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The Walloons – an enigmatic people

Who were they, those foreigners that came to Sweden during the 1600s?

By ROBERT MATTSOON

Many genealogists with Swedish roots are looking for Walloon ancestors. To have a Walloon ancestor seems to be very desirable. It seems to be just as good as to have a Walloon ancestor as a nobleman.

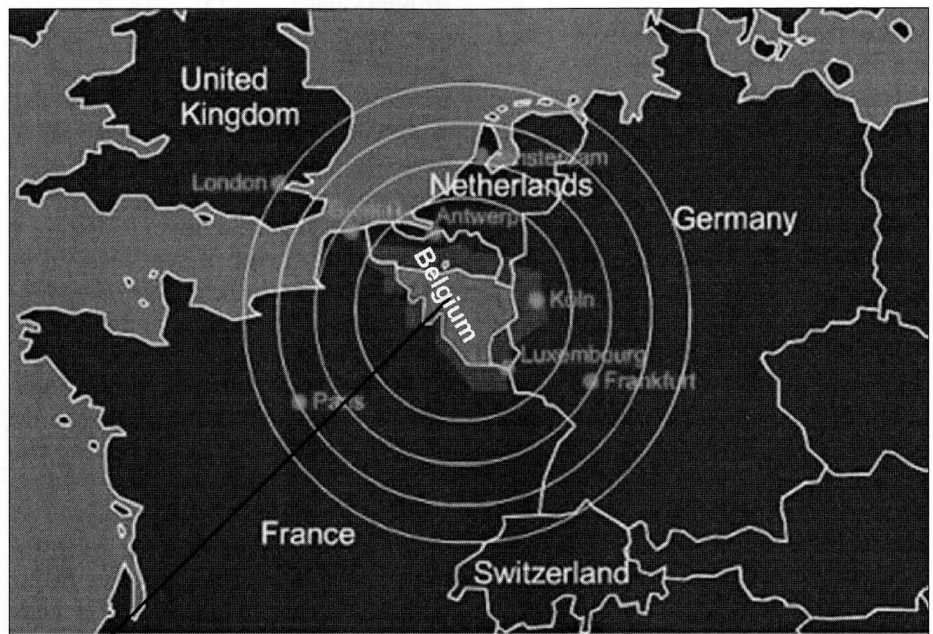
Myths about Walloons

There are many myths about specific physical traits that are supposed to indicate that there are Walloons in the family tree. Many think seriously that a lump on the neck, a lack of an ear-tip, a long second toe, or a special crease in one of the arms is what constitutes a Walloon descendant. Some also think that if the ancestor had dark hair and brown eyes that would also be a result of a Walloon ancestor.

None of the above is relevant for the Walloons. The Walloons were not a consistent group of people, but are instead a mixture of Germanic people, Celts, and Gallo-Romans. That they could be blonde is for instance shown in the name of the hammer-smith Henri le Blanc – Henri the blonde. Some people with a Celtic heritage are redheads, and certainly some of the Walloons were redheads. Yes, some of the Walloons were dark with brown eyes, but the description also fits German immigrants.

The Walloon area

The Walloons originally came from Wallonia, which is an area in southern Belgium, Luxemburg, and the county of Valois in northern France. They had their own language which developed parallel with French from the “vulgar Latin.” In the 1600s



Wallonia is a part of Belgium, France, and Luxemburg.

Wallonia was a part of the Spanish Netherlands. Belgium did not become an independent state until 1830, when it was divided from the Netherlands.

A metal working area

In the Ardennes area of Wallonia there were already in medieval times mines and ironworks and hammer forges. In 1618 the Thirty Years' War broke out in Europe. It concerned Wallonia in that it became difficult to export iron to other countries, which resulted in a high degree of unemployed smiths. Sweden was also one of the fighting forces.

