

AJAKAJA

WINTER 2006

ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY

VOLUME 25

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Eckville, 1955



Alberta Estonian Heritage Society
Alberta Eesti Kultuuripärandi Selts

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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Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) Website: www.aehs.ca

Sõnumileht—AjaKaja—Magazine

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

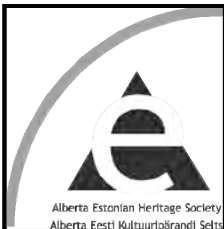
Non-members may purchase AjaKaja for \$5.00 per copy by contacting Eda McClung
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Members and friends are encouraged to submit articles, photographs and heritage-related items to Eda McClung at emcclung@shaw.ca

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).

The graphic on the Editorial page shows an Estonian woman's dress with adornments. It is reproduced from former President Lennart Meri's book "Hõbevalge" (Silverwhite), 1976.



AjaKaja

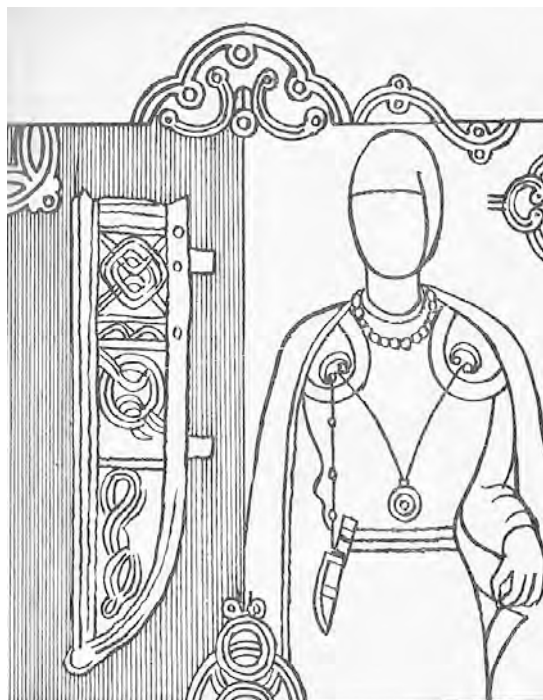
Alberta Estonian Heritage
Society

Issue 25

Winter 2006

Letter from the Editors

Inside this issue



The first issue of AjaKaja appeared in November 1991. It was a single, two-sided sheet that described various activities of the Edmonton Estonian Society such as Jaanipäev celebrations and the first of many sauerkraut-making bees. However, its most significant news was that Estonia was once again independent! The past fifteen years have brought many changes to AjaKaja, and these mirror the extraordinary changes for Estonia as well as those in the Alberta Estonian community.

The centennial celebrations highlighted the lives and legacy of Estonian pioneers. They also raised awareness that Alberta is the only Canadian province to have 100 years of Estonian settlement. More evidence of the Alberta Advantage! The centenaries also showcased a wealth of historical photos, letters, and artifacts. All these told the story of starting anew.

In this, the 25th issue of AjaKaja, an invitation is extended to 'get involved and share your story.' Whether pioneer, settler, immigrant, or other, Alberta Estonians have a story to tell. This issue of AjaKaja features some Estonian pioneer communities in Alberta and western USA, and highlights the renewed interest and pride in our cultural history.

AEHS is planning a DVD to showcase a centennial collection of the people, issues and events that built our community and province. The scope of the DVD project will be determined by funding however the prospects are promising. AEHS has accepted an invitation from the West Coast Estonian Festival to do a multimedia presentation, including this DVD, in Los Angeles in August 2007. This is a perfect opportunity to showcase our history. The premiere of the DVD is planned for Jaanipäev 2007. All are invited to attend this event and spend a family weekend in the recreational heartland of Alberta.

Estonia continues to receive abundant world coverage across a broad spectrum of topics, such as politics, sports, tourism and computerization. AjaKaja has reprinted many of these since they present Estonia in the context of the world stage. Unfortunately copyright laws make it prohibitively expensive to continue to do this. Editorial staff is grateful to our many contributors who send articles and suggestions. The newsletter reflects the interests, views, and contributions of our readers.

On behalf of AEHS, may the joy of the Christmas season be with you throughout the coming year.

Eda McClung, Tiina and Paul Payson, Dave Kiil

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AEHS Legacy project

History of Alberta Estonians

Dave Kiil

The majority of all Alberta Estonians arrived here during the half-century starting in 1899. Many of the early pioneers came directly from Estonia, whereas others left their homes in Nurmekunde and Crimea. The hopelessness of serfdom, pressure to be conscripted into the Russian military, the onset of the Russian Revolution, and much later, the forceful occupation of Estonia by Russia during WWII were the main reasons behind the influx of hundreds of Estonians to Alberta.

The story of Alberta Estonians is certainly unique in Canada and, in fact, all of North America. Estonian pioneers established agricultural communities in several mid-western and western States, including Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, and Montana, during the 1890s and early 1900s, but only the pioneers who settled in Alberta established and maintained several relatively large communities. Most post-WWII immigrants settled in Calgary and Edmonton, but also in some smaller communities. In some instances, they were sponsored by existing Estonian communities to fulfill immigration requirements and later moved to larger cities where job and career opportunities were greater.

Understandably, the makeup of the main Estonian communities such as Medicine Valley and Sylvan Lake, Stettler and Big Valley, Barons, and Peace River has changed since WWII, but there is nevertheless a sense of continuity in the province's Estonian presence.

The memory of Estonian pioneer communities in Alberta was marked by major centennial celebrations in Stettler in 1999, in Medicine Valley-Gilby-Eckville in 2001, and in Barons in 2004. These events

attracted about 1,000 participants and served to highlight the life and times of the pioneers as well as later arrivals. The enthusiasm generated by these celebrations, reinforced periodically by other events here and in Estonia, provided the motivation for a new project, the "History of Alberta Estonians".



Estonian display in Red Deer and District Museum in the 1980s

The project was triggered by an invitation from the organizers of the West Coast Estonian Days to be held in Los Angeles in August, 2007, for us to present the story about Alberta Estonians. We accepted the invitation to present a 1 ½-hr program at this major event and decided to develop a multimedia presentation, with a documentary-type DVD highlighting the history of Alberta Estonians and a Reader's Theatre program with live actors. Introductory and closing comments, including a Question and Answer session, would round out the program.

Collection of materials, including photos, video footage, oral interviews, articles, storyboards from previous celebrations of our heritage, and other objects is progressing nicely. Guidelines for the collection of materials were mailed to all Society members and others with an interest in their heritage.

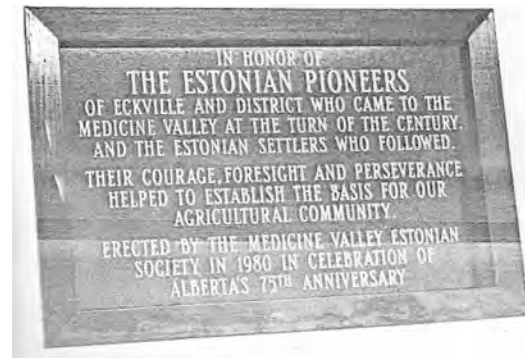
Readers with family history materials are encouraged to contact Dave Kiil (Edmonton) or Helgi Leesment (Calgary) to assemble the broadest possible range of materials for the DVD and the proposed website. Subject to available funding, we visualize the development of an Estonian website to proceed in collaboration with the

Heritage Community Foundation, the custodian of The Alberta On-line Encyclopedia and www.albertasource.ca.

At the time of writing, one of our grant applications has been approved (see below) and we expect to be informed about the outcome of two other grant applications before Christmas.



Roadside sign on Highway 56 near Stettler, erected in 1978, commemorates Estonian settlement in Alberta



A commemorative plaque honoring the Estonian pioneers who settled in the Medicine Valley area. It was unveiled in the Eckville Community Hall in 1980.

Late News Flash!

The National Estonian Foundation of Canada has approved the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society's application for funding in support of our plans to produce a DVD about the "History of Alberta Estonians". A total of \$17,200 will be available for this major project.

Information about the Foundations objectives and programs is provided elsewhere in AjaKaja. We gratefully acknowledge this very generous support of our project and encourage our members to consider the benefits of helping to connect the entire Estonian Canadian community.

Aitäh!

Additional funding is pending.

***The National Estonian Foundation of Canada:
A vision for an Estonian future in Canada***

**THE FUTURE OF THE CANADIAN ESTONIAN COMMUNITY
DEPENDS ON ALL OF US.**

The National Estonian Foundation of Canada (NEFC) has made significant changes to become a catalyst institution linking Canadians of Estonian descent in a network that affirms, inspires and supports their achievements and aspirations.

Together, with the community and its leaders, we are revitalizing and connecting the Estonian Canadian community across Canada to achieve even greater success.

With your help, the National Estonian Foundation of Canada and its member agencies will continue to work with dedication to achieve meaningful results in keeping our community strong and ensure our heritage for our future generations.

There's only one way we can achieve all of this...*together*.

The National Estonian Foundation of Canada is a registered charitable organization, which has been serving Estonians in Canada for more than three decades. The organization continues to expand in its support of Estonian youth, educational, cultural and community programs. Our goal is to strengthen our institutions and community participation through financial support and counsel.

A professional volunteer Board of Trustees of leading community members governs all NEFC decision-making. The Board oversees how donor money is used, shapes our strategic vision and plan, and monitors

organizational performance.

If you have a solid idea for an activity or project that you would like to lead in your local Estonian community, then please contact the NEFC by telephone at 416-465-5600 or info@estonianfoundation.ca to find out if you qualify for sponsorship.



Alberta Estonians receiving Estonian flag.

Ensuring an Estonian future in Canada

**Charitable gifts, bequests and memorial funds
are tax deductible. Charitable gifts made before
the December 31st deadline will receive a tax
receipt for the 2006 taxation year.**

Executive Board: Lia Hess, Lembit Nieländer,
Peeter Põldre, Andres Taul, Toomas Trei and Eva Varangu
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Please contact us:

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Mark your calendars!

Jaanipäev 2007

Saturday, June 16, 2007

Lincoln Hall, near Gull Lake in central Alberta
(on Highway #792, 5 miles north of Highway #12 and 8 miles south of Highway #53)

Plan a weekend in Alberta's recreational heartland

**ENJOY A CELEBRATION OF ALBERTA'S
ESTONIAN PIONEER HERITAGE!**

A lunch of ethnic gourmet hot dogs

An afternoon of pioneer games, visiting and much more

A SUPERB PIG ROAST IN THE EVENING



**Exciting program DVD premiere: ALBERTA'S
ESTONIAN PIONEERS: Their Lives, Their Legacy**

**An evening of musical entertainment including the recently
formed Alberta Estonia Choir**

Dance to Garry Raabis and his band.

