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## PREFACE

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The first attempt to preserve the memory of the early Belgian pioneers in Wisconsin was made in 1881 by Chas. I. Martin. He was editor of the Sturgeon Bay *Expositor* and conceived the excellent idea of increasing the circulation of his newspaper by compiling and publishing short biographical notices of all the old settlers in the county. This was a big undertaking, but Mr. Martin carried it through quite thoroughly. He later published this biographical material with other historical data under the title *History of Door County*. Unfortunately, the haste with which this worthy work was done leaves much to be desired with reference to the correctness of the names and dates recorded. Nevertheless it was a praiseworthy endeavor, and the present writer has been much helped by Mr. Martin's early records. Mr. Martin made no attempt to write any historical survey of the immigration of the Belgians.

The next writer who added to our knowledge of the Belgian pioneers was also named Martin. The *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XIII (1895) contains an article entitled *The Belgians of Northeast Wisconsin* by Xavier Martin. Mr. Martin came from Belgium as a youth in 1853. He was an intelligent man who acquired a good education in this country. Later he saw the transformation of the great wilderness northeast of Green Bay, where fifteen thousand Belgians settled, into a prosperous farming dis-

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trict. He therefore had the best opportunity of writing a comprehensive account of this great migration of his countrymen. However, while his sketch is valuable, it falls far short of what might be expected in the circumstances. He mentions only ten pioneers, and none of these are from Door County. Comparatively little is told of the early struggles, and too much space is devoted to the so-called successful Belgians in the more recent years.

In 1917 the undersigned compiled a *History of Door County* of 450 pages in which he has a chapter on the Belgian Settlement in Union, Brussels and Gardner townships. As the book attempted to cover the whole county, the treatment of the Belgian Settlement was necessarily very brief.

These three modest contributions, covering all together about thirty-five printed pages, are all that have been made to tell the story of one of the largest single groups of foreign settlers in Wisconsin. It is an unusually interesting group, being the only Belgian settlement of importance in the Northwest, remarkably compact, and preserving more of the mother country's speech, customs and characteristics than almost any settlement of foreign origin that may be mentioned.

With a view to preserve a more complete record of this extensive community, the Door County Historical Society undertook to compile as complete a record as possible of that part of the settlement which lies in Door County. The settlement is now almost eighty years old and much valuable material is irretrievably lost. The following account, which is the fruit of this endeavor, is therefore presented with a keen realization of its deficiencies. Fortunately there are still a half dozen old pioneers left who came here among the first in their early boyhood, and the writer is

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deeply grateful to them for the ready assistance received.

The writer's thanks are also due to Mr. Lee W. Metzner for his kind permission to reprint his excellent account of *The First Kirmess*, and to Mr. W. J. Gilson and Rev. M. J. Vanden Elsen who have carefully read this sketch in manuscript and made many valuable suggestions.

HJALMAR RUED HOLAND

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