At the same time Sweden needed to upgrade the army, and large sums were borrowed from the Walloon banker Louis de Geer. He became the lessee of a number of iron works in

Sweden, and hired competent workers from Wallonia with the help of his partner Wellam de Besche. They had agents in the cities of Amsterdam, Liège, and Sedan (situated in northern France), where the recruited workers signed their contracts.

Why did they leave

There have been theories that the religious affiliations of the Walloons would have been the cause of their emigration, but the main cause seems to have been that they were out of a job. The Walloons were members of the Calvinistic denomination, their counterparts in France were called Huguenots. This Protestant faith had been persecuted in France during the 1500s. During the 1600s it has not been shown that they were oppressed by the Catholic

Church. In spite of this, several Walloons emigrated, besides to Sweden, to Spain and England. Many were not accepted into workers' guilds because of religious differences. A few travelled to America in 1624, and in 1924 the U.S. published a postal stamp, "Huguenot Walloon Tercentenary."



Where did they go?

We know the names of about 800 Walloons that immigrated to Sweden. Roughly 20% returned to Wallonia after the end of their contract. Those that stayed also had their wives and children come to Sweden. The journey started in Amsterdam, as that was the usual port for travelling Walloons. If they were lucky, they escaped the French pirates of Dunkirk.

The first Walloons came to Nyköping

(Södm.), Finspång, and Norrköping (Östg.) and worked at the cannon works, where they produced cannons for the army of Gustaf II Adolf. Later during the 1600s the Walloons started to work at other iron works, especially at those owned by Louis de Geer in northern Uppland. Here Leufsta (now: Lövsta), Österby, and Forsmark were the ones with the largest Walloon workforce.

New technology comes

The Walloons introduced new methods for producing iron. They built upright charring-stacks (*kolmila*) in contrast to the older method with horizontal logs. In the charring-stack, charcoal was made for the use in blast furnaces and hammer works, and it was charcoal of the highest quality. About 70% of the Walloons were not smiths, but worked as charcoal burners, lumbermen, or cart drivers.

The French type of blast furnaces, all built of stone, was now also introduced. They were larger than the old type of blast furnaces that were partly constructed of logs. In the blast furnace (*masugn*) iron ore was melted into pig iron (*tackjärn*). A new type of forging was also introduced



Johan August Hübinette, one of the last Walloon smiths.

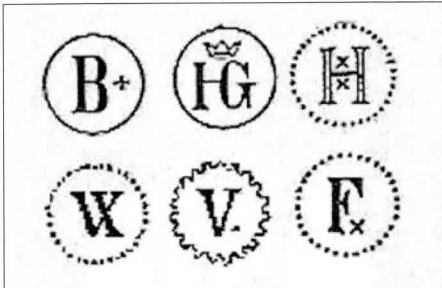
in that a team of smelter workers (*smältare*) worked at a smelter hearth in the hammer forge (*hammarsmedja*) to reduce the slag in the pig iron, after which it was then handled in the flattening hammer hearth (*räckerhammare*) before it could be made into bar iron (*stångjärn*), which was the end product, ready for export. At other iron works the German method was used, where they did not use the first step with the smelters.

Most of the Walloon iron was exported to other countries. Most of it was sent to Sheffield in England, where it was the basis of the production of quality steel, and tools like scissors and knives.

All bar iron was stamped with the mark of the iron works (*bruk*), and much bar iron was also used in England for building purposes. After World War II many pieces of bar iron in London bombed buildings could be



A charring-stack (*kolmila*) of the Walloon model in 2012.



Examples of bar iron marks.

identified by the marks from which Swedish iron works it came.

