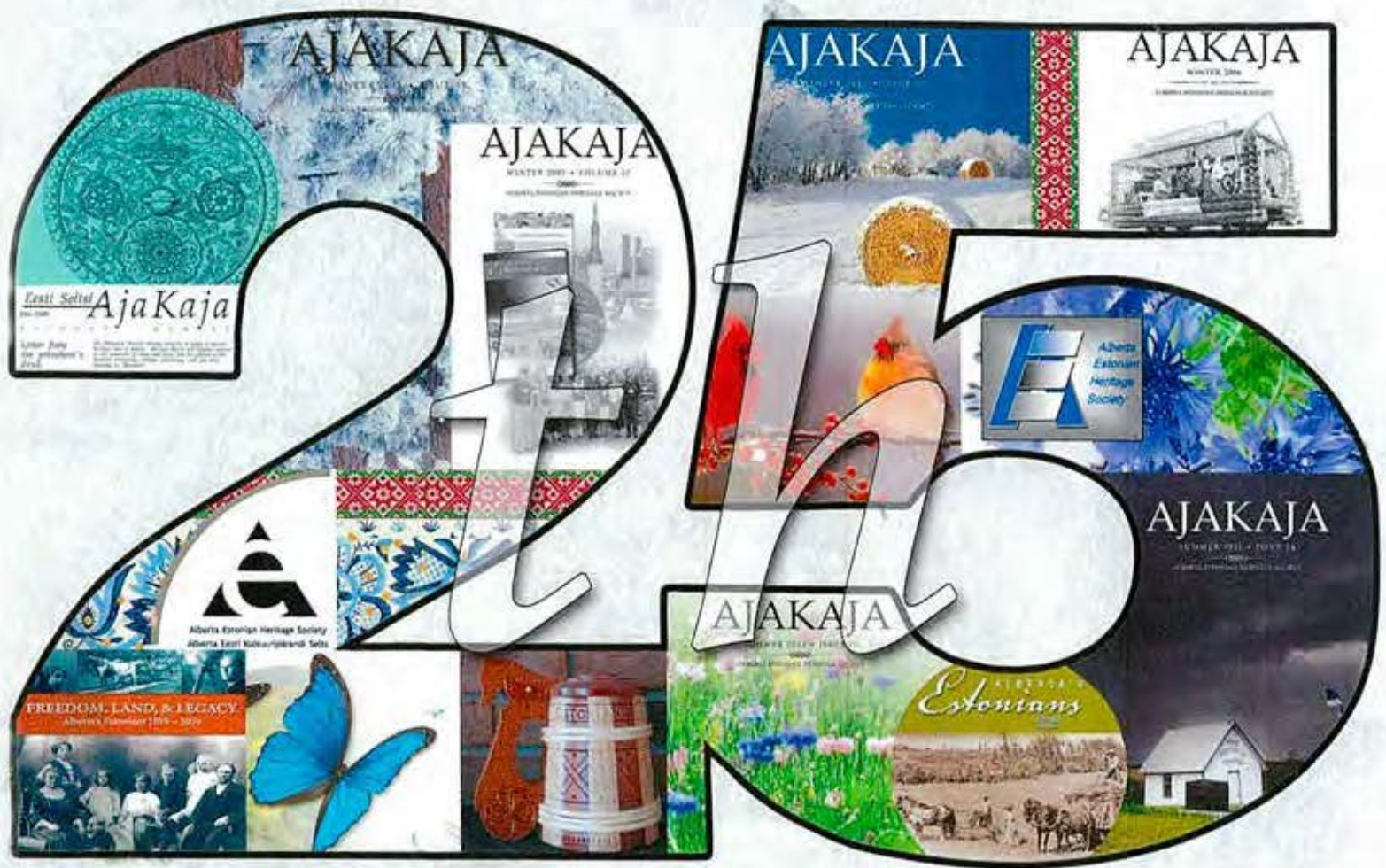


# AJAKAJA

SUMMER 2014

ISSUE 40

ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY



## Anniversary



# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society 2014

The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) was formally established on April 23, 2005 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Alberta's Estonian community, and to increase awareness of developments in Estonia.

## BOARD

President	Ave Peetri
Vice-President	Helgi Leesment
Treasurer	Toomas Paasuke
Secretary	Juri Kraav
Director, Membership	Lorne Hennel
Director , AjaKaja	Eda McClung
Director, Ajakaja	Dave Kiil
Director	Martha Munz Gue
Director	Rein Paasuke
Director	Kaidi Phypers
Past President	Bob Kingsep

**Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) website: [www.aehs.ca](http://www.aehs.ca)**

## AEHS Membership Application

Membership applications can be completed on [www.aehs.ca](http://www.aehs.ca) website under Menu Option: **Membership**. Membership queries and written applications can be submitted to Membership Director Lorne Hennel:

e-mail: [hennell@telus.net](mailto:hennell@telus.net)

Regular mail: Lorne Hennel

48 Thornlee Cres. N.W.,  
Calgary, AB., T2K 2W3.

## AjaKaja

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

Copies of AjaKaja can be ordered from [emcclung@shaw.ca](mailto:emcclung@shaw.ca). Non-members may purchase this special issue of AjaKaja for \$10.00 by contacting Eda McClung.

Please submit articles, photographs and heritage-related items to Eda McClung at [emcclung@shaw.ca](mailto:emcclung@shaw.ca) or Dave Kiil at [adkiil@shaw.ca](mailto:adkiil@shaw.ca)

**Cover Design:** Susan Kenzle is a Landscape Architect, former Archaeologist, and an advocate of historical literacy who lives in Austin, Texas. Her early childhood exposure to Alberta's history and wild lands sparked her interest in the past and in nature. She has a profound appreciation for the role that her parents (Alice and Calvin Kenzle) and grandparents (August and Lilly Moro, Wilfred and Ida Kenzle) played in igniting and encouraging her lifelong interests. AjaKaja Winter 2013 (Issue #39) included a story by Susan Kenzle "Out of the Ether: Medicine Valley's Estonian Communards."





# AjaKaja

Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society

Summer 2014  
Issue Number 40

## From the Editors

Welcome to this special 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of AjaKaja! Who could have imagined in May 1989 that a four page leaflet compiled and named by Mare Maxwell, would go on to have a run of forty issues and grow to become a 52 page magazine? But it did. And now let's celebrate and reflect on Alberta's remarkable Estonian community. Yes, Editor's have responsibility to produce the newsletter but it is you, our readers, who write the stories, supply the content. This became especially true 10 years ago when AEHS was formed and 'heritage' became the tie that binds us. AjaKaja became the repository of countless, valuable pioneer era stories, told by families proud of their heritage and history. For others, it started a journey to learn more about their roots. Readers tell us these family stories are favourites, a reason for keeping the back issues.

AjaKaja is also about current happenings and since the formations of AEHS, we have been a 'happenings' kind of group. Whether it was province-wide Jaanipäevs, visiting athletes, musicians or dignitaries, AjaKaja has a record of the event. Of special importance was the role it played in facilitating the successful completion of our outstanding Heritage Project. When we review back issues, we wonder how our small community could accomplish such enormous tasks.

This is an important anniversary year in many respects. History has come calling. It is 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonian settlement in Alberta; 100 years ago, Estonian cemeteries, chapels, schools, halls and organizations were established; 65 years ago Edmonton and Calgary Estonian Societies were organized and became the focus of post-war immigrant life. We remember the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mass exodus of Estonians fleeing Soviet occupation, people whose journeys into the free world were the beginning of immigrant life. This issue contains two stories that reflect families who made post-war beginnings here. It was 50 years ago *Kreem and Johani* from Toronto came to record and write about our province's Estonians. Fifty years later, their work culminated in our completion of the Heritage Project. AjaKaja, 25 years ago, was a response to hope and 'awakening' in Estonia and we witnessed the end of the Communist order in Eastern Europe. Who can forget the 1999 Centennial Celebrations in Stettler! It was the largest gathering of Estonians in the province's history and 'awakened' pride and awareness of our special story. It also caught the attention of Estonia's President Meri. These events laid the foundation five years later for the formation of AEHS.

And now we come to a time of transition: election of a new AEHS president, the appointment of an Honorary Consul in Alberta and the arrival of an Ambassador of Estonia to Canada, all happening within months of each other. This fortuitous coincidence can help us strengthen linkages between Alberta's Estonian community and the Republic of Estonia. A shared bond has developed as a result of these recent visits, receptions and official ceremonies involving members of the Society, the Honorary Consul and Ambassador. These developments point to mutual benefits as we work collaboratively in the future.

Thank you to our readers for your 25 years of unfailing support. There are still many stories to be written, events to be described. Please keep sending us your material. Wishing all of you an enjoyable summer.  
Eda McClung and Dave Kiil.

## In this issue

From the Editors	3
Ambassador's Message	4
Consul's Corner	5
Official Opening	6
AEHS Presidents' Message	7
AjaKaja 25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary:	
Mare Maxwell	8
Volli Kalm	9
Marta Kivik	10
Morris Flewwelling	11
Telling our Story	12
Summer Social	13
Aleksander Weiler	14
Julie (Hiie) Oro	19
AEHS AGM	22
Alberta's Estonians:	23
115-year pictorial history	
Sestrap Family	31
Lydia Pals	34
Victor Erdman	37
Fraternity Rotalia 100th Anniversary	38
Estonian House Funding Drive	40
Leah Hennel Photo Award	41
AEHS receives grants	42
AEHS travelling exhibit	43
In Memoriam	44
To Breathe as One	45
Oldest Lutheran Church in North America	46
Montana Estonian Settlement	48
AEHS Membership List	50



# Honorary Consul of the Republic of Estonia installed in Edmonton

Gita Kalmet, Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia

"Parts of Estonia are scattered all across Canada," declared the President of Estonia on his state visit to Canada last year. He meant Estonian communities across the country in Alberta, the West Coast, in Ontario, in Quebec and Nova Scotia. Canada is a special country for Estonia since we are linked by more than the usual relations between countries –

we are linked by people – namely Canada's Estonians. In Alberta this is particularly significant – the first Estonians arrived here over a century ago. They came to Alberta fleeing the First World War, they came between the world wars to escape the economic crisis and they came here after 1944 when a foreign power had seized Estonia.

For young Estonians, Canada once again seems a land of golden opportunity. The Working Holiday visa quotas in the Estonian-Canadian youth exchange program are filled up within a couple of hours. Canada has an excellent image among young Estonians. Again there is a desire to come to Alberta. Why? There is exciting untamed nature here, which seems to fascinate Estonians, there is a boom here, there is work here and workers from abroad are welcome.

Estonians have been good Canadians. Governor General David Johnston told me this when I presented my credentials to him last August.

We certainly hope that Estonian youth setting foot in Canada now and in the coming years do not give reason to change this opinion.



*Christine Robertson, newly-appointed Honorary Consul at the official opening reception of the Estonian Honorary Consulate for Alberta in Edmonton, May 25, 2014.*

Christine you, as Honorary Consul, will undoubtedly come into contact with many of these young people, since providing assistance to Estonians where they reside is one of the tasks which the government of Estonia has entrusted to you in your appointment as Honorary Consul.

I am glad that a person as energetic and profoundly positive as you is the Honorary Consul of Estonia. Ahead of us we have the major task of promoting Estonia in Canada and encouraging more Canadians to travel to Estonia: whether to see what winter is like in that part of the world or to study or perform or even set up an enterprise – which can be done quickly in Estonia – by internet and in a matter of minutes.

The Embassy of the Republic of Estonia on this important day would like to present you with something decorative. An Honorary Consul deserves to be honoured as well as to be decorated. This brooch is noteworthy since it has been inspired by the silver brooch worn by our Estonian great grandmothers – the only difference being that is of contemporary design and made of glass. It has however retained the eight pointed star of the ancient brooch. Estonians for generations have considered this motif a symbol of protection. It was meant to bring luck and success to the person wearing it and at the same time repel evil forces. Christine, for you also we wish care and protection! And much success and luck to you and the honorary consulate.



# Consul's Corner

Christine Robertson, Edmonton, Alberta

Tervisi from Edmonton! It seems long ago, back in December 2013, I hosted Ambassador Gita Kalmet on her first visit to Edmonton. We had a two day Consular Mission at the Estonian Consulate in Edmonton (my office) and hosted a small dinner for Ambassador Kalmet with Alberta Estonian Heritage Society's President Ave Peetri and Edmonton's Ain Dave Kiil. It was a cold and snowy two days! I presented Ambassador Kalmet with an Alberta cookbook 'High Plains'.

Since then, there have been monthly Consular Corps luncheon meetings with the Edmonton Consular Corps. (In Edmonton, 24 countries are represented by Honorary Consuls). Guest speakers have included Katherine Huising, Chief of Protocol; Leslie Grover, BMW Diplomatic Sales Manager; the Ambassador to Turkey; Edmonton Chamber of Commerce; Edmonton International Airport; and the ITU World Triathlon Organizing Committee to recruit volunteers and promote the event being held in Edmonton this year from Aug 26-Sept 1, 2014.

Over the months:

I visited Calgary several times to hand out passports. I attended a breakfast for Icelandair with other Consular Corps members to hear the Prime Minister of Iceland speak of travel and business opportunities in Iceland which are now easier with direct flights from Edmonton to Iceland.

I attended this year's Consular Ball on May 3.

I worked overtime with Alberta Protocol to help plan Her Excellency's visit when it was announced in April that Ambassador Kalmet's Official Visit to Alberta to be May 23-26.

The program included consular duties in Calgary and Edmonton, a visit to the Legislature Building, Government House and Commerce Place, and a



***Estonian Ambassador Gita Kalmet and Honorary Consul Christine Robertson at the official opening reception***

reception for her in Edmonton whereby I took 'The Oath of Office'.

In Calgary, Ambassador Kalmet provided two days of Consular Mission. Thank you to Sunwest Aviation for hosting one of the days! This was followed by a dinner hosted by Members from the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society Board at the Calgary Tower. It turned out to be a clear, sunny evening with great views of Calgary and the mountains.

