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HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS OF BELGIUM AND TEXAS ¹

The Belgian Ambassador, Baron de Cartier, had hoped and confidently expected to have the pleasure of coming in person to greet you on the occasion of the commencement exercises of your Institute. Only a few days ago, however, circumstances arose which have made it absolutely impossible for him to absent himself from Washington at the present time owing to his appointment as Ambassador to Great Britain, and he has charged me with the honour of conveying his greetings to you. He wishes me to express to you his deep regret that he has been compelled to forego the pleasure of a personal visit to which he had looked forward with keen interest, as he always has been specially interested in Texas, where reside so many true friends of Belgium. He has instructed me to read to you the address which he had prepared to deliver to you on this occasion.

ROBERT SILVERCRUYS.

THE invitation of your President, Dr. Lovett, to address the students, Faculty and Trustees of the Rice Institute on this occasion is most heartily appreciated, not only as a mark of kind feeling toward myself, but more especially as an evidence of the friendly sentiment of this Seat of Learning towards the country which I have the honour to represent.

¹Address by His Excellency, Baron de Cartier de Marchienne, LL.D., Belgian Ambassador to the United States, read by the Honourable Robert Silvercruys, Counsellor of the Embassy, at the twelfth commencement convocation of the Rice Institute, held in the academic court Monday morning, June 6, 1927, at nine o'clock.

You are accustomed here to sit at the feet of great scholars and to listen to words of wisdom from eminent scientists, but I hope that you do not expect from me any learned discourse. I do not come to you, to-day, to discuss any abstruse problems of science, nor, as Gilbert puts it, to bring you any "cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse". I come simply as a messenger of good-will to bring you the greetings of my compatriots across the seas.

The friendship of Belgians and Americans is of long standing. Under the stress of war that friendship was quickened and ripened, and I am confident that it will ever continue to increase and will be still further strengthened and confirmed as time goes on.

As old friends gather together and talk over the days of their early acquaintance, so, to-day, I should like to talk over with you some of the early events which have led to the friendly relations which so happily exist between my people and yours.

A few years ago, in a most graceful address to your Sister University of Brussels, your distinguished President, Dr. Lovett, referred to the similarity of ideals which have made us kinsmen and he added a most happy allusion to the fact that the Kingdom of Belgium and the Republic of Texas came into existence as sovereign, independent powers at approximately the same period of time. The Kingdom of Belgium was born in 1830 and the Republic of Texas in 1836, making Belgium your elder sister by only six years. I may remark, in passing, that while there is a strong family likeness in character, there is a remarkable disparity in size, the younger sister being more than twenty times the size of the elder.

During the existence of Texas as an independent republic from 1836 to 1845 the diplomatic relations between Texas

and Belgium were extremely cordial. Belgium was one of the first European powers to recognize the new republic, and your diplomatic representative at Brussels, General James Hamilton, reported in his dispatches that the friendly attitude of the Belgian government was of great utility in securing the official recognition of Texas by Great Britain.

Our sovereign at that period was Leopold I, grandfather of our present King. He manifested deep interest in the new republic and had many personal conferences with your diplomatic agent with a view to promoting commercial intercourse between Texas and Belgium. In order to study local conditions and develop commercial relations, a Belgian diplomatic agent was despatched to Texas in the person of Major Pirson, who afterwards was elected to our House of Representatives.

Your republic was, at that time, in need of settlers to develop your vast resources, and your government paid us the compliment of wishing to obtain Belgians. One of your diplomatic agents reported that the Belgian Government was in favour of this plan, and he added: "they (the Belgians) are among the best of emigrants, being sober, industrious, enterprising and peaceful. . . . Indeed, for all practical results touching commercial emigration, Belgium may be as important to us as England or France".

It is gratifying to know that your ancestors held such a high opinion of our people, and I trust as do all Belgians that the present generation may equally merit your regard.