Enjoy a traditional Midsummer Eve bonfire



**Enter the lottery to win a 'Grand Occasion' stay at the
Edmonton Fairmont Macdonald Hotel**



**Plan to attend with friends and family
EVERYONE WELCOME!**



Program details and registration information will be mailed in early 2007



Greetings,

The West Coast Estonian Days are beckoning again next year.

It is with pleasure that I invite you to the 28th West Coast Estonian Days to be held in Los Angeles next summer. The festival will take place from August 9 through 12, 2007. It is not too early to plan your next summer's vacation and we sure hope that your destination will be our four day festival in Los Angeles, California. Come one, come all. Meet old friends and make new ones. The presentations at the festival will be bi-lingual for all to enjoy.

The event will be held at the magnificent Millennium Biltmore Hotel, located in downtown Los Angeles. Special event room rate of \$149 for single and double occupancy will be offered. Children can be accommodated on rollaway beds.

We have worked hard to prepare a content filled, interesting program for the festival. The program, in part, is geared to showcase Estonian arts and culture. This has always been one of the purposes why the festivals are held: we, Estonian Americans / Canadians, do not want to forget our cultural heritage.

But there is more. There will be a two part, two day seminar on recent Estonian history, encompassing the years 1940 to 1991, a tragic period in the country's history that has affected the lives of nearly all Estonians. We will have a lecture by a brilliant mind on European genetics and linguistics. It may answer the age old question of where did the Estonians and their language originate from. Is the origin in the east or in the west? Come and find out. The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society will have a multi-media presentation on Estonian pioneers and their descendants in the heartland of Canada. Here I would like to interject an invitation to all Estonian pioneer descendants wherever they may be, to join the festival. There will be a festival ball and a picnic with fun and games. For the sports minded, there will be a golf tournament and a morning 5K jog (maybe two). For the insomniacs, you can idle the time away in the late-night 'secret' festival pub. These are only some of the highlights of the four day program.

Come and enjoy beautiful Southern California with its pleasant sun-filled climate, its sandy beaches, nearby mountains and deserts. Let's not forget the world class city of Los Angeles itself, worthy many a visit here. But please, let's stay with the festival while it lasts. I will venture to say that you will not regret it.

Until we meet at the XXVIII West Coast Estonian Days in Los Angeles

Juri Tint, President 2005-2007

Estonian League of the West Coast

Discover your roots through music

Helgi Leesment

Astrid Simmermon, an enthusiastic music director, would like to start an AEHS choir or quartet or octet or something in between. It will be based in Calgary but special arrangements can be made for interested Albertans elsewhere. Anneli White has agreed to be accompanist. The group will aim to perform at Jaanipäev next June.

As of January 2007, we will have a place for weekday evening practices.



Astrid grew up in a musical family in London, Ontario, and moved to Calgary in 1991. Astrid has five older sisters and one younger brother about whom she comments “we all sang at school, in the community (Western Fair), in Church and at Estonian functions for all our preschool, elementary and secondary school years.” Astrid comes by her musical talents naturally, having taken piano, singing and conducting courses in addition to being self-taught. She has composed music and produced one cassette tape of Christmas Music (keyboard and vocals) and is working on a CD currently called “Ma Pole Eland Seal/I have not lived there”—all Estonian music and arrangements of popular Estonian folk songs (keyboard and vocals).

She and her husband Dave Simmermon have three children. So far, the oldest, 9-year old Victoria, is also showing musical talent, singing with her mother in Estonian despite not speaking the language at all. Adds Astrid

“I arrange music as well for choirs, soloists and children's singing groups.” In addition she has sung in different choirs and conducted various children's and adult choirs.

Astrid has a dream/vision of Alberta Estonians reaching out across the province and discovering our roots and relations with one another through music.

If you would like to join in forming this singing group, contact Astrid soon. Please pass this information on to anyone you know who might be interested:

Astrid Simmermon tel. 403-730-8897

astrid-simmermon@shaw.ca



Choir director Astrid Simmermon



Accompanist Anneli White

Calgary Estonian Society: A look back

Helgi Leesment

Former executive and long-time members of the Calgary Estonian Society gathered on May 18, 2006, to formally recognize the cessation of this organization. A previous phone-in and mail-in vote had resulted in the unanimous decision to disband this society and encourage all to become active in the recently established Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS). It was also unanimously affirmed that all of the Society's funds be transferred to the Alberta-wide organization. This will be done when the current bank term-deposit matures later this year.

By joining the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society, Calgary Estonians have come full circle. Originally there existed the Lõuna Alberta Eesti Selts / Southern Alberta Estonian Society. The Calgary Estonian Society developed first as a branch of that society, becoming a separate entity at a formative meeting on June 17, 1950. Now, in the 21st Century, its former members have again become part of a provincial level organization.

The activities of roughly the first thirty years of the Calgary Estonian Society revolved mostly around weekly and annual events blended with private social functions

Weekly social gatherings of Estonian pioneers and their descendants took place at the downtown YWCA during the 1950's, gradually joined by a generation of Second World War refugees who arrived in Canada via Germany, Sweden, Australia and elsewhere. A folk dance group functioned for a couple of years until the director moved out of town.



Society members in a party mood in the 1950s!

Typical annual events comprised commemoration / celebration of the February 24th Independence Day, Jaanipäev (midsummer solstice), religious services when funds were available to bring in a Lutheran minister from elsewhere in Canada, Christmas gatherings with mini-concerts and Santa Claus, displays of national costumes and handicrafts at local international fairs as well as selling traditional ethnic foods and home-made cranberry juice (years before it became available in stores) at these events, plus hosting all nationalities of new Canadians at their Citizenship ceremonies in Federal Government facilities.



Calgary Estonian Society's Handicraft Show, 1953

In general, socially, it was and continues to be customary to hold major private gatherings of local Estonians for christenings, confirmations and significant birthdays.

In the late 1980's through early 1990's, an Estonian language school functioned bi-weekly as the city happened to have enough children of suitable age whose parents wanted them to learn something of the Estonian culture and language.

The association's recent history has been somewhat undefined, becoming officially dormant for approximately ten years as there was difficulty finding new executive officers. However, even during that time, various events were spontaneously organized by individual members of the Calgary Estonian community, frequently in response to news of visitors from Estonia. For some occasions the Society temporarily returned into active mode.

At the May 18 gathering, previous executive members spoke of memorable occasions, some solemn, others causing much laughter. Various members added their comments making for lively conversation. All agreed that apart from the original



Willy Kalvee and Helgi Leesment at the wind-up gathering, May 2006

formation of the Society in 1950, the most pivotal events occurred in the years just prior to and following 1991, the year Estonia regained its independence. These were heady times with visits by a basketball team from Estonia, various other sports competitors, a rock band, a large boys choir accompanied by a chamber orchestra, a television documentary crew, several musicians including symphony orchestra conductors, plus various additional Estonians including the democratically elected president of the independent Estonia—guests whose presence in Alberta would have been unthinkable during earlier years of Soviet rule with its political and travel restrictions on its citizens. Children of the Calgary Estonian supplementary school and adults participated in meeting such guests. Among local events, Calgarians, as well as all Albertans, now have business meetings with the staff from the Estonian embassy in Ottawa, another previously unthinkable concept.

This year's May gathering especially recalled another Calgary happening, the well-organized Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian communities' joint

celebration of the 1991 regained independence of all three Baltic nations. This was an especially important event because a large segment of the Calgary Estonian Society were political refugees or the children of political refugees who escaped from Estonia in 1944, fearing for their lives. Their fervent wish since that time was for the country to become independent again, an admittedly hopeless ideal for most of the 51 years since the country was first occupied by Russian, then German and later Russian forces again. Thus, the 1991 actualization of the independence dream was a very emotional experience.

Suddenly, this nation had to establish a government, economic bases, laws, social policies and all of the other things taken for granted by long established independent countries. It quickly became possible to easily visit relatives, carry out historical and genealogical research, do unrestricted sightseeing and establish new contacts. This nation was now a "normal" country within the international community. Suddenly, certain goals of the Calgary Estonian Society altered drastically. These changes, coupled with the general aging of its members and the formation of the AEHS, resulted in the termination decision carried out in 2006, 56 years after the inception of the Calgary Estonian Society.



Former Presidents of the Society, Enn Tiislar and Peter Leesment, reminiscing at the wind-up session, May 2006

The Calgary Estonian community comprises a blend of descendants of early 20th century pioneers plus various waves of later arrivals including political refugees in the 1950's, career related arrivals attracted by or transferred here to Alberta's vibrant energy industry as well as very recent immigrants from Estonia.

All former members of the Calgary Estonian Society wish the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society success and happiness in maintaining aspects of Estonian culture and traditions.

Dedication of new wing at Red Deer and District Museum, 1984: Spotlight on Medicine Valley Estonians

This article was prepared by Nurmi Simm, President of the Edmonton Estonian Society and distributed to Estonian newspapers in Toronto. The dedication of the Museum's new Pioneer's Gallery was an important occasion, especially for Alberta's Estonian community. Under the leadership of Dr. Rita Mattiisen, an impressive display of Estonian folk costumes, descriptive materials, and artifacts was assembled and unveiled during the official dedication of the Pioneer's Gallery. This exhibit was on display for 15 years and represented public recognition of Medicine Valleys' Estonian heritage.

On Sunday, May 27, 1984, Estonians from Red Deer, Edmonton, Calgary, and other communities gathered in Red Deer to participate in the Official Opening of the Pioneer's Gallery of the Red Deer and District Museum. On prominent display in the new wing is a collection of Estonian national costumes and historic artifacts. This permanent exhibit commemorates the Estonian pioneers who settled in the Medicine Valley of central Alberta near the turn of the 20th century.



Official opening ceremony

The speaker's platform at the opening included a number of local dignitaries, among them the Mayor of Red Deer and the provincial MLA for Red Deer. Also present was the Honorable Mr. John Munro, the Minister of Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. An overflow crowd of 600 people attended the launching.

The Estonian exhibit was made possible by the support of the Medicine Valley Estonian Society, and organized by Dr. Rita Mattiisen of Red Deer. She is also a member of the Red Deer and District Museum Society. With the

assistance of the local Estonian community, the folk costumes and artifacts of the early pioneers were assembled for the exhibit. The display items are the final contribution to the community at large by the now disbanded Medicine Valley Estonian Society. The display preserves the memory and achievements of early Estonian pioneers who first settled this area.

