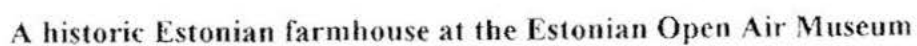


# Aja Kaja



SÜGIS / FALL 2004

# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (2005)

## Alberta Eesti Kultuuripärandi Selts

The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) was established in November 2004 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Alberta's Estonian community, and to increase awareness of developments in Estonia.

Alberta Eesti Kultuuripärandi Selts (AEKS) rajati Novembris, 2004 Alberta eestlaste kultuuripärandi säilitamiseks ja laiemaks tutvustamiseks Eesti rahva elust-olust tänapäeval.

### Executive (Juhatus)

#### **Interim Coordinator**

**(Esialgne Koordineerija):**

Ain Dave Kiil

(780)-988-0019

### Council Members

#### **Edmonton Region:**

Eda McClung

(780)-452-2712

Jaak Koosel

(780)-986-4944

#### **Red Deer/Stettler Region:**

Gladys&Otto Nicklom

(403)-742-6530

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#### **Gilby/Eckville Region:**

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#### **Membership**

Karl Vollman

(780)-440-0344

Helgi Leesment

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Note: Other committees and special projects will be established in the near future

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### Sõnumileht—AjaKaja—Newsletter

Aja Kaja is published biannually to inform members about Society activities and heritage topics of interest. Publication and distribution costs are covered by membership dues.

Non-members may purchase AjaKaja for \$5.00 per copy by contacting Eda McClung

Members and friends are encouraged to submit articles, photographs and heritage-related topics to Eda McClung at [eda@connect.ab.ca](mailto:eda@connect.ab.ca).

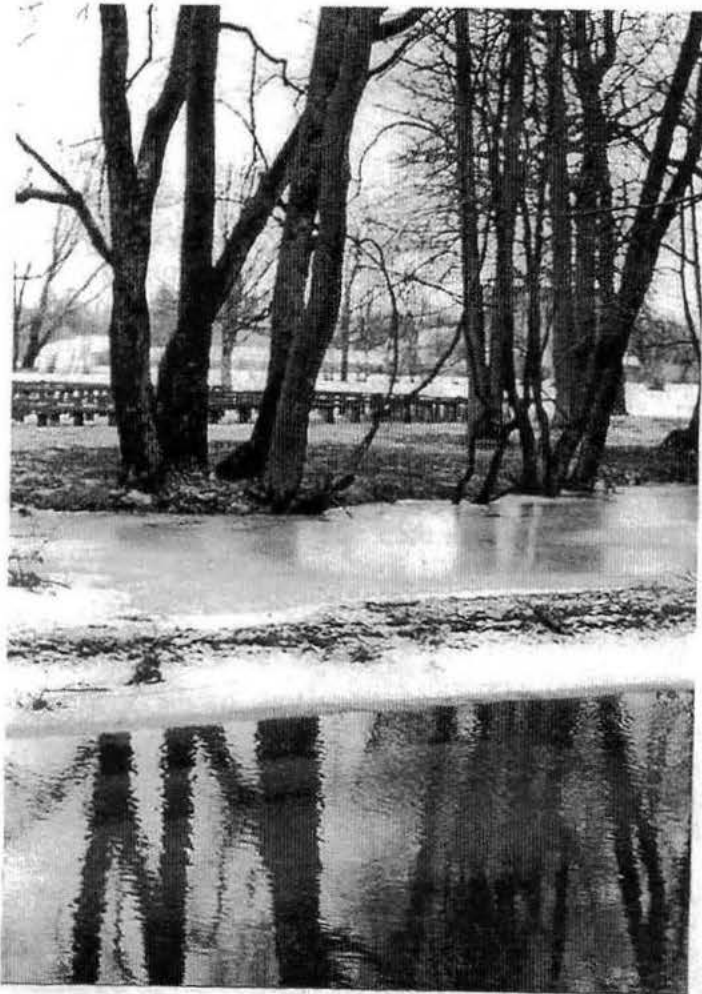
AjaKaja ilmub kaks korda aastas. Sõnumileht teadustab Seltsi tegevusest ja eesti kultuuripärandi teemadel. Publikatsioon ja levitamine on sisse arvestatud liikmemaksusse. Teistel on võimalik sõnumilehte tellida \$5.00 maksuga Eda McClung'ilt.

Ergutame liikmetel ja sõpradel artikleid, fotosi ja teisi andmeid esitada. Palume neid saata Eda McClung'ile ([eda@connect.ab.ca](mailto:eda@connect.ab.ca)).

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Cover photo taken at the Estonian Open Air Museum near Tallinn, Summer, 2004 by Dave Kiil.

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Hiiumaa Lepad Talvel

## Letter from the Editor

In our last issue I stated somewhat prematurely, as it turned out, that it would be my last Letter from the Editor for Ajakaja in its present format.

In fact 2005, the year of Alberta's Centennial will see the launch of a newly formed Alberta Estonian Heritage Society, and will include a revamped AEHS Newsletter which will better reflect the Alberta wide interests, activities and programs relevant to the preservation of our common heritage. A formative meeting of the AEHS has already taken place in Red Deer where the vision of a province wide Albertan Estonian organization was strongly endorsed.

We were pleased to receive several articles from Helgi Leesment in Calgary and written material from other readers for this issue. In fact we have an abundance of riches and have been unable to include everything. This input is valuable and much appreciated. Unused material will be kept for later issues. This bodes well for the future when we hope to get regional correspondents to contribute on a regular basis to keep Ajakaja readers informed of activities and news items from their communities. We want to make sure that our newsletter reflects the interests of all Albertan Estonians.

This issue is also dedicated to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary

1944 the year thousands of Estonians fled from their homeland in the wake of the retreat of the occupying German troops and the advance of the Soviet army into Estonia. We have included our stories and our photographs.

On a sadder note I would like to pay tribute to Justice Buzz McClung who left us, far too early, this October. He was a man of remarkable talents and achievements who has been called one of the great luminaries of the Canadian justice system. He was a scholar, historian and author as well as an athlete and sportsman in his younger days. He had a gift for language, a wonderful turn of phrase and an iconoclastic sense of humour. His memorial service was the largest gathering ever held at the Edmonton Country Club where he once was the highest ranked junior golfer in Alberta.

With all the demands of his profession he still found time to attend EES events with Eda and listen patiently to speeches in Estonian, a language he did not speak, and even played Santa at an EES Christmas party one year. His passing is a great loss to the judiciary, to our province and to our Edmonton Estonian community. Our hearts go out to Eda and her family at this difficult time.

I wish all our readers a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy 2005!

Anne-Marie Hodes

## Alberta Estonian Heritage Society

Dave Kiil

While some of the attendees found themselves touring the streets of Red Deer before finding the secluded John Kerry Nature Centre along the Red Deer River, they settled right down to business and approved the formation of the **Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS)**. The formative meeting was attended by 17 enthusiastic representatives from across the province, united in the belief that their common heritage needs to be preserved for themselves and their descendants.

According to recent Canada Census data there are nearly 2000 Albertans, ranging from recent immigrants to 6<sup>th</sup>-generation descendants of the pioneers who arrived here as early as 1899, who claimed to have Estonian roots. The early pioneers in the Stettler, Gilby and Barons areas established and supported numerous societies and activities as they settled in their new homeland; later, the post-WWII immigrants did the same in Calgary and Edmonton.



**Participants at the formative meeting of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (Alberta Eesti Kultuuripärandi Selts) in Red Deer, November 6, 2004.**

**Left to right:** Jaak Koosel, Jüri Kraav, Ron Hennel, Dave Kiil, Enn Tiislar, Evelyn Shursen, Gladys Nicklom, Otto Nicklom, Pärja Tiislar, Maria Posti, Allan Posti, Helgi Leesment, Toomas Pääsuke, Helle Kraav and Peter Leesment. **Missing in picture but in Attendance:** Bob Tipman and Lori Sparrow. **Absent with Regrets:** Bob Kingsep, Eda McClung and Martha Munz Gue.

The Estonian Flag shown in the photo previously flew on the Tall Hermann Flag Tower in Tallinn. It was presented to the Alberta Estonian community by Avo Kittask, President of the Estonian Central Committee in Canada, and Laas Leivat, Head Consul for Estonia in Canada, during the Barons Area Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homesteading on July 30, 2004.



Three highly successful centennial celebrations were held in Stettler (1999), Gilby (2001) and Barons (2004), demonstrating again that our heritage remains near and dear to our hearts. At the same time, the programs and activities of the Calgary and Edmonton Estonian Societies have become increasingly sporadic with the inevitable thinning of the ranks.

As a consequence, members of the Estonian community in Alberta started thinking about how to best respond to the demonstrated need for some form of organized effort to meet the expectations of an ever-changing demographic of this small ethnic group. Following informal discussion amongst many individuals and groups, a consensus emerged that an Alberta-wide organization, involving participants from many communities across the province, would best provide the leadership and coordination of programs and activities relevant to heritage preservation. While many details remain to be worked out, the following decisions were reached at the Red Deer meeting on November 6, 2004:

- The primary goals of the AEHS are:
  - ✓ To increase awareness of and to preserve our Estonian heritage,
  - ✓ To sponsor events and activities in response to the needs and expectations of a diverse membership, and
  - ✓ To inform members of happenings in the land of their ancestors.
- A Coordinating Council, consisting of at least two representatives from each of the

Calgary, Stettler-Red Deer, Gilby-Eckville and Edmonton regions, was established to develop and implement the goals of the new organization. An interim provincial Coordinator was also appointed. It was agreed that an alternate coordinator should be designated to work with the Coordinator to develop an organizational framework and to help with program implementation.

- The Coordinator, the Council and necessary Committees will be responsible for the overall development and administration of Society business, including major events and activities, finances, membership, bylaws and communications.
- A set of by-laws, followed by a submission for registration as a non-profit organization, will be pursued to enable the Society to apply for grants and other fund-raising activities.
- A website will be developed and maintained to inform members and prospective members of Society news and happenings. A Society logo will be developed for use on letterheads, correspondence, and displays.
- The AEHS will assemble a province-wide mailing list, with mailing addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. The information will be used solely for the purpose of Society business, and every effort will be made to protect a member's privacy on the Internet.
- The newsletter AjaKaja, previously published by the

Edmonton Estonian Society, will become the AEHS newsletter. AjaKaja will be distributed to all paid-up members of the Society.

- Membership dues will be: a) \$25.00/year for families and b) \$20.00/year for individuals. These dues will cover the cost of publication and distribution of AjaKaja, various administrative costs, and general support of Society activities. Membership dues will be reviewed annually.

This is a new organization, put in motion by a group of enthusiastic members of the Alberta Estonian community. Its basic mandate and structure are in place, but full implementation will depend on volunteers to share the workload and to plan and organize activities at provincial and local levels.

We were able to set up an administrative structure at the formative meeting in Red Deer (see the inside cover page of this publication) but much remains to be done before the Society can function fully. The working language of the Society will be largely English, as our primary aim will be to increase awareness of and to promote Estonian heritage amongst members. We hope to scope out a balanced program of traditional and innovative activities and events at provincial and local levels. These might include Midsummer's Eve (Jaanipäev) celebrations, social/cultural evenings, some joint activities with our Baltic and Scandinavian friends, genealogy workshops, hosting of Estonian athletes, diplomats and artists, and special events to attract families and younger members.

Alberta's Estonian community is unique because of a mix of descendants of the early pioneers who settled here during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the immigrants who settled here following WWII. Not surprisingly, the descendants of the early pioneers have integrated into the Canadian mosaic and no longer speak Estonian. The more recent immigrants have banded together to preserve their mother tongue, customs and traditions, but their offspring are increasingly being assimilated into Canadian society. Thus the Alberta Estonian "community" is made up of people with multi-generational roots living in major cities, smaller communities and rural areas. Mixed marriages are the norm, and the opportunity and need to speak Estonian has all but disappeared.

Thanks largely to the recent celebrations to honor the early Estonian settlers, interest in things Estonian remains high and appears to be on the increase. The major challenge facing the newly-established Society is to meet the expectations of all descendants with Estonian roots by delivering forward-looking and interesting programs and activities, with Estonian heritage as the focal point.

As your interim provincial Coordinator I look forward to working with the Council, Committees and members interested in helping to preserve our common heritage. More information about Society activities at the provincial and local levels will be communicated within a few months.