In Edmonton, Ambassador Kalmet had one day of consular duties followed by the reception on Sunday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 50 people attended, including

several members of the Consular Corps, provincial and local politicians, and members of our Estonian community.

On Monday, May 26, the official government visit began from my office at the Shell Aerocentre. I was driven in a Government vehicle to the Legislature to pick up Katherine Huising, Chief of Protocol, then proceeded together to pick up Ambassador Kalmet at her hotel and back again to the Alberta Legislature for our first meeting. Ambassador Kalmet had a Courtesy Call with Honourable Robin Campbell, M.L.A., Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. She got to hold a ceremonial headdress that was on display in Mr. Campbell's office, which he received in 2013 for his work with First Nations. She was most impressed with the details and beading.

Next we proceeded to a briefing on Alberta and a discussion on Alberta/Estonia relations. I learned that between 2009 – 2013, Alberta's exports to Estonia averaged \$235,145 yearly mainly of iron/steel products, machinery and dairy products. Estonia's direct exports to Alberta (not arriving via other provinces) for the same period averaged \$2.17

million, consisting primarily of electrical machinery, furniture and bedding, and tanning dye, paint and putty products. Total two-way trade between Alberta and Estonia for 2013 equalled \$3 million. I also learned there are approximately 2,860 Albertans of Estonian descent! I invite them to become active in the province's Estonian community.

Other Courtesy calls included a meeting with Ms. Lana Lougheed, Deputy Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; Honourable Heather Klimchuk, M.L.A., Minister of Culture; and Honourable Gene Zwozdesky, M.L.A., Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. We had tea with His Honour Col. (Ret'd.) the Honourable Donald S. Ethell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta and attended a lovely reception/luncheon hosted by the Honourable Cal Dallas, M.L.A., Minister of Intergovernmental and International Relations at Government House.

Ambassador Gita Kalmet was warmly welcomed by Minister Dallas who praised Estonia for its progress and acknowledged the rich Estonian heritage in Alberta. Ambassador Kalmet in turn thanked Canada for its strong support during the crisis in Ukraine and for being a welcoming nation for many Estonians who have emigrated here over the decades.

The luncheon at Government House was also attended by Ave Peetri, Calgary, Eda McClung, Külliva Kangur, Dave Kiil and my husband David. Ambassador Kalmet received many wonderful gifts from the Legislature representing the history and culture of Alberta. It was a special day and there will be follow-up work on relations between Estonia and Alberta.

Lastly, I attended the Annual Alberta Government Briefing for Consular Representatives in Calgary on May 30. It is an opportunity for various Government Ministers to provide briefings on their department's work, discuss government initiatives and take questions from consular members. Approximately 65 countries were represented. The luncheon included remarks by Premier Dave Hancock.

I leave for Tallinn on June 27 for the VII Conference of the Honorary Consuls.

Please contact me at [crobertson@shellaero.com](mailto:crobertson@shellaero.com) if you wish to be on my email list to be apprised of news, happenings and upcoming events.

Parimat,  
Christine Robertson  
Honorary Consul to Estonia in Edmonton, for Alberta

## Office of Honorary Consul Officially Opened

Eda McClung, Edmonton, Alberta

In the presence of Ambassador Kalmet and before a roomful of dignitaries and friends on May 25, 2014, Christine Robertson took the Oath of Office: "I swear to perform in accordance with Estonian legislation and in a conscientious and accurate manner the functions required of me with which I have been entrusted". Those words and the signing of the Oath were greeted with cheers and applause. The highly successful opening reception was attended by over fifty guests, including Consular colleagues, provincial and local politicians, business acquaintances, members of the Estonian community, friends and family. Christine's close friends Evaleen Jääger Roy and Lilian Olljum flew in from Vancouver for the day to join the celebration. In colourful folk costume, Lilian and Kirsti Oja greeted the guests. The table, set with Estonian colors, featured foods with ethnic touches. The most popular were traditional *muna ja kilu* sandwiches, prepared by Lilian and Evaleen. Ambassador Kalmet presented Christine with a modern day Estonian crystal brooch and a beautiful leather-bound guest book. With the official celebrations over, the office of Honorary Consul is set to handle the many obligations entrusted to it.



*Lilian Olljum, Christine Robertson, Evaleen Jääger Roy enjoying reception*



*Guests sampling delectable ethnic foods*



# President's Message

Tere!

Having been President of AEHS for over half a year, is a good time to reflect and muse about the future.

My greatest learning has been to get to know the wonderfully clever, resourceful and passionate **people** who make up the Society and its Board. The Estonian spirit of finding solutions and making things happen in spite of obstacles definitely is well and kicking here. In addition, coming to Alberta has taught us the ability to stick together and support each other – as you would, when coming in small numbers and needing help to find your way around.

I love the unique **history** of each of the Alberta Estonians that I have met. Broad-minded, experienced, never quick to judge or label. The wealth of knowledge and the openness to learn and stay in touch with the world has enriched every conversation. Having travelled the world and met thousands of people, I know this is far from being common.

I grew up in Soviet Estonia, where the time of the independent republic between the wars was revered and the anchor for staying true to the **culture** and the spirit of Estonians. It was collectively remembered as a mythological period – when we lived freely in our own land and did not have the occupation. During those gray times of oppression, it fed our confidence to believe that our culture defined us and it was of utmost importance to preserve it. Now, I have seen a glimpse of those times– right here in Alberta. This is what Estonians would have been like, if the war had not ended the way it was.

Celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AEHS this year, thoughts go forward to what the next 10 years will be like. For a mere 10-year old, AEHS has accomplished a lot – drew a province-wide **community** together, recorded the history of Alberta's Estonians, established a **structure** for getting projects accomplished. I hope that the teenage years will bring energy and confidence to



build on these achievements. My vision is the following for the next 10 years:

- Grow the community by engaging the new generations – both grown up here and those who have just arrived in Alberta.

- Add a new dimension to our history by recording the personal stories of the people who live here and the culture they preserved.

We have a great structure in place that can support the launch of new projects: our

flagship AjaKaja turns 25 this year! Congratulations! Many thanks to Eda McClung and Dave Kiil, whose pursuit of a good story and countless hours of editing, make the reading fun and give insight to our community.

Thanks to the vision and hard work of Bob Kingsep, we have web presence to grow awareness amongst the new generations. AEHS has its own Facebook page as well to help spread word about our Society.

Yet, we need **help** in maintaining the sites – people who can help technically and with content. Volunteer! Even if you do not think you are skilled, but are interested in helping, let us know. Skills can be learned!

I hope to hear from you to capture our unique spirit and history. Start sending your personal anecdotes to AEHS website. It could serve as a repository that can grow into something bigger. Simple stories about how life used to be, what your favourite gingerbread recipe was, how you got your first job and what birthday parties were like, etc. Use the member section of the website to record it. There are already some stories there, so go have a look!

I also look forward to meeting you at our Summer Social on July 26<sup>th</sup> at the Friendship Centre in Eckville.

Enjoy your summer!

Ave Peetri

25  
years

## “25 years and getting better”



It all started with Eda. She was the reason in 1989 I ended up preparing invitations and putting together a newsletter. At the time I was studying graphic design at U of A when a course

mate Ilona Kennedy, of Estonian and Polish descent, invited us to her home. I loved the idea of getting involved in a Society that seemed to be awakening, just like Estonia was. Sort of like doing my little bit. It started with invitations but did not stop there. We now had news to report - from near and far. Visitors started to arrive, events were organized and news and reports had to reach Society members. What better way than via a newsletter!

I recall its humble beginnings - initially we managed to put out a mere four pages. But even so, articles, photos, illustrations had to be written and collected and laid out. Then the newsletter was photocopied and folded by hand, with an occasional glass of wine on the side to help glue labels and stamps. Many newsletters now have gone digital. They often end up being harbingers of events to come as opposed to reports of actual events. I like that side of AjaKaja - that it has stayed true to its name: it both notifies and reports. If something is announced, one can be sure that in the next issue it is also reported. So it becomes an immediate record of people and their activities. One can pick up an old issue and be reminded of past events.

In 1995, I moved back to Estonia where I ended up working for a translation centre. The centre was set up with Canadian foreign aid support and was to assist Estonia in getting its legislation translated. Upon

fulfilling many other requirements, Estonia could then join the European Union. Later, in 2006, I came to work in Luxembourg, in the one of the institutions of the Union.

My daughter Johanna is attending a European School which is a real tower of Babel. There are several language sections so kids start studies in their mother tongue and then move to studying subjects in their second and third language. Johanna is worried that she will not be able to speak any language properly, just “know” some Estonian, French, English and soon German which she starts next year. Yet I have observed that most kids in her school are not afraid of trying to get their message across, however poor their command of the language may be.

In March and May we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Estonia’s membership in NATO and the European Union, respectively. In light of recent events in Ukraine I think there are few who now question Estonia’s membership in those organizations. Just recently I heard a remark that in all the preceding years Estonia had not received as many NATO generals as she has in the past few weeks. I believe we have picked allies we can work with and depend on.

A bit like AjaKaja. Still there after 25 years! I thank Eda and the executive for having given me an opportunity to be part of the ‘awakening’. On top of that, it is something that has impressed my daughter, the fact that I did my little bit. She loved her first trip to Alberta two years ago and hopes to cross the Atlantic again, soon. So perhaps we meet again at Lääneranniku Eesti Päevad or Gilby or Laulupidu. I wish the executive and the editorial board of AjaKaja lots of stamina and love in continuing and reshaping the newsletter.

**Mare Maxwell**  
Luxembourg



25  
years

## Contributor to the first issue: Volli Kalm reflects on AjaKaja's 25 years



The first AjaKaja was published during my tenure as a Post Doctoral scholar at the University of Alberta. I had completely forgotten that I wrote a small piece for that first issue until Eda

McClung reminded me 25 years later! I arrived in Edmonton in the fall of 1988 and quite soon made contact with local Estonians. Exactly how this contact happened, I don't recall. Possibly, the intermediary was Dr. Karlis Muhlenbachs, a Latvian Canadian, with whom I shared laboratory space, and whose family had contacts with Alberta's Estonians. In any event, I remember clearly receiving a phone call one evening when Eda McClung and Mare Maxwell invited me to get together. We agreed to meet at a cafe call 'Upper Crust' which, as a geologist, I assumed made reference to the earth's crust! Mare and Eda asked me to describe myself so we could recognize each other. I thought I did rather well. Only later did I hear from them that my description of being 186 cm. tall had required them to do numerous calculations to figure out 'how tall is he really'? Twenty-five years later, these details are wonderful reminders of my first encounters with Alberta's Estonians.

Later on there were various social gatherings in many settings. For all this, many years later, I express my thanks. I will never forget those pleasant evenings at a café, with a glass of wine, or visits in someone's home. I visited the hospital where Eda worked and Nurmi took me out several times to go fishing. Trips were made to Calgary and Linda Hall. I have

unforgettable memories of my stay in Edmonton as it was my first extended time away from home apart from short trips to Hungary and Romania, or the now (fortunately) defunct Soviet Union.

Since returning to Estonia, I have mostly worked at Tartu University (TU). In 1992, I was appointed Professor in Geology, then Dean, Vice-President and since 2012 President (Rektor) to TU. Apart from short breaks, I have been lecturing and conducting research in Norway, USA, Venezuela and Finland.

I have encountered several people from Edmonton in Estonia in the intervening years, including Eda McClung, her brother Arne and daughter Janet, Nurmi Simm and sons, Viivi Rita Piil, my supervisor Prof. Nat Rutter and Prof. Karlis Muhlenbachs and family. During my days at U of A, I formed my first international working partnerships. In 1991, Prof. Nat Rutter and I were in Beijing to present results of our Alberta based research. During that time, I started a longterm joint research project with Prof. Bill Mahoney of York University, Toronto. Together we have traveled to research glacial sedimentation (*liustikke*) in Sweden, Norway, Venezuela, France and Italy.

After living in Edmonton I have visited Canada several times but have not made it out West again. I hope to have the opportunity to meet many of you this summer at the 26th Song and Dance Festival in Tallinn.

I extend best wishes for continued success to editors of AjaKaja. Your 25th anniversary proves you have achieved a major accomplishment for your readers. Best wishes to all Alberta's Estonians.

**Volli Kalm**  
Rektor, Tartu University

25  
years

## Greeting from old friends & co-workers: Looking back in history



Tere Alberta eestlased!  
What a pleasant honour to be asked to greet the Alberta Estonians on the occasion of 25 years of AjaKaja and especially to be remembered and reminded that I contributed to the

first issue in my role as President of the Calgary Estonian Society those many years ago.

When I recollected what was happening in May 1989 amongst Canadians of Estonian heritage in Calgary and beyond, it sure brings back some happy memories! I belonged to the first generation of Canaanian Estonians and the Soviet Union was on the verge of imploding. Many of our parents, who had escaped some forty years earlier, were now seeing evidence of the first signs of freedom in their homeland. It was an exciting time!

Even Canadian Estonians who had come to Canada before WWII were contacting our Estonian Society for information on events that we were organizing with visiting performers from Estonia; RAM boys choir, Ultima Thule rock band, conductor Neeme Järvi leading the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

The work involved in organizing get togethers for these performers had its moments! I have a vivid memory of excited elderly Estonians coming to listen to Ultima Thule and bravely leaving the venue after one song as the volume was too overwhelming. Nevertheless, they waited in the foyer so they could demonstrate their love for their fellow Estonians from the old country by their presence!

I was in recent email contact with an Estonian musician in Iceland who told me that he was a violin player in the orchestra that accompanied the RAM boys choir. We had organized a real western 'cowboy' reception for the choir and orchestra after their performance at Jack Singer Hall and he remembers the fiddlers that performed for them - upon which the Estonians took their violins and fiddled back with no less energy than the local Alberman musicians! This memory was still a wonderful reminder of Albertan hospitality for him!