Housing and work conditions

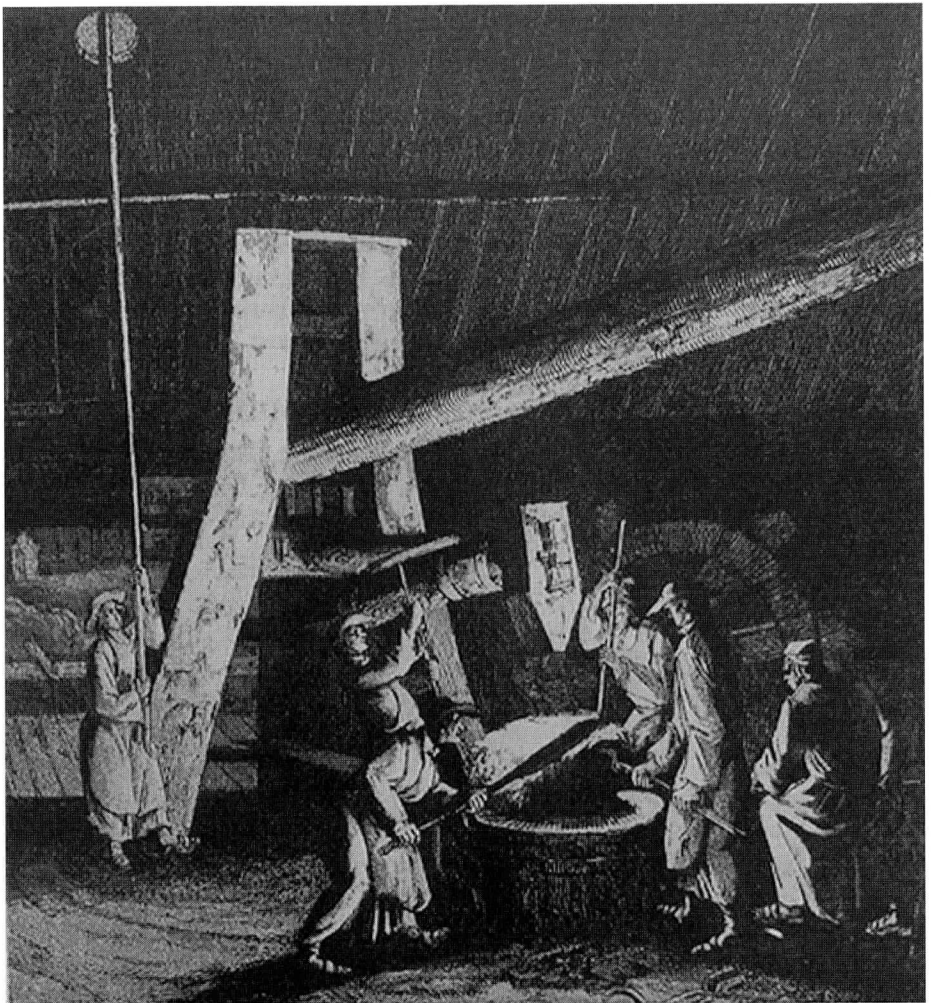
At the Swedish Walloon works the houses were built as a little city with streets and houses close to each other. Behind the houses there was a lane with cow barns. Every household had the right to a place in the cow barn for a cow, a pig, and other small animals. All household chores were done by the wife.



Forsmark iron works (Uppl.)

Their wives often dressed in fine cloths for the Sunday church service. If ordinary Swedish women dressed in the same way, they could be fined.

The salary was paid in kind, and they could get necessary food items in the community shop, or at the tailors, or shoemakers. The "Brukspatron" (owner of the iron works) or his bookkeeper had the responsibility of seeing that there never was a shortage of food, so the people at the iron works were not victims of famine. The husband spent most of his time in the forge, and had time off only on Sundays. When there was enough charcoal and pig iron, the teams had to work both day and night. This was common as early as



A hammer forge in the 1790s. Note the big hammer in the middle of the picture.

in the 1600s. The men worked for four hours, and then rested for four hours. The rest time was spent in the "labby" (French *l'abri*= the refuge)", which was in the forge or very close to it.