The display features three mannequins in festive national costumes. Although the majority of the Medicine Valley settlers came from Võrumaa region of Estonia, the costumes were chosen to depict a variety of regions: Vaivara (Virumaa), Mustjala (Saaremaa) and Tõstamaa (Pärnumaa). The costumes and some articles were hand-made by Toronto craftspeople under the coordination of Mrs. Lilla Tombak. Authentic artifacts include a 1884 family Bible, a hand-made school bench from the Estonian School, built in 1909-1910 in Medicine Valley area, and a handmade silver brooch. A modern replica of an Estonian hope chest, richly carved with traditional folk designs, by Galina Kodu of Calgary, was also prominently featured. A number of smaller items rounded out the display. The exhibit backdrop included an original woollen Estonian flag, photographs from Estonia, and a map showing the location of Estonia in Europe. The map of original Estonian homesteads in Medicine Valley, displayed on the left side of the exhibit, was researched and drawn by the late Voldemar Mattiisen, Rita's husband.

The establishment of this permanent display of Estonian culture is an important event for the



A view of the Estonian exhibit.

people of Alberta and Canada, and especially for Canadians of Estonian descent. Preservation of the Estonian heritage in this Museum recognizes the prominent part played by Estonian pioneers and immigrants in Alberta. The prominence once enjoyed by Estonians in this part of the country has diminished, but their contributions have helped to lay a sound foundation for our future.

Following the official ceremony and reception, about 50 Estonians and friends gathered at the Red Deer home of Dr. Rita Matiisen. A gala note was added to the gathering because it marked a slightly belated celebration of Rita's 75th birthday. The gathering gave Estonians from many parts of Alberta an opportunity to meet and mingle, and to celebrate the success of the exhibit. It was the unanimous conviction of those present that Dr. Matiisen deserves much credit for her leadership to preserve Alberta's Estonian cultural heritage. (In November 1984, Dr. Matiisen received the Alberta Achievement Award in recognition of Community Service).

The Estonian display lasted for 15 years and was visited by tens of thousands of Albertans and Canadians. The research carried out by the Matiisen's also provided considerable local history material for the major 1975 publication 'Estonians in Canada'. This publication serves as an excellent resource for our "History of Alberta Estonians" DVD and website projects.



Left to right: Oskar Reining of Red Deer, Dr. Rita Matiisen of Red Deer, and August Liivam of Eckville

The article and pictures were made available by Eda McClung from her family collection.

ARCHIVES

October 10, 2006

Dave Kiil
Alberta Estonian Heritage Society
3229 112C Street N.W.
Edmonton, Alberta
T6J 3W2

Dear Mr. Kiil,

First and most importantly, my sincere apologizes for the very long delay in following up on our meeting from this spring and your letter and email to me. We got caught up in the publication of a centennial history book for the Roman Catholic Church in Central Alberta. It turned out to be a very successful book, but we had quite a few challenges in meeting all the deadlines. As a result, a number of very important things got backlogged. My sincere apologizes that this happened.

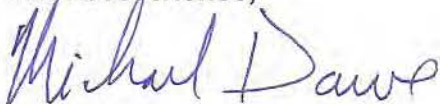
Yes, we would be pleased to act as the repository for the historical archival materials, including the correspondence, magazines, newsletters, articles about pioneer families and historical photographs both created and collected by the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society.

The Estonian community has been a very important part of Central Alberta. It has a very rich history, one which should be properly documented and made available for those who were either part of the community or are interested in learning more about it.

Since the Red Deer and District Archives strives to be the archival information centre for Central Alberta, where so many of the Estonians settled and continue to live, I think we would be an appropriate repository for the material. Moreover, given our central location in the province, we would be equally accessible to those from both Northern Alberta and Southern Alberta, as well as all to those who live in the middle.

It was a great pleasure meeting with you and Eda McClung. Again, my apologizes for the long delay. It certainly was not due to us being uninterested in the proposal to become the repository of the Society's records and collections.

With best wishes,



Michael Dawe
Red Deer and District Archives

History Society of Alberta Honorary Lifetime Membership Awarded to Ralph Erdman

Nominated by the Lethbridge Historical Society

Ralph Erdman has worked hard on behalf of the Lethbridge Historical Society for the past 25 years. From the time he joined the Society in 1981, he was a Councillor on the Executive until 1994. He joined the Book Committee in 1981 and took over book sales at that time, continuing tirelessly in that position until he retired in 1998 at the age of 84. Besides ensuring that the Society's publications were available in local vendor outlets, he travelled to various outlets in the south, taking the Society's new and old publications to venues such as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and the Fort Macleod Museum.

Ralph Erdman was born in 1913 at Barons, Alberta, to Gustav and Magda Erdman. He attended



Ralph Erdman receives Honorary Lifetime Membership plaque from Mrs. Jeane Johnstone

school in Barons and, in 1930, graduated from the Claresholm School of Agriculture. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree from the University of Alberta in 1936, and a Master of

Science degree in 1938. In the early part of his career, he used his knowledge working on soil surveys for the University of Alberta, and as a soil specialist at the Lethbridge Research Station. In 1949, he returned to farming in the Barons district, where he became interested in exhibiting grain. His efforts brought him the 1961 World Wheat Championship at the Toronto Royal Winter Fair. Ralph married Karen Suitso in 1950, and they have one daughter, Katheryn Anne Beveridge, and two grandchildren.

Ralph has received several awards in recognition of his work. In 1990, he received the Alex Johnston Award of Merit from the Lethbridge Historical Society. He also received the Historical Society of Alberta Millennium Award in February 2000.

Ralph Erdman is a man of many interests, including photography, archeology, and banding mountain bluebirds. He is one of the world's best kept secrets and richly deserves this Honorary Lifetime Membership.

Ralph Erdman

Born: 1913 in Barons

Died: November 27, 2006 in Regional Hospital, Lethbridge

Members of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society extend their heartfelt condolences to the extended Erdman family.

The Story of the Search for Freedom by the Estonians of Alba Farm: Part 2

***from Estonia to Crimea, Russia: from Crimea to Pierre, South Dakota, USA,
and finally, to Barons, Alberta, Canada***

Story Teller: Barbara Johnson Gullickson © 2005 Barbara Johnson Gullickson

Part 1 told of their difficult life in Estonia as serfs of German overlords, reasons for leaving and the arduous three-month journey to Crimea – walking all the way! Among the families leaving were my Great-grandparents – Jakob Erdman, ten years old and Mari Tint was seven. This segment is about their life in Targhan, Crimea.



Jakob and Mari had nine children.
This photo was taken in 1894 in Crimea.

Girls standing: Emilia, Helena, Miina, Liisa
In front: Jakob with Charlotte, Robert,
Mari holding Natalie, and Gustav, my grandfather

A daughter, Mary, died when an infant.

From information obtained in an interview with Gustav Erdman and his sister, Liisa (Erdman) Silbermann, at Barons, Alberta, in 1963.

The Good Life in Crimea

The land was desolate when the Estonian families arrived in Crimea in 1861, for two reasons. The Crimean War was just over—the reason for FREE land there—and it had been a poor year for crops. The immigrants found deserted homes, grist mills, and other dwellings, which they fixed up and made livable. Twenty-three families settled in a village called *Targhan*, a shortened version of *Ootzgoitargan* which means, in Turkish, *Three Wells of the Old Chief*. The village was quite close to Simferopol. They were strict Lutherans and all the families went to church regularly—except one!

There were several nationalities living in Crimea—Germans, Russians, Estonians, and Turks. Each village was of only one nationality, and there was no intermingling of school, marriage, business, religion, or social life.

A school teacher, in addition to graduation from four years at a teachers' seminary, was the preacher, leader of the band and choir, and officiated at funerals. Pupils had to be able to read and write before starting school. The average beginning age was nine years old, and there were six years of schooling; the term was from September to April. Subjects taught were bible study, catechism, reading, writing, Russian and Estonian grammar, and singing. All lessons were in Russian, except Estonian grammar. All the Erdman children went to school:

Natalie, the youngest, only one year. My grandfather, Gustav, started two months late each year because he had to help with the harvest, but he easily caught up.

At the time of the interview, Grandpa Gus and Great Aunt Liisa could still speak and understand Russian.

In the village, men were elected to two-year terms as mayor and two men were appointed to help him with his duties. Jakob was mayor at least twice. He was also the Justice of the Peace for many years. He was a juror on a case where a Turk stole a girl from the village. He could not afford to buy a wife and so stole one of the Estonian girls. He was sentenced to 8 years in Siberia. Stealing girls for wives, seemingly, was a common occurrence. Generally, if the stolen girl was gone more than three days, she stayed with her 'husband' and if less than three days, she was returned to her parents.

Crimea was a fertile land: crops were winter wheat, oats, rye, barley, melons, cucumbers, corn, apricots, peaches, pears, cherries, and grapes. Each farmer had an orchard but no garden, except for melons and cucumbers. Jakob had three quarter sections of land. He also had sheep, pigs, eight to ten horses, six oxen, six cows, chickens, ducks, geese and two dogs—one to guard the horses from thieves.

The houses were built of stone with tile roofs. They had earthen clay floors covered with fine sand. The floor was swept regularly and a new one made when the old one wore out. Most houses were one story with two bedrooms. They had cotton sheeting, home-made blankets, home-made woolens, hand sewing machines, looms, and spinning wheels. They bought thread in the city. They had straw bags for mattresses; these were changed each spring. Their furniture was wood, some made by the village cabinet maker. The tailor made the men's suits of material made at home. Firemen made work shoes. Good shoes were bought in the city.

Clothes were washed in a large tub, rubbed on the bottom, then boiled. The stove was built of bricks with an iron plate on top. A thirty-gallon kettle was on it for wash water. There was a separate brick oven (as high as the ceiling) with the opening in the kitchen and the body in the other room for heat. This oven burned straw for fuel – a large basket held the straw.

There was an outside underground cellar for storage of vegetables. All kinds of meats were pickled twice a year and stored in the cellar. Before the meat could be used, it had to be soaked in water overnight to get rid of the salt. The usual kind of cakes that were baked were those with layers of fruit. Bread was baked, but few pies were made.

Sweet milk was used only for tea and coffee; clabbered (sour) milk was drunk and used on cereal. Chicory was added to coffee and ground in the coffee grinder. Sugar was bought in 40- pound chunks. Dried fish, called taran, were bought in a string of 50 fish.

Breakfast consisted of tea made in a samovar over a charcoal fire, coffee, anchovies, boiled potatoes, cold ham, and fried, boiled, or scrambled eggs. Dinner was usually soup (boiled meat with vegetables), stew, melons, beans, cabbage, sauerkraut, and pickled cucumbers with no vinegar.