At one time there were negotiations on foot for still closer relations between Belgium and Texas. Your young republic wanted to issue a loan of about seven million dollars, and several propositions were discussed. Under one plan, the Belgian Government was to guarantee the loan in

return for a privileged position in respect to import duties on certain Belgian products and in consideration of special privileges for Belgian vessels in your coastwise trade. Under an alternative plan, the Belgian Government was to advance or guarantee three and a half million dollars and to buy from you, for another three and a half million dollars, a strip of land along the disputed boundary between Texas and Mexico, the territory thus acquired being designed as a colony of Belgium. This was, I believe, the first effort of the Kingdom of Belgium to establish an outlet for her crowded population in an overseas colony—an aspiration which was not realized until half a century later when our wise and far-seeing ruler, Leopold II, acquired the vast territory in central Africa which is known to-day as the Belgian Congo, and which was explored by an American—Henry Stanley. I may mention as a curious coincidence that the flag adopted for the Congo was identical with the former banner of the Republic of Texas—the Lone Star of gold on a field of blue. The negotiations for a Belgian Colony on your border fell through. Had they been carried to a successful conclusion we Belgians would to-day be your neighbors geographically, as we are actually in the higher sense of the word.

I should like, on this occasion, to look back a little further into the past and to recall some still earlier associations of our people with Texas and with other parts of your country.

I believe that the earliest map on which the name "America" is given to the northern continent of the New World is Mercator's map of 1541. Mercator, as you will remember, was a native of our little town of Rupplemonde, near Antwerp, and was one of the sons of our old Alma Mater, the

University of Louvain. So may I not claim that it was a Belgian who first "put North America on the map".

At that period the whole western hemisphere was claimed by Charles the Fifth, who was, at the same time, sovereign of the Belgian Provinces. He was not only our ruler but he was himself a Belgian, as he was born at Ghent in 1500 and received his education at Malines, where he spent his early youth. Although he inherited the vast Kingdom of Spain and later became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and claimed the sovereignty of the whole western hemisphere, he never lost his love for his native land, and it was in the old palace on the hill of Caudenberg at Brussels that he laid down the sceptre of half the world. It was under the reign of our great ruler, Charles the Fifth, that Pizarro conquered Peru, Cortez vanquished the Aztecs, De Soto took possession of Cuba and Florida and penetrated west of the Mississippi, perhaps as far as northern Texas. It was in the same glorious reign that Coronado and Cabeza de Vaca explored for the first time a part of your great state. We may say, therefore, that, in this dim and distant past, our Belgian Provinces and Texas, together with a large section of your country, were in a way associated in the mighty realm ruled over by Charles of Ghent, afterwards known as the great Emperor Charles the Fifth.

In the succeeding century a French expedition came to your shores and I believe that the first European post in Texas was established by La Salle in 1685 at Matagorda Bay. Among the missionaries who accompanied that expedition were three Belgian priests of the Order of Recollects: Zenobé Membré and his cousin Chrétien Leclercq, of Bapaume, and Anastasius Douay, of Quesnoi—all three born in that portion of the Belgian Province of Hainaut which was afterwards ceded to France by the Treaty of

the Pyrenees. They began the work of Christianizing, civilizing and educating the native tribes of Texas, and although their teaching was, no doubt, extremely elementary, I hope it will not be forgotten by your great, modern university that these three Belgians were among the "pioneer-educators" in your state.

Two of these missionaries, Membré and Leclercq, had already served in the earlier expedition of La Salle in Canada and in the Mississippi Valley, and both of them wrote and published descriptions of your country which are useful contributions to the history of America.

Another of our early missionaries who was also an explorer and historian of your country was Father Hennepin, a native of the little Belgian town of Ath, where a memorial has been recently erected to his memory. Hennepin had accompanied La Salle on his expedition along the St. Lawrence, on the Great Lakes and in the Mississippi Valley. Whether Hennepin ever descended the Mississippi River as far as the Gulf (as he claimed) is a disputed question, but his useful work as a missionary and as an explorer in the Upper Valley is well recognized. His "Description de la Louisiane" was printed in Paris in 1683, and is, I believe, the first published description of a large portion of your country. This book, together with Hennepin's subsequent volumes, was among the "best sellers" of their day and constitute important sources of American history. I am glad to think that this Belgian priest was one of your first historians.

Many other Belgian missionaries had their part in taming the wilderness and in opening up your country. Among them I may mention Ribourde, Luc Buisset, Melithon Watteau, and Pirson—all contemporaries of Hennepin. After these followed others who pushed on to help "blaze the

trail" west of the Mississippi and even as far as Alaska. Among them you will remember the uncle of our great Cardinal Mercier, Father Croquet, who was known as "the Saint of Oregon," and Archbishop Seghers, who was called "the Apostle of Alaska". One of the greatest of all was Father De Smet, who was born at Termonde in East Flanders in 1801 and began his missionary work among the American Indians just a little over one hundred years ago. Father De Smet's "little parish" extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains—and sometimes to the regions beyond—and he rendered immense service in keeping peace among the Indian Tribes on the western frontier. Five years ago the town of Termonde celebrated the centenary of her distinguished son, and Father De Smet's statue was unveiled in the presence of the American Ambassador, Hon. Henry P. Fletcher, who came to do honour to the memory of the man who had done so much for America. President Harding also, in one of his speeches out West, recalled the important part played by Father De Smet in blazing the trail in Washington, Oregon, and elsewhere.