Our Calgary Estonian school had eleven children ranging in age from 4 - 14 years. School events such as Independence Day, Mother's Day and Christmas performances were attended by many. We managed to find Estonian national costumes for the most of the children, taught them Estonian songs and folk dances, and served Estonian food at the events! Many of these children are now parents themselves bringing up families with their Estonian heritage in mind while one has moved back to Estonia and teaches English there!

My tenure as President was a short one as our family soon moved back to Toronto. But my gratitude remains for the wonderful friends I met and made when these events were taking place - the Leesments, the Leetmaas, the Tiislars, the Robertsons, the Matiensens and the McClungs among others. And it was nice to be back in Alberta and Sylvan Lake in 2013 with our Õõbiku Chior from Toronto and perform at the Jaanipäeva celebration. Our choir members enjoyed the pioneer games and the hospitality of the AEHS membership.

Estonia has now been independent for almost the same time as we have enjoyed the AjaKaja publications. Let's hope and pray that given present events in Eastern Europe that Estonia, our Eesti, continues its independent status in the European Union and as a member of NATO.

**Marta Kivik,**  
Toronto, ON



25  
years

## “Quarter Century of Publication: a singular accomplishment”



I am delighted to learn that the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society newsletter has been in publication for 25 years. It is my great pleasure to offer sincere congratulations to AjaKaja on this

auspicious occasion. A quarter century for any periodical publications is a singular accomplishment. It is a testament to the vision of its Editors and contributors as well as the successful changes in focus, content and format as publications change. Enduring work! Good work!

When I was a Director of the Red Deer and District Museum, one of our Board members was the late Dr. Rita Matiisen. Rita brought to the table skills and attributes that helped shape the policies and direction of the institution generally, and of building an appreciation of the rich multicultural fabric of our Alberta community. She used her national connections to secure custom made authentic Estonian folk costumes for an Estonian man, woman and adolescent girl. Complete with jewellery, these were presented to the Museum in 1984 at an official ceremony marking the expansion of the building. The costumes were displayed on three mannequins along with the Estonian flag and artifacts that had accompanied arriving settlers. The costume project was funded from the residual funds of the Medicine Valley Estonian Society that was winding up its affairs.

Little did Rita know that a few short years later the USSR would be breaking up and Estonia along with many other former

states would regain their freedom and independence. This became a major turning point in the focus of Estonian Canadians. Once again easy relationships with family could be formed and the rich culture and custom of the Estonian presence could be revived. As Rita mused, “Never did I imagine I would live to see my Estonian homeland free again.”

And so AjaKaja has chronicled and celebrated the Estonian presence in Canada and Alberta through a quarter-century - a time of renaissance and awakening of the Estonian presence internationally. What a wonderful heritage for a publications to celebrate.

Best wishes for continued success  
***F. Morris Flewwelling, C.M.***



Morris Flewwelling is the recently retired Mayor of the City of Red Deer (2004 - 2010). Mr. Flewwelling was a junior high school classroom and Special Educations teacher for twenty years before becoming the Director of the Red Deer and District Museum from 1978-1995. He has been very active in promoting education, the arts and culture, and environmental matters. In 1997, he was awarded the Order of Canada for his leadership in the volunteer sector and for heritage preservation. It has just been announced that he will be invested with the Alberta Order of Excellence in fall 2014. In his retirement he operates a small cow-calf ranch and trains horses. He is married to Hazel, a teacher, and they have two sons.

# Telling our story...

Gita Kalmet, Ottawa, Ontario.



*Photo: Helgi Leesment*

As I write for Ajakaja, I am unable to shake the feeling that the echoes of times long ago have somehow caught up with us. Once again, we are faced with issues and questions we thought were safely locked away in the past. It is as time had an urge to replay some magically induced matrices.

It would seem that human memory is very short. In Ottawa, to my amazement, I overheard one of my fellow diplomats express annoyance that the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs had compared the annexation of Crimea by Russia to the annexation of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany. For Estonians, the similarities are obvious and a similar scenario was used in Estonia by Stalinist Russia. I express my astonishment by the ignorance of my well-educated colleague but that will not change anything.

Recently, when receiving applications for consular services, a lady born in the Geislingen

refugee camp told me that when she applied for a copy of her birth certificate from Germany, the German official was amazed that so many Estonians had been born in Germany during that time. How could that be? The official had no clue about this part of history or how it had touched the Estonian people.

We may find ourselves at a loss or offended in such cases but it is up to us to provide explanations and tell our stories.

I know here in Canada you have for years already collected stories about Estonians, books have been published and even a few films have been made. Yet if you talk to Estonian filmmakers, they still wonder where they could find a good story to make into a film. Stories such as the flight from Estonia in 1944 and how people coped in a new country, from the perspective of an average Estonian, despite all the tragedy, people had to go on living. In addition to hopelessness there must also have been hope, amusing experiences and of course sadness. We might well ask how is it then that these stories and those who are looking for them cannot seem to find one another?

It would appear that we Estonians are not very good at asking and we are not terribly good at sharing either. If I remember correctly, Aino Kallas once wrote that old and forgotten friendships can be renewed if we just re-read some old letters. I suppose it is the same with stories. They have to be aired, shown to others and talked about. Ah yes, but of course they must first be put down on paper. Writing, as we know, is not easy. I am experiencing this now as I am trying to get something off my chest, instead I just seem to be rambling on.

During consular appointments, and at other gatherings I have heard bits and pieces of someone's memories where a single detail has

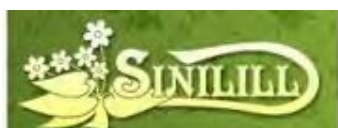


communicated an entire experience, to paint a picture, a whole story. I recently asked an Estonian who was born in Sweden whether he had any recollection of his country of birth. He said that he did not as he was only three and a half when he left. After some reflection he did however recall one memory of a time when he and his mother had taken a ride on the bus. It was a dialogue between a mother and her young son. I am unable to retell this story here, as I have not asked his permission and secondly, I would not want to. It was so vivid and detailed and yet managed to sum up and generalise so much. It was almost a symbol of life.

Stories like these are a treasure! And I have more of them. They have been imparted to me casually, just in passing. Normally, the storyteller has had no idea of what happened.

Just like that woman born in Geislingen thought: What value do my memories have? She was very young at the time and her mother died in the camp. Just faded away, as she told me in response to my curious gaze. There was a far greater story there than either of us was ready to begin at that moment. Our conversation fell silent.

Telling our story, making it visible to others and seeing in through the eyes of others is an important part of bringing it back to life. This is the only true way to convey and preserve a tale. I think that we, Estonians, are closely intertwined as a people through our stories. Through the ones that have been written and the ones we do not talk about. The untold stories are far greater in number. Perhaps we could still try to tell them and write them down. We could tell the happy ones to watch them bring joy again. And we could tell the other stories carried around in silence and give them a chance to breathe, or perhaps take on a life all of their own.



**Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society**

Summer Social





**Saturday July 26**  
**11:30 AM - 5:00 PM**  
**Friendship Centre**  
**5211 51 Street**  
**Eckville**

*AEHS members and guests welcome!*

Admission by donation

- Farewell to our long-time president Bob Kingsep who is relocating to BC this year
- Celebration of numerous Alberta Estonian anniversaries



SCHEDULE

11:30 AM Arrival & visit to cemetery

12:00 noon Hall doors open

1:00 PM Ceremonies, entertainment, speeches, farewell presentation

2:00 PM Potluck meal

4:00 PM Closing remarks

5:00 PM Cleanup by AEHS volunteers

POTLUCK MEAL

- Bring ready-to-serve food
- Bring Heritage or Estonian food if possible
- Bring your own cold drinks and BYOB
- Plastic/paper eating utensils provided
- Coffee & Iced-tea provided



# NEW COUNTRY - NEW CUSTOMS: IMPRESSIONS OF A EUROPEAN NEWCOMER TO THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES IN THE LATE 1940s.

Roland Weiler, Toronto, Ontario



*Roland Weiler*

My grandfather, Aleksander Weiler, immigrated to Canada in January, 1948, together with his wife, Stella. They joined their daughter Lea and her husband, Walter Silverton, in Barons, Alberta.<sup>1</sup> A brief biography, published in *AjaKaja* in the winter edition, 2009, gives an account of his former life and career in Estonia, and his escape to Finland and then Sweden in the fall of 1944 just before the Russian army re-entered Estonia. Having to leave behind his homeland, his newspaper and publishing business to become a displaced person with few resources beyond his own abilities and willpower and then to come at his age to a country which was practically unknown to him was an extraordinary odyssey, but one which all Europeans who settled in North America have undertaken. They lived in Barons until the end of 1949, when Aleksander managed to finance the start of the Estonian weekly newspaper “Meie Elu” [ “Our Life” ] and the two of them moved to Toronto. While in Barons in 1949, he organized the South Alberta Estonian Society which soon merged with the Calgary Estonian Society

People become accustomed to their environment. A newcomer, especially someone from entirely

<sup>1</sup> Walter Silverton’s parents were among the first settlers around Barons at the turn of the twentieth century. Believing in the quality of education in Estonia, he and his siblings were sent there for their education. There he met and married Lea Weiler in 1933 and together they returned to Canada.

different surroundings, will see it with fresh eyes. My grandfather’s impressions of the new country form part of the history of farming on the prairies, specifically around Barons and are perhaps of interest to the descendants of the families living in the area. Fortunately his background as a journalist served him well when he wrote at length about the country new to him, to his sister Johanna, and her husband, Voldemar Päts, who at that time were refugees in a displaced persons camp in Germany.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately he typed his letters and also kept carbon copies of them. Since he wrote in Estonian, the letters obviously have to be translated for an English speaking audience. In the translation, the length, style and order of his sentences and paragraphs have been retained as much as possible. These long letters deal, in addition to his impressions, also at length with the



*Aleksander Weiler, ca 1950*

internal politics of the Estonian refugees in Sweden, here in Canada and elsewhere, and with

<sup>2</sup> His writings, together with considerable other material dealing with his life, are preserved in the archives of Tartu College in Toronto.

personal and family matters, such as the coming of his son and other daughter to Canada.

He devotes the last half of the letters of January 30th and March 22nd, 1948 to Barons and the prairies. He writes as follows in January:

My evaluation of the conditions here was frequently mistaken. I found much that is new. There are two places in Canada where many Estonians live close to one another. Around Barons there may be about 75 Estonians and, of Estonian descent, perhaps 100 near Edmonton. They emigrated from their homeland thirty - thirty-five years ago to open up the prairies, at the start with horses, now with modern combines. I have already made the acquaintance with some of the neighbours here.

Walter's parents welcomed us (they met us at the station in their car) and had lunch with them. A few days later Lea arranged a reception with more than twenty guests. We have also been driven around a lot. Most Estonians here are well off. The

houses may not be much from the outside, but inside there are four to seven rooms, central heating with hot air or water, electric stoves, refrigerators, etc. Many of their children have finished university and now have good paying jobs. The school serves as a melting pot. Many nationalities are present: Estonians, Dutch, Hungarians (one with the same name as I), Finns, Germans from the Volga region etc. The common language here is English. Barons has a good school: nine teachers, twelve years of school, then immediately after graduation to university. It is a small village on a rail line,



*View of Barons area and the Gus Erdman family farm*

has a large community centre, three churches, a branch of the Royal Bank, a dozen or more stores, a post office, a hotel and eight large grain elevators. The nearest large town [Lethbridge] is some thirty kilometres away, but that is not far as the grain fields are some three kilometres long and about half a kilometre wide. In the summer, one works at least twelve hours a day, in the winter one rests. There is no lack of community activities. Lea is on the executive of the community centre and the women's league. Walter is a director of the co-operative and very athletic. The community centre is large enough for a tennis court. There is a tournament next Sunday; some players are coming from the USA as the border is not far distant. One can see the snowy tips of the Rockies in the

distance as in Switzerland. The weather is very variable. For example, yesterday was a warm spring day, today strong winds and snow showers. People drive everywhere and both men and women drive. It is impossible to walk any distance as passing drivers stop

to offer you a ride. My wife and I walk over the fields which are still frozen. The chairman of the local board of education is an Estonian - - Erdman -- who has two sons finishing university. The two sons of the other Erdman have already graduated. One has a doctorate in chemistry and is an executive in the oil industry; the other is a botanical scientist. Children are given an education. Even in financially difficult times, relatives will pool their monies so that education is not disrupted. Estonians are not exactly in the last place among the educated. The older generation



speaks English but they find written language difficult as English is complicated in that respect. The younger generation has not forgotten Estonian. Erdman's sons write home from university in Estonian, but the third generation no longer knows the language. This [ loss of language ] is a worry also among the Dutch, Hungarians, Finns etc.

Books are not lacking; some have read Tõde ja Õigus<sup>3</sup> twice. People visit the town a couple of times per week and the children have piano lessons there. Only a few smoke or drink alcohol. Movie theatres are closed Sundays. Dancing is also forbidden on Sundays. This is in contrast to the USA with its year-round feverish activity and where it is strange to see women smoking on the street. It was really touching to see the Dutch building a new church beside the road. I have seen in my life churches burned down but cannot remember seeing one being built. Our village has three churches (Catholic, United and Baptist).



***Elementary class at Barons School, ca 1950.***

***Roland Weiler is 4<sup>th</sup> from right, middle row***

Naturally small, but the minister's houses are quite nice. The presence of farmers has an effect on everything. The town is full of cars, one can park for only an hour in one place as otherwise traffic is hindered. The farmer makes his purchases and lunches in the better

restaurants, goes to the movies and drives home at dusk. Our first impressions were that Lethbridge resembled the Wild West of the movies. But very cultured. The doctors there have a large office complex, the stores four floors with elevators. Everything is available. Our towns with 15 000 inhabitants do not compare.