In a Walloon forge the crew consisted of a Master Smelter (*smältarmästaren*), a Journeyman Smelter (*mästersvennen*), and two smelter hands (*smältardrängar*) and the "goujar" (a boy who was responsible for getting charcoal to the hearth).

At the flattening hearth (*räckarhärden*) there was the master flattening smith (*räckarmästaren*), two flattening hands (*räckardrängar*), and a *goujar*. The master smiths were mostly Walloon, and they trained their sons or sons-in-law in the craft. Marriages were with members of other Walloon families, and they tried to give most of the work at the forge to family members.

The Walloon surnames survived

for a long time at the Walloon iron works, but charcoal burners, lumbermen, and others lived outside the Walloon community and married into ordinary Swedish families, and then their specific surnames were converted to Swedish names.

The Walloon smiths had a good reputation during the 1600s and 1700s, and lived centrally in the village, close to the forges. They also had their own clergymen and teachers, and schools were started in the middle 1600s. There was also some kind of health professionals that took care if somebody got hurt in the forge or other illness struck. When the smiths became too old to work they got a pension (*gratial*). Widows were housed and fed in the poorhouse of the iron works. As time passed on, the workers of the iron works were considered more as other industrial laborers, and some of their benefits disappeared.

An interesting fact

Due to the very high heat in the forge which was needed to be able to work with the iron under the hammers, the smiths only wore a long white shirt and wooden shoes, even during winter.



Some Walloon names

Allard
Anjou (Anceau, Hanseau, Hanson, le Choux)
Asser le Ganieu
Ballet
Baselier
Baudou
Beguín
Beneux (Benoit)
le Bert
Bertrand (Bertram)
de Biesme
le Blanc (Blank)
Bodechon
Bomblé
Boudry
Bourguignon
de Brabant
Breuse (possibly Bruce)
le Brun (Bernon)
Butin
Cambou
Carlier (Cayet)
Cerfon (see Henrot)
Chaperon
le Charton
Chesne

Chollet
le Clerc (de Clair)
Close
Cochois (Cosswa)
Colart
Collinet
le Compte (Kunt)
Courtehou
Couvrel
Crochet (Kråke)
Dandanel
David
le Dent
Didier
Doctier (possibly de Coeur)
Doneur
Douhan
Drougge
Durant
Evrard
de Fala (Fallan)
Faver
la Feuille (perhaps la Fleur)
Flament
Floncar
Fochet
Fosti
Frangati (van Gardy)
Gaillard
le Ganieu (see Asser)
Genot
Gerquin
Giers (Herceau, Järs)
Godet (Gohde)
Goffart
de Gouie
le Grand (de Grade)
Gregoire (see George)
le Grenadeur (see Fassin)
le Gros
Guillaume (Gilljam)
Hakin
Hannoset
Hardi
Havrenne
Henrot
Herou (see Henrot)
Hubert
Istace
Jadon
Jonneau
Kock
Lalouette
Lamblot
de la Lanne
Leleu
Libotte

Lochette
Louis
Magnette
Maniette
Mahy
Maillot
Malezieu
de Manhey
Marechal
Marlot
de Marte (Marck)
Martinel
Mathieu
Meaux
Melchior
Merien
Michel de Jalhay
le Mignon
de Mombilart
de la Montagne
de Morgny
Moyael
de My (de Mieux, du Meit)
de Nis (Dennis)
Noé Donay
Obey (see Auber)
Oudinet
Pagard (Bagard)
Paradis
Pasar (Poussar)
Pepin
Philip
Pierrou
Pira (Spira, Pirard, maybe Birath)
de Plain
Poncelet
de Porle
Pouillon
Pourel de Hatrize
Prévost
Privet
Rafflier (see Vincent)



The Walloon symbol

Many more names can be found on the web site of the special society for the Walloons, the *Sällskapet Vallon-ättlingar* (Society of Walloon descendants) that works with researching their history. Their web site has information in Swedish, French, and English.

See links on p. 30!

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