In the footsteps of these "pathfinders" there followed Belgian settlers who built their homes and became assimilated with your population in the great "melting pot".

To go back to earlier times and to a different section of America, I would remind you of the early settlement of New York and the surrounding region in which Belgians played an interesting part. The colonists who landed on the shores of the Hudson River a little over 300 years ago—the first "home-makers" in that vicinity—were, according to the records, "mostly Walloons". That is to say, they were Belgians from the southern, or Walloon, provinces of our country. These Belgians were of the Protestant faith

and, like the English Puritans, had been living in voluntary exile in Holland, where they had taken refuge for conscience' sake. The first settlement on the site of what is now the city of New York was effected under the auspices of the Dutch Government, but it was inspired and backed to a large extent by Flemish and Walloon Huguenots.

One of the first governors of the settlement was a man of Belgian blood, Pierre Minuit, and it was he who bought Manhattan Island from the Indians. It must be admitted that my compatriot made a good bargain in order to start your great metropolis in business, for he bought the whole tract on which the city of New York is now situated for the sum of sixty gulden—or about twenty-six dollars in real money.

Belgians settled throughout the district now occupied by the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Delaware, and if you will look at the old maps you will find this whole section marked as "Nova Belgica".

I must not take up too much of your time with reminiscences of the early relations between my country and yours, but I cannot refrain from reminding you of some of the illustrious Makers of America concerning whom it is not generally known that they had at least a few drops of Belgian blood. I will only mention one, the Father of your Country, George Washington.

One of George Washington's ancestors was Nicholas Martiau, a Belgian from our Walloon provinces, who came to Virginia about 1623. He was a man of influence in colonial affairs and took an important part in maintaining the right of the colonists to self-government. Martiau's great-granddaughter married Lawrence Washington, the grandfather of George Washington. Several others of Martiau's descendants were conspicuous in colonial and

revolutionary history, and it is interesting to note that it was on one of the old plantations of Martiau at Yorktown that the decisive battle of the Revolution was fought and where his descendant, General George Washington, received the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

The extent of the participation of Belgians in the colonization and settlement of America has been somewhat obscured by various circumstances. One of these circumstances is the fact that Belgian names and surnames have no distinctive characteristic to identify them as Belgians or to differentiate our people from the natives of the neighboring countries. About one-half of our population are Flemish bearing names similar in form and sound to the names of the natives of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; the other half of our people are Walloons bearing names which in orthography and consonance are identical with those of France. For this reason many of the natives of the Belgian Provinces who have come to your shores have been erroneously supposed to be either Dutch or French.

Our distinctive quality as Belgians has also been somewhat obscured by the many changes in the political status of the Belgian Provinces. Texas has been under six different flags—those of Spain, France, Mexico, your independent Republic, the Confederacy, and the United States. Our Provinces have lived under as many different banners. In the Middle Ages the various feudal dukedoms, counties and lordships became consolidated under the great Dukes of Burgundy; towards the end of the fifteenth century the sovereignty passed by inheritance to the Austrian House of Hapsburg; then to the monarchs who sat upon the Throne of Spain; about the beginning of the eighteenth century the rulership passed back again to the Austrian Hapsburgs; during the time to Napoleon our country was overrun by

the French armies and was for a period a Department of France; after Waterloo we became, by the will of the Great Powers, a part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; it was not until 1830 that Belgium achieved its position as an independent, sovereign kingdom, under our present glorious dynasty. The fact that our country was known as the "Spanish Netherlands", "The Seventeen Provinces", "The Low Countries", "Les Pays-Bays", "The Austrian Netherlands", or under some other title, and that it was not distinctively designated as the "Kingdom of Belgium" until about one hundred years ago, has contributed to cause confusion and misapprehension as to the real origin of many of my compatriots who came to America prior to 1830. I am convinced that there are many more people of Belgian descent in your country to-day than are dreamt of by your statisticians.