In the meantime feel free to contact me (see Inside Cover page) to share information and to suggest how your expectations can best be met.

## ESTONIAN ASPECTS OF THE BARONS AREA CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF HERITAGE AND HOMESTEADING

Helgi Leesment

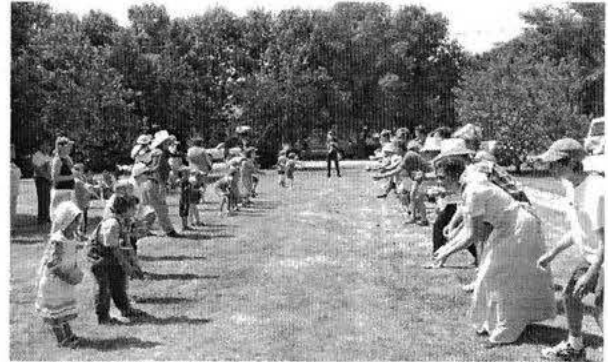
The third centennial celebrating Estonian pioneers and homesteaders took place in Barons, between Claresholm and Lethbridge, in southern Alberta July 30 to August 1, 2004. The first two were the 1999 centennial in Stettler/Linda Hall and the 2001 event in Gilby. The Barons Area Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homesteading was huge success with nearly 500 registered participants and weather cooperating most of the time. Because the demographics of Estonians is somewhat different in the Barons area than in the Eckville/Gilby and Stettler areas, this festival was organized as a general event for all descendants of area pioneers, with some emphasis on the ethnic Estonian aspect.

The initiative came from co-chair Martha Munz-Gue, descendant of Estonian settlers Jakob & Mari Erdman who settled in the Barons area in 1904. Martha was inspired by the 1999 and 2001 celebrations in Alberta, plus the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonians in Crimea which she attended on the shores of the Black Sea in September, 2001. The other co-chair was Perry Kotkas, another descendant of the same two settlers. The Barons and District Historical Society governed the centennial organizing committee which showed ethnic diversity as well geographic diversity, with members driving from Medicine Hat, Calgary and Canmore as well as nearby places to attend meetings in Barons.

A rousing, yet moving, VIP reception on the Friday evening started the festivities on a highly positive note. An ad-hoc choir, having only a few practices, set the tone as they sang energetic praises to the prairies. The reception recognized the donors and sponsors, for without their cash, service and goods donations, the centennial would not have been self-financing. The donors and honoured guests were local businesses, service and other organizations, government officials, diplomats, private individuals, the Edmonton and Calgary Estonian Societies, the Alberta Estonian Centennial Fund and the Estonian Central Council in Canada. The latter four donated a combined total of \$1000 to the Barons centennial. The diplomats were the Honorary Head Consul for Estonia, Laas Leivat from Toronto and Honorary Consul for Estonia in Vancouver, Harry Jaako. Also present was Avo Kittask, president of the Estonian Central Council in Canada. The private donors list included several Alberta Estonians. Naturally, the members of the centennial organizing committee were also recognized that evening, as was the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

Saturday morning breakfast on the grassy grounds of the Barons community centre saw friends and long-lost relatives meeting and greeting with lots of hugs and smiles. This included the Oks and Trummel family, three generations, who had come from Tallinn specifically for this centennial. The opening ceremony featured the awarding of provincial government

plaques to five area farms that have been continuously farmed by the same family for at least 100 years.



**Traditional games were popular with children and adults alike**

The early afternoon Games were geared at times to children, adults and a combination of the two. There were tag games, relay games and simple races. The adults got involved with their children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren in the water-balloon toss. The inventive games leaders, including fourth generation descendants of Estonians, made the games more fun by introducing them to the participants as "ancient Estonian water rites practiced by Estonian Olympic champions" and other such banter which had everyone laughing before the actual contests began. All the children received participant ribbons and their own little soap bubble kit. Adult games were borrowed from previous Stettler Jaanipäev activities; namely the rolling pin toss (women participants only) and the nail pounding contest with its "pound off" to determine the final winner. One family provided horse-drawn hay rides and their very young children operated a lemonade stand.

Displays of arts, crafts, literature, family stories and agricultural implements were spread throughout all the venues in the small village of 200 inhabitants: the curling rink, former school gym, seniors drop-in centre, skating rink, church hall, Legion Hall and community centre. Many displays included Estonian aspects. For example, the agricultural machinery display featured a plow invented during the 1950's by Victor Erdman, an Estonian. The plow works the dry southern Alberta soil in a special way without allowing the constant winds to blow it away. Some family stories were on coloured boards standing on tables, others were artistically arranged on huge areas of wall-space. Many of the names are recognizably Estonian. Now defunct local service club and women's organization activity books were open for perusing. Several craft items consisted of lovingly preserved crocheting, embroidery and knitting done by Estonian grandmothers long since passed away. Harry Jaako, Estonian honorary consul in Vancouver, had brought a



box full of booklets and brochures about current Estonia. Most were gone by Sunday afternoon.

Because the early history of the Barons area involves a sizeable Estonian ethnic community, it was clear as of the first Barons centennial organizational committee meeting in January, 2003 that Estonian culture would be featured at some point in Centennial program. That feature consisted of a two-hour "Estonian Program" on Saturday afternoon, organized by Peter Leesment, former president of the Calgary Estonian Society. The grass and raised cement patio by the Barons Community Centre served variously as the stage.

The program began with two speakers. The first speaker dealt specifically with the pioneer and homesteading history of the Barons area with emphasis on the early Estonian families. The second speaker tied Barons and Southern Alberta historical events to developments co-current in Estonia and introduce Estonia of today. Barbara Gullickson, a descendant of Barons area Estonian pioneers Jakob and Mari Erdman, spoke first and the Estonian Honorary Consul Harry Jaako from Vancouver followed. Overheard conversations later heaped much praise on both. Barbara's speech was printed verbatim in English in the August 27 and September 3 issues of *Eesti Elu/ Estonian Life* newspaper, published in Toronto.



**Barb Gullickson and Harry Jaako speaking to an attentive crowd**

An added element to the Estonian program was hosted by Laas Leivat, Honourary Head Consul for Estonia in Canada, and Avo Kittask, president of the Estonian Central Council in Canada; both of whom had travelled from Toronto specifically for the Barons Centennial. First, Laas Leivat read faxed centennial greetings from the Prime Minister of Estonia. Next these guests jointly awarded two Albertans with a service medal and citation for long-term volunteer work in Estonian communities: Eda McClung of Edmonton and Helgi Leesment of Calgary. The two Torontonians then gave a special flag to four people representing various Alberta Estonian-related communities, on the occasion of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the blue-black-white striped Estonian flag. The four joint recipients were: Otto Nicklom of Stettler, Bob

Tipman of Calgary, Tom Pääsuke of Canmore and Dave Ain Kiil of Edmonton.

Alar Suurkask, representative of the Vancouver Estonian Society, invited all to the West Coast Estonian cultural festival next summer, July 4-8, 2005 at Harrison Hot Springs, near Vancouver.

Next, Peter's wife Helgi directed a simple walking-type Estonian folkdance, the kind originally intended for a whole village to join in. Folkdancers from Vancouver led over 100 centennial guests around on the grass to live accordion accompaniment by Avo Kittask. During intermission, all had an opportunity to taste Estonian-style meat pockets or "pirukad". Lillian Põhjakes of Lethbridge had generously baked 250 of these typical Estonian food items. For refreshment, there was a choice of the "fortified" or non-fortified drink called "Rolling Estonians". It consisted of 80% cranberry juice and 20% soda water. The fortified variety replaced half of the soda water with vodka.

The musical and visual segment of the program followed. Avo Kittask, an opera soloist, sang two songs accompanying himself on the accordion. Six members of the Estonian folkdance group "Kilplased", had driven over 1000 kilometers from Vancouver to participate in the Barons Centennial. They later commented that at Barons they learned about Estonian pioneers in Canada for the first time. They particularly enjoyed performing for the appreciative Barons audience. Performing for a new audience was a welcome change from the equally appreciative Vancouver Estonian community for whom the dancers have been performing since they were kids, a time span of about 20 years.



**The three ladies of the Vancouver Folkdance group preparing for their performance**

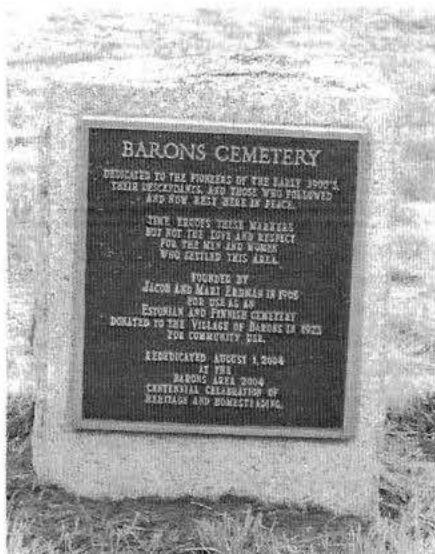
The three women and three men performed a series of lively and intricate Estonian folkdances, some involving only the women or only the men, a foursome, or a mixed threesome. Most numbers included all six



dancing in a gentle breeze and bright sunlight on the green grass. The women danced in bare feet. Some of the dances would have been familiar to the 1904 era Barons region settlers of Estonian heritage. All the dancers wore traditional colourful folk costumes. An idyllic ending to the Estonian program!

In the evening a catered beef dinner was efficiently served in the Community Hall and tent annex, followed by a program of theatre and music. Several members of the Erdman extended family presented a short play "Twice a Pioneer" highlighting their pioneer forefathers' trek from Estonia to Crimea in the 1860's, and 40 years later on to South Dakota, to eventually settle in Barons, Alberta. Certificates were handed out to recognize all pioneer and homesteading families in the Barons area. An old time dance to live band accompaniment concluded the second day of the Centennial celebrations.

The third day of the Barons Centennial began at the Barons Cemetery, once the property of pioneers, Jakob and Mari Erdman, originally donated for use as an Estonian and Finnish cemetery. They and most of their nine children are buried there, as are some members of later generations. The ecumenical ceremony was lead by Rev. Don Koots, himself a descendant of Estonian pioneers from central Alberta, and the local United Church pastor Deborah Walker. The semi-circle of the gentle choir blended with the infinity of the greyish morning drizzle. The patriarchs of two of the pioneer Estonian families were present. One of them unveiled the rededication plaque commenting that six generations of his family were present; three underground and three above ground. It was a moving ceremony, worthy of all the extensive recent restoration work at the site.



**Dedication Plaque at Barons Cemetery**

The second item on Sunday's program was the ecumenical church service. Once again, the choir, now with added members and soloists, sang soul-soothing harmonies. Children received special attention from Rev. Walker. Rev. Koots gave the congregation an

excellent understanding of the souls and minds of the southern Alberta homesteaders and pioneers.

The ecumenical service brought to an end the official program of the Barons Centennial. However, several extended family gatherings took place later that day. In between, Helgi Leesment led an informal discussion on ethnic heritage. All 25 or 30 people present were asked to state how many generations they are removed from ancestors who left Estonia, and then to speak briefly as to how they regard their Estonian ethnic heritage. Most comments were highly positive, some provoked response from others. It was interesting to note that most people felt their ethnic heritage grants their lives variety and added value.

Among the highlights of the entire weekend were the meticulously researched brochures depicting the history of village and farm sites, with accompanying map. Once again, the stories involve many recognizably Estonian names. Early Barons area Estonian families include: Helmi Munz, Silberman, Silverton, Erdman, Kulpas, Pertel, Mathiesen, Hebenik, Andrekson and Kotkas. Many of these and other Barons area Estonian farms kindly took WWII refugee Estonians into their homes in the late 1940's and early 1950's. They gave the fresh immigrants a temporary home plus a chance to learn English, become acquainted with Canadian life and gain local labor experience. Some of the guests were related to their hosts, others were friends or even strangers referred by Estonian acquaintances. The specially produced Barons area historical brochures were intended for self-guided tours during the Centennial, and have since become valuable keepsakes in many families.

By afternoon on Sunday August 1 at the Barons Centennial, new and old acquaintances occupied everyone. People gathered and chatted in small groups anywhere out of the rain. That was what they wanted to do at this stage of the event. People connecting and reconnecting – it doesn't get any better than that! By all measures, such a conclusion indicates the poignant success of the Barons Area 2004 Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homesteading.

