

# AJAKAJA

SUMMER 2005

ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY



*Emilie and Hendrick Kingsep  
First Estonian Pioneers in Canada  
Circa 1920*

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# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society

## 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.

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### Sõnumileht—**Ajakaja**—Newsletter

Ajakaja is published biannually to inform members about Society activities and heritage topics. 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 items to Eda McClung at [emcclung@shaw.ca](mailto:emcclung@shaw.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 ([emcclung@shaw.ca](mailto:emcclung@shaw.ca)).

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**Cover Page: Photo courtesy of the Kingsep/Mottus families**

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## Letter from the Editor:



In the summer of 1998 I wrote the first Editorial for the newly revived Ajakaja. With the Estonian-Canadian Centennial coming up in 1999 and the planning for the Canada wide centennial celebration in full swing, it seemed a good vehicle for keeping not only Edmonton Estonian Society members but all Alberta Estonians updated on the proposed activities.

The past eight years have brought many changes. The centennial celebrations resulted from a successful collaboration between EES members, Calgary Estonians and pioneer descendants from the Medicine River, Stettler and Barons/ Lethbridge areas. In the intervening years our membership in Edmonton has been shrinking and with the resultant decline in volunteers we have no longer been able to keep up our three annual social events. The enthusiasm generated by the successful collaboration between the descendants of the pioneer families and the first generation Estonian Canadians in the meantime continued to grow. Due to the hard work and planning of too many people to mention by name in this Editorial, The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society was founded in this, Alberta's Centennial, year bringing all groups into one Alberta wide organization.

The work needed to make the Society official will continue over the next year. But the first event has already been planned. Linda Hall has been booked

for our Jaanipaev celebration on June 25, 2005 for a family style picnic with "Kerbes" theme. An afternoon ceremony raising the Estonian flag will be followed by games that the Kerbes pioneer family was famous for as well as an evening bonfire complete with a traditional sing along. It promises to be a rousing event guaranteed to bring everyone together in the newly formed organization.

Ajakaja too will undergo some changes. This issue will debut a new logo and masthead designed by the talented Mare Maxwell who started the first Ajakaja. Despite moving back to Estonia she has kept up her connection including writing a guest Editorial some years ago. It seems fitting then that a new Editor should take over the newsletter for the new Society.

I have enjoyed participating in the production of Ajakaja and my time as Editor. It has been very satisfying to see the development of our little amateur newsletter to its present attractive format. With new creative and technological changes it can only get better!

One article in particular is of great interest to me in this issue. I was a rhythmic gymnast in Evelyn Koop's Kalev-Estienne group in my teens and I have many fond memories of performing at various Estonian celebrations in Toronto in the 1950s as well as appearances at the Estonian Days in New York City and New Jersey. We were just a small amateur Estonian group at the time. This was before Rhythmic Gymnastics became an Olympic sport and Evelyn became the doyenne of Canadian Rhythmic gymnasts.

I would like to thank all my readers of the past issues of Ajakaja and look forward to exciting and innovative changes in the coming year.

*Anne-Marie Hodes*

# Greetings to all the members of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society

BOB TIPMAN

*President, Alberta Estonian Heritage Society*



I first want to thank all those people who worked so hard to create the new Alberta Estonian Heritage Society. The formation of this society is very welcome and needed if we are to continue to maintain our connection with our Estonian roots and culture. It also gives us an opportunity to bring together the descendants of the pioneer families with the first generation Estonian Canadians from all over Alberta into one organization. Over the next year we will complete the work needed to make this organization official and communicate this to the other Estonian organizations and government departments. Also, we will plan events to bring our society together and enjoy our friendship and a little Estonian culture.

Our first social function is a “Jaanipäev” celebration with a family style picnic to be held at Linda Hall near Stettler, Alberta on June 25, 2005. The event begins with an early afternoon ceremony around raising the Estonian flag, followed by the games that the pioneer “Kerbes” family made famous. This includes events such as log sawing, nail pounding, rolling pin throwing (at dummies of course) and horseshoes. In the early evening the traditional bonfire will be lit and, with the help of songbooks, we will try to recall some of the tunes that our grandparents

used to sing. The pioneer descendants will be relying heavily on the more recent Estonian Canadians to remember the tunes and pronounce the words. We are hoping for a large turnout to support our new organization.

Our executive will continue with formal registration of the Society with both Provincial and Federal Governments. This will make both levels of Government formally aware of the existence of the Society and establish a mechanism to access to funding. We will also advise other Estonian heritage organizations across Canada and in Estonia of our existence so we can be a focal point for contact with any distinguished visitors, artists or musicians that may be traveling to Alberta. Everyone who attended Linda Hall for the visit from President Meri in 2000 is aware of how appreciative he was of the exceptional hospitality extended to him by the Stettler Estonian community and from the Leesment and Tiislar families.

I also want to express my appreciation for all the good work that Dave Kiil did to bring this new organization into existence. He had the help of many others, notably Helgi Leesment, Juri Kraav, Eda McClung and Toomas Paasuke. Fortunately, all of these individuals are still on the executive so we have the continuity we need to make a smooth transition into the new organization. Continuing to publish Ajakaja will be important for this new organization to keep members informed and involved in the society. Development of a web site is also planned to help better communicate the work of the executive with our members, and to provide a bulletin board for making announcements. The executive is always looking for new ideas and ways to improve our society and we would welcome any suggestions from our members.

We look forward to seeing you at Linda Hall on June 25.

# **Alberta Estonian Heritage Society is up and running!**

Ain Dave Kiil

At a meeting in Red Deer on April 23, 2005, 33 committed members of the fledgling Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) reviewed recent progress and agreed on a course of action for the future. (A special thanks is extended to Jüri Kraav for preparing and distributing Minutes of all meetings leading to the establishment of the Society).

Helgi Leesment reviewed the need for and next steps to achieve provincial and federal registration. It was agreed that "Alberta Estonian Heritage Society" will be the registered name of the organization. The primary objectives are:

- 1) To provide for the recreation of the members and to promote and afford opportunity for friendly and social activities,
- 2) To promote and preserve Estonian heritage and culture in Alberta,
- 3) To facilitate contact and current awareness among persons with an interest in Estonian heritage and culture in Canada, Estonia, and elsewhere.

Toomas Pääsuke advised that the Society has already attracted 67 paid-up members, with membership dues and contributions totaling \$2325.00.

It was decided that the Society's newsletter AJAKAJA will continue to be published biennially and distributed to paid-up members. Eda McClung will continue as the Publisher, with a Board of Contributors to assist in provision of material. Four regional correspondents, namely Irene Kerbes (Stettler), Jack Pallo (Eckville), Helgi Leesment (Calgary) and Barbara Gullickson (Barons) were named.

A discussion about website development resulted in a decision to proceed. It was agreed that the AEHS website should have a restricted website for members only and a home page accessible to all "surfers". Following Helgi Leesment's proposal, it was

agreed that the website design and implementation will be headed up by Bob Kingsep. He will be assisted by Helgi Leesment, Jaan Koosel, Eda McClung, Karl Vollman, Kelly Schuler, and Astrid and Judi Ustina.

Several options were considered for events and activities in the near future. It was agreed that a province-wide event would generate added interest in the Society. Local representatives agreed to confirm the availability of Stettler and Gilby sites for a midsummer "picnic basket" celebration of Jaanipäev.

## **New Executive**

A new executive was elected as follows:

President: Bob Tipman  
Vice-President: Helgi Leesment  
Treasurer: Toomas Pääsuke  
Secretary: Jüri Kraav  
Membership: Karl Vollman  
Website: Bob Kingsep  
AjaKaja: Eda McClung  
Communications: Dave Kiil

## **Directors at Large:**

Barons/Medicine Hat: Martha Munz Gue  
Gilby: Allan Posti;  
Stettler: Deane Kerbes;  
Edmonton: Eda McClung

## **Members at Large:**

Arne Matiisen; Liia Herman; Peter Asmus

**PS.** On a personal note, I would like to express my appreciation for your support and commitment leading to a successful launch of the new Society.

Congratulations to Bob Tipman, President, and the new Executive on their appointments!

Alberta's Estonian community is unique in all of Canada, and the multi-generational makeup and talents of the people involved will no doubt contribute to the celebration of Estonian culture and traditions that will meet our equally diverse expectations.

## The Estonians in Barons, Alberta – Early 1900s

Barbara (Johnson) Gullickson

I am honoured & pleased to be here today.

A little about my family background – My great grandfather, Jacob Erdman, & my grandfather, Gustav Erdman, filed on their homesteads in 1903 & moved here with the family in 1904. As well, my Johnson grandfather homesteaded at Barons in 1904 – and both of my husband's grandfathers homesteaded in 1903 & 1904. So, you see, we have very deep roots in the Barons community.

First, I want to tell a little about the emigration of the families from Estonia to The Crimea, about their life there, and why they moved to North America, first to the United States and then to Alberta. I will talk mostly about their early days here in the Barons area.

A number of Estonians arrived after the World War II and I will talk a little about them.

In the early 1800's, life was very harsh in Estonia for the people; they could not own land, and the rents paid to their landlords were oppressive.

One result of this economic oppression was uprisings in many places. These were severely suppressed by the Russian military. It was at this time, that the Prophet Maltzvet and his followers were waiting for the "White Ship" which was to take them away to the Promised Land'.

It never did arrive.



*The house in Paide, Estonia, where Jacob Erdman was born. This photo was taken in 1927.*

By 1860, there was more freedom of movement – and there was a story going around: the Russian government was giving Free Land to settlers in the South. This was after the Crimean war and some of the Tartars had fled to Turkey so their villages were available.

In 1861, 23 (or 70) families obtained permission from the Russian government to leave Estonia, for free land in The Crimea.