In March, he writes:

In Estonia, the expectation was that when a child attended university, after graduation the type of employment would be less onerous than for his parents. The harder the life for the parents, the easier it would be for the children ... Here, a diploma is not sufficient; it is expected that a person works and no-one fears work. Around here most sons of farmers have university education.... As an example, Andrekson's son is studying medicine, but in the summer works as a hired hand. "Tall Gustav" has two sons at university, but in the summer work as hired hands for the neighbours (their parents do not need as much help). Walter finished university in Europe, but does all the farm work himself: gelds bulls, hauls water from the lake, grinds grain for cattle, mows and threshes with a combine, but also plays lawn tennis. The farmers are well off but none have female servants. The wives look after the housekeeping themselves. Of course they have all the modern conveniences, starting with electric stoves, where one can control the start and timing of a roast (go visiting, come home: the stove is turned off automatically when the food is done) and ending with vacuum cleaners and washing machines on each farm. Even with three to five children there are no servants. Of course, a housewife's work is not easy, but I have not heard any complaints.... Naturally, with all this work, many have become wealthy. Some people live like aristocrats; for example, ...

---

<sup>3</sup> "Truth and Justice" by A.H Tammsaare is one of the major works of Estonian literature; published 1926-1933 in five volumes.

“Little Gustav” House with two stories, six rooms on the second floor, large living-room downstairs. Several children have finished university; one son has a PhD in chemistry and is an engineer with an oil company.

In the same lengthy letter, he states that people in Europe do not know conditions here and people here do not understand Europe, and that he has had to revise his opinions. He continues:

On a prairie farm, one man can do the work of at least ten. The combine is a marvel as are modern tractors that pull several pieces of equipment that plough, harrow and seed in one pass. Work continues in two shifts as machines have headlights. Some farmers travel with their harvesting equipment to the USA where grain ripens two-three weeks earlier and move north until their own holdings are reached. A couple earns \$5,000 working 15 hours a day, the husband on the combine, the wife alongside in a truck transporting the grain.

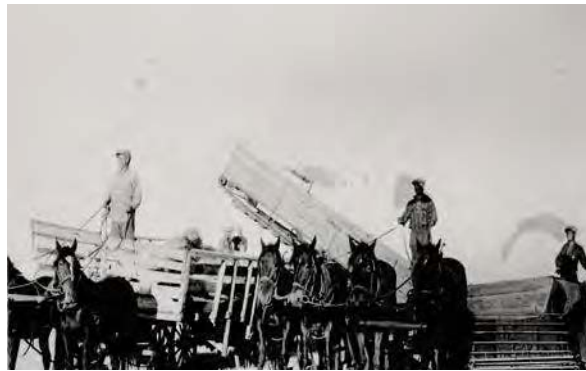
[He writes that there is no mixed farming on the prairies ]. Here the farms are bigger, a minimum of a half section or 320 acres, which will support a family comfortably if everybody works hard seven months a year. For example, Walter, his father and Helmi [his sister] together own, I believe, about 4 sections (nearly 2500 acres) and the work is done by only four persons, two-three tractors and two combines. The first requirement is knowing how to use the machinery and decide quickly what has to be done. Seeding is done in the

spring, no manure or artificial fertilizer is applied. Everything goes well if it rains. After the seed germinates, one draws breath for a couple of months - repairs around the house, to the equipment, etc. Wheat ripens in about 90 days on the prairies. Then real pressure to harvest the grain while the weather is good. The combine cuts, winnows, threshes and blows fine straw dust all over the field. The truck keeps pace to collect the grain and speeds it to the elevator (we have eight large ones) or back to the granary. No need to shovel out the grain; instead a special machine with scoops empties the whole truckload in a minute. The work continues night and day until the fields are bare.... There is little need for an agronomist unless the person is willing

to handle machinery. Much more important is understanding the machines and detect from the sound alone whether the engine is working properly.... Some farmers, including Walter, keep cattle that stay out all winter and find their own feed under the snow. These are

beef cattle, shaggy in the winter but fattened in the summer ... Never before in my life have I seen such beautifully marbled beef.

There is plenty of abandoned land, but it does not support farmers here, much less ones coming from Europe. These are prairie farms, denuded of soil by winds or rainless for many years. Such a triangle transects the provinces, starting in Alberta and extending into Manitoba. Nature here is pitiless. On a mixed farm, it is possible to succeed where the soil is fertile and there is enough rain. The whole



*Collection machine for bundles of wheat on Erdman farm near Barons.*

year is consumed with work. A wheat farmer rests for six months.

In a letter written in May of the same year, he remarks that:

I have changed my opinion about many things and have to say that life here shows a higher level of culture than what we imagined in our homeland and generally in Europe. Perhaps we know America only a little better than they know us. For example, there are neighbouring Estonian farmers who have concert tickets for the winter season and travel more than 75 km to the city in all kinds of weather. Sometimes, of course, one ends up in a ditch and has to be pulled out by a tractor.

In November, he writes that:

... they [the Chinese] own the restaurants and cafes, which are as Europe, but lacking in music and alcohol. The dining rooms are a bit small and many eat seated on stools at a counter, and beer and wine is not served even in restaurants. Women and men have separate entrances to establishments selling alcohol which are combined with restaurant licences. No cabarets, the movie theatres are closed on Sundays. Dancing is usually reserved for Fridays. Even hunting is not allowed on Sundays.

In later letters, he mentions that people know how to “mix cocktails and the whiskey is good, whether served on the rocks or at room temperature.” He was amazed that several farmers owned airplanes, among them Victor Erdman, which were also used for hunting coyotes. He was amused by the bears at Waterton Lakes that begged, together with their cubs, for food around cars and sometimes even held up traffic by strolling in the middle of the street.

The January and March letters dealt at length with his impressions of the prairies. Subsequent letters, though long, become more and more concerned with the problems of Estonians coming to Canada,

the financial success of some, especially younger people, through hard physical work and the internal politics and quarrels of such refugees in Sweden, Germany and here in Canada. But these form a different narrative. It is to be hoped that the above extracts from the translated letters have been of interest to the readers by giving glimpses of a newcomer's impressions of the prairies, although he states that he really knows very little about the rest of the large country of Canada.

### ***Brief biography of Roland Weiler:***

*I was born in Tallinn, Estonia in 1936 and lived through the Russian and German occupations between 1940 and 1944. In February of that year, my grandmother, mother and siblings and I crossed to Finland. In September of the same year, my grandfather and father managed to get to Finland just before the Russians reached Tallinn. Shortly thereafter, we all escaped to Sweden where we lived until 1948 and where my brother and I attended school.*

*In 1948, we all reached Barons, Alberta, where Lea and Walter Silverton, my aunt and her husband and family had lived since before World War II. My grandfather moved to Toronto to found the Estonian weekly “Our Life”. After his death in 1950, our father took over the running of the newspaper, but he died the next year.*

*After leaving high school in Toronto, I studied chemistry at the University of Toronto, graduating with a Master's degree and went on to Dalhousie University in Halifax for a Doctorate in oceanography. There I met and married my wife, Judy. We have three children. After graduating, I worked in the environment departments of both the federal and Ontario governments until retirement in 1995.*

*I was awarded the Kanada Eestlaste Teenetemärk on February 24, 2012.*



# Letters beckon Julie Hiie on a journey to Canada

Astrid (Oro) Ustina, Edmonton, Alberta

One day in 1926, a letter addressed to Julie Hiie arrived at the post office of Estonian seaside resort Haapsalu. It's sender was one Alex Oro of Stettler, Alberta, who explained that he was nearing forty years of age and thought he might be interested in an Estonian wife. A mutual acquaintance, Mr. K. Wali, suggested that Julie might be interested in travel to Canada and so Alex was writing to introduce himself to her.



*Julie Hiie, ca 1925*

Thus their correspondence began with Alex Oro describing Canada as a "big rich country, with open wheat fields, millions of acres of forest, coal, and oil. He stated "When I was of age, the Government of Canada gave me a quarter section of land for a homestead. Maybe I will be fortunate again if you come to Canada."

Julie Hiie was born in 1898 in Haapsalu and

grew up there with three sisters Annie, Minnie and Ellie. Their father Gustav was a blacksmith. Estonia was under Czarist rule therefore all schooling was done in Russian, with German as a second language. Julie spoke Russian, German and Estonian fluently, learning English later.

In 1920, Julie's mother passed away. Two sisters, the youngest and oldest, Annie and Ellie, moved to St. Petersburg in search of a more exciting life. This left Minnie, who was sickly and never married, and Julie to live with their father. Julie was a teacher and taught in the Ungu region until the letter from Alex Oro changed her life.

"I wrote a letter to Mr. K. Wali to let him know that I am so very happy to have made your acquaintance" she wrote. Alex replied "I have to get a permit for you to enter Canada and it is taking a long time...I bought the ticket for \$150 (*why would he need to mention this!*) for your passage from Haapsalu to Stettler." Finally "I am so excited that you are coming here. I shall meet you at the station in Stettler when you arrive."

Thus the journey to Canada started for Julie in February, 1927. It would be a final farewell to her father and sister. They would never meet again. The winter voyage across the Atlantic was gruelling with Julie being seasick the entire way. When she reached Montreal, she had to find her own way to the train station and buy sufficient food to last her four days. Coming from the seaside curative spas, what were her thoughts as she crossed this vast winter landscape?

Alex met her at the Stettler train station and brought her to the farm that he shared with his mother Liisa and three younger brothers: Mike, Otto and Oscar. Alex's father, John, had passed away the previous year. Liisa took one look at the diminutive Julie and said "*Mis tööd see pisike põnn saab teha!*"

(How can a tiny person like you do any work!). She clearly believed Julie was too small and delicate to be a farm wife.

Julie stayed at the farm with everybody until that fall but then packed her bags and moved to Calgary. She found work as a maid and learned English. Alex was disappointed that Julie had left and he continued to write to her. He bought a 1927 Chev and made trips to Calgary to visit. Finally he persuaded Julie to return to the farm. They were married in Calgary before driving back. By then, Liisa, Mike and Otto had moved to another farm about two miles away. Alex's homestead was the place the newlyweds would call home. Oscar by this time had moved to Vancouver.

In November 1928 a son named Harold was born and almost exactly a year later, I was born.

running water or natural gas heating. With two small children underfoot, Julie adapted to farm life. The men were busy in the fields while wives were responsible for chores such

as feeding animals, working wood stoves, hauling water and feeding the animals. Mother learned to milk cows and separate milk from cream. Cream was stored in the ice house to be shipped to the creamery in Stettler from the Sabine station by train. Mother also looked after feeding chickens, gathering and washing eggs before sending them to be sold at the creamery. Julie had a big garden to seed and weed. Mature vegetables were canned, sauerkraut was made and BC fruit was bought for canning.



*Alex and Julie Oro wedding, 1928*

Whilst taking of the chores of a farmwife and defying her mother-in-law's prediction she was too tiny for farm work, Julie felt it important to dress smartly, like a 'city woman.' She never wore pants or slacks, always a dress. She had many hats and shoes with gloves to match. In summer she wore white shoes and purse, in winter it was matching black. She also insisted her husband dress smartly when he went to town on business. Refinements were important to her.

***"She never wore pants or slacks, always a dress."***



*Julie (in dress!) and Alex swathing grain*

Now came the Dirty Thirties. Unlike houses in town, farm houses did not have electricity,

The Depression of the early thirties took hold for many years. Weather was extremely dry and dust storms blew the topsoil into the bush. Wheat



prices tumbled and with no crops the farmers made no money. The lucky ones had some pasture for cattle and some old grain for feed. Julie and Alex survived by selling cream and eggs for grocery money. Julie would cut up her coats to sew coats for my brother and me. Having grown up in Haapsalu, my mother treasured her needlework, knitted mitts, hats and shawls. She even knit long stockings for me to wear to school. No longer having time for the type of embroidery and needlework she had done, she now only had time to knit and sew as a matter of necessity.



*Oro family: L-R: Harold, Julie, Astrid and Alex, ca 1935*

By the end of the thirties, the worst was over. Skies opened up with pouring rain, followed by warm weather and sunshine. Life on the farms was better and farmers prospered. They bought machinery and cars; my father bought a 1937 Chev. Even the start of WWII in Europe did not directly affect farmers too much. But we believe my mother's sisters

Annie and Ellie perished in the 900 -day siege of Leningrad. My mother sent many letters but never heard back after the war.

Harold and I started school not knowing any English. However once we learned the language, we shared what we learned with our mother. She eventually spoke fluent English with her grandchildren. Harold and I both graduated from high school, my brother choosing to stay on the farm while I moved to the city to study Pharmacy. My mother always told me "Don't marry a farmer". She knew about the hard life and the feelings of being entrapped.



*Julie Oro's resting place Estonian Cemetery near Stettler, 1979*

Though Julie never had the opportunity to return to her beloved Estonia, I was fortunate to visit her birthplace in 1966. Prior to that, Julie's father and sister in Haapsalu had both died. But being a messenger from mother's new home in Canada, I met her close childhood friend Sigrid and family, bringing the spirit of my mother with me.

# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society AGM 2014

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

The year 2014 marks ten years since the November 6, 2004 meeting at Kerry Wood Nature Centre, Red Deer, where planning discussions were held regarding the creation of a province-wide organization. In attendance were 17 people of Estonian heritage. Coincidentally, this year's AGM was held at the same place, chaired by our third president, Ave Peetri with 15 members attending, including 5 members from that first meeting.

- The President outlined the AEHS activities during the past year – two Board meetings and a website meeting to plan for the increased use in the future of this important tool.
- The President together with Kaidi Phipers set up an AEHS Facebook page to encourage younger members to learn about and participate in AEHS.
- Our finances are in order with ongoing AEHS operations covered through membership fees and donations.
- Funding has been received to continue with the collection and digitization of new material. Input from members is requested.
- Production and mailing costs of *AjaKaja* are rapidly increasing, A committee will be formed to consider a possible electronic publication.
- AEHS currently has 87 paid member households, representing 148 individual members.
- Paper copy registrations are discontinued and replaced with online membership registration, as of this year. Exceptions will be made for those who do not use a computer.
- The funding drive for the repair of the Estonian House at the Stettler Town and Country Museum has been successful and work is expected to begin this summer.
- The Estonian Heritage Exhibit of six panels is now on display at the Stettler Museum and also in Estonia at the Tallinn University Academic Library.
- AEHS will gift the book *Freedom, Land, & Legacy* and two copies of *Alberta's Estonians* DVD to the newly formed Barons Historical Museum.
- Planning is underway for the AEHS Potluck Summer Social to be held Saturday July 26, 2014 at the Friendship Centre in Eckville.
- As there were no new nominations from the floor, all the previous board members were re-elected to continue in their positions.