Light was provided by a coal-oil lamp. Liisa's job was cleaning the chimney before lighting it. She said it was "a bad job."

In the evening, the children sat at desks writing and drawing. Sometimes they danced the waltz, gallop, and polka to harmonica music. Weddings were festive occasions. A clerk of the court (Justice of the Peace) signed papers, which were taken to the minister who performed the ceremony. The celebration lasted three days, with dancing, eating, and drinking. They drank wine and home-made beer before and after meals, on holidays, and at weddings.

Beer was made by germinating barley in a wet sack, drying it in the oven, chopping it in a mill, making it into bread, baking it, then putting it in a large wooden barrel filled with hot water with hops. It was left there for a while, then put into wooden casks and drunk as soon as it was cool. To make cider, which was drunk by children also, the large wooden barrel was filled with water. This liquid was kept until sour (it was the colour of weak tea) and then drunk.

The boys wore knickers until they were twelve, and then they wore long pants. The men wore shirts with high collars, buttoned on the side. Dress shirts were white and worn with a tie.

Girls' hair was curled in rags. The young girls wore braids, the older girls wore buns. The men shaved—Jakob used a jackknife. Punishment was usually a scolding. However, Gus and his brother, Robert, were switched on their bare feet for running out in the snow without shoes on. They got up at four o'clock in the summer and six o'clock in the winter.

Transportation was usually in horse-drawn wagons. Most people had shiny wagons. Trains were used in very rainy weather.

A lady dentist filled and pulled teeth, and made false teeth. Municipal hospitals were nice. Targhan had a woman doctor who had graduated from a university in Austria. There was free medical care. Babies were born at home with the neighbour's wife's help.

There was a weekly Estonian paper and a monthly Russian one.

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



Jakob's Orchard at Targhan, Crimea, c.1895

100 Years of Sheltering Families

*Recollections of Living in the Homestead House of Jakob and Mari Erdman
on a Farm near Barons, Alberta.*

By Glenda Erdman Barnhart, and Carole Erdman Grant, their great-granddaughters

This home was built in 1906 by Jakob Erdman, his family and their neighbours. Carole said, 'When we removed the old wall paper and coverings we found the names of ALL the people who worked on building the house and the date, 1906. I only wish we had made a note of who they all were because other names besides family were written there. We carefully covered them up with the new surface.'

The house was made of wood with straw for insulation and sheathed with shiplap painted white. Glenda and Carole said that it was cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This New House replaced the sod house, built in 1904 on the homestead, which was where they first lived.



Jakob & Mari's home c. 1920

Glenda's story:

This pleasant farmhouse was built far back from the road, with the front door facing south. The north back door was protected from the weather by a large porch with the entry on the east. The washing machine and various tubs were in the porch, as were outer wear coats, boots, etc.

Entering the large kitchen with a walk-in pantry on the left, I remember a rectangular table, with a bench, a cast-iron coal stove near the middle, against the east wall and a sink with a small pump to bring water from the well (which I think had to be primed often by a large pump). Under the sink drain there was a bucket that was always (in my young mind) in danger of overflowing. Beside the sink was a low shelf on which the drinking water pail stood, with a communal dipper beside it.

I don't remember the other kitchen furniture, but there was a trap door in the floor with a recessed ring handle and this led to a dirt basement where I remember seeing rows of canned fruit in glass jars on wooden shelves. I am guessing that potatoes, carrots and other root vegetables were also kept there. This basement had a nice 'dry dirt' smell which I liked.

There was a smelly kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling in the kitchen, which was later replaced, much to our delight, with a low wattage electric light bulb

when a wind charger was built above the well. There was a wainscoting of narrow tongue-and-groove panels, and the ceiling was also tongue-and-groove, to the despair of my mother as dust constantly sifted down from the attic. Ellen and Roy Johnson's children (our cousins) came to stay with us once, maybe for more than a week, and I can remember us all lined up at the table at breakfast eating our porridge, when an unhappy Gerry plopped his bowl of porridge on Laurie's head, causing a great commotion.

A door on the south wall led to an entry hall which was large enough to have space for two wicker planters holding pots of red geraniums, which I disliked because of the strong odor to my sensitive nose. I was in my fifties before I liked geraniums. There was a telephone in the hall for our party line. Our telephone number was easy - 1111 and other parties on the line had 3 shorts or a long and a short and a long, etc. to call the folks on our party line. To call the operator to reach other party lines, a button was pressed and at the same time, the handle turned. I used to think I would like to be a Telephone Operator so I would know what all was going on! Later on, I thought working in the village Beauty Parlour would get the same results.

The south front door had a screen door (as did the back door) in the summer and a storm door in the winter. A door on the west wall led to a large bedroom with two south-facing windows and it was in this room that my earliest memory comes to mind. My hurried mother was trying to comb out the tangles in my curly hair and I was crying because it hurt. My great-grandmother was sitting in a large chair by a small table on which was a pitcher and a bowl. She dipped her comb in the water and gently combed out my hair – I remember her kindness.

In the south-east corner of the room there was a large bed; I think it was brass or metal, and I remember hearing that Great-grandpa had died in his sleep in that bed. I remember that Great-grandma also died in her sleep in that bed. The room was sunny and pleasant, and I am sure it had wallpaper on the walls.

A small coal stove in the northwest corner warmed the room. A few years ago I visited Denny Johnson who now owns that house and he said they found 13 layers of wallpaper on the walls.

From the entry hall, there was a door on the east wall leading to the beautiful, large living room, heated by a tall, chrome trimmed parlour coal-burning stove sitting on a metal pad. It had isinglass windows which reflected the colour and shapes of the flames inside. My favourite spot was right in front of it where it was nice and warm. I played there with my doll until my brother took it apart to see what made the eyes open and close. Many tears were shed over that unhappy incident. Putting together the Meccano pieces was great fun, also playing Pick-up-Sticks.

A draped doorway to a large bedroom was to the right of the parlour stove, and in the photo of Great-aunt Natalie's graduation from the University of Alberta, a lovely ornate oak rocking chair with a curved moulded seat was on the other side of the door. In the middle of the room was an unforgettable Stickley-style oak library desk and chair. There was linoleum on the floor, over a wood floor painted brown.



*Natalie Erdman,
Jakob & Mari's
youngest, on her
graduation from the
University of
Alberta, 1917.
The interior of the
living room, with the
rocking chair in the
background.*

All the tall narrow double-hung windows had lace panels for curtains. In the fall storm windows were put on, to be taken off again when the warmth of spring arrived. These were stored out in some outbuilding until needed again in the winter months.

Mondays were unforgettable as that was Washday, which took precedence over all other activities. The big copper boiler was brought in, filled with water and when it was boiling, washed diapers, handkerchiefs and underwear were boiled. The washing machine had a hand-cranked wringer. Cornstarch was cooked on the stove and Mrs. ____'s Bluing was always added to the white clothes in the last rinse and everything was hung out on the clothesline, winter and summer. Baby Carole used to grab a chunk of cornstarch and eat it while hiding under the table.

Tuesday was my favourite day as I loved the fragrance of line-dried clothes being ironed. Sad irons with switchable handles were on the range; tablecloths, pillowcases and clothes were ironed, but bedsheets were not ironed – no time for that in this busy household! I got to help folding the flat things.

Saturday was cleaning day; floors were scrubbed, waxed and polished; furniture was dusted especially thoroughly; and I think often a chicken was killed and cleaned for Sunday's midday dinner. We always ate 'supper' in the evenings, eating the left-overs from the noon dinner, the big meal of the day. At night the round tin tub was brought in, put in front of the cast-iron kitchen coal stove, and it was Bath-time. The youngest, Carole, was bathed first, and she always tried to run away after being dried off. Then on up the line, and after we three children were clean, we were put to bed, with the girls hair curled with rags, clean pyjamas, and a heated cloth-wrapped brick already warming the bed in cold weather. We were tucked in under our feather comforters or wool blankets, a wiggly Carole and I sharing the same bed, which made me long for my own bed!

Grandma Magda Erdman (Jakob & Mari's daughter-in-law) was a good seamstress and made each of us a pieced quilt. Because Alvin was the first grandchild, he got a 'crazy-quilt', made of scraps of velvet, corduroy and wool and scraps of satin. We girls liked it because it felt so good to touch the variety of pieces. My quilt was a soft green background with five-pointed stars made from old dresses.

Outside the house, the yard had been pretty well left to grow on its own, but from the planting arrangements, the flowering shrubs, the row of cottonwoods, the hedges of caraganas, and the occasional tulip which showed up in the spring, it was evident that some excellent planning had gone into that yard. Robert Erdman, son of Jakob and Mari, was a passionate gardener, and imported bulbs from Holland and peonies from Japan.



*Charlotte, Magda & Gus Erdman at Charlotte's & Gus's
parents home - Jakob & Mari Erdman: 'Tennis, anyone?'*

While he was alive, it was a showpiece, with a clay tennis court on the west side of the yard, and many kinds of flowering bushes, a circle of caraganas

formed a magical place to play or have a picnic in the summer. None of his many varieties of irises had survived in the front of the house, but near the well and wind charger, he had made an intersection path, lined with gooseberries, chokecherries, etc. In the summer, my mother sent us out into the yard to find the eggs that the chickens had laid under the bushes, and that was always fun - until, as she cracked open an egg to cook, a REALLY rotten smell filled the kitchen. That egg had been hidden out there too long!

A pig was in an area outside the yard and fed all the table scraps. Other garbage and broken dishes, etc. were dumped down the outhouse pit in the back yard. There was a big woodpile and a barrel of tar which we thought made good chewing gum. In one storage shed I spent many hours winding up the old gramophone and listening to cylinder records of Enrico Caruso and other music.

Of course there was a big garden, as we grew vegetables, berries and crab apples that could be preserved and fed us most of the winter.

We always had a cow and at least one horse, kept in the barn, which was in the very back of the yard towards the fields. Also in the 'back forty' were parked the old-fashioned farm wagons, one of which was a huge horizontal barrel for hauling water. There was also old machinery and a beautiful cutter sleigh with wool mohair seats. Too bad it wasn't treasured and kept somewhere safe. But it was during the depression and Second World War and there was no thought given to useless things.

In 1944 my father had the house jacked up and moved a mile or so away onto a piece of farmland that was situated on the power line. We must have had good crops, because suddenly we had bright electric lights, a real bathroom carved out of the big bedroom and it had a flush toilet, sink and bathtub. We got an electric refrigerator, stove and washing machine, iron, mangle for quicker ironing and central heating from a furnace in the full cement basement. It was amazing! We went from living as they had in the mid 1800s to having all the conveniences of the modern world.