The organizing committee:

**Perry Kotkas**, co-chair and managing director

**Martha Munz Gue**, co-chair program director  
**Dee Ryrie**, treasurer, displays  
**Betty Ann Turner**, director - heritage and displays

**Barbara Gullickson**, director - marketing  
**Alan Fraser**, director - arrangements  
**Deanna Fraser**, director - social functions  
**Toomas Pääsuke**, director - finance  
**Helgi Leesment**, secretary  
**Mary Bishop**, Barons and District Historical Society liaison  
**George Andrekson**, director - registration

In addition, several dozen other volunteers contributed to the success of the Barons Area 2004 Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homesteading.

## The 2004 Barons Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homecoming in Full Swing....



Two members of the "Kilplased"  
Folk dance troupe from Vancouver....



Bob Tipman getting refreshments and a  
"pirukas" during a program interlude....



One of the agricultural implements  
invented by Barons area pioneers.....



Co-Chair Perry Kotkas talking about the  
Barons celebration...



Members of the young Erdman clan  
selling lemonade....



Descendants getting acquainted with  
their roots....

Photos by Helgi Leesment and Dave Kiil

## Two Members of the Alberta Estonian Community Recognized for Outstanding Service

Dave Kiil

Eda McClung and Helgi Leesment, longtime leaders in the Edmonton and Calgary Estonian Societies, have been recognized by the Estonian Central Committee in Canada for their service to Alberta's Estonian community. Avo Kittask, President of the Estonian Central Committee in Canada and Laas Leivat, Honorary Head Consul for Estonia presented Eda and Helgi with certificates and Canadian-Estonian Service Medals during the Barons Area Centennial Celebration of Heritage and Homesteading on July 30, 2004.



*Avo Kittask L., President of the Estonian Council in Canada, and Laas Leivat R., Honorary Head Consul for Estonia in Canada, presented Helgi Leesment, centre left, and Eda McClung, centre right, with the 'Canadian-Estonian Award of Merit'.*

*Photo: Barb Gullickson*



*This certificate of merit was presented to Eda McClung during the centennial celebration at Barons on July 30, 2004.*

*Helgi Leesment received a similar citation.*



*The Canadian-Estonian Award of Merit Medal*

Congratulations to Eda and Helgi for their outstanding contributions in preserving our Estonian heritage!

## The Story of Carl Kerbes and Family

Judy Graham (nee Kerbes)

Out of the snow, in the warmth of an Estonian-style sauna, my father Carl Kerbes was born on December 22, 1915. Peter and Julia had cause for celebration of the birth of their last child, a first generation Canadian. The Kerbes family was large and each big sister was responsible for taking care of a baby brother, and my aunt Ann (Johanna) was thrilled that Carl would be "her baby". This responsibility created a close bond between the two siblings that lasted their entire lifetime.



Carl and Ann on the farm



Carl Kerbes

He enjoyed the horses and dogs at the farm and often talked about the long trips to the town of Stettler by oxen. They would hitch up a team of oxen to a wagon on Friday night and they would travel all night and spend the day in Stettler on Saturday. Then they would travel back all Saturday night the same way.

My father talked many times about his life on the farm, and how he knew as he was growing up that the farm life was not for him. He sought employment in the city with the Post Office and was in the Civil Service for thirty-three years. His employment in the Post Office eased his way when he volunteered for the army in the mail corps during the Second World War. He was based in Naples, and while he was there hiked to the top of Mount Vesuvius, the volcano that buried Pompeii.

Carl was glad when the war was over and returned home to Canada. He went to live with his sister Ann and husband Dick in Genelle and again worked at the Post Office as a letter carrier. While there he enjoyed the trips to Christina Lake, the dances at the Pavilion, and diving in the water to swim and cool off when the dance was over.

Carl moved to Calgary where again he was a postman, but more renowned as he delivered mail to a radio station and they often invited him to yodel on the radio. He also skied at this time in Banff, where he skied a nine-mile run into town at the end of the day.

Carl loved to dance and chose to go to a dance at the Rendezvous Dance Club, a dance club designed for servicemen, in Calgary in September



1948. This was to be a major event in his life as he met Ruth Nielsen, who was a hostess at the club that night and a good friend of hers, Tina. Carl talked and danced with both ladies, and joined them on their tram ride home, but didn't show his cards, until it was Ruth's turn to get off, and he walked her home. He met her parents, who had immigrated with their family from Denmark. They hit it off immediately and soon were engaged in November 1948. Ironically they grew up very close to each other, as Mom lived outside Stettler. They married at Sharon Lutheran Church on June 11, 1949.



Carl and Ruth's Wedding

They bought a house in Calgary and a daughter, Judy was born on December 29, 1953. Carl now worked in the railway mail service and traveled by train to Revelstoke. In 1961, Carl had an opportunity for a promotion, but it meant a move to the coast as he would be working out of Vancouver and traveling

by train to Calgary. Carl moved his family to Burnaby in April, 1961.



Ruth, Carl, and baby Judy

In Burnaby, Carl became very involved with the Post Office Union and held several executive positions. He continued his dancing passion with Ruth and they began square and round dancing. They also became very active in Faith Lutheran Church.

Carl was a loving, dedicated father who was very involved in his daughter's life. He took her to swimming lessons and later when she was a teenager, shared his love of skiing with her. Arthritis unfortunately left Carl too sore and stiff to ski, but he drove Judy and her friends regularly up the mountain so they could ski, and waited for them to drive them down. Judy's girl friends enjoyed Carl driving, as another friend's father kept chasing the boys away. Carl never did, and often offered them rides as well.

Carl took his family on a yearly vacation to visit family in Alberta and Christina Lake where Ann and Dick had a cabin. There were many enjoyable days of swimming, family, friends, and feasts. The family went on two major

vacations. One, Carl drove from Calgary to California with Ruth, Judy, and his in-laws Ida and Chris Nielsen. Another vacation was with Ruth and Judy to Hawaii where Judy celebrated her seventeenth birthday. Later Carl and Ruth made several trips to Hawaii on their own.

On one of the trips to Christina Lake Judy met Bruce Graham playing tackle football in the lake, who she married in December 20, 1974.

Eventually the railway mail service was abolished and Carl worked in two different Burnaby Post Offices. He retired after thirty-three years, and began a new career in the insurance business, first with BCAA, and then with ICBC. When Carl finally ended his career, he had a passion for him, Ruth, Judy and husband Bruce to have a family cottage. The family decided on Pender Island where they bought a lot with an ocean view and a five minute walk to beaches on the ocean. Planning and building this place was driven by Carl, and the four spent many pleasurable hours working together to realize their dream. A son, Brett, was born to Bruce and Judy during this time in February 1982. Most of the cabin was finished when Carl died on July 1, 1983. Ruth still lives in their home in Burnaby.

Since then two children were born to Bruce and Judy, a son Torben on July 6, 1984, and daughter, Katrin-Liis on July 24, 1986.

Bruce and Judy live in Surrey. Judy is a Special Education teacher, and Bruce works in the sign business. Judy loves to paint watercolors and Bruce to play hockey. Together they sail and ski. Brett attends University of Victoria in the Faculty of Engineering in Computer Science. Torben attends the University of Victoria in the Faculty of Science

with a goal of becoming a P.E. teacher. Katrin-Liis is completing Grade 12 this year and plans to become a teacher as well. All three love to play hockey and have refereed; Liis refereed the BC Winter Games this year. All three can ski, but Liis prefers to snowboard. They all love to swim, especially at Christina Lake, their Grandpa's favorite. They too love Pender Island like their Grandpa Carl, and all have summer jobs there.

Judy and Bruce traveled to Estonia and Denmark last summer to meet family and for Judy to present at the European Conference on Reading in Tallinn. I know Carl would be pleased to have our Canadian family connect with our Estonian family.



Judy, Brett, Ruth, and Carl  
Brett's first birthday



L to R: Judy, Torben, Brett, Katrin-Liis  
and Bruce celebrating Christmas on  
Pender Island, 2003.

## 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of escape from Estonia

Helgi Leesment

On September 26, 2004, several Calgary Estonians gathered at a restaurant to commemorate a sad and dangerous life-altering experience 60 years ago.

Approximately 100,000 Estonians, fearing for their lives, fled their homeland throughout 1944; the largest numbers during the third week of September. At the time, everyone thought this was a temporary situation and that everything would be straightened out in a few months, then sometime in 1945, all the Estonians would go back home to the politically independent Estonia which had existed since February 24, 1918. That did not happen.

Unknown to much of the world at that time, Russia and Germany under Stalin and Hitler, had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939 containing secret clauses allocating the three Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Soviet ownership. Consequently, the Russians occupied the independent state of Estonia in 1940 giving Estonians first-hand experience with Soviet Communist brutality. Tens of thousands of Estonian citizens were deported to Siberia, hundreds dying enroute in cold cattle cars. Others tasted terror within the borders of their own country.

In 1941 Germany declared war on Russia and its army swept through the Baltic States driving out the Russians. Hitler's long-term plans for Estonia also involved occupation by armed forces, servitude and loss of national identity. Thus, Estonia, a country of approximately one million inhabitants at that time, was attacked and occupied during WWII by both sides - the Allies and the Axis.

In 1944 when Germany was losing the war, Soviet forces quickly advanced on Estonia as German forces

retreated. Upon hearing of the Red Army's advance and seeing the Germans withdrawing, Estonians came to the horrific realization that, once more, they would become victims of the Russian Soviet Communist regime.



*Refugee-laden boats carried thousands of Estonians across the Baltic Sea in 1944. (Photo: Courtesy Vello Püss)*

No nation is able to maintain its own defence system while occupied in turn by two overwhelmingly large foreign armed forces within a time span of four years. Estonia's own army had been dissolved by the Soviets in 1940 and its soldiers deported to Siberia. Estonian men were conscripted first into the Russian Red Army, and after 1941, into the German armed forces. This created untenable situations where sometimes Estonian brother was forced to fight against brother, or father against son, in battles they did not want to fight, mostly on foreign territory where neither wanted to be. They, like all other Estonians, just wanted their own nation's independence to survive.

Estonian soldiers did attempt to protect the country from the second Soviet invasion in 1944. In July and August, despite heavy casualties, they held off the Soviet advance in the Blue Mountains and other areas of eastern Estonia. Thanks to these soldiers' willingness to risk their lives against huge odds, tens of thousands of other people were able to escape the country.

By late September 1944, anyone who had played any role against Russians during the earlier occupation, clearly understood that their lives were in danger. They could expect to be arrested, tortured, executed or shipped to slave labour camps by the returning Soviets for such activities as being a police officer, educator, publisher, land-owner, politician, fishing boat owner, news reporter, apartment building manager, girl guide/scout troop leader, writer, businessman, lawyer or leader of any kind.

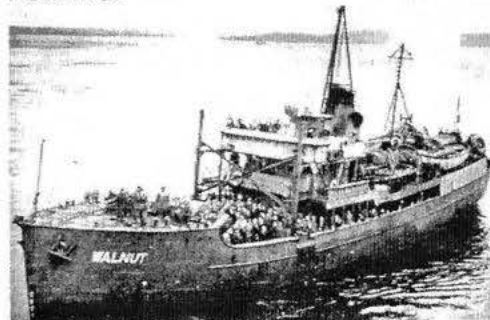
Thus, Estonians scrambled to board almost any kind of floating vehicle and headed for neutral Sweden. German armed forces permitted refugees aboard their own ships retreating to Germany but tried to stop people from heading toward Sweden - shooting, bombing and arresting those. This meant that escaping Estonians had to fear both the Germans and Russians while trying to find small boats in the dark, hidden in various coves and at small wharves. They also feared air and underwater attacks from both sides while negotiating the stormy Baltic Sea, many without adequate charts.

Most escapees reached the safety of other shores despite a violent autumn storm on September 23 & 24, 1944. There were many close calls due to rocky outcrops, insufficient fuel and floating mines. Doubtless, many perished for those three reasons. Some ships and small fishing boats were bombed or torpedoed. There are no records of who was aboard what, as people negotiated with boat owners for passage, often without either party knowing who the other was.

Estonians who landed in the eastern section of Germany had to escape again a few months later when the Soviets battled their way into what eventually became the state of East Germany.

