

The Belgian Connection

A unique group of immigrants established a community that remains connected to its roots.

In 1904 the *Deloraine Times* reported that: "Remi Van de Ponselee arrived back from Belgium, bringing 150 Belgian settlers." That would seem to explain the large number of people of Belgian descent that still reside in the neighbourhood today.

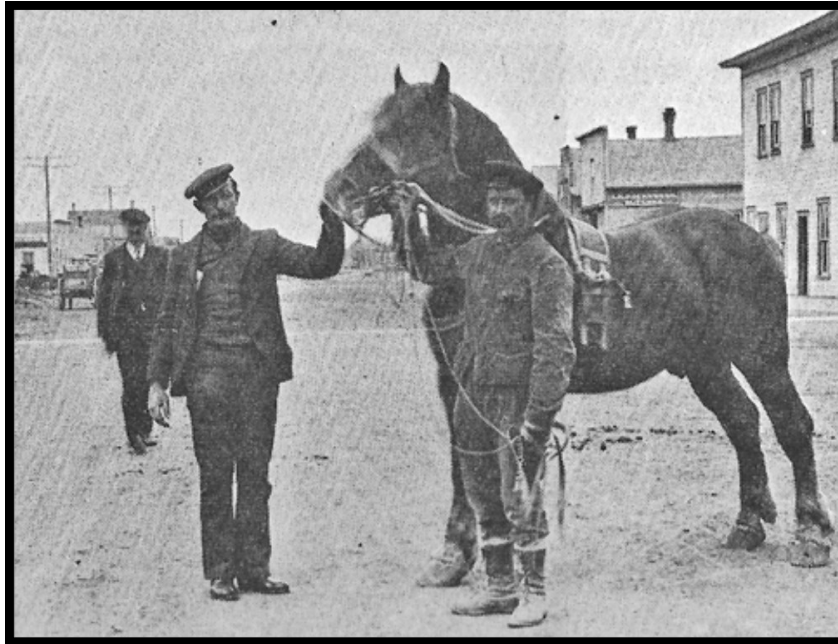
It turns out that his trip was only part of a larger story. It is normal

for immigrants to our country to keep close ties to their homelands, and to influence friends and relatives to join them. Looking back, the ties between the Deloraine area and Belgium were exceptionally strong.

Scrolling through the family histories, several trends become apparent: First, quite a few settlers made trips back to Belgium. They often brought back relatives. Many seemed to find a bride.

"Aime, the second son of Alidor Andries went to Belgium to visit his relatives in the winter of 1929- 1930; there he met his future wife, Jeannette Raes..."

While it was common for settlers from Ontario to return after getting settled and bring a bride back with them, a high number of the Belgian settlers seemed to follow this path. And they brought other things as well.



◀ A Belgian horse imported from Belgium in 1910 by A. Andries.

first home was a sod house. After five years, they returned to their homeland hoping to attract more settlers.

Many others followed. Those of us with friends in Deloraine will recognize the family names.

The first school began in 1904 in Remi

Van de Ponselee's house and Flossie School was built in 1906. The Roman Catholic Church was constructed in the area in 1918 and was the center of social activities for many years.

Although the district was one of the last to be settled, it achieved some major accomplishments. For instance, in the 1920s, Alidor Andries started a fruit orchard, and within a few years was reputed to be one of the finest in Manitoba.

Like all prairie settlers, the people took what opportunities were available. After spending the summer growing crops, they cut wood and sold ice in the winter. Little by little, they began to prosper.

"As a hobby they planted an orchard and Mr. Andries had perennial spinach and celery from Belgium."

"In 1909-1910 Mr. Andries brought back purebred Belgian stallions and mares."

"...by hiring immigrants to look after the horses on the boat they managed to give them a free trip to this country plus they could get free passage for their horses."

The result was a distinct community, still very evident a century later.

The Flossie District

Around 1900 Belgium offered few opportunities for work. This, and the scarcity of land in Belgium, made Canada very attractive for those interested in farming. The Andries family traveled from Brandon to Deloraine by ox cart. Their

Sources:

Deloraine History Book Committee. *Deloraine Scans a Century 1880 - 1980*: Altona. Friesen Printers, 1980.

Additional Research by Tyler Bugg