**Front row L to R: Helle Kraav, Janice Paasuke, Livia Kivisild, Martha Munz Gue; Back row L to R: Toomas Paasuke, Lorne Hennel, Eda McClung, Kevin Ellis, Rein Paasuke, Dave Kiil, Ave Peetri, Helgi Leesment, Juri Kraav. Not pictured: Imbi Ansley & Liia Herman**





# *115 Years of Estonian History in Alberta*

**1899 - 2014**

A pictorial history of  
Alberta's Estonian community.  
Eras, anniversaries,  
events and celebrations.



Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society

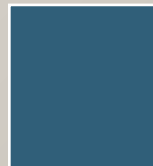
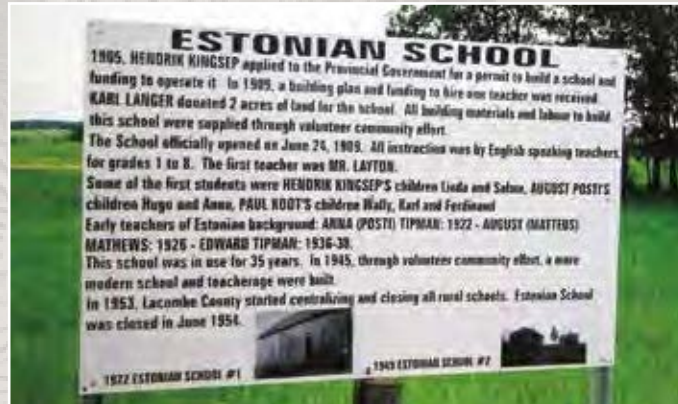


## *115 Years Ago*

Before WWI (1899 - 1918)

Following the arrival of the first Estonian pioneers in Sylvan Lake, settlements were soon established in Medicine Valley (1902), Stettler (1903), and Barons (1904). The first priority of settlers was to acquire homesteads, to clear land for agriculture and to provide adequate shelter for their families and livestock.

Ten years later, the three larger settlements (Medicine Valley, Stettler, Barons) had established schools, halls, a chapel, cemeteries, co-operatives and social organizations.







Before WWI (1899 - 1918)

11



1000 JOURNAL OF CLIMATE







## *75 Years Ago*

(1919 - 1944)

During the inter-war years, a smaller wave of Estonian immigrants arrived from newly-independent Estonia and was for most part absorbed into the existing settlements. Some began farming, others took up businesses such as building mills, power plants, welding and work on railroads and mining camps to earn extra income.

The arrival of immigrants after WWII injected new vigor into Estonian activities in southern and central Alberta, and led to significant concentrations of Estonians in Edmonton and Calgary.

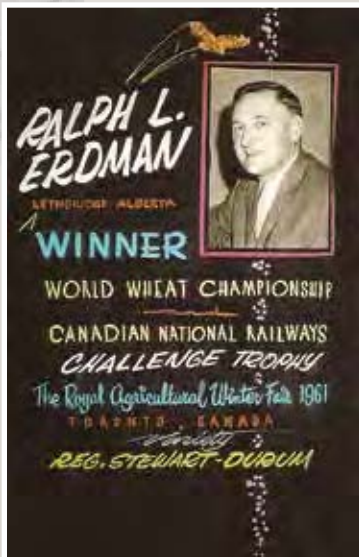
Linda Hall near Stettler burned in 1930 but was replaced by a bigger hall the following year and became a community centre.



Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society







## *30 Years Ago*

Post - WWII (1945 - 1988)

After years of declining activity, Medicine Valley Estonian Society disbanded in 1983. Activities of Calgary and Edmonton Societies also decreased as members assimilated into Canada's multicultural fabric. In 1984, the Red Deer and District Museum mounted a permanent exhibit of Estonian pioneers which highlighted their unique history in Canada.

Newsletter Ajakaja was launched in 1989 to inform members of happenings in Alberta and Estonia. A province-wide Jaanipäev celebration, with guests from Estonia was held at Linda Hall. Calgary Estonian Society hosted Estonian choirs, musicians and athletes. Hope was 'awakening' that Estonia could regain its freedom.





## *15 Years Ago*

(1989 - 2014)

Ärkamisaeg (Awakening) in Estonia in 1989 was followed by Estonia's Declaration of Independence in 1991. This heightened interest and involvement with all things Estonian. Special events and celebrations were held in Calgary and Edmonton. Many travelled to visit Estonia. The Centennial of Estonian settlement was celebrated at Linda Hall in 1999. It was the largest gathering of Estonians in Alberta's history. Jaanipäev/Centennial celebrations at Gilby Hall (2001) and Barons (2004) highlighted this history. President Lennart Meri of Estonia visited Alberta in 2000 and challenged the Estonian community to document its long and fascinating history.

The Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) was formed in 2004 to preserve the cultural history of Alberta's Estonians. Under the leadership of Bob Tipman and Bob Kingsep, both descendants of the early pioneers, AEHS represents the interests of a multi-generational community of Canadians with a keen interest in their history and heritage.



Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society



## *15 Years Ago*

(1989 - 2014)

In June 2007, at West Coast Estonian Days in Los Angeles, AEHS launched a major five-part Heritage Project, now completed. This includes a documentary DVD about Alberta's Estonians; a richly-illustrated book; archival materials at the Provincial Archives of Alberta; the digital Heritage project on the AEHS website; and a travelling six-panel exhibit describing the 115-year history of Alberta's Estonians..

The six-panel display exhibited in Canada and Estonia presents the story of Alberta's Estonians to a worldwide audience.

Ave Peetri was elected President of the AEHS. Christine Robertson was appointed Honorary Consul of the Republic of Estonia in Alberta. Gita Kalmet, Estonian Ambassador to Canada, officiated at a reception in May, 2014 to formally celebrate the appointment. A new chapter has begun for Albertans of Estonian heritage



Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society



# Mart and Emma Sestrap Family: Pioneering spirit and community service

Marlene Sorensen, Calgary, Alberta



*Olga (Sestrap) Stenvig*

I'm providing an introduction to the Sestrap family with excerpts from *Homesteads and Happiness* 1979<sup>1</sup>, followed by insights about my maternal grandmother Emma and my mother Olga (Sestrap) Stenvig.



*Mart Sestrap*

Mart Sestrap (b. 1874), originally Sõstrapuu, and Emmeline (Emma) Pedra (b. 1878) were born in Estonia. At an early age, they migrated to Russia and secured employment with Russian Prince and Princess

Wolkonsky. While thus employed Emma travelled all over Europe with her mistress, learning to speak six languages fluently. After her arrival in Canada her services were much in demand for translating and for explaining business transactions to those who were not familiar with the English language spoken in Canada.

The following is an excerpt from *Homesteads and Happiness*:

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada became a potpourri of ethnic peoples. Among those migrating from Estonia were the Sestrap brothers-Martin, Mike, and Gustav. Mike arrived on January 21, 1905, and filed on a homestead on N.E.30-40-3-W5. Mart soon answered the call to the new land, and arrived on April 20, 1905, settling on

S.W.30-40-3-W5. Two years later Gustav (Gust) followed his brothers to Canada and homesteaded on S.E. 30-40-3-W5, later moving to S. W. 6-41-3-W5. Gust married Jenny Kemila, but in 1919 they, with their three children, moved to Moorcraft, Wyoming, U.S.A. Mart's wife, Emma, did not emigrate to Canada until 1907, when she came to join her husband.

Like all pioneer women, Emma worked alongside her husband, clearing land, harvesting, feeding livestock and raising a huge garden. Along with all of this, she raised a family of four children, Leyda, Alma, Olga, and Robert. Nevertheless, she always found time to lend a helping hand to neighbors in need.



*Emma (Pedra) Sestrap*

By hard work and good management Mart was able, through the years, to build up the biggest farm enterprise in the area west of Lacombe. He acquired a fine herd of Hereford cattle along with hundreds of acres of land which had,

over a period of twenty years, been cleared of trees and bush. Swamp land had been drained and made suitable for cultivation. Mart was also a carpenter, blacksmith and farrier of repute. Farmers brought unmanageable horses to him to be shod. He made the shoes in his shop, and thus a perfect fit resulted for every horse.

Mart's energies were not spent entirely on his own affairs. He was a community-minded pioneer who believed in education, and young people were his pride and joy. For many years baseball games, which drew spectators and players from great distances, were played on the Sestrap farm. For several years community picnics were also held here. Later, under Mart's leadership, Gilby Hall was built by the men of the

<sup>1</sup> *Homesteads and Happiness, Medicine Valley Historical Society, 1979*



community, and it became the center of community activities.

Another of his community projects was a rural telephone line. The Sestrap family owned one of the first telephones north of Eckville, and Mart assembled his neighbors who were in need of phone service and had little money to finance it, and organized twenty or more people who developed a barbwire telephone system. Mart installed a switch in his house, which enabled his family to transfer calls for neighbors over the barbed-wire system. This the family gladly did without remuneration, as a public service. Many times in the dark of the night and in the fiercest weather the Sestrap's were asked to deliver urgent messages to friends or neighbors without phone service. Every request was immediately attended to.



*Standing L-R: Olga, Leyda, Emma, Alma;  
Sitting: Mart and Robert Sestrap*

In the early days the Sestrap family farm was a stopping place between Lacombe, Leslieville, and Rocky Mountain House for travel-weary pioneers with their horses or oxen. All were sheltered without question and later sent on their way. The farm was named by the family "Mersloa Farm". The name was made up of the initials of all members of the family.



*Mart Sestrap's farmhouse*

In 1927 Martin lost his life through a farm accident. This left his widow, Emma, to carry on the successful operation of the farm, along with the assistance of her children, until retirement. She passed away in 1955.

Marlene writes as follows:

My grandmother Emma was a small woman with enormous internal strength. As a widow, she raised her four children and continued to farm in the Gilby area after 1927. Emma was gentle and patient. During a stay in her big farm house, she had made jam from freshly-picked wild strawberries. At breakfast, she treated us to fresh biscuits and wild strawberry jam. Yummy! Christmas and birthday gifts included new hair ribbons and handmade sweaters and dresses. When grandmother visited my mother Olga, I loved to sit beside her and listen to stories about her extraordinary life.

My mother Olga was born in 1912 in Lacombe. She attended Olds Agricultural College but did not finish her course. Instead she chose to return to the farm to help Emma. In her spare time she played the piano at dances as well as being an enthusiastic softball player.



*Olga (Sestrap) and Martin Stenvig*

Olga married Martin Stenvig in 1938. She was an excellent homemaker, gardener and farmer, served on the Home and School Boards, and initiated driver education in schools. My mother encouraged her children to join 4-H programs and was a co-leader of the Garden Club. She coordinated and hosted several family reunions at the farm. In the late 1970s, her grandchildren and I mowed and maintained the Gilby Kalmu Cemetery. My mother was kind and passionate about fellowship, and she successfully encouraged her 12 grandchildren to pursue higher education. That is her legacy.

Children of Mart and Emma Sestrap:

Leyda (born 1908), the eldest daughter of Mart and Emma, graduated from the University of Alberta in 1934 with a degree in medicine. She later served in the Army Medical Corps for four years. Following advanced study with Menminger Clinic, she became a Doctor of Psychiatry which she practiced until her death in 1973.

Alma (born 1910) attended Olds Agricultural College until the untimely death of her father. She married August Liivam in 1932. The couple raised a family of six sons and one daughter while farming in the Gilby area.

Olga and Martin Stenvig had four girls and one boy. They also farmed and continued to live in the Gilby area.

Robert (born 1921), an orchardist and contractor, owned his own extensive cherry and apple orchard on Vashon Island near Seattle, Washington. He has his own cherry cannery and produces quantities of commercial apple cider. He operated an airstrip on the farm. He married Elizabeth (Betsy) Wax and they live on Vashon Island near Seattle, Washington. They had two girls and one boy.



*L to R: George Lythgoe, Emma, Mike Sestrap, Alma, Gust, Jenny, Martin Stenvig, Oliver and Elsie Brown, 1952*



*Sestrap Family Reunion. ca 1995*

*Standing, l to r: Bruce Alexander, August Liivam Jr., Marlene Sorensen, Sharon Alexander, Elsie Brown, Jim Sorensen, Helen Nelson, Olga Stenvig, Valerie Liivam, Donna Bagdan, Martin Stenvig, George Jobs, Audrey Jobs. Sitting, l to r: Mr. Parker, Lydia Sestrap (George's widow), Arv Sestrap, George Sestrap*



# Lydia Pals: The Kindness of Strangers

Ann (Pals) Holtz, Ottawa, Ontario



**Lydia Anton Kass,  
Germany, ca 1945**

Lydia Anton Kass left Estonia in 1944 with the things and people that mattered the most to her. Her children, her mother, her music, and her knowledge. Like many Estonians, her family was fractured between those who remained and could not imagine leaving everything behind, and those who feared what would come if they stayed. She and her family fled to Germany to avoid being caught up in the Soviet invasion of Estonia. Her father and sister Elsa stayed behind and faced dire consequences.

Five years later, April 1949, Lydia arrived in Southern Alberta, April 1949, as a 34 year old divorced woman, with two children aged 6 and 9, to work as farm labour on a sugar beet farm. I can only imagine the shock of getting off the train after travelling for several weeks, first on the Cunard ship line Samaria, and then by train, to arrive in a small rural Alberta town far from anything cultured or urban. She had a choice of coming to

Canada, going to America or to Australia and chose Canada because the landscape sounded more like Estonia. The vast scale of nature in Southern Alberta, when compared to Europe, both overwhelmed and challenged her. Over the years she came to identify very strongly with Western Canada and with the pioneering spirit she found there.