Glenda standing in the front door, c. 1945

There are many still vivid memories of those days, and one year I made a tiny model of the house and part of the yard for a Barons Historical Day and Estonian and

Family Reunion in 2004. These thoughts, and many more, are all there in my memory.

Carole's story:

My earliest recollections of the Jacob & Mari farm house are close to those of Glenda's except that I don't remember the house before it was renovated to have a large kitchen and dining room as it is now. I do remember when my parents renovated it in the early 50's and put drywall on the walls. In the living room beside the doorway to the right as you go into it there is a wonderful secret behind the drywall, the names of all who helped build the house, and the date. I think there were wonderful treasures in the attic as well, but I was never allowed up there.

Glenda talks about the oak library table and the Arts & Crafts chairs that are in a photo or two. These pieces of family furniture are currently in my daughter Kelly's possession. The table is her office desk in her business in Calgary and the chairs are in her living room.

I also have some paintings that were in the house. Two are done with pastels and one is oil. I know nothing about them except that I remember seeing them early in my life. I still have that sewn patchwork quilt top that Grandma Magda made for me that Glenda mentioned. I think my love of fabrics and textures all go back to the quilt of many fabrics that Glenda also mentions - I was 3 years old and I distinctly remember running my fingers over the chunky corduroys, delicate fine silks, rough and scratchy Harris tweeds, and various other pieces. I can still feel them when I remember them!

Quite a few years ago Glenda remembered where the earliest toilet pit was on Great Grandfather Jacob's farm so we decided to dig through the earth in it. We knew that in the early days the toilet pit was the garbage dump and broken china and other unwanted things were dropped in the hole. We found many pieces of china, many bottles, enamel containers that were damaged and several car license plates dated 1917 and 1919. These items are also at Kelly's house. Through the course of generations living on that farmstead (we called it 'the old place'), there were several locations for the old toilet pits and no doubt there are still many unearthed treasures. There was a rumour that someone had lost a diamond ring down one of these during Jakob and Mari's life time but who knows, maybe they are just rumours, for we did not find it!

Editor's note:

This house remains on the land where Victor Erdman (Glenda and Carole's father) moved it in 1944. It is still being used as a residence today. At this time, Dennis Johnson (a great grandson of Jakob and Mari's) owns this property, as well as the quarter homesteaded by Jakob Erdman in 1903.

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The Krikentals Start Over

John Clark

Christmas 1905, Barons, Alberta

Gustav Krikental had the holiday spirit and felt a little rich. He put a whole dollar into the Christmas treat fund at the Erdman's 1905 Christmas party.

Maybe Gustav or his wife, Julie, felt they should make a large party contribution since all their young children would be at the party. Pauline, 15, was the oldest of the three Krikental girls. Mihkel, who was three years old, was the younger of the two boys. Like most people at the party, all the Krikental children had been born in Crimea. In 1903 the whole family made the long journey from the Estonian settlement, Kontshi-Savva, in the Crimean steppes to the plains of Barons, Alberta.

Their last two years had been filled with hard work. With help from their neighbors they had built a sod house, planted the land, and prepared provisions for the harsh winter months. Now the Krikentals were firmly settled in the new Estonian farming community.

Many years later, Maria Kotkas (Sepp), a school friend of the Krikental girls, recalled events of the previous spring.

"It was the first time the preacher came from Medicine Hat and stayed a week. He baptized Hellene Lentman's baby, the first born to that bunch of Estonians. Krikenthal's family had the biggest sod house with a porch built on the front."

So the Palkman's (Mihkel Palkman and Lena Musten) wedding was at Krikenthal's house. They were the first ones to get married in the new place. Lena was dressed in white with a veil and artificial orange blossoms. At that time brides wore orange blossoms, artificial and other silk flowers. The young men would buy their best girls or just girls the artificial flowers. I remember there were more than five young men and all the young girls wore their hair up with flowers in it. At the wedding there was a big dinner and after dinner good things like apples and candy for everyone"

Gustav's neighbors, and his father before him, had made a similar decision almost fifty years earlier to travel to a new land to start a new life. Before immigrating to Crimea, the Kotkas, Sepp, Erdman, Palkman and Krikental families had worked on the neighboring estates in Järvamaa County, Estonia. In Estonia, all the families belonged to the Järva-Madise parish so the Krikental's had known their Crimean-Estonian neighbors for generations. A generation later, in Crimea, they also befriended Lena Musten and her parents, Julia and Karel. The Mustens had only recently come from Estonia to farm in Crimea.



Estonian picnic near Chester, Montana 1916 (used with permission J.Clark)

Top row: Grandma Julia Musten, Joe Musten, George Musten, Nick Laas, Ed Malberg, August Krikental, Mike Yurman, Nick Musten, John Malberg

3rd row: Elvina Kewe, Minnie Minnick, Annette Arick, Martha Musten, Julia Minnick, Emily Palkman, Alida Palkman

2nd row: Lizzie Laas, Ida Yurman, Lena Musten, Anna Arick, Mihkel Palkman (holding Ida Palkman), Lena Palkman (holding Linda Palkman-Keldrauk)

Front: Grandpa Karl Musten, Albert Palkman, Walter Palkman. With guitars: August Waht and Charley Musten

Now Gustav's decision to start over in Alberta seemed to have been a good one. Months before the Christmas party, the Krikentals had harvested and sold their first full crop. Now that it was winter the pace was a bit slower. Everyone in the family was excited about the pending arrival of the first Krikental to be born in America—Julie Krikental was due to deliver right after the holidays.

So Gustav, Julie and their kids, joined with their neighbors at the Erdman house to celebrate the holiday season. The Musten, Kewe, Malberg, Kotkas, and Kulpas families were there. The Reinsons, who had immigrated with the Krikentals, were also present, as were the Minniks, Lentmans, Meers, and Watmans. The children were delighted with the decorations, the stories, games, and particularly the songs—the joy of singing seemed to be an inherited Estonian trait. Gustav and Julie looked forward to the new year which they hoped would bring continued good fortune for the growing Krikental family and the close-knit Estonian community. Both had learned to appreciate any good fortune that came their way.

The New Year brought the cold. Mid-January had blinding snow. With the worst weather each family was isolated and on their own. Venturing very far out-of-doors could be bone chilling and even life threatening. The Krikental homestead was far from their neighbors and even farther from town. It was not the best time to be in labor, but Julie's baby couldn't wait. The baby came into the world without any help from a doctor or midwife. Afterward, Julie's family did what they could, but Julie grew weaker and died the same day.

Maria Kotkas (Sepp) recalled,
"the first week after the New Year, 1906, Mrs. Krikental had a baby. They had no help and she died leaving three girls, a boy and the new baby. At that time no one wanted someone else's baby. Everyone had their own. Grandma Erdman took the nameless baby and called her Margarete and took care of her. They already had five children of their own and four that had died.....When Mrs. Krickendal died Grandpa Erdman said that we needed a cemetery. So he gave maybe an acre of his land for the cemetery. When the preacher came again he blessed the ground. A lot of people are buried there even Grandpa and Grandma Erdman. At that time it did not cost money to be born or to die."

Gustav, at age 37 was now a widower in a new land with a farm to work and five young children to provide for. Once again he needed to find the strength to start over.

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 Starting over in a new land seems to have been, from the very beginning, a part of the Krikental family's genetic makeup.

### The beginnings

According to an analysis of Krikental DNA by the National Geographic-IBM Genographic Project, the first known common Krikental ancestor was a male descendent of "Eurasian Adam", who lived some 31,000 to 79,000 years ago in Africa. All male Krikental ancestors can be genetically identified by their haplogroup N, a lineage defined by a genetic

marker called LLY22GV and an ancient chromosome marker called M168.

This DNA marker showed that Gustav Krikental's forefathers were part of the second great human migration out of Africa—a migration of hunters who, as the ice age receded, followed the expanding grasslands and abundant game to the Middle East. Descendants of this group hunted herds of buffalo, antelope, and woolly mammoths through Iran to the steppes of Central Asia.



**Map and haplogroup information based on Genographic Project information**

One group of hunters pursued the herds eastward, along the Eurasian steppe, until blocked by the mountains of south central Asia. It was probably in Siberia that a new genetic marker (LLY22G) arose in part of this population. This is the haplogroup N marker which is found in Russia, Siberia, northern Finland, Scandinavia, and Northeastern Europe. Members of haplogroup N include the reindeer-herding Saami people of northern Scandinavia and Russia. Today it can be used to trace the last several thousand year's migrations of Uralic-speaking peoples including the Finns and Estonians.

### Estonia

Skipping forward a couple hundred generations, we find the modern Krikental ancestors were still Uralic-speaking but worked at farming rather than herding reindeer. The first mention of the Krikental ancestors is found in the Järva-Madise parish records. Births, deaths, and marriages for the serfs who were owned by the Järvamaa county estates were recorded in detail. The parish, located south of Albu Manor, served eight districts: Albu, Ageri, Ahula, Kaalepi, Kurisoo, Orgmetsa, Seidla and pastorage. Parish records show the birth of the first known Krikental ancestor, Kulli Hinrik in 1784. Since serfs were not allowed to have surnames Hinrik was known also by the assumed name *Kulli* which maybe was the name of a farm.

Kulli Hinrik was born into a family of serfs. Throughout his life the German estate landlords, who were his owners and masters, interpreted and enforced the law. They could treat serfs like slaves and floggings were common. Children of serfs could be taken from their parents and sold. Landholders who got into financial trouble were even known to sell wives and husbands separately to neighbor estates.

When Hinrik was 16, the Czar ruled that although serfs were the property of the estate, families must be sold as a unit.

When Hinrik was 28 he married Kai, who was born in 1790 in the Albu estate district. Kai and Hinrik stayed in Ageri just south east of Albu and raised two daughters, Mai and Kai, and a son Mihkel. In 1835 their daughter, Mai, married a soldier named Jaan, the son of blacksmith Seppa Hallika Jagob. Kulli Mihkel, Gustav Krikental's father, was born in 1819.



**Järva-Madise parish south of Albu Manor and north of Paide (used with permission H.Allik)**

Between 1816 and 1819 the serfs were formally emancipated, so Kulli Mihkel was technically born a freeman. Freedom brought few changes to daily life since the Czars continued to pass laws that, alternatively expanded, then restricted individual rights. Also each estate owner still interpreted the law—usually for the benefit of the estate. Former serfs could not own land and often remained bound to an estate by obligations owed to the land owners. Gradually peasants got the rights to change their rural dwelling place, sell their labor to any estate, and take a surname.