To obtain permission from their landlords to emigrate, each adult between 20 & 40 was required to pay an extra tax, or take 20 lashes. All the adults took the lashes. One man, whose wife was pregnant, took his wife's share & received 40 lashes. The treatment for his lacerated back was regular applications of salt water. This story goes that it took a month for him to recover enough to travel.

He was the only young adult to ride on a wagon. Most walked, some had carts, some had baby carriages, and a few had horses, which pulled the carts. One man had 2 cows. When one got lame, the shoemaker made shoes for it from the people's shoes.

They traveled 1500 miles (about 2200 Kilometers). The journey took 3 months. It was very difficult – many died along the way, mainly the old and very young. Only a small amount of food could be taken. As they went through the land, the Russian farmers gave them food; bread, sour milk, & cider.

When the Estonians arrived in Crimea, they were disappointed; the fields looked barren & unproductive. They were not, however, discouraged.

This was their land and it meant a new start for them as **Free Land Owners**.

The reasons for the desolation of the land were the Crimean War, and as happens to farmers everywhere, it was a bad year for crops.

Twenty three families settled in a town called Targhan, near Simferopol. These families were strict Lutherans and all the families went to church regularly – except one!



*Jacob's and Mari's family in The Crimea, in 1894.  
Standing: Emilia, Helena, Miina, Liisa.  
In front: Jacob with Charlotte, Mari holding Natalie  
and Gustav*

Jacob Erdman was one of the men elected a term as mayor of Targhan. While he was in a position of authority, a Turk stole an Estonian girl, because he could not afford to buy a wife. The Turk was sentenced to 8 years in Siberia. Stealing of girls was quite a common occurrence. If the stolen girl was gone more than 3 days, she stayed with her 'husband'; if less than 3 days, she returned home to her parents.

The Estonians were industrious, ambitious, and productive. They enjoyed their freedom in the new land and became prosperous land owners.



*Jacob's orchard in Targhan, Crimea. Man unknown.*

As time went on, Jacob's and Mari's sons reached the ages of 16 & 17, finding enough good land for them to farm was a problem. As well, 18 was the age young men were conscripted into the army. Mari, who was very determined, decided that her sons would not go into the Russian army! They would leave! Friends of theirs had moved to South Dakota

and told them how good it was in North America, and the decision was made to go there.

Jacob sold their land for \$25,000 in gold. One daughter, Helena, was entrusted to look after the box during the train ride to Estonia and the boat trip to England. She was an impressive lady. Helena was Perry's grandmother. (Perry Kotkas is Managing Director of the Barons 2004 Centennial Celebration of Heritage & Homesteading – and he did a very good job!)

In England, Gustav, the older son, persuaded Jacob to exchange the box of gold for a bank draft. Jacob was very worried – would they every see their money again? When they arrived in New York, Jacob was very relieved when they were able to exchange the piece of paper for money.

The family lived in South Dakota for 1 ½ years, and unhappy with the severe weather conditions – and a bad crop – they decided to look for other land. Some of the other Estonian families were interested in farms with a more favourable climate, as well, and the search was on. Land in Oregon was too expensive.

They heard CHEAP land was available in Alberta. So, in 1903, some of the Estonian families homesteaded here, moving to Barons in 1904.

When they left South Dakota, they traveled by 'Settlers' Train'. Each family had 2 box-cars to accommodate them, their household goods and their livestock. The family lived at one end of one boxcar and the household goods were at the other. In another box-car they had all their cattle and horses. The men took care of the stock at the different stops made by the trains.

After arriving in Lethbridge, they loaded people and goods onto the wagons they had brought with them and went to the river, to the ferry which would take them across the Old Man River. The ferry crossing took one loaded wagon or ten head of stock at one time. There was a cable across the river and the water current took it across. It was slow, but they got to the other side. There was no charge except after 6 p.m., when it cost ten cents a trip.

Arriving at their homesteads, the first thing was to build a sod house, a sod barn and dig a well. In this way the house was built: a walking plow turned the

sod, and let it lay in sheets about 10 inches wide and 3 inches thick. It was cut into 18 inch lengths, and these 'blocks' were made into a wall the same way a brick wall is made.

The only lumber used was for framing doors and windows. The roof was built from trees cut from the river bottom; then it was covered with prairie wool (hay) and (they say) this roof never leaked. The first doors and windows were made of gunny sack.

The well served as a fridge. It was cool down there and a pail with milk, butter and the usual perishable food was stored down there.



*This is the interior of Jacob's and Mari's home at Barons. This photo is of their youngest daughter, Natalie, who graduated from the University of Alberta in 1917.*

The trials of these pioneers included prairie fires, which had nothing to stop them, wild cattle as there were no fences and they roamed free, and the weather. In the summer, it was very hot, often over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (about 38 C), and the severe winters, which reached less than - 40 degrees Fahrenheit (-40 C). A mystery and a wonder were the Chinook winds. When these came, the temperature could rise 60 degrees in 24 hours.

Jack Kulpas tells of a prairie fire shortly after they homesteaded. Fortunately his father had experienced a prairie fire in South Dakota and knew how to protect his farm. He kept the grass burnt off around the buildings. So when they saw a wall of flames coming toward them, they were ready with all available containers filled with water. The fire was

fanned by the wind and the flames were 20 feet high. The fire passed over in a few seconds and the burnt area around the buildings prevented the fire from coming too close to their home, and the sparks which lit the haystack were quickly put out by the pails of water.

Jack's words, 'A week later the new grass came up green as velvet. The prairie was beautiful.'

Another good result of the fire was that it exposed their winter's supply of fuel – cow chips or buffalo chips, which burned hot and quite slowly. The children were given gunny sacks in which to collect them. The objective was to have enough to keep them warm all winter.

Each homesteader had to 'prove up' his quarter section of land, 160 acres. It was required that 10 acres of land be broken each year for the first 3 years, and that the homesteaders had to live on the land or within 10 miles, for 6 months each year.

When Grandpa Gus hauled wheat to Lethbridge, he would get up at 2 or 3 am, deliver the grain to the elevator, and return home the same day, getting home very late. It was expensive to stay overnight in the city, especially with a 4-horse team. He would bring mail, coal and groceries home.

In the early days, before there were roads or even trails, Grandpa Gus and some others would aim bee-line for Lethbridge. Grandpa said, 'We met the Blackfoot Trail at Black Butte, a little south of what is now Nobleford. There we made a big pile of rocks and put a buffalo skull on top of it, so that on the way back we would know when to turn off the Blackfoot Trail.'

Finally we found that the Blackfoot Trail continued past our homestead, only a few miles east. One can still see the mark of it passing through the grounds of the Barons Consolidated School.'

By 1908, there were 20 Estonian families in the Barons area – 77 individuals.

Some names of the Estonian families: Minnik, Kewe, Musten, Kulpas, Krikental, Kotkas, Erdman, Lentsman, Reinstein, Malberg, Meer, Watman, Silbermann, Andrekson.

In 1916, the crops were very good. Weather conditions were just right and even bad farmers



could get a crop. Prices for wheat were \$2.00 to \$2.25 a bushel and the yield for wheat ran around 50 bushels to the acre, oats yielded 130 bushels to the acre. The only taxes were for the school, \$2.00/quarter.

So it was at this time that big, new houses were built, new cars were purchased and a good time was had by all.



*One of the big houses built in 1917. This is Gus and Madga Erdman's home. Gus is Jacob's and Mari's son.*

New equipment was bought for farming; a steam engine and threshing outfit, with cook car, bunk car, sheaf loader, water tanks, bundle racks and wagons.



*Gus Erdman's threshing outfit, c. 1917. The Barons elevators are in the background.*

All these purchases did not use up all the profit from farming – several poker games were going on. These were pretty wide open with bets up to \$2,000.

Bowling became very popular around this time and Barons had a world class team, taking part in contests in Calgary, Lethbridge and Winnipeg. Barons also had a ball team, and the competition with Carmangay (the neighbouring town) was fierce,

including importing of high-priced players.



*A ball game, c. 1918, at Steve Pakkila's homestead, north east of Barons.*

Good crops brought the gophers: at some time, perhaps around 1917-19, gophers were particularly numerous. Mr. Gow offered the boys 1 cent for each tail. When the boys brought their tails in for payment, Mr. Gow threw them into his stove. Of course, it was summer and there was no fire. The boys collected the tails when Mr. Gow wasn't looking and re-sold them to him.



*1933, Jacob's & Mari's 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. Their house at Barons is in the background. This is a wood frame house, with straw in the walls for insulation. Their son, Robert, was an avid gardener and imported bulbs from Holland and peonies from Japan. The house was moved to a new location some years ago, and is still used as a residence.*

Reverend Silak, a Lutheran Minister who lived in Medicine Hat, came a few times a year, performed church services, baptized, married those who were engaged and buried the dead. In the meantime, these were performed by Gus Erdman. His last baptism was Mary Lou Andrekson. Mr. Ira Allen and his

wife often would come to the services by Reverend Silak. Although they did not understand the service, which Reverend Silak performed in both Estonian and German, they sat through both renditions. When asked why they came, they said they enjoyed being in a place of God and the singing.

The most was made of the farm products. Sheep's wool was carded, made into quilts, knitted into socks and mittens. The garden fruit and vegetables were canned. 20-gallon crocks of sauerkraut, salt pork, and corned beef were common. The pioneer women also made their own soap.

I haven't mentioned the 'barb-wire' communication system. The barb-wire fences were used as a way to talk with one's neighbour. Sound traveled through the barbed wire, and a can was used as a receiver.

The Estonians gathered often for meals, to exchange ideas (argue), to sing and dance. Anyone who needed help had a neighbour to assist.