One of the things that characterized Lydia was her resilience. She took things as they were. That first summer she worked the sugar beet fields as best she

could as part of her sponsorship agreement. She saw this obligation as the trade off for freedom and a better future for herself and more importantly, for her children. For this opportunity, she was grateful for the rest of her life to the family that sponsored her. That first year her family lived in a small one room house on the farm near Turin, Alberta. Everything they received was through donations, from the kindness of strangers. It quickly became apparent that Lydia was not suited to farm labour but she persevered, enlisting her children to help with the work. It was back breaking work that could also damage her hands. She was not afraid of the work, however the possible damage to her hands was a different story.

Lydia played her first piano recital in Canada at the Barons Community Hall in 1949. Wearing a borrowed long gown, she brought a glimpse of a different world and a different time to this prairie place. For many it was the first time they heard Beethoven,



**Estonians in Calgary, 1953**

maninoff, and Chopin. The evening has been described as magical and over sixty years later remains a vivid memory. She also performed at and took part in Estonian celebrations in Lethbridge and Calgary. At *Suvepäevad* in the Estonian Hall near Eckville the hall piano was not played often. So with the thundering chords that started her first piece, mice ran out from under the piano!

I asked my mother why did she do it...why leave all she knew to come to Canada? She said she knew she faced certain death if she stayed in Estonia because of her association with Uncle Otto. Her beloved Uncle



Otto Heinze was a much decorated General in the first World War and fought in the Estonian War of Independence. Living in Germany for five years showed her that there was no future there either. My sense is Lydia knew that she could rely on her skills and knowledge. She was not afraid of the future and did not dwell on what life had dealt her.

Amongst the things that Lydia acquired while in the Displaced Person (DP) camp in Germany were two *kuivnõel* (pen & ink) works by Agaate Veber (1901-1988). One was of a young woman in Estonian folk costume, the other was of a traditional Estonian farmstead. Both had a place of prominence in our home and were reminders of her time in Germany and of course, Estonia. These art works were also featured in early displays of Estonian culture and arts in Edmonton. Other items often on display included a wood inlay letter opener, hand made lace, a carved wooden container, her hand made linens and a leather bound photo album. These material cultural items were scarce in Edmonton in the 1950s and 1960s. Lydia was called upon to talk about the evolution of Estonian arts and culture and was considered an authority. She and Rita Matiisen were sought after spokespersons by virtue of their knowledge and willingness to speak.

What made her an expert? She would talk about the context, the themes, the personalities in an engaging and personal way. As a result of her membership in korp! Fidentia, an Estonian women's sorority, she mingled with other musicians. She knew Veber personally, Juhan Aavik composed music for her, singers Maret Pank and Jutta Muurman were friends.

Talking about objects for her was not talking about things. It was about the cultural history and the evolution of a people, her people. Music, culture, Estonian language and literature became her areas of expertise and she became a cultural advocate and person of influence in Edmonton. She was instrumental in arranging the donation of Estonian folk costumes to the Alberta Provincial Museum in 1967. She was interviewed for both television and radio about Estonian history, political situation, culture and Estonian immigrant experiences in Canada. Lydia also supported initiatives advocating Estonian independence directly through letter writing campaigns to Canadian government officials, through

the University of Alberta Centre for East European Studies, and supported the Baltic German Society and both the Lithuanian and Latvian Societies in Edmonton.



***L-R: Lydia Anton, General Otto Heinze, Elsa Anton, unnamed child, Julia Anton, Ämari, 1934***

### ***How would Lydia describe herself?***

Lydia considered herself lucky to be in Canada. She was grateful for the kindness of strangers who helped her and her family when they arrived, helped her get started in her new life. Giving back to the community was her way of saying thank you.

She was someone who was interested in what was going on around her. If something stood in Lydia's way, she found a way around it. She had no patience for fools. She saw herself as a modern woman, she drove, she worked, and she was an independent thinker. She was not afraid of technology and was not afraid of the future.

Lydia considered herself wealthy in the sense that she was surrounded by wonderful people with abilities; she had a good education and used it. She was passionate about what she did, she threw herself into projects, events, concerts...she was a capable organizer and leader. She had a vision of what should happen and worked hard to make it so whether being the Women's Musical Club president, being on Registered Music Teachers of Alberta executive or working on behalf of her students.

Despite the hardship of her first years in Canada, she developed an interest in gardening. Gloves on, she worked the soil and loved to plant flowers. Peonies reminded her of her father. She loved being in nature and especially loved our Sandy Lake property or being in the mountains.

Lydia was characterized by her determination, strength, class and undeterred drive. Not everyone was a fan though. She felt a mission to bring culture, learning and refinement to all of her endeavors. She also liked to associate with like minded individuals but was impatient with others. Lydia cared about people, was very loyal and had a zest for life.

In chatting with Eda McClung about her mother and my mother's friendship she observed that "they saw themselves as having lost status but were determined to create a better life here, especially for the sake of their children. The sadness and loss of their earlier

lives was their private conversation. They were proud of their Estonian heritage and promoted this culturally whenever possible. They believed that caring for family left behind was of utmost importance and taught us to think the same way. And we did for decades.”

Lydia’s legacy has several layers: stronger music institutions in Edmonton that continue today; a presence in Edmonton’s music culture and education. She saw musical education of young people as a key to expand mental capacity and long term development. Over a thirty four year period, she taught many young people, fostered composition education and quality music competitions. She was a teacher, a mentor, a counsellor, an inspiration and a friend.



***Lydia Pals portrait taken in honor of her last solo recital performance, 1970***

Lydia was also a proud Canadian and devoted much of her later life to giving back to the broader Canadian musical community. She was generous with her time and willing to share her knowledge.

Lydia was also a mother, my mother. She made sure I knew where I came from and that I knew about Estonian traditions and culture. Her example of leadership and giving back to the community was instilled in me. I grew up in a household filled with music, helped to entertain dignitaries, helped to organize events, learned how to share my culture and experienced the value of being in a community.

#### ***A biographical sketch:***

Lydia Anton was born in St. Petersburg in 1915 to Elsa (nee Heinze) and Aleksander Anton. The family moved to Narva when Aleksander secured a position as a textile engineer at the *Kreenholm Vabrik*. Lydia completed high school at Narva Gymnasium and went on to study music at the Tallinn Conservatory with Prof. Leimer. Her professional debut as a concert pianist was in Tallinn in 1935. She went on to study with Walter Giesecking in Wiesbaden, Germany. She continued her concert career and studies with Giesecking subsequent to her marriage to Julius Kass

in 1938. When the circumstances of World War II made it clear that she could no longer live in her beloved Estonia, Lydia returned for the last time at great personal risk to bring her two young children and mother, Elsa, to Germany. A family story is told about being packed on the ship, like sardines, the children were sick. Lydia noticed a piano onboard, sat down and started playing to lighten the mood. She played and played for hours to help people forget the awful experience they were in.... an example of her character and her kindness to strangers. During her time in Germany, she worked for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) at Aglasterhausen, Weisbaden and the YMCA IRO Resettlement Center. In addition to her work as a translator, she also discovered a joy in helping children who were orphaned, to begin the process of healing through music. This laid the foundation for her future work as a music teacher and educator.

After that first year in Canada, with the help of the Enerson family she moved her family to Lethbridge, again with the help of strangers. She taught piano in Lethbridge to the Johnson and Erdman children amongst others, going from house to house. The kindness of these families helped her get a piano to teach from home. This launched her career as a music teacher and more importantly, the ability to provide for her family. Following her marriage in 1952 to Ilmar Pals and a relatively short period of residence in Calgary, she settled in Edmonton, where her third child Ann was born in 1955.

As a woman growing up during the 1920s and 1930s, Lydia spoke four languages: Estonian, German, Russian and English and considered herself an independent modern woman. She was an accomplished professional musician, well educated and an excellent conversationalist who enjoyed a privileged life whether in Tallinn, at Narva- Jõesuu, or at Uncle Otto's estate, 'Ämari.' What she was able to accomplish later in her life was in part, because of her upbringing in Estonia. Lydia passed away in 1983.

#### ***Ann Pals Holtz:***

The youngest child of Lydia and Ilmar Pals, Ann grew up learning how to organize and entertain whether it was sauna parties, recitals or being part of the Edmonton Estonian community. A favorite memory is participating in the Estonian tent at Edmonton Heritage Days which showcased Estonian arts and culture and sold hundreds of *pirukaid* and apple cake to the public. Ann, her husband Al Holtz and their three children left Alberta in 1989 for Vancouver. They moved to Ottawa in 2010 where they currently reside. Ann is still looking for good rye bread and this past winter tried to teach herself to make proper sourdough starter, with mixed results.

# VICTOR ERDMAN: FARMER, INVENTOR, MANUFACTURER

Carole Erdman Grant, Calgary, Alberta

My father, Victor Erdman, the oldest son of Gustav and Magda Erdman, was a struggling Barons, Alberta, farmer like everyone else in the 1930s. To help with the family income he made his own welder out of a motor and commenced to open a welding shop in the village of Barons across from the post office. As well as operating his farm he welded for others on whatever was necessary. For a period of time he was also employed by the government of Alberta at the 'Youth Training Schools' to teach welding throughout many rural areas of the province. He was the first welder for C.S. Noble in his Nobleford manufacturing plant but soon decided to launch his own farm machinery manufacturing company. He called his company Victory Equipment



**Victor Erdman, originator of the V-shaped cultivator blade**

Ltd. and his initial product was the Victory Blade, easily identifiable by its orange and black livery. His cultivator design was born out of the problem with high winds in southern Alberta that blew the precious rich topsoil away. The distinctive V-shape left stubble on the top keeping the soil from blowing away. The manufacturing was started in a shop on our farm and as a little kid I had great fun with all the activity -- piles of steel to climb on, electric tools in the shop to experiment with where I would go in the evenings. I remember turning on the giant electric hole punch and punching holes with a huge drill in everything I could see including pieces of wood and metal. Dad made a pipe cutter for his shop out of an ancient cylindrical record player that we previously used to play those wonderful old cylinder records on. He was very good at innovation and created many tools that were needed in his manufacturing, partly out of his own ingenuity and partly out of necessity because many tools weren't available.

By 1949 Victory Equipment had manufactured 100 machines on our farm and Dad eventually moved his expanded manufacturing plant into Lethbridge where supplies and employees were easier to obtain. In 1952 Victor developed an 'air seeding machine' which spread a wide row of seeds beneath the earth. Later he developed a very simple but effective rod weeder attachment for the blades of his cultivators. He also held many patents for other

machinery designs he developed. Victory Equipment Ltd had an extensive distribution system for their farm machinery with salesmen who went as far away as Texas. They organized farm machinery dealers throughout Western Canada, and the middle and southern USA who sold Victory blades promoting the topsoil preservation system of this machine.

Another notable development by Victor was nylon pickup fingers for combine harvesters that were designed to better and more efficiently feed the swathed row of grain into the combines. He had a special machine and mold for this product which he manufactured and sold for many years.

Many of the people Victor employed as welders in his manufacturing plant were Estonians whose immigration to Canada he sponsored and who he taught to weld. These families had come from their homeland for a better life and they were integrated into the southern Alberta Estonian community and also learned a new skill. This enterprise as well as farming at Barons kept us all very occupied.

Victor sold his Victory Equipment Ltd. manufacturing plant in 1977. A nephew now farms Victor's land which his grandparents homesteaded in the very early part of the last century. Our great grandparents, Jacob and Mari Erdman, built the house in 1907 that we lived in. Victor had it moved to the current site because electricity was only available there -- the power line had not arrived at the initial homestead. His legacy remains for the benefit of farming in Alberta.



*Carole Erdman Grant is the third child of Victor and Hilda Erdman. She has two children, Kelly Schuler in Calgary and Cameron Schuler in Edmonton. She is grandmother to five lovely grandchildren. Carole grew up on the family farm at Barons and in Lethbridge. Currently the Grants live in Calgary. Both Carole and her husband, Barrie Grant, are professional sailors. When they are not in Calgary they are rebuilding a 107- year old Dutch Tjalk to journey the thousands of miles of rivers and canals of Europe.*



# Fraternity Korp! Rotalia Celebrates Its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Bob Tipman and Juri Kraav, Calgary, Alberta.

It was close to midnight when Bob landed at the Tallinn airport on a flight from Frankfurt. He caught a cab and in his best Estonian asked the driver to take him to the Hotel St. Barbara. The driver replied in perfect English that the fare would be 10 Euros and the hotel was downtown, just a short drive from the airport. He then asked the reason for the visit to Tallinn and when informed it was to attend the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Korp! Rotalia he replied he knew all about it as it had been well publicised in the city.



***Bob, Helle and Juri relaxing at St. Barbara Hotel after a day full of activity***

The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of any organization is a milestone event especially when it has survived amidst the upheavals and wars of the last century in Europe. Thus the celebration of the founding of Korp! Rotalia to which Enn, Juri and Bob all belong was important to us. It was Enn Tiislar who conceived the idea that the three of us along with his wife Parja and Juri's wife Helle should participate in the week of festivities in Tallinn and Tartu. We were all scheduled to meet at the St. Barbara Hotel in Tallinn on November 6, but unfortunately, Enn had a sudden health problem, so he and Parja cancelled their trip.

A brief history: Korp! Rotalia was founded in St. Petersburg, Russia on November 10, 1913 by ten Estonian university students who established the fraternity in much the same

fashion as the university fraternities in Canada. They are distinguished for their camaraderie and rituals as well as the bonding which makes fraternity brothers support and maintain friendships long after their graduation. Korp! Rotalia is also the largest fraternity in Estonia with close to 600 members and facilities in Tallinn and Tartu. In addition, chapters were established outside Estonia during the Russian Occupation when all fraternities and sororities were forbidden. Only in the late 1990s were fraternities and sororities allowed to resume operation in Estonia. The members who fled Estonia during fall of 1944 established branches in Stockholm, Helsinki and Brussels in Europe, New York City, Los Angeles, Washington, Seattle in the United States, and Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver in Canada. Toronto has the largest membership outside of Estonia. The members have monthly meetings and the main events are the spring and fall Kommerss which are formal gatherings. There are also friendship pacts (sõpruslepingud) with Finnish, Latvian and Polish fraternities. Many of the members of these fraternities were also represented at the 100 anniversary celebrations in Tartu bringing the total attendance to around 550 members.