The friendly intercourse between Belgians and Americans is of ancient date, but our two peoples were brought into still closer touch by the events of the world war. Belgium will never forget your spontaneous sympathy in the time of her affliction nor the gallantry of your troops in the great struggle through which our land was liberated from the invader. The men of Texas, true to their traditions of freedom and fair-play, were among the first to volunteer when your country entered the war and their deeds are imperishably recorded on the roll of honour. As your President, Dr. Lovett, said in a discourse at Brussels to which I have already alluded: "in these more peaceful days, search for truth and service to the well-being of humankind still shape for us a common course of comradeship". Indeed, our comradeship has grown closer in divers ways, but there is one on which I should like to dwell specially for a few moments, and that is our comradeship in intellectual life.

In that great organization, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, inspired and directed by Herbert Hoover, there were many young graduates of American universities, who, even while they were still ministering to the wants of our civilian population, conceived the idea of perpetuating their friendship for Belgium by establishing a closer communion between the students of our two countries. After the war, means were found to realize this ideal. In January, 1920, there was chartered an organization known as the Commission for Relief in Belgium Educational Foundation, of which I have the honour to be a Trustee, and with which are associated such eminent men of Texas as Dr. Lovett, Mr. E. A. Peden, and Mr. J. S. Cullinan. Through the C. R. B. Educational Foundation, exchange fellowships and lecture-ships have been provided so that, during the past seven years, hundreds of students have been exchanged between our two countries, professorships and fellowships have been endowed and considerable sums have been devoted to such purposes as will contribute to the intellectual communion of Belgians and Americans. Here at the Rice Institute you have had, I believe, three Belgian Lecturers under the auspices of the Foundation. I hope you will have more, and that you will also arrange for an exchange of students between your Institute and our universities.

Among the gifts of the Foundation is a sum for the erection of new buildings for the University of Brussels. The corner stone was laid in November, 1924, and at that ceremony the University was honoured by the presence of Dr. Lovett as the delegate of your Institute.

Another donation from the Foundation was a fund to complete the construction of the Library of the University of Louvain. Through the efforts of an American Committee, five hundred thousand dollars had been raised to

erect a new Library building as a memorial of the friendship of the intellectual world of America to the intellectual world of Belgium. This amount was found insufficient to complete the work, and the C. R. B. Educational Foundation came to the rescue. The Foundation donated \$465,900, and, in response to Mr. Hoover's personal appeal, \$292,000 was received from other sources, making a total of \$757,900 contributed by the Foundation or through Mr. Hoover's efforts—or a grand total of over one and a quarter million dollars from various American sources. The Library Building will, therefore, be entirely an American memorial.

It has given me great pleasure to learn that the Trustees of Rice Institute have expressed their intention of making a most generous gift to the Library of Louvain, and I am glad to have this opportunity to express my thanks for this mark of their friendship which will, I know, be most gratefully appreciated by our old Alma Mater. I shall suggest to the proper authorities that a suitable tablet be placed in the central hall of the Library commemorating this act of comradeship by which your young and vigorous university has shown its sympathy and affection for our venerable Seat of Learning which will, within a few days, be celebrating its five hundredth anniversary.

I have dwelt at some length this morning on the adventures of the pioneers who established the early communications between your shores and ours, and on the subsequent development of our relationship, but, in the past few days, the brilliant exploit of an American pioneer has brought Europe and America into still closer touch. I need hardly say that I allude to that daring, cool, courageous pioneer of the air, Captain Charles Lindbergh. He has not only found a new way between our continents, but he has found

the way to the hearts of all people, and has won the admiration of the world by his courage, his true sportsmanship and manly character. In him we recognize and honour the true spirit of America. Now that he has led the way, we may hope that the eastern and western shores of the Atlantic may soon be united by regular and rapid service over the air route. In the meantime, Captain Lindbergh's daring flight has, in itself, drawn your people and ours closer together in spirit and in friendship.

To you, students and graduates of Rice Institute, I wish to extend my congratulations on having had the privilege of making your studies in these beautiful halls, in this environment of culture, and under the guidance of this learned Faculty. You will, I know, go forth into the world well fitted for the great tasks of life. May success attend you in your various vocations in the future. On behalf of your fellow-students in Belgium across the seas, as well as on my own behalf, I wish you "God-speed" and every happiness.

BARON DE CARTIER DE MARCHIENNE.