**Everyone knew everyone for miles and miles around, personally.**

The Estonian community placed great emphasis on education, and a large number of their children went on to university to receive Bachelors, Masters and Doctors degrees.

Although the early years were difficult, the Estonians prospered, bought more land and became bigger land-holders. Owning land still seems to be important to us.

The people of Barons worked together as a team, no matter what their ethnic backgrounds were: Estonian, Norwegian, Swede, Chinese, Finnish, German, English, and people from the United States.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, a number of Estonians wanted to come to Canada. Some because they believed it was a good place to live, and others because they had escaped from USSR dominated Estonia and needed a safe place to live. A number of them had relatives or friends in Alberta and were able to arrange sponsors.

It seems that all the Estonians who were still in the Barons area sponsored a number of these. Many were professional people: doctors, lawyers, dentists,

etc., and others were people who worked in factories and on farms. All of these people were required to work on farms, in sugar beet fields, etc. for, I believe, 2 years. It was expected that during this time, they would learn to speak English, and then to return to their profession.

I would like to name the sponsors and the people sponsored, but I do not know all of them and I do not like to leave out people who should be named.

I remember a cousin of my mother's who was sponsored by Grandfather. She was a ballet dancer. I don't know if she worked in the fields, but she lived at Grandfather's house, and taught dancing to the girls in Barons. She then moved to Edmonton, where she gained fame as a Ballet teacher.

My cousin, Glenda Erdman was telling me of an Estonian who was sponsored by her father, Victor Erdman. Mr. Liiv didn't speak English and wasn't able to work in Victor's plant, so Victor gave him his grandmother's house to live in, and he became their gardener. Glenda said they had a picture perfect garden, flowers the size of butter plates, vegetables which were spectacular, and he even grew celery, hilling up the soil around them, so they had the white flesh typical of celery. At this time, Glenda's little brother was about 2 years old, and as any 2-year old, was intent on creating havoc in the garden. When David got too close to a precious plant, Mr. Liiv would shake his finger at him and forcefully say, "Aye, yi, yi, yi."

Some of the attractive girls married our Estonian farmers.

It was not easy for these people to come to a new country, to mostly be among strangers, and to not be able to work at their chosen profession.

It comforts me to believe that their lives here are better than they would have been in the Old Country.

**Thank you**

From the talk Barbara (Johnson) Gullickson presented during the Estonian program at the *Barons 2004 Centennial Celebration of Heritage & Homesteading*, July 31, 2004. Barons was the third settlement of Estonians in Alberta.

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# The 4Ks and fifty years of musical memories

My time with the 4Ks was relatively short, and I wasn't party to the early chapters at all. But since my Mom asked me to tell the story ... what could I say?

For those of you who have no idea what I'm even talking about, the 4Ks was an orchestra – though not in the classical sense, where the term usually includes “symphony” or “philharmonic” and implies dozens of musicians playing oboes and tympani and cellos and piccolos.



*Original 4K's at Linda Hall in the 1950's.  
L to R: Helen Kerbes (Mulligan), Bert Kerbes, Charlie Klaus, Elmer Kerbes.*

Nope. Time was that an orchestra was simply a group of musicians, playing a variety of instruments, providing music for listening and dancing pleasure. And if anything sums up the half century history of the 4Ks ... they made music you could dance to. Which folks all over Central Alberta, especially the Estonians who settled in the Stettler area, did for about fifty years.

My name is Hal Kerbes. From the day I made my debut in the Stettler General Hospital (Good Friday, 1957), the 4Ks had a direct impact on my daily life & my future ... because at any given time in history, a significant number of those Ks were Kerbeses. My family. Through the eyes of a child, I watched Mom & Dad head off to play at those weddings and dances. My sister, Annette, & I became “4Ks” ourselves in the '60s. Through countless weddings, parties and New Years' Eves, I learned what it meant to be a musician – how to plan the dancing at a wedding, play popular tunes, staying up *waaaaay* too late, eat New Year's Eve dinner at 5:00

AM. But mostly, I learned how it meant contributing your skills to your community.

It's been twenty years since age and a changing world transformed the 4Ks from popular dance band to fond memory, but that doesn't change five decades of history ... so come back with me to the beginning.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, millions of people left Europe in search of a better life, betting their future on a

mystical land called Canada. Thousands of those pioneers came from Estonia, and many of them settled in the newly minted province of Alberta. They cleared the bush on a homestead, built shelter, planted crops, survived that first bitter winter .... and created a community. It was a typically balmy Alberta day in January of 1910 when my grandparents, Jaan & Anette Kerbes, with their children John, Elizabeth and Rosanta (Rose), stepped off the train in Stettler (the next sibling - Elvine – wisely waited until that April to be born). On a homestead in the Wooded Hills district, not far from the Red Deer River west of Big Valley, this branch of the Kerbes family tree put down its roots and grew; the next child – Albert – arrived in February of 1912. The seven members of the family worked hard, and not much changed until the spring of 1922, when my dad, Elmer Kerbes, was born.

Canada was now well established. Automobiles were becoming common place. First nations families no longer turned up unexpectedly on the homestead;

electricity & running water were within reach, and maybe the fact that survival wasn't the first priority any more is why Elmer was encouraged to do something that his people had always valued and enjoyed.

Elmer made music. He sang, and he could coax a tune out of any instrument you put into his hands. Elmer was the kind of musician seen rarely in a generation; a great ear, a mechanical knack for the horn, the ability to charm the crowd with music ... and my dad, along with other members of his family, was at the heart of the community's music.

Before the 4Ks evolved, the Riverside Revelers were breaking musical trails; in the mid 1930's, Albert Kerbes on his C melody sax & drum, Carl Nicklom on a soprano sax and Beth Kerbes on piano played at Whetzel and Fenn Schools. It was fun, and it was a hobby. By that time twenty-something Albert was a farmer, his sister Beth was helping look after the chickens and the house and Elmer was staying with sister Elvine in Castor to finish high school, where he became smitten with the saxophone. And it was evident that he had more than a little musical skill.

It wasn't long before Bert & Elmer Kerbes, their cousin Helen Kerbes and friend and neighbour Charlie Klaus began to play together on a regular basis, and in the late 30s, the 4Ks Orchestra was officially born. In Erskine, Alberta, in December of 1939, an historic event occurred – the marriage of Cora Clark and Stanton Pooley was the first of hundreds of weddings to be celebrated by dancing to the music of the 4Ks.

In those early days, the 4Ks used to practice on Sunday afternoon. Charlie Klaus remembers more than one chilly hike over to Kerbes' farm. It was "only a mile," but making that hike through snow up to his knees sometimes made it seem a lot longer. But then there were those idyllic summers of a time long gone, when the highlight of any week was to go out to Buffalo Lake and dance the to 4Ks. Warm July air, a clear, starlit sky, water lapping softly at the shore ... which happened to be

right under the orchestra. Especially if it had been a rainy June. The group also played every two weeks on an open air stage at Content Bridge, and since in those days weddings weren't just on Saturdays, they might play three or four times a week in any one of the dozens of community halls in the region. Elmer would listen to new music, at a nickel a song, on the Wurlitzer - the pay-for play record player that had begun to appear even in small town cafes & restaurants. After hearing it a few times, he'd write the chords and lead line on a napkin and make the music happen at the next dance.

In 1950, a young school teacher, fresh out of Normal School, arrived in the Wooded Hills territory as a

temporary replacement. She boarded at a farm in the district, and became acquainted with the youngest member of the family. In 1954, Marguarite Gilday & Elmer Kerbes were married in a double ceremony with Albert Kerbes & Rose Nicklom ...and the 4Ks got a permanent pianist in the bargain.

Youthful exuberance prevailed, and there were many times when Elmer & Bert had to shovel snow while Marguarite drove the car through a drift blocking the road, because they had to play at a dance. Then they'd shovel again to get home, sometimes traveling through fields because road was impassable. The 4Ks'



*Elmer Kerbes playing two saxophones*

popularity continued to grow, and for decades they played all across the province, but most of their music was made in central Alberta. Certain occasions – New Years' Eve and Halloween, Sports Days for Elks, Valentines Day for the Royal Purple, Athletic Association Dance, the Ice Carnival – were special dates reserved for Big Valley. But in Erskine, Great Bend, Botha, Stettler, Castor, Rimbey, Red Willow, Rumsey, Trenville, Byemoor, Delburne, on Rochon Sands and the Farmer's Picnic at Buffalo Lake, at Carter's Hall, at graduation dances at Big Valley, Alix, Delburne, Stettler ... the 4Ks were on the stage, making the music that made dreams come true on the dance floor. The 4Ks orchestra became an important component of any

wedding celebration. Rituals evolved over the years .... traditions such as having the guests at a wedding dance form a circle around the bride and groom to sing "For they are Jolly Good Fellows" which was always followed by presentation of the money collected by passing the hat amongst the guests. Everyone was happy to contribute a dollar to help out the newlyweds, whether toward a honeymoon, or to help with the expenses of their new home.

The most popular venues for a 4Ks dance was always at the heart of the Estonian community ... Linda Hall. It was, and still is, a sturdy, practical facility which been upgraded many times over the years.

The 4Ks' other regular haunt of was Spinler's Hall in Big Valley ... and it was something else altogether. One of the most infamous dance halls in Central Alberta in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its main floor was a pool room, where the young men of the district wiled away the hours trying to sink a ball in the corner pocket. But more important to the social life of the region was the second floor dancehall.

