

Richmond, Virginia
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SUBJ: "Bells For Peace, Inc" Acknowledges All 161,000 Persons Who Were Processed in Belgian Friendship Building For WWII"

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WHAT: The Belgian Friendship Building on the Virginia Union University campus was used as an "induction site" by the US War Department for draftees entering World War II. From 1943 until 1947, **161,000 individuals** from eastern Virginia were processed in the "central examining station," and **40,236 were selected** for military service. (Richmond News Leader, Thursday, February 4, 1943, p.3 and Richmond News Leader, Thursday, July 24, 1947 p. 23) Watkins.

WHEN: From March 1, 1943 to Fall 1947 (Richmond News Leader, Thursday, February 4, 1943, p.3 and Richmond News Leader, Thursday, July 24, 1947 p. 23, Also John M. Ellison letter dated Jan. 14, 1944, VUU Archives.) Watkins

WHY: New regulations had required that recruits for Army, Navy and Marines be accepted through the Selective Service system. Larger sites were needed. The spacious Belgian Friendship Building had 20,000 square feet of floor space and could more easily accommodate processing the drafted men and personnel. The former location, Blue's Armory had 13,000 square feet. (Richmond News Leader, Thursday, February 4, 1943, p.3) Watkins

Belgium had awarded its pavilion from the 1939-40 New York World's Fair to **Virginia Union University** in 1941 because of its educational mission and location. Belgium was under siege by Germany and its building could not be returned.

The Belgian Friendship Building is a designated US Treasure and Virginia Historical Landmark. Virginia Union University is an historical African American institution that opened in Richmond in 1865 out of Lumpkin's Jail, a former slave holding pen. Belgium's gift was a powerful gesture of international goodwill years before Civil Rights Laws were enacted.

Belgium presented the building's 35 tower peace bells to Former President Herbert Hoover for his new library at **Stanford University** before it left New York. Their gift to Mr. Hoover was in appreciation of his humanitarian relief efforts to Belgium after WWI. Neither university had a record of their common history until March 2004.

"Bells for Peace, Inc." is a non-profit organization approved under section 501 (c)(3) by IRS. It is working to restore the Belgian Friendship Building's Robert L. Vann Memorial Tower with bells. The charity is based on the joint legacy of the late Dr. John Malcus Ellison, Sr., first African American president of Virginia Union University from 1941-1955, and his late wife, Elizabeth Balfour Ellison. They invested in people, enabling countless students to make profound contributions to their communities world-wide. Dr. Ellison raised \$500,000 to transport and reassemble the Belgian Building in Richmond during WWII and during an era of Jim Crow laws. Illustrious students emerged including the late Vice-Admiral Samuel L. Gravely, Jr., a 1948 graduate of Virginia Union University and first African American to achieve the rank of Admiral; The late Robert L. Vann, a Virginia Union University student, attorney and founder of the Pittsburgh Courier Newspaper; and Richmond Mayor L. Douglas Wilder, a 1951 graduate, first African American Governor of Virginia.

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA are invited and encouraged to profile the story. WWII Veterans who were inducted at the site can provide personal perspectives. It will make an important and fascinating international feature. Individuals nation-wide, who were processed at the building, are encouraged to send their contact information and stories to bellsforpeace@comcast.net or **P.O. Box 27371, Richmond, VA 23261-7371.**