Understandably, in September 1944, the decision to leave Estonia

was made quickly, especially upon hearing rumors of available space on an escape boat. There was no time to plan what to pack or to inform close relatives. Bear in mind, there were no cell phones or computers in the 1940's, and land line telephones were found in only a small percentage of city homes, rarely in the countryside where older family members tended to reside. Sometimes families became separated, parents from children and spouses from each other. In the West, most were able to link up later thanks to help from the Red Cross and other international agencies. When a family member or relative had left Estonia, Soviet policy forbade reunions with family members inside the Soviet Union. Further, Stalin had a policy of forbidding all contact and correspondence with anyone outside the Soviet Union. Thus grandparents in Estonia died in old age without ever knowing whether their children and grandchildren were alive somewhere else or not. The outside contact restriction was partially eased after Stalin's death in 1953. Even after that, with censored correspondence, a whole generation of Estonian grandchildren grew up in Australia, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Argentina, USA, Great Britain and other places without knowing their grandparents. Separated spouses sometimes remarried without knowing for sure whether or not they were widows/widowers, and tried to make a new life.



*The refugee ship Walnut arriving at Halifax in December 1948. (Courtesy Estonian Central Archives in Canada).*



So, who were some of the Calgarians who had experienced the above catastrophe?

One was a 17-year old girl attending boarding school away from her rural home. As the school officials' understanding of Estonia's desperate plight grew, someone talked the girl into joining them in an impulse escape attempt. She balked at leaving her family behind, especially without being able to contact them. Eventually, in Sweden, the girl discovered that her family also had escaped, with equal misgivings about leaving her behind. The parents and all children of this family were reunited in Sweden.

Another young girl had been sent to Finland by her mother, for safety, along with her older sister. A bomb just missed the room occupied by the two girls in Helsinki. Her story is told in a separate article within this issue of AjaKaja.

Another person was too young to remember the escape, but much later as adult, she had asked her parents to put the experience in writing. She read out parts of her late parents' story. It was a case of her parents knowing the right people (to be aware of likely ships and available space on them) - the family having risked the hiding of businessmen, various freedom fighters and a mobile printing press in their home; the intended escape ship having been taken over by the Germans for troop transportation; and a superstitious captain who would not sail the alternate ship on a Friday. There was the same violent night storm experienced by all who crossed that sea at that time and much illness onboard the deliberately unlit ship. There was the incredible sense of calm and relief at being generously welcomed by Swedes at a coastal town with electrical lights turned on at night. This was in direct contrast to Tallinn and other Estonian cities and towns, which, for the previous five years, had had a black-out imposed to

minimize accuracy during night bombing raids.

After escaping to Germany, a seven-year-old boy ended up travelling alone in a divided Germany to see both of his Estonian parents. From the end of WWII in 1945 until 1949, Germany was divided into four Allied military occupation zones: French, British, American and Russian. The boy's father resided in the French zone while his mother lived in the American zone. Food and cigarettes were in short supply. Cigarettes were a kind of substitute currency at that time; they could be bartered for sparsely available goods. One parent was able to provide cigarettes and the other had access to sausages. The young boy regularly smuggled these products past the unsuspecting zone-border guards, thus helping the entire family.

One participant at the Calgary gathering had not been born at the time his parents escaped from Estonia. As it happened, each of his parents escaped during that September on a different ship to Germany where they had to endure a precarious existence until the Allies occupied the country. They were outsiders in a foreign land and had to find work in order to feed themselves. The uncertain existence continued in displaced person camps after the war where the threat of being deported back to Estonia to the harsh existence in Stalin's new regime loomed. Spirits were high despite the grim conditions and food shortages. The war at least was over. A few years after the war ended, both parents migrated on separate ships to Australia seeking new opportunities in life. It is amazing that they met each other for the first time in Australia - two refugees so far and so many years from their homeland.

# Lahkumine kodumaalt

by *Andreas Pilt*  
Edmonton, AB



**Andreas Pilt**

kuulutati 1944a. Jaanuaris üldmobilisatsioon, mille alla kuulusin mina. Pidin jätma ome noore perekonnasaatuse hoolde, samuti ka vananevad vanemad kodutalus Järvamaal. Seda oli teinud minu vanem vend Ilmar juba paar aastat varem astudes vabatahtlikuna Piirikaitse rügementi.

Eesti Leegioni formeerimine toimus Kloogal Punaväpoolt ehitatud barakkides. Ainus võimalus varustuse saamiseks oli Saksamaa kuna Inglismaa js USA olid liidus ja aitasid venemaad. Kokkuleppe kohaselt võis Leegion võidelda ainult idarindel. Eestlastel oli tänuvõlg 1918a. saadud Inglise abi eest Eesti Vabariigi loomisel.

Märtsi 12-ndal saime nädal puhkust koduste olude korraldamiseks. Rongi ühendus Tallinnaga oli eelmise öö pommirünnaku tõttu katkenud, saime sinna järgmisel hommikul, sõjaväe autol. Rong Märjamaale väljus alles keskööl. Päev kulus tädi- ja tädimehe Lembitu tänaval põlenud majadest päästetud esemete käruga Nõmmel elava sugulase juurde viimiseks. Oli eelvaade sõja koledustele, näha põlevat linna ja tänavatel lebavaid laipu.

Nädal Märjamaal möödus kiirelt kuni käes oli kurb lahkumine naisest Bettist, väikesest tütrest, ja paljudest sõpradest, kes lubasid mu naiselapse Rootsi aidate kui selleks vajadus.

Tema oli sellest keeldunud nagu ütles kirjas, mille sain alles Saksamaal.

Märtsi keskel saadeti suurtüki raske rügement, mille koosseisu kuulusin, väljaõppele Tsehhoslovakkiasse. Seal saime hobused, 150 mm. kahurid ja varustuse, mille käsitamist tuli õppida. Juunis läksime tagasi Narva rindele, ja tegime kaasa Narva lahingu, kus kaotasime lähiskaitse rühma ja ühe suurtüki. Rinne tõmmati tagasi Vaivara- Sinimägede joonele. Olime eesliini kaevikutes, toiduta viis päeva, mille järele meid välja vahetati. Saime kokku oma rügemendi staapide ja osadega Krivasoo lääneserval. Umbes nädal hiljem tuli käsk minna uuele positsioonile Krivasoo rappa, kuhu pääses vaid põikpalkidest tehtud tee, mis vajus suurtükkide raskuse all ja tekitas tunde nagu roniksime üles märke.

Meie positsioon oli paar korda vaenlase kahuritule all, kuid mürsud langesid kahjutult pehmesse soose. Septembri alul tuli käsk positsioonilt kiirelt taganeda. Suure-Jaanis andsime oma hobustega veetud suurtükid saksa motoriseeritud üksusele. Minul tuli viia patarei voor Memelisse. Oli kuuldusi, et Inglise ja Rootsi Dessandid Pärnu lähedal maandunud ja liitunud admiral Pitka partisanide- ja kodumaale tulnud Soome poiste üksustega. Otsustasime taganemistee viia läbi Pärnu et võimaluse korral nendega liituda. Voor jäi Sindi lähedale. Ratsutasin väikese grupiga Pärnu maad kuulama. Pärnu linna valitsus ja politsei oli kadunud, Saksa järelkaitse patrullis tänavatel. Palju maju ja suvilaid põlesid.

Kohtasin veoauto täit Märjamaa põgenikke, kes tulid läbi alade mis pidid olema partisanide valduses, ilma mingit tegevust märkamata. Selgus et Inglise ja Rootsi abi on punastelevitatud vale. Kuulsime ka et Tallinn on langenud ja Punavägi suurema osa Eestit vallutanud. Püüdsime saada tagasi voori juurde Sindisse, kuid välispolitsei ei lasknud meid rinde läheduse tõttu. Minu viimane öö kodumaal

möödus unetult, mure ja kurbusega Pärnus, kuhu ka jäi minu ratsahobune-truu sober, alates ajast mil sain to omale Tsehhoslovakkias. Järgmisel hommikul saime küüdi Saksa Järelkaitse üksuse veoauto, peale seda kui nad olid õhku lasknud Pärnu suure silla, ja oli vist viimne Saksa üksus Pärnus.

Krivasoos olles tekkisid mu näole rōugete taolised lööved, mis ei paranenud. Velsker ravis neid salviga ja kleepis peale vatitükid. Heinaste juures korjas välispolitsei audodelt sõjaväelasi tee lähedase löömiseks. Mind ja velskerit jäeti veokisse, vist peeti raskelt haavatuks. Lätis saime kokku oma rügemendi osadega. Kiirustati taganemist kuna oli karta kotti jäämist. Meemelis sain rongile grupi kergelt haavatutega kuid ei saanud sellel kuigi kaugele, eespool oli raudtee suurtüki tule all. Katsusime ranna lähedastel heinamaadel edasi pääseda, kuid peatselt oli eespool kuulda lahingut. Puhkasime lagunud heina küünis, kus keegi leidis kasti roostes naelte ja vana kirvega. Tekkis idee küünipalgid kasutada parveks et sellega pääseda üle lahe maakitsusele, mis kulgeb Meemelist Köningsbergini. Palkidele naelutasime lauad, lohistasime parve vette ja proovisime madalas vees kandejõudu. Selgus et kandis kõiki, kuid kohta ei võinud keegi muuta, parv võis tasakaalu kaodata. Aerudeks ja madalas vees lükkamiseks kasutasime roovikuid. Laht oli madal ja peegelsile, ja umbes nelja tunniga ületatud.

Mändide all liivasel maakitsusel puhkasime seni kui külm, nälg ja hädaoht hommikupool ööd sundis edasi marssima. Peatselt jõudsime kogumis punkti kus saime ersatz kohvi ja sooja, vedelat putru. Hiljem viidi meid veoautol Königsbergi lähedale ranna paviljoni, sealt hiljem raudteel Neuhammeri laagrisse, kus Saksamaale saabunud Eesti väeliigid koondati Eesti Diviisi koosseisu, kaasaarvatute isegi lennuvägi.

1945 a. Jaanuaris keskel jõudis rinne meile lähedale. Tuli hakkata jälle jalga laskma. Peatusime mitmes paigas lühimet aega. Saime pisut jalaväe relvi kuid lubatud suurtükke ei näinud. Diviis saadeti rindele Brieg-Opelni liinile. Mind koos kahe lennuväe ohvitseriga saadeti Tsehhoslovakkiasse patarei ülemate

kursustele. Ka sealt tuli umbes kuu aja järele põgeneda. Saime välja viimasel rongil, ennem kui kool ümber piirati ja kott sulges. Rong jõudis Dresdeni kohutava pommitamise järgneval hommikul. Linn poles ja oli rusudes, kuid raudtee jaam ja rööpad olid imekombel terved. Välikomandantuurist saime marsikäsud Daani, Hans Christjan Anderseni kodu-linna Odensesse, kus oli olnud diviisi Tagavara Pataljon. Rong möödus Berliinist läänepoolt. Mitmel korral peatus õhurünnakute ohul. Kord purustas luurelennuki kuulipilduja tuli veduri ja mõned vagunid. Olime päeva rongi lähedal põösastes. Uus vedur saabus pimeduse kattel.

Odenses selgus et pataljon oli ära saadetud Diviisi juurde. Ohvitserid majutati Park Hotelli kuni kapitulatsioonini. Selle järgi paigutati ühte keskkooli, kuhu kogunes pidevalt Eesti diviisisõdureid ja lennuväe abiteenistuse mehi- ja naisi.

Olin laagri ülemaks kuni saabus minu õnneks üks major, kellele sain üle anda oma kohustused. Mul oli kindel kavatsus jääda Daani 1936 a. Olin kaheksa kuud Daanis, koolipoolt mõtud põllutöö praktilal ja õppisin ka Daani keelt. Kui laager Saksamaale marssis kadusin Koldingi lähedal tsiviil-põgenikkude laagrisse.