The celebration week was packed with activities which started in Tallinn and ended in Tartu with the formal "Kommerss". Our first event was in the Old Town in Tallinn where we attended a panel titled "Quo Vadis, Estonian Foreign Policy" by a panel of Estonian Government members, including the Estonian Foreign Minister, former German and French Ambassadors to Estonia and foreign experts who debated the role of Estonia in the European Union. There was simultaneous translation of Estonian into English, but significantly, the panelists all talked in English as did the Estonian moderator. That evening, we enjoyed a concert put on by the student orchestra of the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama. Before the concert, Rotalia Foundation presented scholarships to winners of scholarship competitions. Since 1985, the Foundation has awarded 650 scholarships at Tartu, Tallinn and Helsinki Universities.



*Photo: Margus Muts*

***About 400 ‘brothers’ marching with lit torches from Rotalia House to Vanemuise Concert Hall, Tartu***

Next day, November 7, we travelled to Tartu where the main celebrations were held over the next three days. The formal ball was held at the Vanemuise Concert Hall on November 8, where we were entertained by a variety concert featuring several Estonian singers, two of whom are studying music in the US and who later sang as the younger generation waltzed and discoed.

On the morning of November 9, there was a special ceremony at the Convocation Hall of Tartu University with an address to the group by the President of Estonia, as well as numerous other dignitaries and presentations of gifts to the fraternity. A choir provided the musical component without which no Estonian occasion is complete.

The preparation for the main event “Kommerss” began Saturday afternoon at Rotalia House with an official group picture taking, then the induction of new members into the Fraternity. This ceremony gives the new members their formal colours and asks for their oath of allegiance to the values and principles

of the fraternity. The rain, which began in the early evening, failed to dampen the spirits of the over 400 brothers who sang as they marched with lit torches from Rotalia House to the Vanemuise Concert Hall. There tables had been set up for 500 attendees to celebrate the Kommerss (Vennastus) ceremony. Out came the beer and after the formal ritual of renewing their oaths to the fraternity was completed, out came the food, more beer and vodka. For several hours, various members took turns leading the singing. By the end of the evening, all the participants were in a jovial mood and were nicely lubricated. For some of the hardy, celebrating continued well into the early morning. It was an exhausting day.

The next day the bus brought us back to Tallinn for our return trip home. It was a quiet and sleepy group on the way back, completely different from the chatty and enthusiastic group that had been on the bus to Tartu three days earlier. For Juri, Helle and Bob it was a truly memorable experience.

# Estonian House in Stettler is Historical Landmark

E. McClung, Edmonton, Alberta

When this modest log building was donated to the Stettler Town and Country Museum in 1978, no one could have expected it to become the first permanent display of Estonian pioneer history in Alberta. Stettler was once the largest Estonian settlement in Canada, with a cemetery and chapel erected in 1906 and Linda Hall community centre in 1911. These structures still stand as testament to those hardy pioneers. Over the years, Estonian House suffered water and structural damage with the artefacts having to be moved into storage. Its future was uncertain.



***Deane Kerbes and Ron Hennel at Linda Hall Family Spring Dance which contributed funds to Estonian House repair***

Last fall, a community wide funding drive was started under the leadership of Deane Kerbes and Ron Hennel.



***L-R: Deane Kerbes, Lyndsay Dayman, Gilbert Ellis, Norma Rairdan at Stettler Trade Show, April 11, 2014 in front of Museum display***

With the generosity of local people and organizations, including Linda Hall Society and AEHS, funds totalling \$24,000 have been secured. This will provide for a concrete foundation, replacement of the wood floor and

repair of the roof. All labour is provided by volunteers. Additional repairs will be completed as more funding arrives. Work will commence this spring when weather permits.



***Shannon (Saar) Shirley presents Deane Kerbes with generous donation for Estonian House Repair on behalf of Destination West Marketing Fund Ltd/Ramada Inn and Suites (Stettler).***

Once restoration is complete, Estonian House will again become the repository of local historical artefacts. Karen Wahlund, General Manager, and Wilda Gibbons, Curator, indicate that items donated have been catalogued and preserved. Amongst these are items brought to Alberta around 1911 by settlers such as a wicker basket to carry potatoes and a Russian buck saw, bench vice and scythe. Ron Hennel and Deane Kerbes are working closely with the Museum in all aspects of the restoration. The donations that make this project possible are much appreciated.

The goal is to repair Estonian House with funds already raised. However the Museum has indicated with additional monies they would appreciate having a knowledgeable guide to call upon for special occasions. The Stettler Museum is proud to display this small iconic building. The Museum is also showcasing the AEHS six panel display this summer. They are a reminder of the vibrant cultural influence of Alberta's Estonian pioneers.

Donations are tax deductible and payable to the Stettler Town and Country Museum. Cheques designated to 'Estonian House Repair' should be mailed to:

Deane Kerbes  
Box 1504  
Stettler, AB T0C 2L0



## Leah Hennel wins first prize at National Newspaper Awards



Leah Hennel won first prize at the National Newspaper Awards in P.E.I. May 30, 2014 in the Feature Photo Category.

When flooding hit Calgary last summer, Leah Hennel of the Calgary Herald came across a woman facing an age old conundrum: how does one gracefully deal with a huge street-corner puddle? The woman leapt into the waiting arms of her husband, creating a balletic image that the judges said Leah Hennel anticipated

and executed perfectly. One judge called it a whimsical, nice storytelling moment during the unpleasantness of the floods. Leah was also part of the Calgary Herald's team flood coverage that won the Breaking News Category.

These awards represent huge accomplishment and recognition as they are judged from thousands of entries from across the country.

Leah Hennel is a 5th generation descendent of Kristjan and Anne Marie Hennel who settled near Stettler in 1903.



*Photo: Leah*

*Leah Hennel's award winning photo of a woman striking a balletic pose as she leaps over floodwaters in downtown Calgary during the June 2013 flood. Does she make it across the puddle...?*

## **Estonian Foundation of Canada supports production of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of AjaKaja**



**“The Estonian Foundation of Canada is recognized as a vital institution and catalyst, linking Canadians of Estonian descent in a network that affirms, inspires and supports their achievements and aspirations....”**

**AEHS appreciates the funding support received from the Foundation to cover incremental costs of printing the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of Ajakaja.**

---

### **AEHS receives grant from Estonian Government’s “Rahvuskaaslaste Programm, 2014”**

The National Archives of Estonia administers this program and focuses on expatriate Estonian communities to support the collection, description and preservation of their history and cultural heritage. One of the key aims of the program is to make the archival collections - printed and digitized - available globally.

The grant received from the National Archives of Estonia will be used to collect, organize, digitize, describe, catalogue, store and preserve archival materials and to make them available to family researchers, archives and museums.

## ***‘Alberta’s Estonians: 1899 – Present’ on display in Tallinn***

The Estonian diaspora has been formed by two major waves of emigration. The first mass emigration started in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until World War I; the second mass emigration was in the form of a refugee exodus during World War II. During the first period, most of the emigrants found a new home in the rural regions of the Russian Empire (more than 300 Estonian settlements were established all across Russia), but some Estonians found their way to North America as well.

One colorful page in America’s Estonian history is Alberta’s Estonian settlement which dates back to the year 1899 when the first Estonian pioneers arrived in the province of Alberta. Estonian Expatriate Literature Centre had the great honor to open the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society (AEHS) exhibition *‘Alberta’s Estonians 1899 – Present’* at the Academic Library of Tallinn University (Rävala Ave. 10, Tallinn) on Thursday, May 15, 2014.

It is wonderful to see how Alberta’s relatively small Estonian community is active in collecting and preserving their heritage even after a century since the community was established.



***Part of Alberta’s Estonian heritage exhibit on display at Tallinn University***

The exhibit, the book *Freedom, Land, & Legacy: Alberta’s Estonians 1899-2009* (both compiled by Eda McClung and Ain Dave Kiil) and the documentary film *Alberta’s Estonians* together provide an excellent overview of the history of Estonians in Alberta. And now all of these can be seen in Estonia – in Alberta’s Estonians’ ancestral land.

I would like to thank the members of AEHS and specially Ain Dave Kiil for the support in bringing the exhibition to Tallinn!

Sander Jürisson

Head, Estonian Expatriate Literature Centre, Tallinn University

---

## **Alberta’s Estonian Exhibit on display at Stettler Museum**



Since its premiere at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton in 2012, Alberta Estonian Heritage Society’s ‘travelling exhibit’ has also been on display at Gilby Hall during 2012 Jaanipäev celebration, at Tartu College in Toronto and on Parliament Hill in Ottawa in 2013. As described above, the exhibit is on display at the Academic Library of Tallinn University. Closer to home, it opened at the Stettler Town and Country Museum on May 20, 2014. The Museum is open daily from 10:00 am to 5:30 pm until the Labor Day weekend in September.



## In Memoriam

### Helen (Kerbes) Mulligan 1922-2014



Helen (Kerbes) Mulligan passed away recently in Kelowna, BC at the age of 91 years. Helen was an original member, pianist and singer with the well-known 4K's Orchestra that performed for years throughout the Stettler area. She was instrumental in naming the group. The original members included herself, Charlie Klaus, and Bert and Elmer Kerbes. Helen was the last surviving member of this group. Their music will long be remembered by family, friends and the Linda Hall community.

Helen was born on a farm in Stettler, AB where she was part of a large musical family with six brothers and sisters. She excelled at school in academics and music, and from an early age became part of a popular family band which performed at various events

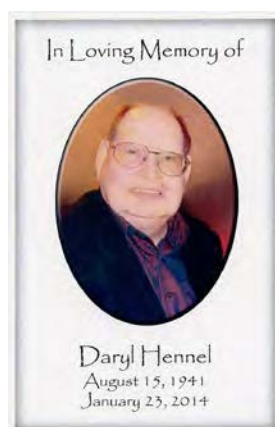


*Original 4 K's Band at Linda Hall, ca 1945. L-R: Helen Kerbes (Mulligan), Bert Kerbes, , Charlie Kerbes, Elmer Kerbes*

throughout Central Alberta. Following graduation, she worked in Vancouver for Boeing but returned to Stettler where she married Pat Mulligan. In 1948 they moved to Penticton, BC where they raised a family of four children. In the 1960's, Helen formed a band with her three sons and two other musicians, and played for dances through out the Okanagan Valley. Her musical career continued for 40 years and there was no doubt that she was always 'the leader of the band'.

---

### Daryl Hennel August 15, 1941-January 23, 2013



Daryl was born August 15, 1941 in Vancouver, B.C. When Daryl was five years old he started school at the Vancouver School for the Deaf. While he was in school he would visit his uncle and aunt who farmed in Langley B.C. Daryl then transferred to the Saskatoon School for the Deaf. As Daryl got older he would take the train from Saskatoon to

Camrose to visit his family in Stettler.

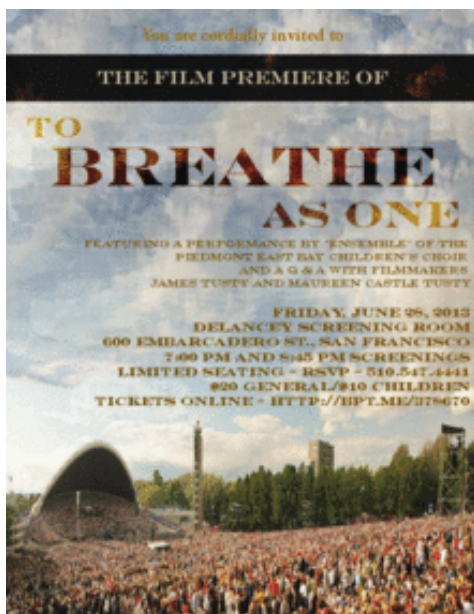
When Daryl became a senior he finished his education at the Edmonton School for the Deaf. Other than working on the farm Daryl also worked at the Stettler bakery which later led to working in a bakery in Edmonton, working at five different bakeries over twenty nine years.

Daryl met Gloria in 1981 and though they didn't have much time together, with Gloria working days and Daryl working nights, they were married in April 24, 1982. Two boys Jeff and Tommy were born. Daryl loved to travel. He travelled to places like Russia, Israel, Hawaii, Scotland, England, USA and many more. Daryl never stopped travelling. With Gloria they had many camping trips across Alberta and travelled to Alaska, Newfoundland, and other smaller trips.

Daryl and Gloria moved from Edmonton to Myrnam, AB where they delivered the Edmonton Journal. Daryl would build toys, shelves and many things around the house and put together lots of puzzles as well as reading lots of books, bowling and watching wrestling every Monday night. With 31 years of marriage, a wife and two boys Daryl had a life full of adventures. He passed away peacefully on January 23, 2014 at the age of 72 due to complications with diabetes. Throughout his life he was always making people smile with his jokes and will be missed by family and friends.

## **“To Breathe as One”**

### **Broadcasts & Screenings**



Filmmakers Maureen and James Tusty have announced that Public Broadcasting Stations (PBS) in the U.S have scheduled airdates for this summer. For example, Spokane and Detroit PBS stations have scheduled screenings on June 27 and 28. Dates and times of screenings in your area are available on website:

[www.tobreatheasone.com](http://www.tobreatheasone.com)

"To Breathe As One" tells the unique story of an enormous cultural event that reflects the heart of an entire nation. Estonia's Laulupidu song festival gathers as many as 30,000 well rehearsed singers to the stage, with over 100,000 attending in the audience, for a spectacular two-day musical phenomenon. But "To Breathe As One" is about much more than a concert event. The film brings to life the role

this festival played for Estonians as an integral force in maintaining strength and national identity for a people facing cultural genocide more than once. It fueled the now-heralded "Singing Revolution" of the late 1980s, when Estonians played a significant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

---

## **Mark your calendars!**

**West Coast Estonian Days will be held in Whistler, BC from August 5-9, 2015**



*Whistler is located on British Columbia Highway 99, approximately 58 kilometres north of Squamish, 125 kilometres from Vancouver and about 1,000 kilometres from central Alberta*

*Check website : LEP2015 for details*

## Oldest Estonian Lutheran Church in North America: More than a church, a monument to freedom

The story of an idyllic Estonian Lutheran Church in Wisconsin, near the town of Gleason, invites comparisons with the Estonian Chapel<sup>1</sup> near the town of Stettler, Alberta. Both areas were settled by Estonian pioneers during the first decades of the 1900's.