Mom remembers New Years' Eve at Spinler's, when lunch was served at midnight at the restaurant up the street; by the time people got back to the hall - sometimes not until 2 am - they were ready to celebrate some more and had the energy to dance all night. But what everyone mostly remembers about Spinler's is its notoriously "springy" floor. The building was torn down years ago, but I have vague memories of being a little kid, at the back of the stage during a dance, falling asleep to a rhythmic vibration like a train or a ship ... but it was actually the floor shaking. In later years, poplar logs were propped up in the pool hall to support the dance floor - which made playing pool even more difficult, - one pool player reports that during a dance the pool balls danced on the tables whenever folks were dancing upstairs. My mom says they eventually had to stop playing the bunny hop due to concerns for public safety, and with a coal heater at either end of the hall, she had nightmares about the floor collapsing and the heaters and orchestra ending up on the top of a fiery heap.

The 4Ks was not made up exclusively of Kerbeses. Although Bert and Elmer and their saxophones were always the core of the orchestra, they always needed a drummer. Charlie Klaus, who bought a set of drums for the staggering sum of \$250, was the first, and was followed by Glen Viger, Sharon Nicklom and Dorothy Klaus. Helen (Kerbes) Mulligan was the first pianist, then Archie Kerbes and Lil Prudden took over until 1951, when Marguarite (Gilday) Kerbes joined the family ... and the orchestra. Any dance band worth its salt had a singer, and over the years the 4Ks had Helen Kerbes, Rudy Nicklom, Lillian Gabriel, Hal Kerbes and

Annette Kerbes at the microphone. Claude Blair from Delburne played trumpet with the group for a time, and Ross Annable sometimes played guitar.

Still, because Elmer & Marg & Bert were always there, the 4Ks and the Kerbes family became interchangeable over the years, and both the family & the orchestra were very active in the community. They hosted events such as the West Bonspiels and golf tournaments, they provided the sound equipment and announcements for Farmer's Union, Elks, Royal Purple and Legion events; they instigated and provided equipment for log sawing, nail pounding, horse shoes and rolling pin (Queen of 4 AM ) contests that were a big part of events such as the Legion Raft Race.

In 1966, another change came with the formation of a Community band in Big Valley. Calgarian Art Dee was the first conductor; Lloyd Harris took the reigns in 1968, and some of the 4Ks shared their talents. Dad took on the new challenge of playing the sousaphone, Mom learned saxophone and that's also when I first took up the trumpet. Annette joined three years later playing the clarinet, and the whole family traveled with this marching band to play in parades in Delia, Rocky Mountain House, Bashaw, Byemoor, Stettler and Red Deer. In 1974, the Community Band led the parade for Homecoming, then the Kerbeses quickly changed uniform so that the 4Ks Orchestra could play at the end of the parade. Marguarite Kerbes eventually became the Band Director, and Big Valley's Community Marching band continued to be a source of pride for many years. During that period Mom (Marguarite) also taught piano lessons and classroom music, and of her students during that twenty five years continued their music as teachers or performers, winning top honors at Stettler and Drumheller Music Festivals.

Annette & I came very late to the 4Ks, and in the scope of 50 years of music-making, our time was a relative drop in the bucket. But I still remember looking up at the stars through the unfinished roof of the Big Valley's Jubilee Hall in 1964 as the 4Ks prepared to play. I remember that first New Year's Eve dance I played ... being handed a crisp \$10 bill for playing from 8:00 until about three in the morning. I remember playing "second generation" wedding dances, and of course the group played 25<sup>th</sup> anniversaries for many folks who'd had the 4Ks at their wedding - in a couple of cases they even played 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries. As the crowds waltzed and schottised and butterflied to their music, the 4Ks saw many a romance blossom on the dance floor ... and maybe one or two that ended there as well.

But time passes. Things change. My sister and I both moved away from the area long ago. Annette studied music for a time in Calgary, but then discovered her interest in things technical and went to NAIT. She has

called Edmonton home for many years now; she and her husband, Michael Berry, both work for Dow Chemical. They volunteer for their community and their church and keep very busy getting 8 year old Alexander to gymnastics and music lessons and hockey and tap class.

I've been in Calgary since 1974, and have spent most of the last thirty years working in theatre; my wife (Kathryn) and I have a theatre company, we work in film & TV and on stage and produce interactive mystery dinner theatre. Our eldest daughter, Sarah, just finished her third year in the Drama department at the University of Victoria. Our 14 year old, Hannah, plays violin and studies voice, and was able to go with me to New York this past winter .... fuelling her conviction that she belongs on Broadway.

And the 4Ks? ... with us kids gone, and with the original members of the group growing older, the charm of loading up a car full of gear and heading out to play a dance till all hours of the night began to pale. The 4Ks played their last wedding dance – for Alfred and Joyce Klaus - at Linda Hall in 1981; from that time on, their music making became less and less frequent.

Many of original 4Ks are gone now. My dad passed away in 2001 and Uncle Bert has been gone since January of 2004. Mom is now happily ensconced in her condo in Stettler.

The farm where the music of the 4Ks took root is quiet & still; in many places saplings and grass are covering the evidence of a century's labors, and the last piano on the place probably hasn't had a note played in a couple of decades.

But the music of the 4Ks lives on ... every time my nephew, Alexander, plays piano for me, I hear his grandfather's songs. Every time my daughters sing, I'm reminded of the times my sister & I shared the microphone for a duet.

And in that funny way life has of coming full circle ... these days I spend every other summer weekend in Big Valley. Our company produces mysteries & musicals in association with the Alberta Prairie Rail Excursions. For the past couple of years, my daughter Sarah has been a member of the troupe, as we carry on the tradition of making music, entertaining tourists who come for the thrill of an old-fashioned train experience ...

...very much like the one that brought my grandparents to this little corner of the prairie almost a century ago.

Hal Kerbes

## Estonian Factoids

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### **Did you know that:**

The Estonian language is closely related to Finnish, and more remotely to Hungarian. It is not a Romance, Slavic or Germanic language. Estonia has had one of the highest literacy rates of the planet over the past 150 years.

**Estonia is one of the world's smallest cultural languages to include contemporary terminology for all major fields of life.**

### **Did you know that:**

Estonia is larger than

- Denmark
- Switzerland
- Holland
- Belgium
- Iceland
- Albania

5/6 of Estonia's border is water.

**Estonia is rising and Finland is sinking. The slab of earth upon which Finland sits, is slowly slipping under the slab of earth that forms Estonia. The rate of the rise is approximately 2 to 3 mm. per year.**

## John Pihooja: A man with a wanderlust

Ralph Pihooja

A young Estonian man has been touring the Chinese city of Peking and has inadvertently wandered into the Forbidden City. He is arrested and taken away for questioning - an interrogation that must have been fruitless since the young man spoke only a few words of Chinese and the Chinese did not speak Estonian. Somehow he made an escape and continued on his adventures while traveling around the world. True story or family legend?



The Forbidden City, Beijing

This is the dilemma facing the young man's descendants when attempting to piece together a cohesive timeline of the man's life and adventures. The young man in question, John Pihooja, kept no journal of his travels and only a few faded postcards with almost illegible messages exist from that time. The stories have been preserved through oral retelling; and even though dates and details are sketchy, they still provide a glimpse of the world in the early twentieth century and the life of a restless young man before he settled down to become one of Alberta's early Estonian pioneers.

Born to Peeter and Liiso Pihooja of Võru, Estonia in 1892, Juhan Pihooja was the youngest son in the family of six

boys and two girls. At this time Russia controlled Estonia, they taxed the peasants on their small farms, established the Russian language as the official language, and conscripted young Estonian men into the Russian army. One by one upon their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Juhan's older brothers served time in the Russian army. In 1905 Juhan's eldest brother August emigrated to Canada with his wife and infant daughter to join their friends Henry Kingsep and a small community of Estonian settlers who



John Pihooja, 1892-1976

were homesteading west of Red Deer, Alberta. This provided the young Juhan with a contact when he later embarked on his travel adventures.

In 1912 19-year-old Juhan and his 26-year-old brother Karl, second youngest son in the family, arrived in the Gilby-Medicine River area of Alberta where their brother August was farming. Postcards from Estonia were sent to Juhan, care of the Gilby Post Office, so we know he was in the area at the time. In today's age of jet planes, freeways and controlled border crossings it is difficult to visualize a time in North America when crossing borders was easy, citizenship wasn't challenged, and travel was by boat, train or horse. But that seems to be the case when tracing the series of postcards sent between John, Karl and their family and friends in this early time.



John Pihooja, Oscar Ossul,  
Karl Huul, Karl Pihooja

By May 1913, postcards from Estonia were addressed to John in Red Deer, where he was working in a sawmill. The young man's restless nature was showing, for later that year John received a postcard at a Pender Street address in Vancouver from his friend Eduard Wirro in Coquitlam, B.C. Edward complained of the rainy weather but asked John to look out for a job for him in the city if one came by. John was

working in the logging industry then. One of the mills he worked at for was located where Gastown is situated today. Hastings Street was the main skid line for the mules that pulled the logs over greased corduroys. By the next summer John returned to the Gilby-Medicine River area and appeared ready to become a homesteader as he and his friend Carl Huul acquired land in an area known as Risulas (a very desolate and uninhabited area). A year later John's friend Eduard wrote from Anaconda, Montana where he was working in a copper smelter making \$3.25 in an eight hour shift. This news eventually encouraged John, his brother Karl, and their Estonian friends Carl Huul and Oscar Ossul to join Eduard in Montana. Throughout 1916 they variously worked at the Anaconda smelter and copper mine in Butte. At this time Canada was involved in World War I, but the United States had not yet entered the war so there appeared to be lots of work for the young men. It was very hot and dangerous working in the mine. John recalled how one of the underground walls collapsed and struck the carbide lamp he was carrying. But the Estonian bachelors had a lively social life as their postcards mentioned Butte's many amusements and dancing half the night with pretty girls, and John played in the Butte Orchestra. In 1917 there was a strike at the Butte mine and John returned to Red Deer while his brother moved to Vancouver. By May of the following year, John was in Vancouver but planned to travel by boat with Oscar to Seattle, Washington to meet Karl at the harbor. It is believed that this is when John and Karl embarked on their working tour around the world, although it is possible they may have done some traveling through Finland and Siberia



prior to arriving in Alberta in 1912. The only existing postcard from this time, dated September 1920, is to John in Shanghai from Karl in Hong Kong in which Karl urges John to come to Hong Kong quickly as there is a Chinese boat that will be sailing soon.



