



BELLS FOR PEACE, INC

Contact: Dianne N. Watkins

Phone: (804) 359-3009 **E-mail:** bellsforpeace@comcast.net

Address: P.O. Box 27371, Richmond, VA 23261-7371

See: <http://www.bellsforpeace.org>

Belgium Announces Gift of Bells to Virginia Union University

His Excellency Dominique Struye de Swielande, Belgian Ambassador to the United States, announced recently that the Belgian Government will give a 4-bell peal to Virginia Union University for installation in the Belgian Friendship Building. The Ambassador indicated that the gift was prompted by the commitment of "Bells for Peace, Inc." to the restoration of the Belgian Friendship Building that has graced the Virginia Union University campus for over sixty years. According to Ambassador Struye, "Bells have been a significant and joyful element in Belgium's cultural life for centuries. It seems therefore very appropriate that it will be through bells that we renew the special link that exists between Virginia Union and Belgium, and a happy coincidence that the bells we have chosen, the ACD and E notes, are called joyous random ringing." The Government of Belgium will purchase the bells from **The Verdin Company of Cincinnati** for \$69,000. The bells are to be installed and functioning by the end of 2007. Other bells are being solicited to form a full carillon.

The Belgian building's 161 feet Vann Memorial Tower has been silent - without bells - for more than 60 years. **At the close of the 1939 New York World's Fair, Belgium awarded its pavilion complex to VUU because of its educational mission and location. The Belgian American Educational Foundation purchased the building's carillon of 35 tower bells for presentation to Former President Herbert Hoover for his new library at Stanford University.** The gift to Hoover was in appreciation for his humanitarian relief efforts to Belgium after WWI. Neither university had a record of their common history until March, 2004, when the connection came to light.

"Bells for Peace, Inc." is a non-profit charitable organization approved under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Founded by Dianne Watkins, its mission is to restore and endow the Belgian Friendship Building and educational programs for humankind's peaceful endeavors in memory of John Malcus Ellison, Sr., first African American president of VUU and VUU graduate, and his wife, Elizabeth Balfour Ellison. It was through the actions of the Ellison's, and compassionate donors, that \$500,000 was given to transport and reconstruct the Belgian Building in Richmond in the 1940's. Supporters provided the moral and financial support that helped the university to become a highly respected and admired institution.



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BELLS FOR PEACE FACT SHEET

- Millions visited the Belgian Pavilion, an exhibition hall, at the 1939 New York World's Fair.
- Belgium's gift was a powerful gesture of international goodwill years before Civil Rights Laws were enacted.
- 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.
- Illustrious graduates of VUU include the late Admiral Samuel L. Gravely, first African American Admiral (1948) and Former Virginia Governor, L. Douglas Wilder, First African American Governor in the United States (1954). Mr. Wilder is currently the Mayor of Richmond. (VUU Archives).
- The Belgian Friendship Building is a listed U.S. Treasure through the U.S. Department of Interior and is a designated Virginia Historical Landmark.
- The Belgian Friendship Building was designed by world renowned Belgian Architect, Henri Van de Velde.
- The building has exterior bas-reliefs in sandstone created by Belgian sculptors Oscar Jespers, Henri Puvrez and Arthur Dupagne.
- The building has traveled the world from Belgium, New York, and Virginia.
- The building has housed a library, classrooms, cultural arts center and gymnasium on the VUU campus.
- The 22,000 square feet Belgian Friendship Building was an induction center for WWII for Eastern Virginia. 161,000 men were processed by the U.S. from the building between 1943 and 1947. (Richmond News Leader, February 4, 1943, p.3 and July 24, 1947 p. 23). Watkins Nov. 9, 2006.
- Robert L. Vann, for whom the Belgian Friendship Building Tower is named, was a former VUU student, famed editor and publisher of the Pittsburgh Courier, and Assistant Attorney General during the Franklin Roosevelt Administration. He was a Civil Rights Activist. The U.S.S. Robert L. Vann Liberty Ship was named for him in October 1943. Launched from Portland, Maine, the ship was sunk in March 1945 off the coast of Belgium at Ostend. 45 crew members, no casualties. (A Careless Word...A Needless Sinking by Captain Arthur R. Moore). Watkins, Dec.15, 2006.
- Stanford University Alumni and world visitors have heard the carillon including world heads of state.
- Alan Nelson of Greenville, North Carolina, clued by Dianne Watkins of Richmond, Virginia, made the connection between the Belgian Friendship Building on the Virginia Union University campus and Hoover Tower of Stanford University in March 2004.
- In 1941, The Belgian Friendship Building Sponsoring Committee was chaired by Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, His Excellency Count Van Der Straten-Ponthoz, Belgian Ambassador in the United States, His Excellency James Hubert Price, Governor of Virginia, Harold J. Manson, Brooklyn Representative, S.E. Hening, Treasurer, American Baptist Home Mission Society in New York.

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