As freemen, Mihkel and his father Hinrik may have left the Kulli farm for other work—parish records list Henrik's occupation as watchman, which at that time was a prestigious occupation. Maybe because of unpleasant memories of the Kulli farm or maybe just because they could, the name Kulli was dropped in favor of a new surname recorded with the Ageri estate as *Grekenthal*, *Grekental*, and *Krekental*. If the name *Grekenthal* originated from German it can be translated as “the people from the green valley”. If the name *Krekental* originated from Estonian it might have been “Germanized” to *Grekenthal*. Many Estonians wanted to take uncommon, even unique names. The name *Krekental* is unique and may have been created from whole cloth since all *Krekentals* are Mihkel's descendants. For the next 50 years the form *Grekenthal* was used for legal and civil records. The family probably used the Estonian form, *Krekental*, in everyday life.

In 1842 Mihkel married Mina Kirsipu in Ageri—the same year Mihkel's mother, Kai, died at age 52. Judge Herr Gustav Ferdinand Hermann von Baggehuffwundt, the owner of the Ageri estate, witnessed Mihkel and Mina's November wedding. This was the only peasant wedding where his attendance was recorded. His one-time-only presence let's us speculate that Mihkel's father may have been a watchman assigned to the Manor house campus where he was personally known.

Mina's family surname was registered with the Ageri estate as both *Kirschbaum* and *Kirsbaum*. Only Mina's brother, Jacob used the German version, *Kirschbaum*. Mina and the rest of the family used the Estonian version, *Kirsipuu*. The *Kirschbaum* and *Palkmann* families were registered with *both* the Albu and Ageri estates. Included among the hundreds of peasants registered with the Albu Estate were the Erdmann, Kotkas, Kleesmann, Otraw, Salman, Palkmann, Pedow, Reinson, Salman, Sepp, and Valkman families.

Six years after his own wedding, Mihkel Grekenthal witnessed Mina's sister Anno's marriage to Jaan Pilwe. In the years following both weddings, the Järvamaa county peasants grew bolder, wiser, and more rebellious. When the peasants exercised their rights as freemen, landowners would sometimes call in the soldiers to keep the peasants “in their place.”

The Grekenthals and their neighbors resented their treatment by the estate owners and yearned for a better life for their families. In the years between 1856 and 1863 Czar Alexander II granted Estonian serfs more rights to education, ownership of land, and the freedom to move within and outside the country. In 1861 he freed all Russian serfs.



**Albu Manor house (used with permission H.Allik)**

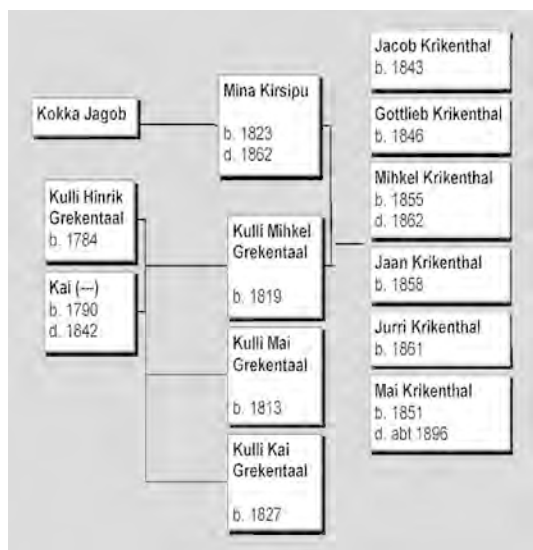
These rights helped embolden to action the Järvamaa county peasants. They learned that the Czar would give them their own farms in Crimea. The Tartars were exiled to Turkey following the recently concluded Crimean War. Now Tartar farms were vacant and the Russian government needed settlers to come to Crimea and work the land. The Czar promised free land, free seed, and freedom from the military draft. This was welcome news for Mihkel and Mina since the family now had just one daughter, Mai, and five sons: Jakob, Gottlieb, Mihkel, Jaan, and Jurri.

Many of the Järvamaa county peasant families were related through blood and marriage so plans for immigration to Crimea spread easily through the community. When the estate owners learned of the plans they grew fearful of losing their low cost work



force and tried to block immigration efforts. Albu Manor overseers called in the soldiers to battle with the peasants in what is still remembered as a blood bath.

Mihkel Grekenthal was among a bold group of Järvamaa county peasants who signed and sent a letter to the Czar to complain that their landlords would not provide the release papers that would allow them to immigrate to Crimea.



Beginnings of the Krikenthal family 1784 Estonia

A dream of starting life over in a new land, completely free from the whims of estate owners grew among those who had endured oppression and whippings at

the Albu and Ageri estates. Long delays in obtaining passports were the rule. Eventually, three Kotkas families, the Palkmans, the Grekenthal family, and Mina Grekenthal's sister Anno and her husband Jaan Pilwe (all registered with the Ageri Estate), were among those obtaining passports.

Gradually most families who applied were granted passports and the freedom to attempt the back-breaking 1,600 mile journey south to the "warm" new land of Crimea.

#### Notes regarding names

Spelling of family names has generally been taken from source materials. Many surnames went through many changes between their original selection in Estonia and their use in Crimea, Canada, and the USA.

The Krikental family name was recorded as "Grekenthal" on Crimean immigration, birth and death records. The name had changed to "Krikenthal" on papers supporting immigration to Canada and later the USA.

In American homestead, legal, and death records the name was recorded as Kirkendahl, Krikendahl, Krikendal, Krickendahl, and, Krickentol.

Interestingly, about 1905 both Gustav and his cousins that remained in Crimea all seemed to favor the spelling "Krikental".

For this article, the family name is spelled as it was historically: Grekenthal for Estonian and Crimean family history and Krikental for American family history.

Also from the Kulli farm (or place), Kulli Jagob's children took the surname Orraw (Orav). Kulli Jürri, vabadik got the surname Waht (Vaht). And Kulli Otto registered the surname Kesker.

| Ukru Aggers wofsch.                                          |                 |                 |                                                                                  |                                                             |                                                                                  |                                                                                               |               |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------|
| Geschlecht, Tauf- und Familienname, Stand, Rang oder Gewerbe | Ort, der Geburt | Jahr und Tag    | Ob verheirathet und seit wann, oder ob verwittwet oder geschieden, und seit wann | Wann in die Gemeinde gekommen, falls nicht daselbst geboren | Kenntnisse im Lesen und in der Religion, sofern solches dem Prediger bekannt ist | Besondere Bemerkungen und Hinweise auf ältere Personal-Bücher, oder auf andere Kirchen-Bücher | Ob confirmirt |        |
|                                                              |                 |                 |                                                                                  |                                                             |                                                                                  |                                                                                               | Wann?         | Wo?    |
| Kulli Hinrik, Mafschel -                                     | Aggers          | 1784 d. 11 März | Verheirathet seit 1812.                                                          |                                                             | Gutsherrsch.                                                                     | Gre = Grekentaal                                                                              | 1802.         | Mathes |
| Mai Kai +                                                    | Alp.            | 1790 d. 17 Jul. | ist supra                                                                        |                                                             | 2. d. g. l.                                                                      |                                                                                               | 1808          | ibid.  |
| M. Kinder: Mai                                               | Aggers          | 1813. 14. Aug.  |                                                                                  |                                                             | Münze d.                                                                         |                                                                                               | 1831          | ibid.  |
| 1) Mihkel                                                    | ibid.           | 1819. 24. Jul.  | Verheirathet 1842                                                                |                                                             | ibid.                                                                            |                                                                                               | 1838          | ibid.  |
| 2) Kai -                                                     | ibid.           | 1817. 17. März  |                                                                                  |                                                             |                                                                                  |                                                                                               | 1843          | ib.    |

The first recorded use of the Krikentaal family name. Kulli Hinrik & Kai with children Mai, Mihkel, Kai are listed in the first column. The forth column shows the wedding dates for Mihkel and his father. Both (Krik) and Grekentaal (Gre = Krikentaal) are used in the seventh column. Confirmation dates are in the eighth column. Aggers, in the second column is now known as Ageri. Alp, in is now Albu. (From Saaga database, Ageri estate, Kulli family page 1834-1843)

Thanks to Helgi Leesment, and Dave Kiil for research, fact checking, and editing

Next: The Krikental family in Crimea



## Johannes “John” Kerbes – Early Settler

Johannes (John) Kerbes was the fourth son born to Liisu and Mihkel Kerbes on November 7, 1880, in Tver, Russia. The family were serfs in Estonia, and with the hope of owning land, they moved to Russia. There they were given four acres of land and a cow. This was a private deal with the landowner, a Mr. Brunt. The men had to work for him in the forest until the debt was paid off.

When the young men reached 25 years of age; they had to serve in the Czar’s army for seven years. The Russians needed manpower in their conflict against Japan between 1903 and 1905. To avoid conscription into the Russian military, Johannes Kerbes and Alec Liiv came to Canada in 1903.

The Estonians were promised certain benefits in return for their relocation to Russia, such as not having to serve in the military, not having to pay taxes for a certain period of time, and having freedom of religion. These turned out to be LIES!

John Kerbes left Estonia at the age of 23 in 1903. He travelled by ship from Liverpool, England, and arrived in Halifax, N.S., on September 25, 1903. The ship had a total of 752 passengers: 47 in cabins and 705 in steerage, for. After John arrived in Halifax; his only suitcase was stolen, leaving him with nothing. He managed to work his way west to the Red Deer, Alberta, area and on to Sylvan Lake. Eventually he settled in the Linda Hall district and worked on tobacco farms, apple orchards, and whatever jobs he could get. In 1904, John filed on a homestead at N.W.1/4-20-37-19-W4th Meridian for a \$10.00 fee and ownership of 160 acres of land. When he homesteaded, it was easier to walk to Red Deer than to take a team of oxen, when he needed supplies and his mail. In the absence of roads, the return trip would last four days. He would camp by a slough and cook some oatmeal for himself. In later years, he went to Blumeneau Store, 16 km north of his homestead, for mail and supplies.

In 1909, John married Sophia Wartnow; whom he had met near Sylvan Lake. Sophia, born in January 1891 on the family’s homestead south of Stettler, was the daughter of Michael Wartnow and Elizabeth Kask. John and Sophia resided on John’s homestead and had four children:

Julia (1910–1987) married Dick Hennel  
Alexander1(912–1966) married Hazel Galleberg  
Archie (1914–2003) married Rosella Viger  
Hilda (1916) married Chummy Dancocks



**Johannes Kerbes, 1956**

In 1910, the Estonian community decided to build a community hall, Linda Hall. John Kerbes donated an acre of land for the site at N.W. ¼-20-37-19-W4th. John was the Secretary of the “Linda Eesti Põllumeeste Selts” or “Linda Estonian Farmers Organization.” He was a member of the Docendo School Board for many years. When the Kerbes children attended Docendo School, the Kerbes family lived on the Liiv place.

