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In this issue of Bee World we have reported that the Historical Collection of Dr. Eva Crane has been given a new safe haven at Ghent University, Belgium, after wandering around in various Flemish institutes under the care and protection of Emeritus Professor Octaaf Van Laere. Professor Van Laere is now 93 years old and it would be a disgrace if we only remember him for his care for this museum collection of beekeeping objects. So it's time to dive into his rich career.

Octaaf Van Laere (Figure 1) was born in Evergem, Belgium in 1930. He graduated as an Agricultural Engineer (nowadays called Bio-engineer) at Ghent University in 1953 and received his PhD at the same university. Years later, in 1971 he obtained the special diploma of Aggregated for Higher Education with a thesis defense at the faculty and a public lecture of 60 minutes in the aula of the University. In 1974 he was appointed as lecturer and in 1980 as full-professor, both at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. In the meantime (from 1975–1984) he was also part-time director of the Center for Agricultural Research, National Station for Nematology and Entomology. The latter was due to health reasons of the former director and this lasted until his retirement. Afterwards, Octaaf Van Laere was confirmed in this position until his own retirement in 1994.

Dirk de Graaf: From where came your interest in honey bees?

Octaaf Van Laere: My personal interest in beekeeping came from the family. From the age of 15 I would regularly help in my uncle's apiary, including the honey harvest.

DdG: What are your most important scientific achievements?

OVL: An important scientific result lies in the study of the annual cycle of the nest development. I then discovered (in the fifties) that bridging the winter period by honey bees is not primarily due to cold or

lack of food, but to an internally regulated form of 'reproductive diapause'.

In the early 1960s, with the cooperation of the Walloon beekeepers' federations, I collected about 2,400 samples of honey all over Belgium and carried out a pollen analysis. The results were published in the agricultural magazine 'Landbouwtijdschrift—Revue d'Agriculture'.

A highlight in my fundamental scientific research lies in the study of the endocrine system of the honey bee. By imaging the ultrastructure of important elements of the endocrine system, it became clear by which mode of action the neurohormone ends up in the hemolymph, which was at that time only established in the Order of the Diptera.

DdG: The Historical Collection of Dr. Eva Crane, at a certain moment, came into your hands and was for many years exhibited in Flemish museums. How did that happen?

OVL: Around the 2000s, there was disagreement in the Council of the

International Bee Research Association (IBRA) about the future of the Historical Collection of Dr. Eva Crane. There were even calls for the entire collection to be sold. Hence the question to find a place to keep this valuable collection undivided. In



Figure 1. Emeritus Professor Octaaf Van Laere (Photo copyright – Honey Bee Valley).



Figure 2. Octaaf Van Laere, his wife Nelly on the left and other visitors at the Beekeeping Museum in Tilff near Liège, Belgium (1976; Photo copyright – Eva Crane Trust).



■ **Figure 3.** Octaaf Van Laere showing a swarm trap that was used in the Northern part of Central Makedonia. The lower part of the trap should be attached to the flight entrance of a colony with swarm tendencies (Photo copyright – Eva Crane Trust).

this way, my proposal accepted by the city council, the collection ended up in the city of Mechelen. Until political influences put an end to this (Figure 2, 3).

DdG: I remember that you were President of IBRA.

OVL: My election as President of IBRA was a complete surprise. I had been a member of the Council for a number of years and as I said, I had actively contributed to the search for a solution that was acceptable to everyone to perpetuate the Eva Crane collection as a

whole. I attended the meetings of the IBRA Council relatively infrequently, but each time I made my personal assessments and proposals known in writing to the Director who put them before the Council.

DdG: Did you know Eva Crane personally?

OVL: I had excellent relations with Eva Crane (Figure 4). I have been to her house in Evergem twice, the second time for five days. For the Apimondia congress of 1997 I asked her to take on the task of ‘general scientific advisor’, which certainly helped the good relationship between IBRA and Apimondia.

DdG: You were also President of the Standing Commission for Bee Biology of Apimondia. How did that happen?

OVL: Regular attendance at nearly all successive Apimondia Congresses since 1960 and my service as secretary of the Standing Commission for Bee Biology undoubtedly resulted in my unanimous election as president in 1983 after Ruttner’s resignation. A candidate proposed by Slovenia did not receive a single vote. Thirty-two countries had a voting representative.

DdG: I know that you have a good knowledge of the Russian language. Where does this interest come from, and did it help you in your professional activities?

OVL: Comparative language study is to some extent one of my hobbies. But the main reason for tackling the Russian language lies with Apimondia. As chairman of the Standing Commission for Bee Biology, I noticed that a small Russian delegation was present at one of the congresses, where simultaneous translation was lacking. I enrolled in a Russian course in Ghent and my interest in Russian culture grew to such an extent that it lasted for five years. In the Apimondia conferences I therefore had frequent and interesting contacts with the Russian delegation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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■ **Figure 4.** Octaaf Van Laere and Eva Crane in front of the entrance of the Beekeeping Museum in Kalmthout (Photo copyright – Eva Crane Trust).