Sailing Under the Japanese Flag,  
S.S. Atsuta Maru, 7974 Tons.

Without specific dates or the precise chronological order that these travels occurred, we have only an oral history of the early twentieth century trip around the world and personal experiences of John Pihooja. He has told of crossing Russia along the Siberian railway and working from Vladivostok with the summer fishing fleet. He visited Japan where he experienced a high scale earthquake, which he said was like walking on jelly.

In Peking he saw the Forbidden City and in Shanghai he received the urgent postcard from Karl. Why and when they were separated is unknown. Other places he traveled to and worked were Hong Kong, Haiphong, Vietnam, Singapore, Colombia and Ceylon. In Ceylon he worked on the rubber trees and in logging operations where elephants were used to skid the logs. John recalled getting along very well with the twelve-year-old elephant and the mahout (elephant handler).

Postcards in Hong Kong and Ceylon were printed in English and postcards in Haiphong were printed in French. In all John sailed under the British, Norwegian, Swedish, and Japanese flags. From here details are sketchy. We know



Logging in Ceylon

he survived the treacherous journey around Cape Horn and at sometime the two brothers ended up back in Estonia where in 1922 John married 18-year-old Wanda Schlack, who had fled from Bolshevik Russia.



John and Wanda, 1922

In July 1922 the two newlyweds left Tallinn, Estonia and sailed on the R.M.S Empress of France to arrive in Quebec, Canada the following month. From there they traveled by C.P.R to Eckville Alberta. Because of the Canadian rules for homesteading and because John had abandoned his early homestead in the Risulas area, John and Wanda had to buy a new farmstead. After staying with Estonian friends in the area, they bought their own land at Wood Lake, northwest of Eckville and became early Alberta farmers. Their only son, Ralph was born in 1923. The farm on the shores of Wood Lake was a scene of many festivities and annual celebrations.

Foremost was the festival of “Jaanipäev” in which everyone would drink, dance and sing around the bonfire. For some weeks before, timber and material was gathered to make a huge pile. Then on June 23<sup>rd</sup> it was set ablaze. It was said that the flames were visible from as far away as Medicine Hills. The second activity of the summer was the annual Fish Soup Festival. Nets were cast the evening before and the bounty, along with milk, potatoes and onions was prepared in large cauldrons. On one occasion the Raabis family’s new Oldsmobile sedan’s engine burst into flames. A few ingenious souls lifted the huge cauldron of soup and threw it on the burning motor. That quick action saved the car, however, the aroma lingered on for quite a while. In the winter months the Lake was the scene for many skating parties. John and Wanda opened their home for skaters to warm up and to tend to small scrapes and bruises.



Winter in Eckville

As the farm was midway from Eckville and the homes of many travelers from the northwest, it was a haven for travelers to warm up in the winter and have nourishment. At times John also repaired broken harnesses or fixed loose horseshoes. John and Wanda also were active in the Estonian drama group’s annual production in the Estonian Hall, consisting of three act plays which played to a full house. It was sometimes necessary to travel ten to twelve miles in sub-zero temperatures to rehearse in individual homes.

John and Wanda retired from farming in the mid-fifties and moved into the village of Eckville. Purchasing the Eckville Billiard Hall, John became known as a friendly pool hall operator. In 1968 they joined their son Ralph and family in the warmer climes of Oliver, B.C. John’s beloved wife died in 1974 after battling cancer for months. John suffered a stroke while living with his family in Penticton, B.C. and passed away in 1976. Both are buried in Oliver, B.C.

Credits: Liz Tardie

## The elder Kerbes Brothers – Part 3 (Sons of Peter Kerbes)

Gwen Hall

In 1931 August Kerbes bought land north of Wooded Hills School, near the Red Deer River. While he was building his house and corrals, he lived with Alex and Riina Krisbi who farmed two miles away. There he met their daughter Lilly. August and Lilly were married in 1933; they had five children: Charlotte (died in a house fire), Gwen, Robert, Richard and Rose.



August and Lilly Kerbes Family in 1961. L to R (Front) Lilly, August; L to R (Standing): Richard, Robert, Rose and Gwen.

August and Lilly had to rebuild their house after a disastrous fire. They endured much hardship and had to live off the land. August, who was a skilled hunter, provided a steady supply of deer, rabbit, grouse and wild ducks. In addition, he trapped muskrats and weasels to supplement his farming income.

August enjoyed playing his guitar while visiting friends, and sang songs he learned while working in the U.S.A. In 1942, he and his family moved closer to Wooded Hills School to make it more convenient for the children to attend

school. They attended High School in Big Valley.

Gwen received a R.N Degree at the Calgary General Hospital in 1957. She married Bill Snyder the same year and they had three children: Dan, Grace and Jason. She divorced Bill and married Ernie Hall of Gibbons, Alberta in 1970. They continued farming until 1980 when the couple moved to their current home near Boyle, Alberta. Gwen worked at various hospitals from 1953 to 1988.

Robert was born prematurely on the farm and was kept warm in a shoe box on the door of a wood stove. He farmed in the Stettler area while working part-time on oil rigs. Following his marriage to Carol Holtz in 1966, they had four children: Stanley, Jeffrey, Corina and Lana Mae.

Richard was born at home during a blizzard, with neighbor Pauline Nicklom acting as midwife. He graduated from the University of Alberta with a Zoology degree in 1965 and joined the Canadian Wildlife Service. His studies of wild geese (Snow, Ross, White-fronted, Canada) took him on many expeditions to the northern breeding grounds of these birds. His work with geese enabled him to travel to many countries and resulted in the publication of several books and research papers. His studies serve as a basis for decision-making about the effects of high Snow goose populations on the fragile northern environment.

Rose married Bob Silverthorn in 1967 and they have three children: Randolph, Bartlett and Cindy. Bob taught at NAIT in Edmonton while Rose worked at the Petroleum Club. They have retired to Ohaton, Alberta.

# Rhythmic Gymnastics

## An Estonian contribution to Canadian culture

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

Over the last hundred and some years, several waves of Estonian immigrants have arrived in Canada. Each wave brought a variety of skills and contributions to make Canada what it is today. One of those contributions has been Rhythmic Gymnastics.

The female sport of rhythmic gymnastics started in Europe during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Estonians seemed to take to it naturally.

coordination with the music and coordination with other gymnasts in the group. It can be a participation and/or performance activity. Rhythmic gymnastics is practiced at all skill levels from beginner to elite. Because the movements are "natural", rhythmic gymnastics is suitable for all ages from 4 to adults. In other words, it is a life long sport. Often girls who give up rhythmic gymnastics in their teens, return to it as adult gymnasts at a later stage in their lives.

When a large group gymnastics display was first



NorGlen Rhythmic Gymnastics Club "Retro Stars", 2004

What is rhythmic gymnastics?

It is a fun way to move to music using hand apparatus such as a ball, hoop, scarf, skipping rope, long ribbon on a stick and other items. The flowing skills are based on natural body movements. A unique feature is that a stretch phase and relax phase are built into many skills, including those using balls, hoops and other hand apparatus. Several levels of coordination are developed in the course of learning this sport: coordination between various parts of the body, coordination between the body and the hand held apparatus,

proposed in Estonia early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, school girls and young women spontaneously joined the rehearsals all over the country in fields and whatever green space was available. This style of physical activity seemed to suit the Estonian soul. Physical education training for teachers and coaches included the types of movement skills used in this non-competitive sport and led to many mass displays in outdoor stadiums. This tradition continues today as part of the famous Song Festival, held every four years in Tallinn.

When politics and war in the 1940's caused over 100,000 Estonians to escape from their homeland, they took their love of rhythmic gymnastics with them. In particular, Ernst Idla established a training centre in Stockholm, Sweden shortly after the war (thousands of Estonians became war refugees in Sweden as it gradually became clear to them that going back to their homeland was not an option if they valued their lives). Hundreds of Estonian women and girls of all ages took Ernst Idla's training and participated in Lingiads and other major mass performances in Sweden. One of his daughters continues to operate the Idla Centre in Stockholm today.

Several of his students took Ernst Idla's training extra seriously and began rhythmic gymnastics clubs elsewhere as they moved away from Stockholm.

One of them is Evelyn Koop who established the Kalev-Estienne School of Rhythmic Gymnastics in Toronto in 1960. Her elite gymnasts have performed at major Ontario-wide functions. They gave a command performance for Queen Elizabeth during her 1968 visit to Canada. Kalev-Estienne in turn has spawned many rhythmic gymnastics coaches who have taken the sport to other parts of Canada where they have gone to live. This club continues as a leader in the field of Canadian non-competitive rhythmic gymnastics.

Evelyn Koop founded the Ontario Rhythmic Gymnastics Federation and the Canadian Rhythmic Gymnastics Federation, being president for a number of years. For several decades, a number of Estonians were prominent on the executive of both organizations as other Canadians began to see the benefits, beauty and challenges of this style of gymnastics, and joined the clubs as well as the executive of these types of organizations.

Another major Estonian-led rhythmic gymnastics club in Toronto was operated by Helene Tiidus until her retirement in the 1970's.

In 1979, Annely Riga arrived in Toronto directly from Estonia and established the Ritmika club, which just celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. It is also one of the Canadian leaders in this type of sport. Annely has organized a National Gymnastrada and numerous other display events and has served on various Boards.

