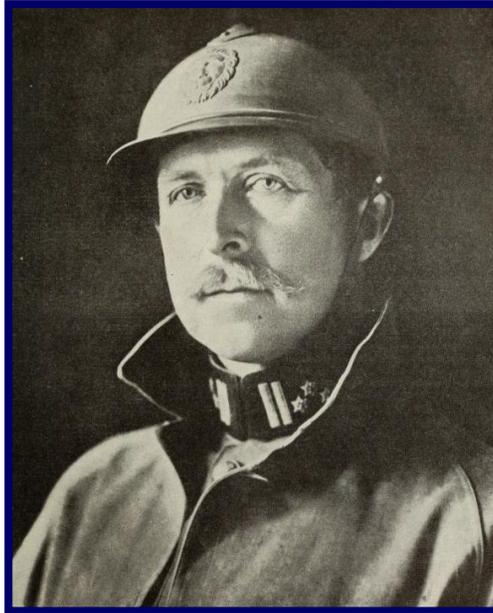


The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended, and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. Leo XIII., Columbus, Queen Isabella, and

Annals from the Archives

King Albert's Visit to America

King Albert of Belgium
Photo taken by
Richard N. Speaight in 1919
From Archive.org



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—The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were delighted and relieved with the end of World War I. With their Motherhouse located in the center of Belgium, in the city of Namur, they had feared for the safety of the sisters who lived under German occupation. And so, when the King and Queen of Belgium, Albert and Elisabeth, made an official visit to the United States almost a year after the Armistice was signed, many Americans were thrilled. Among those were Sister Wilfrid of the Sacred Heart Parsons, who was ecstatic to be present for the royal family's visit to Trinity College on October 30, 1919.

To the Belgian people, as well as to many others, King Albert and Queen Elisabeth were heroes. Through the entire war, King Albert attempted to negotiate a diplomatic settlement with Germany to end the suffering of his people. When those efforts failed, the king fought alongside his troops, leading many of the battles, while the queen served as a nurse to the wounded. Near the end of the war, he led the final offensive against the Germans that ultimately freed his people.

On September 23, 1919, King Albert and Queen Elisabeth, along with their son, Prince Leopold, began their tour of the U.S. Starting on the east coast, they visited New York City where they were honored with a ticker tape parade. Their next stop was Boston, where the king was given an honorary degree from Harvard. The family then crossed the country by train, pausing in many of the cities along the way to visit, before arriving in Santa Barbara. While in California, they toured Sacramento, San Francisco and the Los Angeles movie studios. From California, they traveled east again, stopping to see the pueblos in New Mexico, then traveling onto Illinois. There they visited the grave of Abraham Lincoln. Moving on again, they passed through St. Louis and Cincinnati before returning to New York state. While there, they joined Theodore Roosevelt Jr. for a visit to the grave of his father, President Theodore Roosevelt, who had died the previous January. Finally on October 30th, near the end of their American journey, they came to Washington D.C. and Trinity College.

Sr. Wilfrid kept scrupulous notes of the visit, her excitement at his arrival evident in every word of her journal. *"How little I dreamed during those terrible war years that I would actually behold with my own eyes the heroic figure of King Albert of Belgium, whom I had admired with such actual hero-worship for his magnificent courage and his splendid defiance of the Huns. And today he came here under our roof—the roof of Trinity College—he came into our hall and although his stay was breathlessly brief, I saw him plainly, stood within three feet of him. The way of it was this. . . On Monday evening last [Oct. 28] they came to Washington and we had after much interchange of telegrams and messages to and from the State Department, offered to confer an Litt.D. on the Queen, who very graciously accepted. The Catholic University decided to confer an LL.D. on the King."*

Sister Wilfrid described the anxiety at Trinity, that with the honorary degree given only to the queen, the king and prince might not be able to attend the ceremony. Despite their worry, they pressed forward with the plans. Thrones were brought into

the hall, a red carpet was laid for the procession, elaborate wreaths and garlands were hung, as well as the American and Belgian flags. Sr. Wilfrid went on, saying that, “students were in white with streamers of Belgian color, Seniors in Cap and Gown, everybody in white gloves, seniors lined the aisle shoulder to shoulder—everybody standing. Needless to expatiate on the intense scurrying about the thrilled excitement of all and sundry. . .”

The waiting went on and on and on with “several false alarms.” At last, though, the royal party arrived, “and the King came in! Very tall and exact in uniform, with ribbons of decorations and a Sam Browne belt just seen under the overcoat. He carried his cap under his left arm and walked with a long, swinging stride. . . He looked something older than I expected and shows evident signs of what he has lived through. He came in expressly to honor the institution which was to honor his queen, but he would not stay because it was her function and he would not detract from the honor which was to be hers. So, after walking up on to the stage and speaking a minute with the Cardinal, he turned and looked out over the audience and said (heard only by those nearest), “Come, boys, we must go now,” and then came out as he had gone in.”

Sr. Wilfrid’s thrill at the short encounter continued for more than another page, as she described her emotions. “Even his rather ruffled appearance. . .seemed rather to add to than detract from the commanding dignity of his appearance. One could easily see how men would die for him. . .As he passed by the rows where the Sisters were, he shot a piercing glance over the line of us—that was when I was within three or four feet of him. And then he was gone. . .”

In a few more minutes, Queen Elisabeth arrived and the ceremony to honor her began. Sr. Wilfrid’s account of the event and day continued for several more pages. To view her descriptions of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth’s visit to Trinity College, click [here](#).



King Albert [on the left] with
Theodore Roosevelt Jr. visiting
President Theodore Roosevelt’s grave
From the Library of Congress

Sources consulted for this article

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