subsequently widely adopted. He served a final term as mayor in 1961–62 and left a third of his estate to the Prince Albert Public Library.<sup>58</sup>

In rural towns and villages many Belgians served their communities well and their contribution has passed largely unheralded. Ross Dujardin in Deloraine, for example, member of town council from 1962 to 1966, mayor from 1966 to 1975, made his mark first in local business, Catholic benevolent organizations, the hospital board, and the Elks Lodge, to become known affectionately in town as "Ross the Boss."<sup>59</sup> August DePape, a self-educated man who read and wrote both official languages and his native Flemish, served as an immigration interpreter, insurance agent, municipal councillor for ten years, school trustee for twenty years, justice of the peace and first president of a local grain marketing board. Likewise, Maurice Delichte served as a school trustee for twenty-three years and as a director of the Manitoba Milk Marketing Producers' Board. Remi DePape served as secretary of the Somerset school board and was a member of the Swan Lake hospital board before being elected mayor of the village of Somerset in 1962.

### *Family Businesses*

The early emphasis on wheat-growing led to urban growth as well because it required grain-handling facilities, agricultural equipment dealerships,

railway stations, loading facilities, grocery stores, banks, and insurance offices. The counterpart of the traditional family farm was the family business. The rural community was dependent on the village community and the village community survived because of the surrounding farm families. Villages, serving as local service centres, were strung out about fourteen kilometres apart along the railway lines, the indispensable transportation links, and only later were they connected by highways.<sup>60</sup>

Three village institutions in particular attracted Belgian planters: the “general store,” the implement sales business, and the local hotel. The village grocery store constituted a meeting place as well as a supplier of a wide range of goods: “meats and smoked fish, hardware, machines and tools, canned goods, hats, dishes, crockery, paper goods, tobacco, toiletries, groceries, and whatever else. Sometimes also the local post office.”<sup>61</sup> These stores carried a large inventory and the mark-up on goods varied between 30 per cent and 35 per cent. They dealt with Winnipeg, sometimes Vancouver, suppliers and usually granted credit, the bills payable after fall harvesting. Among the successful family “general stores” were John Van de Sempel’s in Veregin, serving the Doukhobor community, and Nicolas Rondelet’s in Girouxville, serving a French-Canadian clientele.<sup>62</sup> The evolution of this prairie institution was documented by Emile Bosmans of Antwerp who came to Bittern Lake NWT in 1889. In 1902 he built a trading post and stopping place for incoming settlers taking up homesteads, expanded the following year into a general store and post office. Eventually he ran a feed mill and cheese factory, then began selling farm machinery. Finally, he donated land for the construction of a railway station and sold part of his property for the townsite of Roundhill.<sup>63</sup>

The local hotel was in some ways a social centre replacing the Flemish and Walloon café or *estaminet*. However, the Canadian version lacked the conviviality of the open-air shaded tables and the variety of beers and food, restricted as it was both in venue and service by provincial statutes. The Tourist Hotel in St. Boniface, operated initially by M. Van Daele and later the Van Belleghems, was the first stop for many arriving from Belgium. Flemings seemed particularly attracted to operating village hotels. Omer Huybrecht at St. Lazare, Maurice Vandermeulen at Oak Lake, Alphonse Jaenen at Manor, among many others, chose this occupation which entailed work for the entire family as this institution not only offered overnight rooms, but also provided a dining room, a beer parlour, and sometimes a pool hall or dance hall. In the beer parlour

many deals were closed, local gossip was exchanged, and politics and religion were discussed. The hotel provided indispensable lodging and food for travelling salesmen and the occasional work gang.

### *Military Connections*

Unlike Canada, Belgium grew out of revolution with the result that military ideals and virtues remained prominent, conscription was normal and expenditures on defensive works, weapons and training were voted regularly by parliament. Her standing army was never large because Article VII of the Twenty-Four Articles (1839) recognized Belgium as an “independent and perpetually neutral state” under the collective guaranty of the Great Powers. The violation of these articles, the “mere scrap of paper,” by German armies advancing on France on 4 August 1914 aroused strong feelings in Canada.<sup>64</sup> On October 15, King Albert I ordered his small army to retreat behind the Yser River line, where the Belgians held on to five hundred square kilometres, including forty villages, of native soil the Germans never conquered. With military headquarters at La Panne, and the government in exile in London, Albert I passed into history as the courageous “soldier king.” An enduring stereotype of Belgium and Belgians was established.<sup>65</sup> A few Belgian Canadians escaped to neutral Holland. Maurice Ingeveld who had enlisted in Calgary, for example, rejoined his former regiment in Antwerp and escaped with some compatriots to Holland, where he was interned. He managed to escape to England and then rejoined Belgian forces in France. Michel Burgelman, who worked on a ranch near Burmis, also fled to Holland after the fall of Antwerp, managed to make his way to England, and from there back to rejoin his family at Frank in June 1915. It appears that he would have been considered a deserter if he did not rejoin the army.<sup>66</sup>