As the sport of rhythmic gymnastics evolved, a competitive branch was established internationally and gained Olympic Games status in 1984. The first ever

winner of an Olympic gold medal in competitive rhythmic gymnastics was Lori Fung of Vancouver, whose main coach was an Estonian, Mall Vesik. Competitive rhythmic gymnastics is restricted to the use of five International Gymnastics Federation approved apparatus: ball, hoop, ribbon, skipping rope and clubs, and involves extreme flexibility, high leaps and speedy apparatus handling. Standard competition is done individually or in groups of five.

Another student of Ernst Idla's, Leida Leesment, established the non-competitive Malmö Flickorna (Malmö Girls) in southern Sweden. That club is a world leader in the field and receives support from the Swedish government which often asks the elite performing team to represent Sweden as performers and informal ambassadors at international events. The Malmö Flickorna pioneered the technique of using two-balls and three balls while maintaining various body movements. The organization is now operated by Leida's daughter Tiina. Another daughter, Reet, introduced two-ball and three-ball skills to Canadians when she first immigrated to Ontario in the 1960's.

Other clubs, led by Estonians, have flourished for short times in various parts of Canada from Montreal to Vancouver. In many cases, Estonians developed new coaches all over this country by volunteering on provincial federation executives, conducting coaching workshops, providing coaching apprenticeship programs and preparing or contributing to manuals and video-tapes about the sport. Of course, rhythmic gymnastics leaders originating from other countries have also played major roles in developing this sport in Canada, but Estonians were the initiators and were prominent in the 1960's through the 1980's.

In Calgary, Helgi Leesment is currently the Ladies Group coach at the NorGlen Rhythmic Gymnastics Club which she co-founded 25 years ago.

Alberta has several rhythmic gymnastics clubs, both competitive and non-competitive. If anyone is interested in joining one or starting one, contact:

Rhythmic Gymnastics Alberta  
11759 Groat Road, 3rd Floor,  
Edmonton, AB T5M 3K6  
Phone: 780-427-8152: Toll Free in Alberta: 1-800-881-2504  
Web Site: [www.rgalberta.com](http://www.rgalberta.com)  
Email: [rga@rgalberta.co](mailto:rga@rgalberta.co)

# Celebrating 104 Years

## Game thrills birthday gal

### Juniors' win makes her day

By TODD SAELHOF  
Calgary Sun

It's one thing to live to the ripe old age of 104, but quite another to get exactly what you want for such a milestone.

Margarete Paasuke was all smiles yesterday for more reasons than just celebrating her birthday with 83 close friends and family at The Manor Village Life Centre.

"Mother is particularly happy because the Canadian junior hockey team won," Tom Paasuke said of his mom's wish fulfilled a night earlier by Canada's young stars.

"Oh yes ... I was so delighted they beat those Russians," said the birthday gal.

Then came yesterday's celebration especially for Paasuke.

The seniors centre's dining room was decorated, and her arrival met with song, a cake, a violinist and speeches.

"It is maybe too much for an old person like me," she said.

Paasuke is a native of Estonia and endured a difficult life that continued even after she immigrated to Montreal in 1948.

"I never dreamed I would live this long after all those unhappy days," said Paasuke, whose 62-year-old son believes caring for others kept her going all these years.

"First of all, I had to live for my sons because my husband died (in 1951) when they were eight and 10."

She also helped her relatives in Estonia when it belonged to the Soviet Union and bought her folks a farm to retire on.

Adhering to a daily regimen of walking at least 500 steps — despite bad knees — has also helped her longevity.

These days, it's hockey — especially the Canadiens and Flames — that helps keep her going.

**"I never dreamed I would live this long."**

— Margarete Paasuke,  
104 years old

todd.saelhof@calgarysun.com



— KEVIN UDAHL, Calgary Sun

**IT'S A SLICE ...** Margarete Paasuke slices the cake for friends and relatives as she celebrates her 104th birthday at The Manor Village Life Centre yesterday. She was also glad Canada won the junior hockey title.

Alberta's Estonian community congratulates Margarete Paasuke on the extra special occasion of her 104<sup>th</sup> birthday!  
We share in the joy and celebration of a long life, young at heart.

## Celebration of Andreas Pilts' 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday

On March 12, 2005, a birthday luncheon was held to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Andreas Pilts. Friends gathered to congratulate him and pay tribute to a wonderful person who has given decades of leadership to the Edmonton Estonian community. Also in attendance were out-of-town guests from Seattle, Eckville and Canmore. Treasured memories, some spanning more than 50 years of friendship, were recalled on this special day.



*Andreas Pilts accepting gifts and sharing lasting memories of a long life.*



**Back row, L to R:** Toomas Pääsuke (Canmore), Anne-Marie Hodes, Helmut Langeste, Tina Matiisen (Eckville), Laine Sastok, Külliva DeElespp, Eda McClung, Betty Ann Kiil. **Front row, L to R:** Dave Kiil, Shirley and Andreas Pilts, Epp Liikane (Seattle)

### In memory of Eugene Pastewka, 1916-2005



The Alberta Estonian community extends its heartfelt sympathy to Astrid Pastewka, son Peter and family, on the death of their husband and father, Eugene.

Throughout the 1950s and onward, friends from Estonia, Poland and other 'new Canadians' in Edmonton helped Astrid and Eugene build their lives and pursue their dreams. The Edmonton Estonian Society gratefully acknowledges their support for over 50 years.



**'Little Ellie'**

A sixth-generation descendant of Estonian settlers to Barons is shown behind a commemorative plaque unveiled at the Barons Cemetery in August 2004.

# OPINION FROM ESTONIA

## DEPENDENCY DISORDERS IN INDEPENDENT ESTONIA

Anti Liiv

Estonian psychiatrist

**What about alcohol and illicit drug problems in Estonia in 2005? A brief answer would be: it reflects the cultural history of Estonia (population 1.3 million).**

Up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the most important agent of pleasure for Estonian consumers was alcohol. Over the last five centuries the favourite was beer. When at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century some hundred miles from Estonian border a new capital of Russia (St. Petersburg) was built, the new Russian elite consumed so much vodka, that the Baltic (German) lords in local manors understood possible good business to sell many oak barrels of vodka in this enormous market. With this idea of vodka-business the development of modern Estonian market-economy started. However, it pushed the Estonian farmer to also steal more and more vodka for himself. The consumption of alcohol (alcohol production and selling was state monopoly at that time) was quite low in Estonia – at the end of 1930s only 3.0 litres of absolute alcohol per person per year.



A typical village pub in Estonia during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, serving about 1000 peasant farmers.

### After WWII

The situation changed after WWII. Russian occupation-government in Estonia increased alcohol selling and did it with low prices. Step by step Estonians started to drink more, parallel to the immigration of Russian-speaking workers to Estonia (Russian speaking migration was mainly to big towns in the northern part of Estonia – Narva, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe, Paldiski, Tallinn; to the rural areas it was minimal). In 1982 the alcohol consumption was 11.2 litres of absolute alcohol annually/per person. The Estonian state registered 26,000 alcohol dependent persons – about 2% of Estonian population at that time. The consumption of illegal drugs was not worth mentioning - about 0.02% (or ca 260 persons).

### Re-independent Estonia in 1990s

When re-independence was established in Estonia (1991), the state monopoly of alcohol production and selling came to an end. The alcohol market became very liberal. Also the background of data-collecting totally changed. According to the new-style data-collecting, the alcohol consumption is approximately 50% lower. But the locals can tell how many new bars and pubs have been opened during last 15 years, how many adults have become hard-drinkers, and how much family violence has risen during the last 10 years. Also, the state register of alcoholics was discontinued, so it is hard to determine how large the alcohol dependent part of the population in Estonia in 2005 actually is.

### New phenomenon – large illicit drug consumption in Estonia

In 1990s a new phenomenon in Estonia started, namely illicit drug consumption. It started and is still rising among teenagers and young adults up to 30 years of age. If in 1980 this phenomenon was totally unknown, in 2005 Estonian students opinion is: the smoking of cannabis is very normal, safe and common in Estonian life. Also it is quite common to have the opinion that cannabis must be legalised in Estonia in the coming years. Probably in 10 years it will be an acute political problem in Estonia. Perhaps 10-20% of students from different schools already have their own experience smoking cannabis. At the same time – it is more common in town schools than in rural schools. It is a common opinion among students of the urban schools, that it is very easy to buy cannabis.

After the cannabis (as gateway) they often consume other illegal drugs.

### Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking people consume different illicit drugs

Attitudes toward consumption of illicit drugs are different among Estonian and Russian speaking parts of the population. The Russian-speaking part is apt to use heroin as the next step, but the Estonian-speaking population uses more amphetamines. Cocaine is also used in Estonia, more among 20 to 35 year-olds “the bold and beautiful” people. If we want to compare, the prices of illicit drugs on the Estonian black-market are significantly lower than they are in Canada or USA.

In the northern part of Estonia (Narva, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe, Paldiski, Tallinn) the older generation (40-70 years old) of Russian-speaking population often



consumes illegal alcohol (it is sometimes expected that up to ¼ to 1/3 of alcohol consumed in Estonia is illegal), which has a local Russian nickname “samagon” (moonlight), but for local authorities it is known as an old problem and not as horrible as intravenous heroin consumption.

### **HIV as complication**

An arising problem is the complication of IV heroin consumption – HIV. It started as a problem in early 1990s in Estonia among gays, but in late 1990s it was already mainly as the problem of IV heroin consumers (According USA World Almanac 2005 p. 89 there are 7800 HIV+ adult persons in Estonia, or 1.1% of the adult population). The social workers in Estonia every year provide free of charge thousands of new clean syringes and condoms for IV illicit drug consumers. Also social workers are providing more and more free methadone for heroin-dependent persons.