In 1910, Johannes’ brother Jaan, his wife Annette, and their three children, as well as Liisu Kerbes immigrated from Estonia, and they all lived with John and Sophia and family in the two-room house. In 1911, another brother, Peter, wife Julia, and eight children also immigrated, and the entire clan lived together for six

weeks. Jaan and Peter's families later homesteaded west of Big Valley, also known by the locals as Kalev.



**Standing, left to right: Ernie Kerbes, Hilda (Kerbes) Dancocks, Archie Kerbes, Helen (Kerbes) Mulligan, Geneva (Kerbes) Parker, Marjorie (Kerbes) Olive, Jim Kerbes; Front row, left to right: Julia (Kerbes) Hennel, Minnie (Mother) Kerbes, Alec Kerbes, 1963**

Sophia died of cancer on August 2, 1918, in Calgary General Hospital. She left a letter to her daughter, Julia (aged 8) instructing her to look after Archie, Alec, and Hilda and to keep them clean. Sophia was buried in the Estonian cemetery near Linda Hall. Following the funeral, John Kerbes sat by the door of the old log house with his violin wrapped in one of Sophia's blouses.

In 1920, John married Sophia's sister, Minnie, in Stettler, and they lived on the homestead until 1927. Minnie and John had five children:  
Helen (b.1922) married Pat Mulligan  
Ernie was born in 1925 on the homestead. He married Irene Sivacoe  
Marjorie (b. 1927) married Bill Olive  
Geneva (b. 1929) married Don Parker  
Jim (b. 1930) married Helen Mulhbach

In 1927, Ernie's family moved to their current farm site at S.E.1/4-13-37-20-W4th. They built an Estonian sauna of logs. When the bathhouse began to deteriorate, a lumber sauna was erected. The sauna was enjoyed by many people for a lot of years. The Kerbes children attended Spring Lake School.

John and Minnie worked very hard and raised their family of nine children in a home filled with music, song, Estonian culture, and customs. John taught the four boys to play the violin. Ernie says "Archie was the best violin player in the family".

Archie learned to play the violin, guitar, and piano and was able to take a few lessons, and mastered piano-accordion. In the early years, John, Archie, and Alec played at local dances and functions, including their supper! Helen played the piano and sang. She competed in Music Festivals and was the pianist and singer with her cousins "The 4K's"-for many years. Helen resides in Penticton, B.C., and enjoys entertaining seniors in Lodges and at various functions.

Oscar and Annie (Wartnow) Raho were married in 1932. Archie Kerbes on the piano, and Ed Raho on the violin, played for their wedding dance at Spring Lake School. Archie Kerbes also played the piano with his cousins' band, the 4K's at different times.

Ernie and Jim Kerbes play the violin by ear and are always called upon at family gatherings and parties to entertain. This tradition is carried on by Ernie and Jim's grand-children, Nathan Kerbes and Stephanie Marshal.

To quote Ernie Kerbes "There was always a piano or a violin being played in John and Minnie Kerbes' home, and lots of singing in Estonian and English." Along with the music and singing, there was dancing by young and old! Grandchildren of John and Minnie recall many happy times visiting, singing, dancing, and of course enjoying the homemade headcheese and rye bread that Minnie always served at celebrations.

Ernie Kerbes married Irene Sivacoe in 1953, and they lived in the farmyard with John and Minnie; raising a family of five children. John Kerbes did not learn to drive a vehicle. In 1959, John and Minnie retired to Stettler, where Minnie was employed at the Stettler Municipal Hospital. John passed away May 8, 1963, and was buried on May 10, 1963, in Lakeview Cemetery in Stettler. Minnie moved back to the farm in 1966 and later into a mobile home in Big Valley, to be near her daughter, Marjorie Oliver. Minnie Kerbes passed away on October 30, 1977, in Stettler and was also buried in Lakeview Cemetery.

Like all pioneer families, the Kerbes' endured many hardships, but with lots of hard work, determination, and tenacity, they were able to fulfill the hope and dream of being free and to own their own piece of land. John and Minnie left a legacy of Estonian culture and customs to their large family who celebrate the traditions with the gift of music.

Information was provided by Ernie Kerbes, Jim Kerbes, Shirley Raynard, and Lorraine Gerlitz.

Compiled by Irene and Deane Kerbes, 2006.

# Estonian Chapel in Alberta: 100 Years Old

Irene Kerbes

In 1905, when the railroad was completed to Stettler, Alberta, there was a group of Estonian people of the Lutheran Faith living in the area south of Stettler. At a meeting of the local people, Pastor John Sillak, an Estonian Lutheran, came from Medicine Hat, Alberta to address the gathering. He explained that the Government would give two acres of land for a cemetery, probably taxable. If the people would decide to build a Church, then the Government would give them ten acres, and no taxes. The Estonian group, being devout Lutherans, wanted a sanctuary to worship in and a sacred place to bury their deceased. Taking Sillak's advice; the group pursued the ten acres of land.



**Reverend John Sillak**

The Estonian Cemetery and Chapel were established in April, 1906, located on S.E. ¼ -28-37-19, about a mile east of present day Linda Hall. The Gov't gave a grant of ten acres from this quarter to the Evangelical Lutheran Church-"Püha Johannese Luteriusu Kogudus" "Holy John Lutheran Congregation"- the Church had its beginning. People gathered in the home of Joseph Hennel for the purpose of organizing in the faith of the

Evangelical Lutheran Church. John Sillak, who had a P.H.D. in Philosophy and spoke several languages, addressed the assembly as to which foundation it was to be organized. John Sillak traveled over an enormous area, serving scattered Estonians and other Baltic immigrants from California to Manitoba.

The land was acquired from Christian Hennel in 1906. It is believed that Hans Asberg was the main carpenter when a simple all lumber structure was built by local Estonian volunteers and a cemetery was also created. The Chapel is a simple wooden building on the knoll over-looking the landscape. On the east and west walls are four-foot square windows, a door on the south end; and a cross on the top of the peak.



**The Early Estonian Chapel**

In the interior there are plain wooden pews, and an altar painted gold. Pastor Sillak held services here. He baptized the children and buried the deceased. When Pastor Sillak was unable to serve the Congregation, Gustav Nicklom, who served as a Vesper in Estonia, conducted the necessary service

The first caretaker of burials in 1906 was Hans Asberg, as he was the only one who could speak English. In 1909, this job was taken over

by Gustav Nicklom until 1915. The post was open until 1930, when Martin Hennel filled in until 1932. At this time Joseph Tipman Jr. became Secretary-Treasurer and he kept the burial records until his death in 2000. Jay Tipman then kept the records until he left the area. He gave all of the records to Vern Raho.

According to statistics, there were three burials in 1907, these being the first of many to be buried in the Estonian Cemetery. Unfortunately, Rev. Sillak decided that two certain persons did not follow the teachings of the Lutheran faith so these people were buried outside of the Cemetery. At a later date, the Gov't granted another acre of land; thereby adding the two graves to the Cemetery.

The founders of the St. John Lutheran Congregation were: Rev. John Sillak, Naden Silverman, Hans Asberg, Kristian Magi, John Kerbes, Martin Oliver (Ebruik), Alex Saar, Christian Hennel, Anders Negols, Joseph Hennel, Hans Johanson, John Kolga, Otto Renglas, Mrs. Magnus Tipman and Mrs. Joseph Tipman Sr. The idea was to get ten acres of land from the Federal Gov't for \$10.00 fee. The Gov't was to notify John Sillak, the Pastor, as the land was, and then an inspector would be ordered to inspect it. The Estonians complied with all regulations and a Patent was issued to the Estonian Group and in 1910 the Gov't forwarded the patent to the Pastor. The Pastor was ill with rheumatism so he proposed to send the Patent over to Hans Asberg, secretary of the Trustees, because the chairman, Hans Johanson, had passed away on Sept. 29, 1910. Hans Asberg would not accept the Patent because he didn't want the Congregation to think that he would get the land for his own use. Pastor Sillak accepted the Patent and brought it to the gathering at a regular business meeting, Jan. 4-1910- in Docendo School-it was 50 degrees below zero!

A meeting was held at Joseph Hennel's in 1911. The elected chairman was Joseph Tipman Sr. and the Secretary was Hans Asberg. The assembled people were asked to contribute to raise the \$10.00 fee. Those who did contribute were: John Sillak, Martin Silverman, Hans Asberg, Christian Magi, John

Kerbes, Martin Oliver, Alexander Saar, Christian Hennel, Anders Negols, Joseph Hennel, John Kolga, Otto and Jacob Renglas, Mrs. Magnus Tipman and Mrs. Joseph Tipman.



**The Estonian Cemetery near Stettler**

The Creed Read: "He who wants to be a member of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran , St John's Congregation must accept these creeds unconditionally and believe what they say." The title was given in the names of Joseph Tipman Sr., Cristian Hennel and William Hennel- and that this land is the property of the Congregation and must remain with the Congregation forever.

The local people helped to maintain the cemetery and gave generously of their time and money to build a fence around the Cemetery and to care for their Church. Those who helped had the eternal right to bury their deceased in the Cemetery. It was written and dated Dec.10,1929.

"Whosoever troubles us after this meeting of the 10<sup>th</sup> day of 1929, by trying to rob from us, the Church and with the Church and the Cemetery; these persons are not allowed to bury no corpses in our Cemetery".

Signed by: Joseph Hennel  
Christian Hennel  
William Klaus  
Pastor John Sillak

Secretary Joseph Tipman Sr., Christian Hennel and William Hennel were the first Trustees and kept the records. Others to follow in this capacity were Gustav Nicklom, George

Klaus Sr., Joseph Hennel, Joe Tipman Jr., Martin Hennel, Rudolph Hennel, Alfred Klaus, Otto Nicklom and many others.

There was a time when the Chapel and Cemetery fell into an unkempt state. The Gov't contacted the Linda Hall Men's Club and informed them – if the area was not improved, the Gov't would relocate the remains to another cemetery. The Men's Club contacted the local Estonian families and organized a clean-up bee in June of 1967. The people came with equipment and lots of energy and began the restoration. The Chapel was moved to its present site, closer to the burial ground. The Chapel received new windows, a new door and a paint job. A new fence, several gates and a sign were eventually erected. Trees and a hedge of lilacs were planted. Rose Kerbes (Albert), grand-daughter of Gustav Nicklom, stamped the iron crosses which were placed in rows to signify the many unmarked graves.