There was an immediate response in Canada to Belgium’s plight. On August 6, only two days after the German violation of Belgian neutrality, Maurice Kimpe, the consul in Edmonton, took action. He inserted the following announcement in French in *Le Progrès Albertain*: “General mobilization of the Belgian army having been decreed, military personnel residing in Canada are required to present themselves immediately, by the quickest and shortest route, directly to the depots and forts where their arms and equipment are stored.”<sup>67</sup> On December 10, this call to arms was repeated in both French and Flemish, after two Francophone

contingents had left Edmonton for the war zone. Miners in the Crowsnest Pass area and workers at the Trochu ranches had also returned to serve the homeland. Louis Houbregs in Blairmore left a wife and six children under twelve years of age. Edouard d'Arippe of the Big Hill Ranch, near High River, had to arrange with the Bank of Commerce to conduct the sales of his stock while he was at the front. Others, such as Jacob Clemens in Carlyle, joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force as an effective way to come to the aid of Belgium while assuring a good reception eventually for the family in Canada.<sup>68</sup> Jean Melkenbeke, for example, was identified in this manner: "He is a Belgian subject and has not been naturalised Canadian. He, therefore, has the choice between being sent by me [Consul] to the Belgian army or volunteering with the Canadian forces."<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, Canadian naturalization was not officially recognized in Belgium as granting exemption from military service.<sup>70</sup> In August 1915, there was a third call for "every member of the French and Belgian colony in Edmonton and suburbs, who has not yet been called to the front and who desires to join, can be enrolled on Saturday next."<sup>71</sup> By this time, the Canadian "colonial" troops had distinguished themselves and established their reputation at the second battle of Ypres, when on 24 April 1915 the full brunt of a chlorine gas attack, a violation of the Hague Convention (1897) on chemical warfare, failed to break their ranks.

The question of call-up of Belgian reservists and the classes mobilized while residing in Western Canada raised a number of practical questions. Firstly, many did not respond to appeals published in local newspapers across the country because they did not subscribe to or read these English and French newspapers. Nor did they pay attention to notices posted in local post offices. Those reservists who did respond voluntarily wanted certificates confirming that they had volunteered in Canada in order that they be discharged in Canada at the termination of hostilities.<sup>72</sup> Raymond van de Syde, for example, who farmed at Ceylon, Saskatchewan, had gone to work in a coalmine at Blairmore, Alberta, in the winter of 1916–17 when he received his military call. The consul in Calgary considered that he was a resident of Blairmore and so he faced the challenge of selling his livestock and renting his farm in Saskatchewan.<sup>73</sup>

Those who failed to respond to the call to arms were treated as deserters and were subject to court martial. There remained the problem whether they had in fact received official notification, place of residence not always known by the authorities, especially if they had never

registered at the nearest consulate upon arrival in Canada. Joseph Private of Blairmore, who had volunteered for the Belgian army, returned to Alberta after thirty months of active duty in France and required a four months extension of his leave because of travel difficulties. The acting consul in Calgary warned: "You must not count on an amnesty because there will never be any for deserters and you will never be able to return to Belgium.... That would be regrettable after thirty months of good service, but the law is the same for everybody." He added, "Moreover, he sees around him young Belgian men who refuse to leave and who escape not only Belgian conscription but also Canadian conscription."<sup>74</sup> Canadian employers did not want to be accused of harbouring "deserters." Pat Burns, a prominent business leader in Calgary and strong supporter of the Belgian cause, made a point of checking with the consulate on the status of his employees. L. Stockett, director of collieries for the CPR, told Consul de Burlet in 1917 that, "miners should not be called up because the mines are short of men especially here in the West." He added: "it is absolutely necessary that the coal mines can be worked regularly so that the functioning of the railroads, the zinc, copper and iron foundries, and consequently the munitions factories, not be hindered." The message was passed on to higher authorities.<sup>75</sup> Belgians employed in the Canadian civil service who had been granted leave to do their military service "shall be entitled to receive regular salary during such period of service," by order of the Privy Council.<sup>76</sup>

A few Belgian subjects who had served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, upon discharge and return to Canada, requested financial assistance for repatriation from Belgium. The Department of Militia and Defence paid the railway fares from Montreal for six Belgian reservists to their Western Canadian residences – three to Winnipeg and one each to Weyburn, Vanguard and Ponteix. The reservist from Ponteix was Léon Courmont, a farmer whose land had provided no income during his absence, who had served three years at the front, was seriously wounded and crippled for life and had spent a year in hospital in Brussels. He had been granted a three months' convalescence leave to settle his affairs in Saskatchewan. The abbé Napoleon Poirier, a personal friend, parish priest at Bellegarde and colonization agent, petitioned for a reduction of Courmont's transportation fares to return to Belgium to continue his medical treatment. All the Department of Militia and Defence would authorize was "transportation on repayment from Ponteix, Sask., to



Montreal, and third class passage to England, at government rate.” In other words, minimum assistance even for honoured allies.<sup>77</sup> Also, there were petitions to the Belgian consulates for assistance. These requests were directed to the Canadian Patriotic Fund, a charitable institution designed specifically to assist the wives and children of soldiers in the Belgian army or the Canadian Expeditionary Force who were the sole support of the family.