The Estonian settlers in the Gleason area came from New York, North and South Dakota, and Estonia. In 1907, a group of Estonians purchased several acres of land for a church and cemetery, and deeded it to the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) in 1914. It is located on Estonian Church Road. Prior to and during the building of the church, Reverend Hans Rebane of Boston made annual visits to the Gleason area to preach to the Estonians. Other pastors continued to serve the local Estonian and Latvian communities until the 1960's.

When Ito (Bill) Rebane moved from Chicago to the Gleason, Wisconsin area in 1966, he was unaware of the Estonian and Latvian settlements. He was surprised to discover that Rev. Hans Rebane was his great grand uncle! And it had nothing to do with his move to Gleason! Now, 100 years since the construction of the Estonian Church, Bill



*Estonian Lutheran Church in Gleason,  
Wisconsin*

is trying to save the Church as a landmark for Estonians in U.S.A. He reminisces<sup>2</sup> about his involvement as follows:

*As early as the 1970's, the Church had already been neglected and abandoned by the Estonians in the area. The Pay Brothers, the wealthiest Estonian farmers remaining, introduced me to the Church and to one of the original founders, Albert Sommi, who was in a nursing home.*

*Sommi's last wish was that the church be saved as a landmark of Estonian immigrants to America. The Pay Brothers had no further interest in the property, as they built a new Lutheran Church in Irma, Wisconsin. (without any Estonian connection).*

*During my early visits to the Estonian Church, it was in reasonable repair with benches, pulpit, doors and windows, and the original church bell in the tower. At the time I was commuting between Germany and Wisconsin in my business. Between visits and services held at the church, vandalism kept re-occurring. Replacement of windows, doors, benches and the bell soon led to the realization that this did not produce the desired results.*

*It was not until the mid- to- late 1980's that I began to perform some due*

---

<sup>1</sup> A church has a steeple (tower, spire) and bells; a Chapel does not.

---

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication



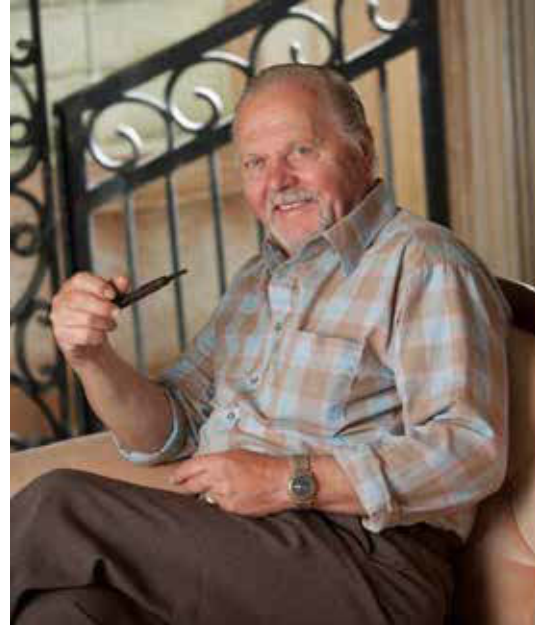
*diligence pertaining to the legal status of the property. It was clear that whomever was left of past members, the EELC and all who had belonged to it were no longer active. It was not until I went to Estonia in 1992 as trade representative for Estonia that I took the appropriate action in 1994 to reinstate the church under it's original name and deeded it as the Estonian Evangelical Martin Luther Church (Eesti Evangeelne Martin Luteri Kogudus).*

*Unfortunately, there aren't many Estonians left in the Gleason area to be interested in the restoration of the church. "More Americans find this to be a good cause," Bill admits, "which is sad. I read that Estonia is one of the least religious countries in the world. They will have to understand that this is more than a church – irrespective of religious preferences, it is a monument to freedom and the Republic of Estonia as a whole."*

*"Our President, Toomas Ilves, knows about the church. It would be nice if he could come and see it personally," Bill says hopefully."*

***... "this is more than a church...it is a monument to freedom."***

With this new agenda, the organizers intend to renew restoration efforts to make the church available for all Estonians and others of Baltic heritage to enjoy the beautiful wooded property for worship, picnics and recreation, and to find solace and peace in these surroundings. At the time of writing, Bill Rebane reports that over \$2,000 has already been raised for the project. A team of volunteers from Chicago will work all summer to restore the church.



*Itto (Bill) Rebane,*

The Estonian-American film producer and director, Bill Rebane, has certainly had an interesting life. Born in Latvia, schooled in Germany and worked in the United States, he's one of the few people of Estonian heritage who have made a difference in the arts of motion pictures. And yet, after a lifetime of making horror films<sup>3</sup> some of them rather intriguingly titled as *The Giant Spider Invasion*, *Monster A Go-Go* and *Blood Harvest*, Rebane admits that he's never been a fan of horror. Interestingly though, even at the age of 77, he's in the process of producing a musical based on one of his earlier movies, and he has put his heart into restoring an Estonian church in the village of Gleason, Wisconsin, some 300 miles north from Chicago.

*Compiled by Dave Kiil*

---

<sup>3</sup> Stan Hankewitz: *Bill Rebane-the maker of horror films who's "never been a fan of horror."* People, April 13, 2014.

# **Chester, Montana: site of first “Estonian House” built in U.S.A.**

Dave Kiil, Edmonton, Alberta



*Members of the Chester, Montana Estonian settlement at the opening of the first Estonian House (Eesti Maja) in U.S.A, 1916.*

The United States Government's Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 doubled the land granted from 160 acres to 320 acres for dry land farming. The availability of free land was also advertised in Europe and Russia, as well as in eastern U.S.A and Canada, and attracted additional settlers to the Chester, Montana area. Between 1910 and 1916, about forty Estonian families were homesteading northwest of the town of Chester located about 50 km south of the Alberta border.

The settlement was established largely by emigrants from Crimea who initially settled in North and South Dakota. Faced with challenging living conditions, they ventured west and north in search of better land for homesteading. In 1904, about thirty families packed their belongings and travelled by train

from the Dakotas to Barons to establish a settlement there.

In 1910, a year after the Enlarged Homestead Act was announced, about ten Estonian families who had settled in the Barons area only six years previously, pulled up roots again to join others from the Dakotas at the Estonian settlement near Chester. The pioneers in the Chester area were faced with the daunting task of providing shelter for their families while coping with the physical challenges of cultivating pristine prairie for agriculture. Settlers lived in unheated, tiny shacks, mud-brick houses and barns<sup>1</sup>. There was a scarcity of drinking water, and preservation of food during very harsh

---

<sup>1</sup> T. Ets, *America's first Estonian House*, *Estonian World Review*, 2006.

western winters was another challenge facing the new settlers.

The Chester-area Estonians built a community hall (Estonian House) in 1916, with all materials and labor donated by them. They didn't have funds to paint the building so they mortgaged it to buy paint! The hall was the site of dances, plays, songfests, a school for their children, and other celebrations, affording the homesteaders a break from the rigors of everyday life on the hostile prairie.

The daughter of Lisa (Kerbes) and Nick Laas, Edna (Laas) Leffler<sup>2</sup>, provides some insights into life of the community:



*Lisa (Lizzie) and Nick Laas, 1916*

My mother Lisa grew up in Big Valley near the Stettler Estonian settlement. Having met her future husband at Linda Hall, she moved to Chester in 1916 and married Nick Laas. Edna, born in 1929, recalls seeing pictures of waist-high wheat crops until about

1920. By the early 1920's, drought and various plagues took their toll and forced many Estonians to leave the area. A few even travelled to Russia to help establish the commune Koit.

Edna's family, including her two sisters and three brothers, lived through the depression years, and learned to work hard and to value money: "To this day, I still pick up a penny on the ground." Her mother told her that on one trip to the town of Chester, Edna's dad told her "don't spend too much, I have only one round" meaning one silver dollar! On the farm she pulled weeds, herded and

sheared sheep, drove tractors and, later, drove a load of wheat to the elevators. In the 1970's, Edna finally met some of her Estonian cousins in Washington State. They accompanied their visitors in her



*Edna Leffler*

husband's Beechcraft and flew them to the Chester area. When they visited the cemetery, cousin Ed knelt on Edna's father's grave and

tearfully said "I don't know where the other Laas brothers are buried."

In the 1920's, many Estonian families left the area in search of better living conditions. Some of the original community members remained when conditions began to improve near the end of the decade. The Estonian House was moved to Chester and became a community hall for local residents. Later, it was used as a warehouse for agricultural equipment.



*A "Mud House, built of mud and straw," near Chester, Montana. (Property of Walt Laas), Deane Kerbes and Alma Kerbes are pictured on left side of photo, 1988*

The Chester Estonian community, comprised of nearly 100 homesteaders, grew quickly during the decade between 1910 and 1920, but it dissolved equally quickly as a result of drought and plagues in the 1920's. It's lasting legacy is the first Estonian House (Eesti Maja) in the U.S.A., a gathering place for young and old.

<sup>2</sup> *Personal communication*



# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society

## Members , June, 2014

Allen	Dianne	Spruce Grove	AB
Boehrsen	Sylvia	Calgary	AB
de Launay	David	Peterborough	ON
de Launay	Geoff	Kanata	ON
Clark	John	Denver	Col
Derksen	Colin & Linda	Edmonton	AB
Dinning	Shirley & Leonard	Edmonton	AB
Elvey	Ruth	Sidney	AB
Erdman	Evelyn	Calgary	AB
Franchini	Karen	Burnaby	BC
Gue	Anita	Yellowknife	NWT
Gue	Brian	Edmonton	AB
Gue	Kevin	Hornby Isl.	BC
Gue	Lisa	Ottawa	ON
Gullickson	Barbara	Barons	AB
Hall	Gwen	Ashmont	AB
Hennel	Gloria	Myrnham	AB
Hennel	Kimberley	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Leah	Calgary	AB
Hennel	Lorne & Anne Marie	Calgary	AB
Hennel	Rodney & Liz	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Ron W. F.	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Theresa	Red Deer	AB
Herman	Liia	Inisfail	AB
Herman	Lori	N. Vancouver	BC
Jaako	Harry	Vancouver	BC
Kalev	Tiiu	Eckville	AB
Kaljuste	Truuta Kai	Montreal	QC
Kalvee	Willy G.	Calgary	AB
Kenzle	Alice	Nanton	AB
Kenzle	Susan	Austin	TX
Kerbes	Deane & Irene	Stettler	AB
Kerbes	Richard	Saskatoon	SK
Kiil	Dave & Betty	Edmonton	AB
Kiil	Lisa	Edmonton	AB
Kingsep	Bob & Annette	Redwood Mdws	AB
Kivisild	Livia	Calgary	AB
Kotkas	Perry&Karen	Calgary	AB
Kraav	Jüri & Helle	Calgary	AB
Krasman	Leslie	Champion	AB
Kroll	Nicole & Mike	Edmonton	AB
Kruuv	Riho	Ottawa	ON
Kuester	Matt F.	Edmonton	AB

Kuutan	Marlene	Toronto	ON
Leesment	Peeter & Helgi	Calgary	AB
Leilop	Aino	St. Albert	AB
Leffler	Edna	Manson	WA
Maddison	Anneliese	Edmonton	AB
Madill	Anita & Wallace	Calgary	AB
Matiisen	Arne	Calgary	AB
McClung	Eda	Edmonton	AB
McElroy	Elve	Camrose	AB
Moro	Bonnie	Victoria	BC
Mottus	Brian	Whitehorse	YT
Munz Gue	Martha	Medicine Hat	AB
Nicklom	Otto & Gladys	Stettler	AB
Nirk	Arne	Lethbridge	AB
Oja	Kirsti	Edmonton	AB
Ojamaa	Peter & Tina	Calgary	AB
Pääsuke	Elizabeth	Edmonton	AB
Pääsuke	Mark	Vancouver	BC
Pääsuke	Rein & Janice	Calgary	AB
Pääsuke	Toomas	Canmore	AB
Pallo	Jack Henry	Red Deer	AB
Peet	Ethel	Edmonton	AB
Peetri	Ave & Kevin	Calgary	AB
Phypers	Kaidi	Calgary	AB
Pilt	Shirley	Edmonton	AB
Renne	Thomas	Calgary	AB
Robertson	David & Christine	Leduc	AB
Ruus	Allan	Calgary	AB
Ruus	Ivar & Lea	Calgary	AB
Saar	Rein & Patricia	Calgary	AB
Sanders	Myrna	Ardossan	BC
Schuler	Kelly	Calgary	AB
Shongrunden	Astrid	Penticton	BC
Silverton	Ernest	St. Albert	AB
Sorenson	Marlene	Calgary	AB
Tardie	Elizabeth	Edmonton	AB
Tiisler	Enn & Pärja	Canmore	AB
Timma	Olev	Calgary	AB
Tipman	Lisa	Calgary	AB
Tipman	Bob & Kathy	Calgary	AB
Ustina	Astrid	Edmonton	AB
Ustina	Judy K	Edmonton	AB
Ustina	Stephanie	Victoria	BC
Visser	Mari & Igor	Cochrane	AB
Wartnow	Floyd C	Delta	BC
Watson	Maret	Spruce Grove	AB
Zach	Inge	Calgary	AB
Zielinski	Michel & Kristine	Spruce Grove	AB



