

# AJAKAJA



ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY  
SUMMER 2017 • ISSUE 46



**100<sup>th</sup>**  
*Saja aasta  
juubel*

**150<sup>th</sup>**  
*Anniversary*



## Alberta Estonian Heritage Society 2017

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.

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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:

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### AjaKaja

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

Copies of AjaKaja can be purchased from Eda McClung at [emcclung@shaw.ca](mailto:emcclung@shaw.ca). Cost of AjaKaja is \$10.00 per issue, including postage in Canada.

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)

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# AjaKaja

From the Editors



Alberta Estonian  
Heritage Society  
Summer 2017  
Issue Number 46

Welcome to 2017 and Canada's 150<sup>th</sup>! At the same time, get set to join celebrations next year marking 100 years of Estonian independence! The juxtaposition of these events is our front cover and the theme for this issue.

In this AjaKaja we attempt to draw a connection between these dates and local, contemporary events in our province. Alberta's Estonians are framed by this history. Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> enables us a place and time for reflection. The past talks to you as you recall, record and celebrate the Reinson family journey from Crimea to Cochrane, Alberta. An evocative Mottus Golden Wedding speech in Canada's Centennial Year amongst the Eckville pioneer community is tenderly recalled by a grandson, noting this year will mark 100 years since that wedding in July 1917. However, for those in Estonia, 1917 marks a grim date, that of the Bolshevik Revolution. From its chaos and disorganization, Estonia fought for and gained independence in 1918. Survival during this upheaval depended on nerves and some luck. Read the personal Simm family memoir of life in Estonia during the treacherous revolutionary period. Estonia's regaining of independence in 1991 was also dramatic. Paasuke family was there and we are fortunate to have their firsthand account of how these memorable, and ultimately joyous, events unfolded.

Some of us still recall the spectacular Centennial events when we felt Canada had come of age and the world came to Expo'67. Alberta's Baltic people joined to celebrate their new homeland's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and staged a series of impressive cultural events which are described in this issue.

Congratulations to our members who have received recognition for their accomplishments: Bob Kingsep is a worthy recipient of the Estonian Foundation of Canada Award of Merit and Leah Hennel continues as an award-winning photographer for Postmedia. We thank Leah and Janet Matiisen for their assistance with this issue's outstanding cover design.

In the spring of 2017, AEHS received grant funds to revise and complete website, including the transfer of the new website to a Canadian website host, with full access of ownership to AEHS. Grant funds will also be used to update archival and heritage materials. Families and other contributors will be able to submit their updates through a web form to the reference material.

Thank you all who took time to contribute and be involved. Through the exceptional contributions of our readers to this issue, we can appreciate the power of history. Congratulations to the organizers of 2017 Jaanipäev celebration in Red Deer with its focus on children. We wish our members of all ages an enjoyable summer and Happy Canada 150th!

Eda McClung and Dave Kiil

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We thank the National Archives of  
Estonia and the Estonian  
Foundation of Canada for their  
support of AEHS Projects



## AEHS President's Message

Kelly Schuler, Calgary, Alberta

**Time for celebration and appreciation of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> (this year) and Estonia's 100<sup>th</sup> (next year)!**

The celebration of Estonian and Canadian heritage and freedom is a privilege which we enjoy as the result of sacrifices by our family, friends and unknown heroes who came before us. By recognizing and appreciating these people, our path becomes more purposeful. We are truly blessed to be Estonian Albertans in Canada.



*Kelly Schuler, AEHS President, Calgary*

Our identity and connection to our mother country begins before we are old enough to realize it. When I was a toddler, my parents returned with many stories from my Dad's UNESCO fellowship as the one Canadian chosen to visit England, France, Sweden, West Germany and communist Poland to examine adult education practices. They returned to Canada amidst the excitement of our Canadian Centennial celebrations. At age four, when father asked me 'who is Canada's Father of Confederation', instead of answering John A. Macdonald, I would say 'John A. Fisher' because he was Commissioner of the Centennial and so often on TV.

As a young child, I equated Canada's birthday with a connection to people around the world. I had a funny, interesting child's

understanding of buttons. I called my belly button my 'centennial button' (of which we received many that year of celebrations). I'll make this analogy: we are still connected to our homeland even though the umbilical cord is not attached. We are imprinted with DNA which makes us who we are today. As Alberta Estonians we have much to celebrate and appreciate. I hope you will feel to your core that you can wear your symbolic Estonian Centennial button, blow out the birthday candles and make

a wish for a positive future.