Hiljem koguti Eesti, Läti ja Leedu põgenikud ühte laagrisse. Talumehed vajasisid tööjõudu, saime kolme poisiga ühte suurtallu talutööliseks, kus töötasime kuni sügis tegi lõpu talutööle. Laisklesin laagris kuni 1946 a. Jaanuarini, mil võimaldus saada õpilaseks Rahvusvahelisse Rahva Ülikooli, Elingöri. Õppekavas oli pearõhk Ingliskeelele, sotsioloogiale ja erinevatest riikidest päritud õpilastele omavahelise arusaamise, usalduse ja sõprus arendamine et sel teel vältida tuleviku sõdasi, rahvuste-vahelist vihkamist ja vaenu. Ka oli vähesel määral aiandust ja puutööd. Kursuse lõpul pakuti mulle puutöö instruktori kohta millest loobusin, kuni igatsus oli oma kaasmaalaste järele. Läksin Kopenhaageni, kus oli võrdlemisi suur Eesti põgenikkude laager K.B. Hallis. Olin seal järgmise suve Juunikuuni. Oli kartus et põgenikke hakatakse Vene nõudmisel tagasi saatma. Paadimees viis tasu eest mind nelja kaaslasega üle väina Rootsi, kust tulime 1949 a. Kanadasse.



# Night Crossing

*Livia Kivisild  
Calgary, AB*



Thousands of Estonians fled their country in September 1944 when the Red Army was once again threatening. However, a large number of Estonians had left earlier during the German

## Occupation

**Livia Kivisild** Estonian boys - my brother among them - had fled to Finland to join the Finnish army in their fight against the Soviet Union. There were other Estonian refugees living in Finland; an Estonian Relief Committee in Helsinki acted as a communication centre for the Estonian troops. Estonians with connections to Sweden had migrated to that country legally. There was an agreement between the Swedish Government and the German occupation forces to allow Swedish citizens, their relatives and descendants to settle in Sweden. In spite of the war, a passenger boat made regular trips between Stockholm and Tallinn to evacuate the Swedes to their neutral homeland. Among the evacuees were many whose ties to Sweden were quite tenuous, but any way to escape the German occupation and the possible horror of a new Soviet invasion was welcome.

I was a teenager, a war time teenager, but still in many ways a child and I also started my journey earlier than most. It was January 1944. One day Mother told me I was leaving for Finland tomorrow. Everything was arranged. I tried to argue that there was this and that I had promised to do, I had to play the piano in my chamber music group and... But Mother was firm. I was leaving. It was arranged. And since I was a girl and could not really go alone, she had arranged for me to go with my brother's friend Vova, who was five

years older than I, a university student fleeing from the draft into the German army. He had promised to take care of me, Mother said. Tomorrow came. The 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 1944. Not a very cold day, but it was snowing. Heavy, wet, coastal snow. Mother hired a horse drawn sleigh complete with bells to take us the 500 meters to Narva Road, where the traveling party was to assemble.

I was dressed for the cold journey: ski pants, two sweaters, winter coat with fur collar, and on my feet, my aunt's trusty Swiss mountain climbing boots, oiled to be water proof. The boots had been given to me, because my feet had grown as had the rest of me, but there had not been any shoe stores open for three years - just no shoes to be bought during the war.

My only piece of luggage was also a family heirloom: grandfather's rucksack. Dark green canvas with leather trim; it came from Switzerland as well. Mother let me take minimal luggage for two reasons. Firstly it was easy to carry. With the rucksack on my back, it left my hands free, which turned out to be a blessing. Secondly I was leaving the country illegally. Should the coast guard catch us, they might believe my prepared story about being on my way to the coast to visit cousins.

The sleigh stopped. We walked through a gate and found ourselves in the yard of an apartment building. A truck was parked at an angle, and people bundled up as I was, were standing around. There were two children - a boy and a girl perhaps eight or ten years old. They stood silently next to their mother while a man - their father - was arguing. The well dressed man, who turned out to be a judge, wanted the driver of the truck to give him a guarantee that his family would arrive safely. The request was ridiculous. Outboards crossing arms of the sea with ice floes, illegally at night in wartime carry no guarantees. The fisherman was clearly tired of the insistent customer. He turned and said: "Even if the boat did capsize - which is not likely, and your kids did fall in, the water



would not turn to pea soup and the fish would live there as before."

With that we were told to get in the back of the truck, lie down and be quiet. I had one last glimpse of Mother standing in the snow. Then the tarpaulin was pulled over us to hide us from view, the truck started and we were off. The drive seemed endless. It was totally dark under the cover and no one dared to even whisper.

Finally the truck came to a stop. The cover was lifted and we disembarked. We were in a farmyard by the sea. There was no moon and no light visible in the house. But I was used to that. Windows were covered during the war. Blackout was very real.

A man stepped out of the shadows, told us to be quiet and to come in. We did. In the big room of the farmhouse, there was a long table, chairs and benches along the walls. So there was space for everyone to sit down. And the house was warm if dark.

We could see two boats pulled ashore. One had an outboard, the other did not. Then the older man who had stepped out of the shadows came into the house. He told us we would be leaving in about ten minutes or as soon as the coast guard patrol was further away. Then he said we should deposit our luggage in the motorless boat and board the outboard. He said the outboard would tow the other boat and we would be more comfortable with no clutter in our boat. I was confused. Mother had said under no circumstances to leave my rucksack anywhere, and my experience with boats made me doubt an outboard could tow another boat heavy with luggage all the way - 80 km - to Finland. So I did what I had to do. I told the man I was taking the rucksack, because I had to take it. Everybody turned to look at me. But it was dark and they couldn't see that I wasn't as sure of myself as I sounded.

Then it was time to go. Dutifully, my fellow passengers deposited their suitcases in the boat and I climbed into the passenger boat with my bag on my back. The motor started, and after about 50 meters, the rope towing the second boat gave way, and we could see men wading into the water and pulling the boat and cargo ashore. So I was the only member of my group setting off with my possessions intact.

Further away from shore, a light wind was blowing, and there were waves. Waves rocked the boat, but fortunately there were no ice floes. So there was no immediate danger. Still, some passengers became seasick. Among them Vova, who was supposed to escort and protect me. Instead, I had to sit next to him and prevent his falling overboard as he leaned over the side of the boat. In a way it was a good thing: the

strenuous effort gave me no time to be afraid or to feel the cold. We were, after all, crossing the Gulf of Finland in an open outboard in the middle of a Nordic winter night.

Then we hit ice floes, but the Finnish islands were already in sight. We came to within 40 or 50 meters of the shore, and then the boat could not take us any further. Suddenly it was cold. It was still dark. With the number of hours we had traveled, it should have been morning, but it was winter and the nights were long. In the shallow waters of the Estonian coast we could have waded into the water, got ourselves wet and cold, and walked ashore. But the Finnish islands were rocky, and the water very close to shore could be quite deep. We had no choice. The boat had to return south and the two fishermen ordered us to jump the floes to the island. The grown-ups were terrified and tried to argue, but I was still indestructible. It was simple. The ice was white, the water black. All that was necessary was to make sure one stepped on the white and not the black. And off we went. No one fell in the water and in a few minutes we were all safely on Finnish soil.

Our exhausted group was met by a Finnish coast guard officer, apparently quite used to travelers like us. He invited us into a cabin on the other side of the tiny island. It was a modest wooden cabin, but it was warm, and we were served hot tea with sugar. It was probably very ordinary tea, but it tasted divine. And many of us hadn't had sugar cubes in years. So we sat on benches along the walls, and some of us on benches along the table, that was like an indoor picnic table. It was intoxicating to be warm, to not move, or sway, or rock. And we had arrived. The danger was over.

## Fleeing Estonia to Start a New Life

Ain Dave Kiil

Like thousands of other Estonians, my life as an eight-year-old farm boy changed drastically in September of 1944 when the Russian forces overcame any remaining military resistance in the country and began an unwelcome occupation that lasted some 50 years. My family joined many other boat people who were forced to leave their homes in a hurry.

Manivald Jõgi, a historian, has written about the people in Lümada and Kihelkonna counties who escaped to the West in 1944. (Kaheaastaraamat, 1999-2000, Saaremaa Museum). Many of Saaremaa's coastal villages lost more than 25% of their population; in total, over 800 people escaped from the above two counties. In addition, 127 people were deported to Siberia. Others were shot in Kuressaare Castle.

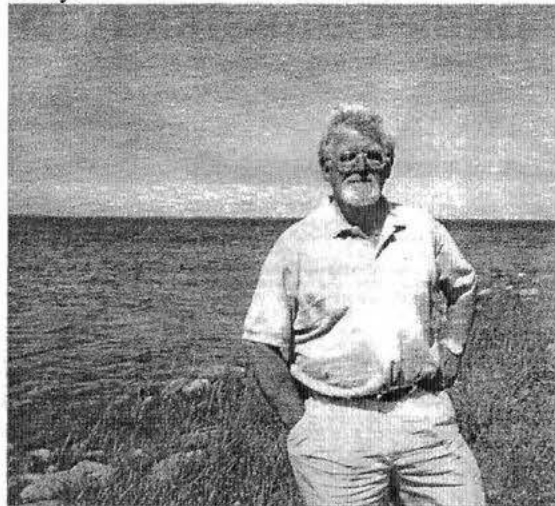
My family farm was located near the shore of Pilguse Bay on the west coast of Saaremaa, the largest island in the Baltic Sea. My earliest memories include being treated to the best-tasting ice cream following church service at the Lutheran Church in Kihelkonna, hanging on to a bedpost for dear life so I didn't have to go for immunization shots, splashing in the shallow waters of the Bay watching flounder trying to hide in the sand, or searching for four-leaf clover in the meadows surrounding the farm. I was to attend Lümada Elementary School that autumn when my family made the fateful decision to escape the "sickle and hammer" tyranny of the Stalin regime.

Three years earlier, in August of 1941, my 20-year-old brother Kalju was mobilized into the Russian Army just prior to the arrival of the Germans. He was taken by ship and train via Tallinn and Leningrad to Siberia. He never saw

his family again, having reportedly been shot in the back while searching for food in a field of peas.

I imagine that my parents didn't agonize too long before deciding to put some distance between the rapidly-advancing Russians and ourselves. The opportunity to leave for Sweden came during harvest time on September 21, my older sister Lehte's birthday! But it didn't turn out as a very happy day for her.

That evening, all of the harvesters were seated around the dinner table in our farmhouse, enjoying the well-deserved food and home-made beer after a long day in the field. During the traditional singing of the "dinner song", my family left through the back door to start the journey to the departure point near Pilguse Bay, a couple of kilometers away.



Sixty years after escaping to Sweden in the fall of 1944, the author returns to the west coast of Saaremaa in 2004.

Photo: Tõnu Anger, Meie Maa, 2004

The road took us by our Holland-type windmill where my mother Leena (nee

Kuivjõgi) asked a friend to inform Kalju of our departure in the unlikely event that my brother ever returned home from Siberia.

When my father Edmund, my mother and sister arrived at the departure point near Katri, preparations were well underway for a hasty departure that evening. My younger sister Õie, who was attending Kuressaare Gümnasium (High School) at the time, was expected to join us. The 30-some km trip by bicycle took longer than planned as her bike had a flat tire. Fortunately, a friendly farmer was able to fix the tire and she made it to the waiting boat.

My parents now faced an agonizing decision as one member of our family could not be accommodated on the boat. As a result, my older sister Lehte stayed behind, not knowing if she would ever be able to rejoin us in Sweden.

The boat, filled to capacity with about 20 passengers, including members of the Sepp, Himmist and Kiil families, departed for Gotland at the onset of darkness. During the next day, I remember seeing an airplane in the distance. It did not approach our boat, as it was likely a German reconnaissance aircraft. We reached the coast of Gotland late in the day or early the following morning. In the days that followed, our group was processed through quarantine and housed in what I recall as a large warehouse which served as our home for several weeks.

Our next stop was at a refugee camp (Vinnerby?) on the mainland. I spent the first winter here with my mother, whereas my father and younger sister were housed elsewhere. It was here that I strapped tube skates onto my boots for the first time and tried to skate on the moat ice around a Swedish castle. It was also during that time that my mother,

who had been a teacher in her youth, tried to teach me to read and to remember the multiplication and division tables.

Our family was reunited around Christmas as Lehte found us with the help of a refugee newspaper. Apparently two men from a nearby village had returned to Saaremaa a couple of weeks after our departure to take their own families to safety in Sweden. One of the men, Ats Lääs, became aware of my sister's predicament and found room for her in his boat. It was likely one of the last boats to leave the Island.