### **13 000 heroin dependent persons**

It is expected that by 2005 there will be about 13 000 (1% of population) heroin-dependent persons in Estonia, apart from amphetamine and cocaine dependent persons. Also, it is quite common in Estonia that a dependent person is consuming all he/she can pick up (from alcohol and cannabis to heroin). Due to the lack of a state register, nobody knows the real numbers of dependent persons. Information about their social background is not known (what was their social status before they started to use illicit drugs and pick up HIV).

### **Marriage is collapsing**

The situation has also become more difficult because the former role of family is diminishing: official marriage has become unpopular during last 15 years – more and more young couples prefer to live together some years and then change their partner. Even the students of the secondary schools (age 16 to 18) live together and the first sexual activity often starts at the age of 10 to 15. Members of the same age group also have their first experience with illicit drugs, so it is having far-reaching effects on increased HIV risk. At the same time, we cannot forget that, in Estonia, the birth-rate is negative: the Estonian local population is diminishing (-0.35% per year) and in forthcoming years Estonia must

probably increase immigration in order to support Estonia’s weakening labour force. But this negative immigration (in 2020-2040) will trigger their own new social problems and complications.

To conclude, Estonia has fulfilled her first three most important dreams: re-established independence and, in a short time of development, became a member of EU and NATO. Now it is suffering from a national identity crisis: what will be the next reason to unite the nation? If it is only money, then we pick up lot of social problems as well.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Anti Liiv (b. 1946) was born and raised on the island of Saaremaa. He graduated from Tartu University first as a physician, then as a psychologist. He is working as a psychiatrist on the island of Saaremaa and in Tallinn. He has published more than 500 articles, mainly in the area of mental health. He introduced AA in Estonia in 1987, and Parents against Drugs in 1992. Now he is working as psychiatrist in the Anti Liew & Soul Care Foundation.

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# Moscow Signs Border Agreement with Estonia

VLADIMIR SOCOR

Jamestown, *Friday, May 20, 2005*

Russia-Estonia border formally resolved. On May 18 in Moscow, Ministers of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov and Urmas Paet signed a long-awaited agreement on the Russia-Estonia border. The agreement had been initialed in 1996 and reconfirmed in 1999, its content fully approved by the Russian side in all details. However, Russia stonewalled the signing, as it did on the Russia-Latvia agreement. Moscow miscalculated that the absence of border agreements could impede those countries' admission to NATO and the European Union. It also sought changes to Estonia's and Latvia's legislation on language and citizenship as a price for Russia's signature on the border agreements. The situation changed fundamentally with the Baltic states' accession to NATO and the EU in 2004, when the Estonia-Russia and Latvia-Russia borders became part of the EU-Russia border.

Last month, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally consented to sign the border agreement with Latvia as part of a complex set of unacknowledged linkages, involving the Latvian president's attendance at the World War II victory anniversary celebrations in Moscow on May 9 and the EU-Russia summit on May 10. Russia continued stonewalling on the border treaty with Estonia (whose president declined to attend the Moscow celebrations). However, when the Latvian government attached an interpretative declaration to its treaty with Russia on April 29, Moscow reacted by refusing to sign that treaty, and unexpectedly inviting Estonia to sign the border treaty with Russia on May 18.

Moscow's move is triply significant: First, as a bow to the inevitable in terms of Russia-EU relations; second, as an attempt at wedge-drawing between Baltic states, trying to isolate Latvia; and, third, as an indication that Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has become entangled in its own maneuvers, unable to control the dynamic of events.

The U.S. State Department, the EU's Foreign and Security Policy chief Javier Solana, and External Relations Commissioner Bettina Ferrero-Waldner, and other authorities have welcomed the treaty signing, urged speedy ratification by the Russian and Estonian parliaments, and called for the signing of the Russia-Latvia border treaty as well, in the interests of Russia's relations with its Baltic neighbors and the West.

The Estonia-Russia agreement consists of two documents, defining the border on land and in the Narva estuary and Gulf of Finland, respectively. Under the agreement, Russia obtains confirmation of its possession of two areas that were taken from Estonia and attached to the Russian SFSR during the occupation era: the town and environs of Iaanilinn (Ivangorod, opposite Narva) and the district of Petseri (Pechery, now in Pskov region). These areas made up 5% of Estonia's territory prior to the occupation. Partly

because of this issue, Moscow ruled out from the border agreement any reference to the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty, which had recognized Estonia's territorial integrity within the borders that included Iaanilinn and Petseri.

Today's border divides the Setu people, a rural group closely related to Estonians ethnically and linguistically. Estonia is applying to UNESCO to include the Setu cultural heritage on both sides of today's border on the



Cultural Heritage List and offering to develop the area's tourism potential. The Estonian government is offering to help Setu residents from the Russian side willing to relocate to the Estonian side of the border.

President Arnold Ruutel, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Paet, former president Lennart Meri, and most Estonian party leaders are calling for undelayed parliamentary ratification of the border agreement. Some political leaders, as well as Setu representatives, however, propose the adoption of an interpretative declaration that would refer to the Tartu Peace Treaty. This -- like the 1920 Riga Treaty in Latvia's case -- is a cornerstone of the state's legal continuity and, implicitly, of its territorial integrity as then constituted. It was mainly for these reasons that Moscow ruled out references to these Treaties from the border agreements with Estonia and Latvia. In that situation, Latvia apparently had no choice but to attach its interpretative declaration, in compliance with the Latvian constitution.

In what Moscow apparently deems a goodwill gesture, Lavrov no longer rules out the return of an Estonian state symbol, seized in 1940 and kept in the Kremlin: the presidential necklace and badge, worn by President Konstantin Pats, who died in a Soviet prison. Under Estonian law, presidents hand over that regalia to their successors. Meanwhile, Lavrov explicitly refused on May 18 the return of the renowned collections of Estonia's Tartu University, which were carted off by Russian forces during the First World War. The items were subsequently stored in the Soviet Union and are now in the provincial museum of Voronezh. The Estonians have since 1992 sought the return of those collections.

# The Estonian Biographical Centre

Fred Puss

Two-thirds of all users of archival material are interested in the lives of their own ancestors. Genealogy is a hobby that has become popular all over the world.

Each family historian starts looking for old documents and photos at home that have been preserved, and consults with living relatives to obtain additional information. In many instances, the research ends with the collection and preservation of this material for future generations.

However, the knowledge of family members may be incomplete and some facts may not have been passed on from generation to generation. Then one has to turn to the archives

Estonian archival materials have been preserved quite well. Recent materials are more abundant than ancient records. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to church books and soul revision lists, there are also commune and court records, and materials about school and military matters. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is very rich with records, especially the independence period. From 1920s and 1930s we can use tax declarations, service files, school records, photos on applications and questionnaires, etc. It is possible to find out how a certain city apartment looked like back then – how much space it had (numbers of rooms and windows), rental rates, when electricity was introduced, to name a few. The Soviet period provides interesting materials, but on a limited scale. From the 1940s, thousands of files reflect the lives of repressed persons. Many materials from that time are in Russian.

Researching of archival material takes a lot of time. For that reason most amateur researchers quit after getting basic information about names and birth-marriage-death data. Sometimes the search for even such basic

information presents a challenge. Depending on the period of interest, it might be necessary to know when and where the children died in order to find out when and where the parents were born. It is much more important to know the place when something happened rather than the exact date.

Many amateur researchers do not take advantage of all the information in the archival documents. Besides names and dates, there might be information about living quarters, professions, religions, or relocations. To fully use the document one has to know why it was created and used (certainly not for present historians!) and how to interpret the facts. Knowledge of Russian, German and Gothic handwriting is most helpful.

The Estonian Biographical Center employs historians with university degrees who specialize in genealogy. With the help of our professionals one can find a considerable amount of information even within a few working hours. Of course, it depends on a region, religion (it is a little more difficult to find information about families of the Russian Orthodox persuasion), profession of the family, and other circumstances. If you wish to find information about your ancestors and relatives, then the Estonian Biographical Center is at your service!

Estonian Biographical Center

Tüügi 10-51

51003 Tartu, Estonia

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Editor's note: Mr. Puss has informed us that he charges an hourly fee of \$14.97 for genealogical research.

## On how to find your Estonian relatives

Ain Dave Kiil

The lives of tens of thousands of Estonians have been disrupted by invasions, migration, war, deportation, and mobilization. Families have been forcefully uprooted, whereas others chose to leave their ancestral homes to avoid living under foreign rulers. It is therefore little wonder that the descendants of these people are curious about their forefathers.

For me, a nostalgic visit to the family's ancestral farm on Saaremaa in 1992 kindled an interest in my genetic and cultural roots. Until the late 1990s, progress was very slow and limited to information about my immediate family. It was only after I inadvertently found that microfilm records of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church were available through the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City that the scope of my research escalated. This source of information, reinforced with access to Estonian archival documents in Tartu, Tallinn, Kuressaare and Kihelkonna, helped me to assemble a computer-based data base of several thousand relatives.

For budding genealogists, there are two main avenues to pursue. The first approach is described in this issue of AJAKAJA by Fred Puss of the Estonian Biographical Centre (<http://www.isik.ee>, [info@isik.ee](mailto:info@isik.ee)). Perhaps the main advantage of this approach is that professional genealogists are aware of the available archival materials and therefore able to zero in on relevant information in a short period of time. Handwritten archival records may be in Russian, German, Estonian and even Gothic, and present quite a challenge for the neophyte family historian.

The other approach, whereby you do your own research, is also feasible owing to the wealth of material now available on the

Internet. A new website <http://www.eha.ee/saaga/>, launched in May of this year, contains many of the archives of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and provides access to a wealth of information. The website is in Estonian but will likely have an English version soon. After opening the website, the user will be asked to register by inserting a User Name and a Password.