King Albert appointed a royal commission to gather information on alleged atrocities, such as the use of poison gas on troops, the bombardment of civilian targets, ambulances and medical facilities, and some alleged torture and killing of civilians. In England, the Lord Bryce Commission report, a propaganda instrument designed to arouse humanitarian and patriotic sentiments, concluded there had been “mass rapes, the splitting of babies on bayonets, the cutting off of children’s hands and women’s breasts, hostage murders, Germans excreting on private possessions.” Eventually, diligent reporters challenged the accuracy of these serious allegations.<sup>78</sup> The alleged “atrocities” referred quite often to the killing of civilians as they tried to flee to France. Fact and fiction were intermingled in unlikely statements, in reminiscences decades later, such as “we saw people being burned in ovens and other people being buried alive.”<sup>79</sup> Jules Minet, on the other hand, maintained that as hundreds clogged the roads into northern France some people were killed in battles between German and French troops, artillery strikes, etc. The only “atrocities” he recalled were those against civilians who took up arms against German troops. A young man in the village of Spy, for example, climbed into the church spire to fire on advancing Germans and was captured and dragged behind a horse through the village streets as a warning to civilians to respect the rules of war.<sup>80</sup> Much was made of alleged atrocities in the village of Tamines. Professor Peter Buitenhuis investigated the “atrocities myth” and concluded that the Bryce Report was “largely a tissue of invention, unsubstantiated observations by unnamed witnesses, and second-hand eyewitness reports, depending far more on imagination than on any other factor.” Furthermore, “there was no attempt at scholarly investigation and evaluation of the evidence. Most significant of all, the documents and testimony of the witnesses disappeared from British records at the end of the war,” making it impossible to check the evidence.<sup>81</sup>

The Belgian Mission, commissioned to publicize the plight of Belgian civilians, entered Canada by train from Boston to Saint John and Montreal,

where it was received with enthusiasm by a crowd of an estimated 25,000 at Windsor Station. The Chambre de Commerce Belge in Montreal had made all the arrangements for the publicity throughout Canada “to bring to light as much as possible the great role the small Belgian population played in this formidable conflict ... to arouse more intense sympathy for the noble sovereign.” The Belgian Mission was headed by Henri Carton de Wiart, Belgian Minister of Justice (1911–18), an influential aristocrat whose brother Edmond was the secretary of King Albert and a director of the Société Générale de Belgique.<sup>82</sup> The most important role of the mission was fund-raising and the message in the English-language Montreal press was transmitted across the country. Gustave Francq, prominent Belgian Canadian labour leader in Quebec, hosted the Montreal headquarters of a relief committee that was organized and he printed the trilingual *Pro Belgica*, the authorized mouthpiece of the Belgian Relief Fund, from 1915 to 1919 on his presses.<sup>83</sup>

Emile Francqui, managing director of the Banque d’Outre-Mer, and Herbert Hoover in the United States organized the National Relief and Food Committee, but the Canadian agency was the Belgian Relief Fund. Within a few months, Saskatchewan people had contributed nine railway cars of food. In St. Boniface, the Relief Fund, quite appropriately, was administered by Nicholas Piroton through the Club Belge.<sup>84</sup> J.H. Woods, editor of the *Calgary Daily Herald*, was honorary secretary-treasurer of the Belgian Relief Fund for southern Alberta. He was ably seconded by his secretary, Della James, an indefatigable fund-raiser, Maude Riley who rallied the support of the social elite of Calgary, Pat Burns of the business community, and Baron de t’Serclaes of the Belgian community. A scholarly driving force behind the Belgian Relief Fund was Dr. S. Mack Eastman, prominent history professor at Vancouver and Calgary, who gave a series of lectures across Alberta in support of the fund. He said: “These lectures have been well attended and have resulted in a considerable accession to the Belgian Relief Fund, besides which I am sure that they have given much information concerning Belgium to a number of Alberta communities.” It was an important exercise in fund-raising and public education.<sup>85</sup> The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire sponsored a series of lectures accompanied by lantern slides by Professor Eastman in seven Alberta towns as well as a concert of Belgian instrumental and vocal music in Calgary.<sup>86</sup> The only misfortune was that on 6 December 1917 a Norwegian ship sailing out of Halifax harbour with relief supplies for