Our next destination was Landskrona in southern Sweden where we stayed in accommodation near the waterfront, along with other Estonian refugees.

In the summer of 1945, our family settled in Björknäs, a small community about a 20-minute bus ride from Stockholm. I was enrolled in the Stockholm Estonian School and attended the school until we left for Canada during the last week of 1950, arriving in Halifax aboard the refugee ship General Ballou in mid- January.

I've been asked: What would have happened to you if you remained in Saaremaa? One can only speculate. My family may well have been deported to Siberia in the late 1940's or even during the mid-fifties. Death in Siberia would have been a possibility, or a return to Saaremaa. Work on a collective farm and/or mobilization into the Soviet military are other possibilities.

Last summer, sixty years after the fateful journey to Sweden, I visited our departure point on Pilguse Bay not as a barefooted eight-year-old but as a seasoned tourist on the trail of his ancestral roots.





## Introducing the *Heritage Community Foundation!*

The Heritage Community Foundation is a charitable trust which attempts to tell the story of Alberta via its online resources. Its websites are an abundant source for historic facts, stories, and images with a focus on youth programs, public education, and research. The foundation was established in 1999 with a mission to bring heritage into the mainstream. Its goal is to ensure that our rich heritage is enjoyed and appreciated by all. As a result of its partnerships with a wide variety of heritage, governmental, and non-governmental institutions it has been able to make Alberta and Canada's heritage come alive through the World Wide Web.

Examples of its websites include:

- ***AlbertaSource.ca*** - an online encyclopedia of heritage in Alberta
- ***AlbertaHeritage.net*** - a heritage and cultural tourism site
- ***Canada's Digital Collections website*** - includes profiles of groups of Albertans, including "Albertans: Who Do They Think They Are?", and "Alberta Inventors and Iventions: A Century of Innovation".
- ***Canada's Local Internet Collections*** - includes profiles of collections in Alberta such as the British Air Commonwealth.
- ***Canada's Culture Online Program*** - includes archives of culture such as the CKUA sound archives.
- ***Virtual Museum of Canada***
- ***Alberta Law Foundation*** - Includes descriptions of great Alberta law cases.
- ***ETC....!***

An Estonian profile can be found on the *Albertans* site at [www.albertasource.ca](http://www.albertasource.ca) under "Ethnocultural" in the index. **OR**, it may be accessed directly as follows:  
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/albertans/> .

The Heritage Community Foundation is looking forward to exploring the possibility of developing a "Celebrating Alberta's Estonian Community" site with Alberta Estonians!





# LÄÄNERANNIKU LESTI PÄEVAD July 4 – 8, 2005



Make new friends and renew old friendships at our traditions festival, **WEST COAST ESTONIAN DAYS**. The event will be held at Harrison Hot Springs, in the Lower Fraser Valley, 2 hours east of Vancouver. Many traditional and non-traditional activities are planned, including:

Song festival  
Folk dancing  
Art Exhibit  
Academic lunch  
Homemade beer pub  
Hiking

Traditional folk picnic/party  
Mtgs of various Eesto org.  
Religious services  
Childrens' activities  
Gala dinner and ball  
Young peoples' events

Sandcastle building  
Theatre group  
Golfing  
Swimming

The West Coast Days is a wonderful opportunity to experience Estonian culture and meet new friends. The July 2005 event is the 27<sup>th</sup> festival, having started in 1953 in San Francisco. The various coastal cities of Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles take turns hosting it every other year.

During the first decades, the event was conducted entirely in Estonian with west coast communities providing the program content. Recently, most of the program is conducted in English, with major groups directly from Estonia providing a significant portion of the entertainment.

Registration forms will be available in the Spring; however, it is recommended to reserve accommodations earlier.

## Contacts

### **Lääneranniku Eesti Päevad Website**

URL: [www.lep2005.ca](http://www.lep2005.ca)

### **Harrison Hot Springs Resort \***

Ph: 1-800-663-2266  
or 604-796-2244

E-mail: [res@harrisonresort.com](mailto:res@harrisonresort.com) or [info@harrisonresort.com](mailto:info@harrisonresort.com)

URL: [www.harrisonresort.com](http://www.harrisonresort.com)

\* Mention "Estonian League" for discount reservation rates



### **Days Hotel, Surrey, BC** (for accommodation before or after the festival)

This hotel is owned and operated by a local Estonian family, and will have bus transportation directly from the hotel to Harrison Hot Springs on July 4, returning July 8.

Ph: 1-800-663-0660  
Or 604-588-9511

Fax: 604-588-7949

E-mail: [info@dayshotel.ca](mailto:info@dayshotel.ca)

URL: [www.surreyinn.com](http://www.surreyinn.com)

### **To be placed on the mailing list for festival registration forms, contact:**

Estonian League of the West Coast  
4195 West 12<sup>th</sup> Ave., Vancouver, BC V6R 2P5

Ph: 604-224-5901

Fax: 604-224-5050

E-mail: [suurkask@axionet.com](mailto:suurkask@axionet.com)

## Government approves support program for Estonians abroad

March 25 – The Estonian government approved a program of support for Estonian communities abroad for the 2004-2008 period. The aim of the program is to preserve the identity of Estonians and support their return into Estonia.

The main objective of the program is to establish which Estonian communities abroad are viable and provide them with steady support, a spokesman for the government said. In places where the number of Estonians is in decline the goal of the program is to secure the preservation of historical and cultural records in archives.

The program attaches importance to preservation of real estate owned by Estonian organizations and the state of Estonia.

Eldar Efeadujev, Minister of Ethnic Affairs wrote in a covering letter that the task of the program is to bridge the historical gap between Estonians living in the territories of the former Soviet Union and those in western countries. The minister observed that the Estonians in the East are more in need of direct material aid, but the Estonians in the East and the West alike can help Estonia to achieve its economic, political and cultural goals. A key priority of the program is to support the learning of the Estonian

language and the Estonian culture in other countries, as well as the training of teachers of Estonian.

Estonia must conclude agreements with other countries to establish a legal basis for Estonian schools operating there. The state pledges to finance sending visiting teachers to Estonian communities abroad and higher educational institutions in this country are to admit 10 Estonian students from abroad every year in the 2004-2008 period.

The program further calls for supporting the activity of Estonian cultural societies. Their leaders are to be invited to Estonia for supplementary training.

According to the program, Estonians living abroad must be informed about the possibility of obtaining and restoring Estonian citizenship. Estonians abroad who carry an Estonian passport have closer ties with their country, consequently, granting them citizenship must be supported, the program says.

The minister's office estimates the cost of the program in 2004 at 5.7 million kroons (EUR 364,000).

About 160,000 people or roughly 14 percent of Estonians live abroad.

From Estonian Review, March 23-30, 2003

## The Estonian language is enchanting to foreigners

Mall Pesti teaches Estonian at the University of Washington. She is also one of the authors of "E nagu Eesti" (E as in Estonia), an Estonian-language textbook sold in about 45 countries. The textbook provides a straight-forward approach to language learning, including everyday dialogue and a minimum of grammar. Use of children's poems has contributed to the enjoyment of the learning process.

She explains that her course is based on the textbook and the use of the Internet. By following the textbook, pupils learn the dialogue and poems, work through exercises, and compare their work against the answers provided in the textbook. A cassette is part of the course, enabling students to practice their language skills. Assignments and test are also available on the Internet. Students and teacher "chat" via the Internet once a week for 45 minutes. The work is in Estonian and leaves very little time for reflection. An essay is required on a weekly basis.

The opportunity to develop an Internet course to teach Estonian was sponsored by the Finnish Ministry of Education. The course is part of the Laurea Technical College in Finland where Internet teaching is an integral part of the curriculum.

Mall Pesti is astounded that there is interest in the Estonian language in every corner of the globe. People are motivated for different reasons, but Estonia is perceived to be a fairly exotic place and the Estonian language has something that seems to enchant people. Many students have personal ties with Estonia, some have started to research their roots, and others have formed business ties. University students take the course as part of a broader research effort involving Baltic history, economics, politics and culture. They also expect to visit those countries for additional research. Yet others learn Estonian without any particular motivation or reason.

Anyone interested in the Internet course can contact Mall Pesti at [pestim@yahoo.com](mailto:pestim@yahoo.com) for further information about the course.

Note: The above article is an abstract of an Estonian-language article which appeared in Estonian Life (Eesti Elu) in September, 2004, based on an interview involving Kaire Tensuda of Estonian Life and Mall Pesti.

Prepared by Dave Kiil

# Estonia PM Satisfied with the Outcome of EU-Russia Summit

EU Business

November 26, 2004

Estonian Prime Minister Juhan Parts said on Friday that he was satisfied with the outcome of the European Union-Russia summit and expressed hope that a border treaty between Estonia and Russia would be signed soon.

"I am satisfied with the results of the EU-Russia summit because several questions that are important also for Estonia, especially the still unsigned border treaty with Russia, were discussed at the meeting," Parts told AFP in an interview.

"The border treaty between two neighbouring countries should be one of the most basic treaties and because of that it has been very hard for Estonia to understand why Russia delayed signing it for so many years, despite Estonia regaining its independence 13 years ago," he said.

"I am glad Russia has now indicated that the treaty may soon be signed.

"I believe we should also thank our partners from the EU for that because the matter has been raised several times in EU-Russian meetings," Parts said.

The Estonian prime minister also welcomed an EU decision at the summit in the Netherlands on Thursday to start regular consultations with Russia on matters concerning human rights and other basic freedoms.

"I appreciate the decision as it will also give Estonia a chance to develop an open and constructive dialogue on human rights with Russia. It will give us a chance to ask Russia for explanations of human rights matters worrying us, like the situation in Chechnya, cases of extremism and attempts to limit media freedom," he said.

"Despite the fact that Russia may try to politicise minority matters in Latvia and Estonia during these consultations, we have nothing to hide. Our partners know Estonia is a democratic state respecting the rights of all people, including minorities.

"The situation of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia is in line with European norms," Parts added.

Moscow regularly charges both Latvia and Estonia, -- both republics of the Soviet Union until 13 years ago and which have large ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking minorities -- with repressing minority rights.

The two Baltic states maintain that their top priority is consolidating their re-acquired statehood, sometimes through cultural and linguistic steps that may be at odds with Russia.

Russia has so far refused to sign a border treaty with them both.

<http://www.eubusiness.com>

# In Estonia, e-banking, e-commerce, e-government

THOMAS FULLER  
*International Herald Tribune*  
September 13, 2004  
TALLINN, Estonia

The government promotes this Baltic nation as E-stonia, and it has a point.

There is e-banking: Nearly half of all bank customers in Estonia avoid trips to the teller by managing their money online. There is e-government: Cabinet meetings are almost paperless, with each minister following the agenda on a flat-screen monitor. And there is e-commerce: Ordinary citizens can use mobile phones to pay for parking or a bouquet of flowers, or to transfer money to a friend.

Only 14 years ago, the "E" in Estonia could have stood for East Bloc. Visitors here today can still spot signs of the country's Soviet past in the Communist-style apartment complexes, some of them abandoned and falling apart, and a sprinkling of old Russian cars. But Estonia is hoping that by becoming a laboratory of innovative technology projects, it can erase the legacy of its Communist past.

It is off to a good start. Software well-known elsewhere is written here. Both Kazaa, the file-swapping program that allows users to download music, games or other files, and Skype, the internet phone service, were developed by a group of programmers in Estonia under the guidance of Niklas Zennstrom, a Swedish entrepreneur. "There are definitely a lot of programming projects going on," said Jaan Tallinn, a senior developer for Skype.

Low cost is a factor. Tallinn estimates that programmers in Estonia make an average of E1,000 to E1,300 a month, about \$1,225 to \$1,600.

But wage levels are not the only attraction of Estonia's programmers. Zennstrom was recently quoted as saying that "in terms of technical expertise, I have never found anywhere better."

Among Estonia's innovations is its parking system. About 25,000 people use their mobile phones to pay for parking, said Tonu Grunberg, executive vice president of EMT, Estonia's largest mobile phone company.

A user sends a text message to the phone number of the parking authority, and the fee is added to his or her phone bill. The system was invented here, and EMT is now seeking to export it.

The technology department at Eesti Uhispank, the country's second-largest bank, has taken mobile technology one step further. The bank allows customers to transfer money to each other with their mobile phones, a service intended partly to allow plumbers or electricians to collect fees directly from customers. The service began this year, and 30,000 people have signed up to use it.