The archives are listed by the name of the congregation (kogudus) of interest. Once you open the data base for a particular congregation, you have access to listings of family names and groupings, births, names of godparents, deaths, christenings, marriages, and other information. Generally, the church/census information prior to about 1890 is in German, between 1890-1918 in Russian, and in Estonian during the first Estonian Independence period from 1918 to the early 1940s. The same type of information can be ordered on microfilm through the Family History Centers of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Microfilm readers and computers are available on site.

The following websites (in English) also provide valuable information about Estonian genealogy:

1) Archival Information System (AIS) : <http://ais.ra.ee>;

2) Estonian Genealogical Society and links: [www.genealogia.ee/English/english.html](http://www.genealogia.ee/English/english.html)

Note:

Should there be enough interest, we might consider holding a workshop, or set up a "genealogy support group" to assist us in tracing our Estonian ancestors. Feedback is welcome.

My e-mail address is: [adkiil@telusplanet.net](mailto:adkiil@telusplanet.net)

## Circumnavigator Ahto Walter

Helmut Langeste



Ahto Walter in  
1930-s

The first sailboat that made a trip around the globe under the Estonian flag was a ketch called "Ahto" and it was named after its skipper Ahto Walter. In the book titled "Circumnavigators", which is about small-boat voyagers of modern time, the author Donald Holm calls him "one of the least known and most resourceful of blue-water sailors". Sailing with yachts across the ocean seems to have been Ahto Walter's vocation, I wonder if he ever did anything else.

He was born into a seafaring family on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1912 in a coastal town named Heinaste near the Latvian border. His father was a sailboat era merchant-marine captain and his brothers were sailors as well. After finishing elementary school in Tallinn he was a deck's boy on a four-mast sail ship and then studied seamanship at the now nonexistent navigation school in Käsmu. Ahto had three brothers, they all had names that sound exotic even for an Estonian. His brothers were called Uku, Kõu and Jariilo (also known as Jay in America). Ahto and Uku are deities in Finno-Ugric Mythology, Ahto being the God for deep waters and fishing and Uku the God of thunder. Kõu is another Estonian word that means thunder. I do not know where Jariilo comes from, but it sounds very similar to Spanish name Jarillo. Ahto Walter sailed a 28-foot sloop from Tallinn to Miami in 1930, together with his brother Kõu for a mate. He was then 18 years old and that was his first journey across the Atlantic Ocean. All Walter (originally Valter) brothers eventually settled in America. Kõu captained a small research trawler for the University of Miami and Jariilo had been a tugboat skipper.

When the Walter boys tried to clear their papers for "Ahto's" first ocean-voyage, the Tallinn harbormaster refused to sign them, because he did not approve of the

venture. My guess is that an 18 year-old boy couldn't possibly have had the required sea captains rating for taking a vessel across the ocean legally. Later he was so famous that nobody bothered to ask. The sloop was also named after Ahto Walter like the two-masted ketch that he later sailed around the world with.

The brothers then registered their boat for a short fishing trip on the Baltic Sea at a coastguard station. With those papers they left Tallinn on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1930 and sailed straight to England. The British press greeted the young Estonian globetrotters with a terrific welcome, whereas people in their homeland hadn't even heard about them yet. Ahto Walter's youthful gentlemanly charm enchanted sailing enthusiasts all along the south coast of England. When they reached Torquay, the Royal Torquay Yacht Club gave them honorary memberships in their club.

After leaving England they made short stops at Madeira and Las Palmas for picking up supplies and landed in Miami on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1930. Everything publicly known about Ahto Walter from there on is about his sailing. In November 1932 he began his 5<sup>th</sup> journey toward America. This time he was accompanied with several others. In the month of July in the same year he had sailed with his brother Jariilo from Sandy Hook America to Bishop Rock in England, crossing the Atlantic Ocean in 18 days, which was a new speed record at that time. In 1935 Ahto Walter and another passionate sailor Tom Olsen co-authored a book titled "Racing The Seas", mostly about Ahto's ventures. Two fellows, Cutting and Fulton wrote a book about a 1937 summer holiday on the Atlantic Ocean that Ahto arranged for 16 to 19 year-old amateurs. They called it "At Sea with Ahto". The above mentioned books are still available in rare and out of print bookshops in New York and advertised on the Internet.

Ahto Walter married an American woman Margaret Duff in 1935. She evidently was just as crazy about sailing as her husband, because they sailed together on many occasions, including the trip around the world. That voyage began on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1938 from Greenwich Connecticut on a 70-foot ketch "Ahto" and lasted exactly 18 months. He acquired the boat in Estonia two years earlier and brought it to America with only two other people aboard for a crew, his wife Margaret and his brother Jariilo. The journey around the globe is well described in Jim Baille's autobiography,

ghostwritten by Bernadette Hardaker. Jim Baille, one of Ahto Walter's travel companions from Toronto Canada, had made detailed notes about everything that happened on the way. A crewmember named Bill Mcrae recorded the trip with a movie camera. The former Kāsmu navigation School houses now a museum and the museum has obtained a copy of that film from Jim Baille. They chose the easy route from the Atlantic into the Pacific Ocean and went through the Panama Canal instead of sailing around the Cape Horn.

The boat was registered in Estonia but the crew was multinational, with the skipper being the only Estonian on it. Jüri Erm on his web site for Ahto Walter claims that there were all together 19 persons on the roster when "Ahto" sailed out from the Greenwich harbor. According to Jim Baille, some people didn't finish the tour and dropped out before it was over. The first mate was an Englishman, a few crewmembers were Americans, two were from Canada, three from Australia and one from Tahiti. Four sailors were women, one English girl and two from Australia. The skipper's wife Margaret with her 14-month old son Ahto-Theodor traveled along with her husband and the other three ladies were mustered on so that she would have female company. Everybody kept watch except the skipper and his wife. Ahto Walter thought women's presence on the boat to have a civilizing effect on men. Living separated from the opposite sex for a long time can turn a bunch of men quite crude and sloppy and their language gets terrible. Each sailor contributed 100 dollars a month per person toward the voyage expenses. The boat's outfitting was finalized in England when on its way from Estonia to America and Jim Baille wonders how Ahto Walter managed to get it done, because he had no money.

They spent Christmas at Cocos Island west of Panama. The next stop was at Galapagos, where they had trouble with the local "commandante". He wanted bribes, which the skipper wasn't going to pay. Several days were spent on Tahiti and some guys went for a tour around the Island. One American crewmember was laid off at Tahiti, because he had difficulties with taking orders from Ahto Walter. He thought to know more about sailing than the skipper, since he was a lawyer who specialized in maritime law. Two other Americans quit at the same time and left with him. After several stops on other Polynesian islands they reached Sydney Australia on June 12<sup>th</sup> in 1939. North of Brisbane they run on the Reef one night and were stuck there for a day or so. The channel markers had been changed, but not marked on the new charts that they got from Sydney.

England declared war on Germany the same day when "Ahto" sailed into Surabaya harbor in Indonesia. The English girl and the first mate quit after hearing that and

they left together on a cargo ship to Singapore, hoping to get a ride home from there. One of the Australian girls also departed. The others remained in Surabaya for three weeks, while the boat was in the dry dock for repairing the damages caused by hitting the coral reef.



**Sailboat "Ahto" on the ocean**

The original plan was to cut through the Suez Canal and go home via Mediterranean Sea, but the skipper changed his mind and sailed around Africa instead. Because of the ongoing war, that seemed to be a safer course to take. There was another maintenance stop at Cape Town during Christmas 1939 and the crew spent the holidays there. Next May 2<sup>nd</sup> they sailed back into Greenwich harbor where the journey had began.

The last time Ahto Walter visited Estonia was in 1972 and 10 years later he sailed all alone from St. Thomas Island in the Caribbean Sea to Australia. He was then 70 years old. St. Thomas' Island was his home, he died there in 1991. When the St. Thomas yacht club was founded in the 1950-s, he was unanimously elected for its first commodore. His boat got smashed up at the marina in Australia. Workers at the dry dock dropped it when they lifted it off the water for maintenance.

Reputedly, Ahto Walter's sailing enthusiast daughter Mary Ann has carried on the family seafaring tradition.

**ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY**  
**Membership Application 2005**

The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) is a new organization. It was established in November, 2004 at a meeting held in Red Deer. The Society will work to preserve our Estonian heritage, to sponsor informative and interesting activities for members, and to provide information about happenings in Estonia.

As both the Calgary and Edmonton Estonian Societies were relatively inactive during 2004, members were not asked to submit annual dues. Expenses incurred during the year, largely attributable to the publication and mailing of AJAKAJA, were charged against accumulated funds

from previous years. Any remaining funds in the accounts of the Calgary and Edmonton Societies will be made available for use by the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society.

All members of the former Calgary and Edmonton Societies, as well as any prospective new members from across Alberta and elsewhere, are invited to complete and submit the Membership Application Form below. All paid-up members will receive the highly-acclaimed AJAKAJA, mail-outs of information about Society programs and activities, and announcements about and invitations to a variety of events.

**Due to publication and distribution costs, copies of AJAKAJA will only be mailed to families and individuals who are members of the AEHS**

**Membership Application Form 2005**

(please do not complete if you have already submitted membership dues for 2005)

Memberships: Family (\$25.00) \_\_\_\_\_ or/and: Individual (\$20.00) \_\_\_\_\_

Contributions are welcome: An amount of \_\_\_\_\_ is also included.

Applicant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \*: \_\_\_\_\_

\*We encourage you to include your e-mail address (if applicable) to facilitate communication about Society activities.

Please make cheques payable to the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society and mail to:

Mr. T. Paasuke, #9 – 127 Carey, Canmore, AB. T1W 2R3