Belgium collided with a French munitions ship causing a gigantic explosion that claimed 1 600 victims and destroyed much of the city. In 1919 the Belgian Relief Fund was succeeded by Relief Work for the Victims of War in Belgium, an organization mandated to “receive and collect money, food and other articles in Canada or elsewhere,” directed by Robert John Dale, insurance broker and future Belgian consul in Winnipeg, and Gustave Francq, printer and labour organizer.<sup>87</sup> The organization remained active for a number of years and was replaced in 1937 by a federally chartered Belgium-Canada Association with an exchange mandate that included the facilitation of industrial and agricultural development and the promotion of cultural and scientific projects.<sup>88</sup>

Mgr Hebbelynck, delegated by the University of Louvain to go to Canada, solicited aid “in money and in books to rebuild the university library and the commercial school affiliated with the university” which had been damaged in the course of hostilities.<sup>89</sup> Among private donors, none was more successful than François Adam of Camrose, who sent shipments of beef and pork to the hungry population of Poland and Belgium.<sup>90</sup> The consuls in New York and Calgary were quite unaware of Adam’s illustrious career or his important national and international contacts.<sup>91</sup>

Another unusual offer of help came from an association of ranchers in Medicine Hat that owned more than twenty thousand horses. They offered to send five thousand horses of the type suitable for farm work to Belgium to replace the horses lost during the war years. It was an indication of the interest and sympathy aroused in Western Canada for the plight of Belgian civilians.<sup>92</sup>

Belgium was firmly implanted in the Canadian consciousness. Belgians, in turn, remember solemnly Canada’s contribution to the liberation of their country, especially battles at Ypres and Mons. At Passchendaele every evening, regardless of adverse weather or other activities in the city, some citizens of Ypres, now including children of a third generation, gather at a war memorial to remember the 15,654 Canadian casualties, a perpetual and extraordinary act of remembrance without parallel anywhere. Also remembered is the fact that, following the armistice on 11 November 1918, the corps of the Royal Canadian Engineers began to reconstruct the bridges, clear the canals for navigation, and rebuild the railway lines of Belgium.

Canadians played a less conspicuous role in Belgium in the Second World War in 1939–45. The Department of External Affairs agreed that Belgian nationals conscripted by Belgian authorities would not be admitted to the Canadian armed forces “merely as a means of escaping obligations to serve in the Belgian Army,” nor would Canada enlist Belgian nationals “until their cases have been referred to the Belgian authorities.”<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, Lt. Maurice Henri Pirenne and twelve compatriots who had pursued graduate studies in the United States and were stationed with the Belgian Military Training Unit in Cornwall, Ontario, were expected to serve either in the Belgian forces or in the Royal Air Force.<sup>94</sup> In May 1943 the Air Liaison Mission in Ottawa approved the enlisting of a restricted number of Belgian nationals as part of the British quota at Canadian facilities, to be trained in Canada at the expense of the Canadian government.<sup>95</sup> In 1944 the Canadian government made no apparent effort to locate ninety-one Belgians in Western Canada listed as “deserters” because they had not responded to mobilization orders.<sup>96</sup>

The First Canadian Army undertook the task in 1944 of opening the Channel ports for the supplying of the invasion forces. The Twelfth Manitoba Dragoons liberated Ostend on 6 September and Bruges on 12 September. The last pockets of German resistance in Flanders collapsed at Walchteren on 9 November. By the beginning of December, thousands of tonnes of stores landed at Antwerp, which became the principal Allied supply port in northeastern Europe. Two events flowed from victory. Firstly, Belgian Canadians, like Max Emke, for example, who had been trapped in Belgium by the blitzkrieg and had been interned, were liberated.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, Belgian brides of Canadian soldiers, 649 in number, were rapidly given passage to Canada. Naturally, the approach of final victory was suitably observed at home:

Winnipeg and vicinity Belgians celebrated Sunday morning for the partial liberation of Belgium. They met at the Belgian Club on Provencher Avenue, and with flags waving and band playing, proceeded to the Belgian Sacred Heart Church on Plinquet Avenue, where a Te Deum mass was sung by Father Peter.... Father Peter gave an address in the three languages. After Mass, the celebrants returned to the cenotaph on Provencher Avenue where a prayer was said and the Last Post sounded.<sup>98</sup>

Belgium had entered the Canadian imagination as a “preferred country” whose emigrants were deemed frugal, industrious and innovative contributors to the Canadian socio-economic fabric. They never lost their status although the demands of Canadian society evolved over the decades with the development of a more diversified economy and multicultural society. Two world wars had further strengthened the bonds between the two countries.