Estonia, with 65 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people, according to the International Telecommunication Union, has a similar mobile phone penetration to France (69) but is well behind its northern neighbor, Finland (90), yet well ahead of Russia (12).

Government ministers and technology experts in Estonia offer a range of explanations as to why a Baltic country with a population of about 1.3 million has so quickly adopted computing and mobile communications projects. "Estonia is a small country," said the foreign minister, Kristiina Ojuland. "You can do things in a small country fast if you have political will."



Jaan Kaplinski, a poet and former member of Parliament, said Estonia owes much of its progress in Internet adoption and technology to its proximity to Finland. "The two success stories of Eastern Europe are located nearby rich countries," Kaplinski said.

Slovenia, the wealthiest Central European country to enter the European Union in May, is near Austria and Italy, he pointed out.

Estonia, which also entered the EU in May along with nine other countries, is near Helsinki and Sweden and has cultural and business links with both. "There is a sometimes desperate wish to modernize, to put our house in order," Kaplinski said. Information technology "is a very strong symbol of modernity."

Others say Estonia benefits from its dismal climate. "It's dark and cold, so what do you do? Just sit behind your computer and think of great, beautiful stuff," said Tallinn, the Skype programmer, who noted that the same impulse was evident in Finland.

To get young people interested in the Internet, Estonia has put computers in classrooms, established Internet centers in rural areas and placed wireless hot spots in cities and towns across the country. Many other countries have hot spots, which are areas that provide wireless Internet signals, but in Estonia the access is free.

Tallinn, the Skype programmer, compares access to personal computers now with Soviet times. "In the late '80s, you could buy two houses for one PC," he said. "They were ridiculously expensive."

Last year, Estonia reported 33 Internet users for every 100 people, according to the International Telecommunication Union. This ration is more than Ireland (31), Spain (24), Poland (23), Hungary (16) and Greece (15), but it is less than France (37), Germany (47) or Sweden (57).

To get older workers online, the government teamed up in 2001 with banks

and telecommunications companies to offer free lessons on how to use the Internet, a program called Look@world that trained 100,000 people, more than one of every 10 adults in the country.

"It was directed mainly at blue-collar workers and older people," said Jaan Tamm, director of technology at Eesti Uhispank.

The bank also helped pay to install computers and Internet connections in libraries, cultural centers and post offices around the country.

The investments have paid off, Tamm said. More than half of Uhispank's 600,000 customers bank online, and the figure is much higher among what Tamm calls "active" customers: About 80 percent of them use e-banking.

The bank has saved millions of euros by closing half of its branches; it now has 64 left. One sign of Estonia's transformation into a nation of online bankers: It skipped a system of bank checks; residents use a credit card or cash.

As for government, paperless meetings have been a time-saver, said Tex Vertmann, a government technology adviser.

Cabinet meetings used to take a minimum of two hours "and sometimes seven or eight hours," he said.

Now, with each minister following the meeting on his or her flat-screen monitor, the average cabinet meeting lasts 45 minutes, Vertmann said.

But ministers also meet separately - without computers - to hash things out on Thursday afternoons. "The actual debates will take place in that meeting," Vertmann said.

Even in E-stonia, ministers take an eye break from their computer screens.

International Herald Tribune  
<http://www.iht.com>



By Michael Tarm

Vello Mäss leans across a wood-spoked shipswheel and eagerly scans the Baltic Sea horizon as far as the eye can see—where, he says, tens of thousands of historically important ships, from the Danish coast to Russia, lie below the cold-gray waves waiting to be found.

"There are hundreds of Viking ships out there, hundreds of old trading ships, hundreds of warships," mused the captain cum researcher, dubbed The Baltic Sea Sherlock Holmes in his native Estonia for finding so many such ships himself. "The Baltic's an archaeological paradise." Standing on the bridge of his tiny research boat docked in Tallinn for the winter, the burly, blue-eyed 63-year-old speaks excitedly about the next mystery he hopes to solve this summer: The whereabouts of the passenger ship *Vironia*, torpedoed near Estonia by Nazi planes during World War II.

War and stormy weather have been claiming Baltic seafarers for over 5,000 years, since the waterway became Northern Europe's most prized and heavily plied trading route. Its best known recent victim was the Estonia ferry, which perished in 1994 when towering waves ripped off its bow door; 852 people died.

Clashes between Sweden and Russia cost hundreds of ships and thousands of lives; on just one day, July 3, 1790, Sweden alone lost 30 ships in the Battle of Vyborg against Russian forces. Sea mines laid during both World War I and II claimed thousands.

Up to 100,000 shipwrecks lie today on the Baltic Sea floor, said Stefan Wessman, a marine archeologist at Finland's Maritime Museum. Researchers in the region widely agree on that figure.

"The Baltic Sea has huge potential—and I

believe this is recognized by scientists internationally," he said. "There is nothing comparable to it in the world."

It's not just the sheer number of ship wrecks in the Baltic that so enthralls underwater archeologists like Wessman and Mäss. It's that so many are remarkably well-preserved—veritable time capsules certain to expand mankind's understanding of the past.

"It's hard to imagine something telling us more," explained Wessman. "You can get a whole cross-section of a society on one ship. The only equivalent on land I can think of is if you found a whole ancient library buried intact. Ships are also the biggest and most technologically advanced objects of the different ages—not unlike rockets today—so they tell us more about the day's science than even a cathedral might."

Sweden's royal warship *Vasa*, the most celebrated Baltic Sea discovery, was so well preserved after being raised 350 years after it sank in 1628—that minute details were clearly visible, down to smirks on dozens of cherubs and the flashing teeth on carved lions decorating its elaborate exterior.

Cutlery, shoes, muskets, gameboards and hundreds of other items were also found on the *Vasa*, one of the most advanced, decorative warships of its age. (While high-tech for the time, it foundered and sank on its maiden voyage because of apparent miscalculations about the required ballast to keep it stable.)

Archeologists can thank wood-eating shipworms—or, rather, the lack thereof.

The *teredo navalis*—actually a mollusc, not a worm—thrives in high-salt Atlantic and Pacific and can devour whole ships in decades. But this bane to underwater archeology avoids low-salt seas like the Baltic, the largest so called brackish sea in the world.

"If the *Vasa* had sunk in almost any other sea, you might find parts of it that were buried under the seabed—but any wood exposed to the sea would be gone," said Wessman. "All that would be left would be a small pile of things that weren't wood."

"Only the American Great Lakes are roughly similar to the Baltic Sea in this respect," he added. "But they don't have the same long history of the Baltic Sea, which has seen virtually every type of ship sail across it."

The Baltic's cold temperatures and a low-oxygen content also act as preservatives.

Sweden's *Jonkoeping* schooner, sunk by a



German submarine in 1916 and salvaged near Finland in 1998, held nearly 5,000 bottles of top-quality French *Gout Americain* champagne, perfectly preserved in the constant 4 C temperatures. Several bottles were later auctioned at London's *Christie's* for 4,000 dollars each.

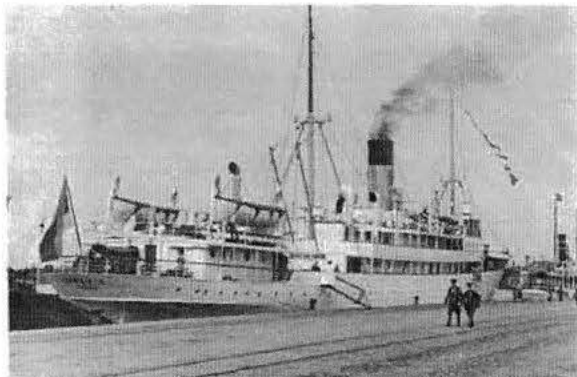
The Baltic's also a mere 55-meters deep on average, compared to 3,700-meters in the Atlantic, so, once they're found, wrecks are well within reach of even low-tech divers. Deep-sea dives in the major oceans require top-notch, and top-priced gear.

New three-dimensional sonar has also improved chances of finding wrecks—even by accident.

A Swedish submarine crew doing routine scanning last year was shocked to stumble upon an 18th century ship intact and upright—as if set lovingly on the seabed, a carved sea horse presiding majestically at its stern. Human skulls on deck were the only obvious signs of mishap.

But the key factor in opening up new opportunities for archeology in the region, at least for Mäss, has been a political sea change: namely, the demise of the Iron Curtain.

When it still draped across the Baltic Sea, communist Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland



and East Germany strictly forbid most underwater exploration.

"Getting permission for dives was very, very difficult," recalled Mäss, born the year the Red Army occupied the three Baltic states in 1940. "The Soviets were paranoid about everything—that we might see underwater military equipment, that we might escape to the West."

As a young sailor in the 1960s, he had to wait for 15 years before he was finally allowed to travel to and disembark in a foreign port.

"Soviet officials didn't trust people from the Baltic states," he said.

With no Soviet-era courses, Mäss taught himself the art of underwater archeology—deriving inspiration from films of history's most famed diving innovator, Jacques Cousteau. A decade after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained independence during the 1991 Soviet collapse, he's now one of just a few regional experts in the field, a one-man force in Baltic shipwreck hunting.

Freedom not only opened up access to the Baltic Sea, it has allowed for a vital exchange of information and know-how across it. Sweden, for instance, donated one of those modern, three-dimensional sonars for use on Mäss' ship—a converted fishing trawler called the *Mare*.

Speaking back at his office in Tallinn's Maritime Museum, he keeps excusing himself to answer the phone—as his Nordic counterparts called to ask about his latest discoveries.

"There's a hundred years' worth of work out there," he said, sweeping his hand at stacks of papers on his desk. "Life's short. I've got to give it 100 percent." He estimated that 10,000 ships lie off Estonia's coast waiting for him and others to find.

While their coastlines have proven slightly less treacherous than Estonia's, the seas around Latvia and Lithuania have also claimed their share of ships, including at the mouths of major rivers favored by fearsome Viking dragon boats. Both countries have also carried out more underwater surveys over the past ten years than they had in the previous 50.

Mäss' most recent find, in July, was of Russia's first armored navy ship, the *Russalka*, or *Mermaid* in Russian. Underwater photos of the ship, which sank in a storm en route from Estonia to Finland in 1893, showed it stuck vertically in the soft sea floor like an enormous sword.

The discovery was widely hailed in Estonia, where a 1902 monument to the *Russalka*, a bronze angel tilting a crucifix toward the ship's watery grave, is a popular tourist attraction in Tallinn. Many newlyweds leave bouquets at its granite base to honor the 177 sailors who died.

"One of my first concerns when we found the *Russalka* was whether the cross actually pointed the right way, towards where the ship sank," Mäss said. "I was so relieved to find out it does."

Hungry for still more discoveries, Mäss has thumbed through old newspaper clippings and even quizzed fishermen to glean clues about the sleek-white *Vironia* (photo), attacked by German planes as it ferried Soviet officials fleeing the 1941 wartime invasion of Estonia by the Nazis. Its route was laden with mines.

"Steam rushed out of the boilers with an infernal noise, drowning all other sounds," recalled one witness, Russian naval commander Pjotr Makejev aboard a nearby vessel, in his memoirs. "People jumped overboard. Soon another mine exploded and the *Vironia* went down."

The *Vironia* was in a 90-ship convoy carrying Soviet officers, Communists and their families in a frantic, last-minute escape from Tallinn. But within hours, 30 ships were sunk and 15,000 people died—one of the largest death tolls in a single engagement in history.

Many of the ships in that convoy belonged to pre-war Baltic owners but were commandeered by the Soviets after they annexed the countries. The



Estonian-flagged *Vironia*, Latvia's MS *Everita* and Lithuania's *Silguda*—both of which also sank—were among them.

In 1941 alone, 400 mostly Soviet ships went down in battles on the Baltic.

Similar carnage continued throughout the war, including when several refugee ships escaping resurgent Red Army forces in 1944 were torpedoed by Soviet planes and sunk. One that was carrying several thousand Estonian escapees went down near Latvia.

Fishermen told Mäss how their nets kept becoming snagged near where the *Vironia* was believed to have perished—crucial information that will help narrow down its precise location. Mäss used similar leads to find a British naval minesweeper sunk in 1919 as it aided Estonia's battle for independence against Russia.