In 1996, a trust fund was set up for the perpetual care and maintenance of the Chapel and grounds.

In 1997, a new roof and siding were put on the Chapel. This was done to preserve the original structure from the weather. The interior is as it was in 1906.

In the roadside Cemetery, beneath rows of iron crosses and many beautiful headstones, lie approximately one hundred Estonian Pioneer family members providing mute testimony to the early Estonian presence in the area. But the struggles and great contributions of the Pioneer Estonians are alive in the memories of their children and grand-children; and should become part of the awareness of all Albertans seeking to understand the many cultures which have come together to make today's Alberta.

“May they rest in Peace and not be forgotten”

Information has been taken from The Estonian Cemetery Records and articles by Joe Tipman, Jr.

Compiled by Irene Kerbes 2006

## **President Bush visits Estonia**

President George W. Bush visited the Estonian capital Tallinn on November 28, 2006 enroute to the NATO Conference in Riga, Latvia. He is the first US President to visit Estonia.

According to the White House press release President Bush, during the joint press conference with Estonian President Ilves, stated that “we talked about how our nations can cooperate to achieve common objectives and promote common values, values such as human dignity and human rights and the freedom to speak and worship the way one sees fit.”

Bush stated that he considers Estonia “a strong friend and ally of the US”. He also said that Estonians understand the “need to resist tyranny and realize their dreams of living in a free society”.

Several news agencies reported that President Bush was particularly impressed with Estonia's tax system: “they've got a tax system here that is transparent, open and simple”. He was presented with two gifts: a glass sculpture and a Skype wireless phone that can be used to make calls over the Internet.



President Bush and President Ilves walk to a joint news conference at the National Bank of Estonia in Tallinn, Estonia.

## **Estonian pioneers in Alberta:**

### ***Community halls and cemeteries***

Dave Kiil

In the late 1800s and the first decades of the 20th century Estonian pioneers settled west of the Great Lakes on both sides of the 49th parallel in the U.S. and Canada, including Alberta, Montana, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Availability of large blocks of land was the primary attraction. Important Estonian agricultural communities were established in Bloomville, Wisconsin; Fort Pierre, South Dakota; Daglum, North Dakota; Chester, Montana; and Stettler, Medicine Valley, and Barons, Alberta.

The settlements varied in size from about a dozen families to several hundred. Initially, the settlers concentrated on providing shelter for their families, acquiring domestic animals, and clearing land for agriculture. As the pioneer settlers became established, various forms of social and economic organizations were established in support of their lifestyles. Communes or collective organizations were formed, sometimes driven by the political leanings of the community leaders. Agricultural societies, loan and savings co-operatives, men's and

women's clubs, sports teams and bands, and, perhaps most importantly, community halls, churches, and cemeteries were established in the bigger communities.

In the U.S., the Fort Pierre, South Dakota, Estonian agricultural colony became established in 1894, followed by a Lutheran congregation in 1897. Apparently the congregation existed without a Church. A small settlement was established in 1902 near Daglum, North Dakota. In Wisconsin, the Schley Estonian Church was built in 1914. An Estonian community became established in Chester, Montana, by 1910 and included Estonians who left Barons in southern Alberta.

The following pictures provide an introduction to the community halls, a school, a chapel, and cemeteries established by Estonian pioneers in Alberta during the first decades of the 1900s. Linda Hall and the chapel/cemetery, the Gilby Kalmu and Barons cemeteries continue to serve the needs of local communities.



**Linda Hall was originally built in 1911 to provide for the social and economic needs of the Estonian pioneers who settled here during the first decades of the 1900s. It burned down in 1930 but was rebuilt in 1931 (photo on the left). The photo on the right shows the Hall in the 1990s. It remains a popular venue for many events and functions, including major gatherings of Alberta's Estonian community.**

## Archival gallery.....



**Left:** The original Estonian School in the Medicine Valley area, shown here, was built in 1910 by local volunteers. From the beginning, instruction was in English. It closed in the early 1950s and was moved to Eckville. **Right:** Estonian Chapel, located a few kilometers from Linda Hall in the Stettler area, was built in 1906, making it the oldest chapel or small church in North America.



**Left:** Medicine Valley Estonian Hall at it's closing sale and auction, 1980. It was built in 1919 and served as a social centre for the area pioneers. The Hall burned down a few weeks later. **Right:** The Estonian Hall's interior, facing the stage.



**Left:** The original Gilby Cemetery, established on the Raabis homestead in 1903, is the resting place of a dozen Estonian pioneers and their children. **Middle:** The Gilby Kalmu cemetery was established in 1914 and continues to serve the surrounding community. Many Estonian pioneers and their descendants are buried here. **Right:** The Barons cemetery was established in the early 1900s and rededicated in 2004.

# Coming of Age: Tartu, August 2006

Steve Appleton

## *About the Author:*

*Steve was raised in Red Deer, Alberta and is the eldest son of Don and Yvonne Appleton. He has spent 27 years in the Canadian Army, serving in Germany, Bosnia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He retired in March 2005 as a Colonel.*

*Since then, Steve has served as a Project Manager for the International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, for NATO, and he is presently serving with the UN as the Head of the road construction effort for that country.*

*Steve holds degrees in civil engineering, an MBA, and a Masters degree in strategic studies.*

*He has been married for 23 years and has two daughters. The older daughter is 19 years of age and in third year at the University of Calgary. The younger daughter is 16 years of age and in Grade 11 in Calgary.*

I am honoured to be asked to share my experiences while in Estonia serving as a Senior Lecturer for the Baltic Defence College. I have been fulfilling this duty for the past three years where I instruct in the subjects of international strategy and strategic studies. The fact that a NATO sponsored Defence College was located in Tartu, Estonia was originally a surprise to me, not being familiar with its exact location. Three years later, I can say that the selection of Estonia was visionary, and the selection of Tartu, as I shall relate below, was magnificent.

The road trip to Tartu, after arriving in Tallinn via London, Dubai, and originally Kabul, Afghanistan, reminded me of two places where I previously resided. Firstly, the landscape, green and rich with agriculture, could have been a snapshot of anywhere in Canada. Looking about I saw the beauty of a countryside full of life and activity. Estonia also reminded me of Germany; the development of the road system, infrastructure, and traffic signs, spoke to me as if I was once again traveling along

the infamous Autobahn in Germany back in the 1980s.

This mental picture of Estonia was an interesting mélange of images. Both images, very powerful in their own right, yet calming, beautiful, and highly impressive when brought together.



Street scene in Tartu

As we arrived in Tartu, the familiar sites of cobblestone streets, parks, and Toome Hill emerged. The combination of old Gothic buildings and new highrises spoke of the emergence of a city and people that were moving forward into the 21st Century, whilst



recognizing and appreciating the uniqueness of their heritage. Tartu is a university town; the University of Tartu is well recognized in this region of the world as a leading institution in education, from medicine to astronomy, from KJ Peterson to FR Faehlmann.

The city also features both a new city centre and an old town. Believed to have been established in the 13th Century, the Old Town within Tartu features such historic jewels as the St. John's Church with its terracotta decorations, the Town Hall, and the trapezoid-shaped marketplace. The new city centre was, in part, built after the Second World War, when almost 50% of the buildings in Tartu were destroyed. Today, the new city centre features the Tartu Art Building, the Vanemuine Theatre, the popular Wilde pub, and the Emajõe Business Centre. In the daytime, the streets are full of vibrant, healthy looking Estonians, youthful in appearance, and surprisingly familiar with the English language.



**Steve Appleton in downtown Tartu**

In my opinion, the most impressive feature of the Town Hall is the monument built in 1998 of a young couple kissing. Situated in the midst of a circular water fountain, this monument captures the spirit and youthfulness of

Tartu, if not all of Estonia. To view the couple is to think of the future and the opportunities that exist for those willing to strive forward. I am told that a competition is held every year to see how long participating couples can maintain the exact pose of the sculpture. The event is reportedly hugely popular with all Estonians.



**The Kissing Couple statue in front of Town Hall in Tartu**

This does not surprise me. It is evident to a visitor, such as me, that all Estonians have embraced the theme of the passionate monument: the desire to move forward and create opportunity in a new era.

#### **Estonians now visa free for Canada**

Monte Solberg, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, recently announced that Estonian citizens no longer require a temporary resident visa to visit Canada. He further noted that Canada has the largest community of Estonians outside Estonia.

According to the Estonian Central Council in Canada, this decision justifiably raises expectations of close cultural relations as well as bi-lateral trade and business opportunities. Of the new European Union members, Estonia was the only country to be granted this status by Canada after accession. The Council's lobbying efforts for visa-free travel have been consistent for over a decade.

## New President for Estonia

The election of Swedish-born diplomat Toomas Hendrik Ilves as president of Estonia means that all three Baltic States are now led by former exiles from Soviet power.

“It’s a response to political corruption and scandals. These outsiders are free from that, and bring a fresh transparency and honesty to politics,” Andres Kasekamp, professor of Baltic politics at Tartu University, told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

All three Baltic States were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944–45. Many Baltic citizens fled to the west rather than live under communism but maintained contact with their homelands until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

Returning exiles have played an important role in the development of Baltic society since independence, influencing local journalism, economics, arts and entertainment, as well as politics. Some have been criticized for not understanding the Soviet past, however.

Toomas Ilves, 52, was born in Stockholm to exiles from Soviet-dominated Estonia, which the Red Army conquered in 1944–45. Like so many Baltic refugees, his parents later moved to the United States, and Ilves was educated at Columbia University, studying psychology.

In the 1980s he began working for the US-funded Radio Free Europe, becoming head of its Estonian desk in 1988. He returned to Estonia after the fall of communism and, in 1993, was appointed ambassador to the United States, Canada and Mexico, becoming foreign minister in 1996.

Elizabeth II made the first-ever visit by a British monarch to the Baltic States in October. There, she praised the Baltic people for their strength in the face of oppression, and their determination to regain independence. “I have seen three very different countries but have seen one feature

that you all share. It is that indomitable spirit, which was able to keep alive the flame of independence, despite all attempts to extinguish it, during the very worst of times,” the queen said here Thursday at a state dinner.

“It is this spirit which has driven forward the rapid political, economic, and social change in all your countries, change which is not something to be measured simply by statistics, but in the freedom, peace and prosperity which all your peoples now enjoy.”



**Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (L) and Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves (R) attend the concert 'Estonia Sings' at Town Hall Square in Tallinn, Estonia, October 20, 2006. EPA/INGA KUNDZINA**

Thousands of people packed into Tallinn’s medieval City Hall Square to give Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II a musical send-off from the Baltic states with an open-air concert called “Estonia Sings.”



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