A prime source for data on older wrecks are Danish customs records from 1490-1856, during which the Danes forced all ships entering the Baltic Sea to pay a toll. The papers, now kept in Denmark's National Archives, include details on destinations and ports of departure.

Among ships identified using the Danish records was Holland's *Vrouw Maria*, which sank off Finland en route to St. Petersburg in 1771. It was listed as carrying artwork for Russian Empress Catherine the Great. It was found in 1999, but hasn't yet been salvaged.

Salvage laws differ in countries around the Baltic Sea, but there are laws in all meant to protect shipwrecks and their contents. All finds over 100-years-old in Finnish waters have been designated state property, according to Wessman.

Sites of other more recent disasters, like the Estonia ferry, are considered grave sanctuaries and, by law and under threat of arrest, are strictly off limits to divers and salvagers.

Mäss said finding something comparable to Sweden's *Vasa*, the dramatic centerpiece of a popular museum in Stockholm, is the fantasy of most divers. His is to find an Estonian-built ship from the Viking era, when Estonians themselves staged raids across the Baltic Sea.

Money shortages mean researchers in all three Baltics are still mostly limited to briefly mapping and filming their discoveries. Some safes aboard World War II ships, like the *Vironia*, could contain historically important, perfectly preserved papers. But Mäss said Estonians don't currently have resources to find them and bring them up.

"We'll have to leave that to future generations," he said.

It's not only ships in the Baltic that are stirring excitement.

Hundreds of Stone Age settlements, overtaken by rising seas, have also been found—especially in Danish waters. And there are hundreds of planes that were shot down or crashed—some under mysterious

circumstances during the Cold War.

And then there's all that talk of treasure.

Titillating stories about caches of gold aboard long-lost shipwrecks abound in fishing villages up and down the 10 Baltic Sea coast countries—none of which, adds the kindly but matter-of-fact Mäss, he believes for a second.

In contrast to often gold-laden Spanish ships that plied the route back and forth from the New World, Baltic ships of that age typically hauled far less glamorous cargo—the likes of bricks, salt, furs, grain and herring, explained Mäss.

When he says so, he doesn't show the slightest trace of disappointment that among the rewards he insists he reaps from his work—instant wealth will almost certainly never be among them.

"I've got history on my mind," he said with a short laugh, "not gold."

**Source: City Paper, The Baltic States**

## Muhu Chair

The best-known chair-makers in Estonia came from the island of Muhu; their work was distinctive and evolved into a particular type of chair, which came to be known as muhu tool ('Muhu chair').



Originally a bridal chair – this piece of furniture became known among Estonian peasants, in the 18th century, in the form of a wedding gift to the bride on which she was seated during the ritual *tanutamine* ('capping of the bride'). The frame-chair provides a significant example of a transfer of motifs from the 'feminine crafts' to the 'masculine ones' – the ornament on the back-piece of a Muhu chair is a copy of the embroidery, but turned upside-down, on bride's wedding apron from the same island.

**Source: Vaike Reeman and Piret Õunapuu. 2004. Crafts and Arts in Estonia: Past and Present. Published by the Estonian Institute**



# Jaan Kross

**Jaan Kross** (born 19 February 1920) is the most eminent contemporary Estonian writer.



Born in Tallinn, he attended the University of Tartu, graduated from its School of Law in 1944, and taught there as a lecturer until 1946 (and again as Professor of *Artes Liberales* in 1998). He was arrested by the Nazis in 1944 and by the Soviets in 1946, who deported him to Siberia, where he remained in the Gulag until 1954. Upon his return to Estonia, then a Soviet Republic, he became a professional writer.

Kross is by far the most translated and nationally as well as internationally best-known Estonian writer. He was nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in

Literature and holds several honorary doctorates and international decorations, including the highest Estonian and one of the highest German orders.

Kross' novels (and short stories) are almost universally historical; indeed, he is often credited with a significant rejuvenation of the genre of the Historical Novel. Most of his works take place in Estonia and deal, usually, with the relationship of Estonians and Baltic Germans and Russians as well. Very often, Kross' description of the historical struggle of the Estonians against the Baltic Germans, however, was actually a Metaphor for the contemporary struggle against the Soviet occupation. However, Kross' acclaim internationally (and nationally even after the regaining of Estonian independence) show that his novels also deal with topics beyond such concerns; rather, they deal with questions of mixed identities, loyalty, and belonging.

Generally, *The Czar's Madman* has been considered Kross' best novel; it is also the most translated one. Also well-translated is *Professor Martens' Departure*, which because of its subject matter (academics, expertise, and national loyalty) is very popular in academe and an important "professorial novel". The earlier *Excavations*, dealing with the "defrosting" period after Stalin's death as well as with the Danish conquest of Estonia in the early Middle Ages, and today considered by several critics as his finest, has not been translated into English yet; it is however available in German.

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H.Langeste

# Ivo Schenkenberg

## The "Estonian Hannibal"

A journeyman coin-maker named Ivo Schenkenberg from Tallinn became a hero during the Russo-Livonian War when he recruited a 500-man strong cavalry corps of Estonian farmers and led them in the battles against Ivan the Terrible's forces. Fighting for Tallinn and the King of Sweden, he became an outstanding figure in 16<sup>th</sup> century Estonian history. Despite his German name, some claim he was of ethnic Estonian descent. 40% of the Tallinn's citizenry were ethnic Estonians, the ruling class of Low-German merchants numbered barely one third of the burghers' total, and the rest were a mix.

In January 1558 Russian troops entered Estonia for a short time, demanding that the Bishopric of Tartu pay a tax to the Tsar or else they would start a war. No money was found for it and the tax was not paid. This set off the war between Russia and Livonia. The central authority of the Livonian Order of Knights had diminished to the point where the Order-master wasn't capable of organizing a defence force to prevent a Russian invasion and 25 years of chaos followed. In addition to the Russian army, Estonia and Livonia were also partly occupied by Polish and Swedish troops. The land was ravaged by fighting, until Sweden gained the upper hand and expelled the other armies. The people of Tallinn lived in one of the best fortified cities in Europe, but didn't think their own town guard could defend it against the massive Russian forces.

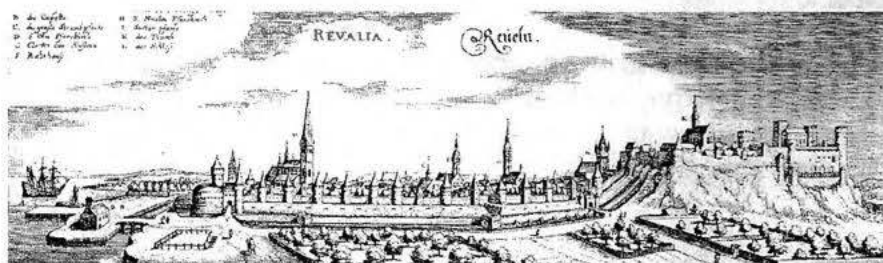
Aware of its vulnerability, in 1561 Tallinn

voluntarily swore allegiance to the king of Sweden, and thus became the first Swedish foothold in Estonia.

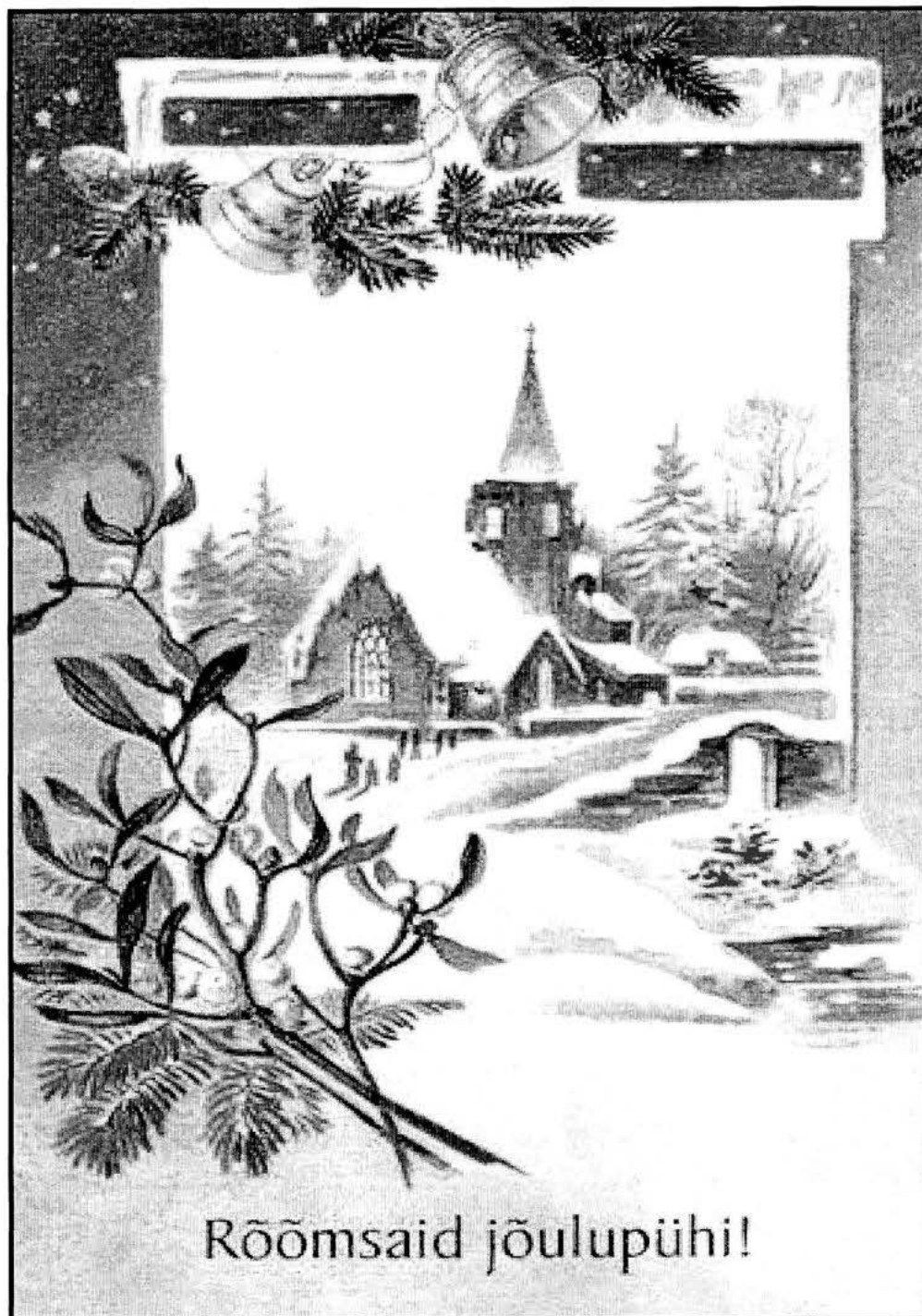
When the Russian army in northern Estonia laid siege on Tallinn, some farmers sought refuge within the city walls. Ivo Schenkenberg formed a guerilla group from them. A bunch of peasants fighting as partisans on horseback were not taken seriously. He was mockingly called "The Estonian Hannibal" and his men became the Hannibal Folks. However, the nickname got a different meaning after they had proven to be a real pain in the neck for the invaders. The "Hannibal men" were well trained, disciplined, and motivated raiders and were more than willing to take revenge for all the damage that Ivan the Terrible did to their homeland. Ivan's favorite tactics were to destroy everything on the way of the march, leaving nothing that could be useful for the enemy. Houses were torched and horses, grain and livestock taken from farmers. Schenkenberg's Hannibal Folks were familiar with the landscape and knew how to make quick surprise attacks on enemy encampments. They proved to be a real problem for the Russians.

Schenkenberg's saga ended tragically. On July 1579 he was wounded in a battle with a much larger enemy force, near Rakvere. He and 60 of his compatriots, including his brother Cristoffer, were taken prisoners. For the enemy this was an important victory. The prisoners were brought to Pihkva (Pskov) and killed in the presence of Ivan the Terrible himself, 430 years ago.

H. Langeste



Tallinn about year 1600



Rõõmsaid jõulupühi!

*Tasakesi...tasakesi...  
Lumi langeb rahuga  
Ilm on vaikne, ilm on sume,  
Lumel aega laugeda.*

*Häid Jõule ja Õnnerikast Uut Aastat!  
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*