This fall AEHS will launch a new website which will be linked to social media where you will be able to renew your AEHS membership online. You will receive e-mail notice of its launch! In the meantime, you can connect by 'liking' our Facebook page at: [www.Facebook.com/AlbertaEstonianHeritageSociety/](http://www.Facebook.com/AlbertaEstonianHeritageSociety/)

Thank you to the creators of AjaKaja and all its contributors. We appreciate how AjaKaja helps to deepen our relationship with each other and with our Canadian Albertan Estonian-ess.

Let's celebrate and appreciate! Your celebration plans and ideas are welcome, so please connect with me.

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# President Kersti Kaljulaid emphasizes Estonia's need to outperform expectations

Speech at Lennart Meri Conference dinner highlights Estonia's place in NATO and importance of upcoming EU Presidency



Getty Images

Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid.

*Remarks by the President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the Lennart Meri Conference dinner on 12 May 2017 in Tallinn*

Welcome to Tallinn, to Kultuurikatel, to this year's edition of the Lennart Meri conference, to the premier foreign and security policy conference in Northern Europe. A free exchange of minds, where competent people do not read out their speeches but express their true thoughts.

Indeed, discussions at the Lennart Meri Conference are open, frank and do not beat around the bush. Many of the ideas put forth at the conference are refreshingly

provocative. And if you want to know how things are in this part of the world and what people really think of them, this is the place to be.

The spirit of this conference is very much the spirit of Lennart Meri. Lennart Meri – his government, his colleagues, his people – was an expression of smart security. Lennart was quick to spot and grasp opportunities. He was also smart to see the grey elements on the horizon from quite afar. In many speeches since 2001, he drew attention to the fact that the security environment around us is getting much more nervous, while urging Estonian politicians

to take the last remaining steps for our integration into western structures extremely seriously. Thank you, dear Lennart, you were so right! Although I wish that you had been wrong about the deteriorating security environment.

It is also, I hope, a good place for coming together to discuss what the future might bring and what we, as policymakers and policy shapers, can do to bring about positive change, despite the overall climate of global unpredictability and uncertainty.

It is obvious that we will not succeed in predicting future events exactly, but just by going through various scenarios, we will



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Celebrations for the 99th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia on February 24th, 2017.

be able to better react to any development that we might face. That is the value of this conference – to serve as a situational awareness exercise, where everyone can contribute to the awareness part. This is the place where those who need to take decisions, can either openly or in their minds, prepare their reactions.

To be better placed to decide when we really must decide.

The Lennart Meri Conference is an Estonian conference. It, therefore, has to reflect Estonia in some way. As you, our friends from abroad, have told us, we Estonians, for the past 25 years, have defied all logic of transformation and development, luckily mostly outperforming everybody's expectations. A friend of mine, former Prime Minister Mart Laar, likes to use the metaphor – Estonians are like a lizard running on water – to explain our phenomenon. A lizard doesn't actually know that it can run on water, it simply does so. This is very Estonian.

The Lennart Meri Conference is very Estonian. The Lennart Meri Conference is also unconventional. Its trademarks include an absence of ceremony – well, as soon as I finish here, that is – hierarchy and seniority. Everyone can weigh in, present arguments. And so unsurprisingly, a lot of new talent from the region, but not only, has surfaced from these conferences. Look at the flying career of Mrs. Federica Mogherini, she spoke at the conference some years ago.

The Lennart Meri Conference also adds value to Estonia's own debates on foreign and security policy issues. As those of you who know us well know, a somewhat peculiar characteristic of Estonians is that they believe the analysis about themselves much more if it is delivered by foreigners.

On the positive side, this shows that we clearly value the peer review approach. On the other hand, one might see this as a lingering inferiority complex from when we were isolated from our European friends. Events, like this conference, spark surges of self-confidence, as others show us their support and understanding, therefore validating our own view of our country and its surroundings.

In these trying times, we have seen and welcomed the upsurge in the attention given to defence and security issues in Europe. The NATO Warsaw decisions are being implemented and NATO's current deterrence posture reflects adequately the risk profile of our region. But given the current volatility of the global environment, more discussion on the future is needed. And so I am pleased that so many top security experts are at this year's conference. And especially glad that I don't have to explain to you, unlike the international media, that being security-conscious, which Estonia no doubt is and always has to be, is not the same as being insecure, let alone afraid.

I am encouraged by the fact that an entire

panel of this year's conference will be dedicated to NATO-EU relations. We clearly need fair burden sharing among NATO and EU member states. We need more that more Allies invest more in defence. And we must keep up the momentum of the Defence Investment Pledge made at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 in order to stop the cuts, gradually increase and then move towards spending 2% within a decade. This is important for the strength of NATO, as well as for the strength of the EU.

This year's conference also concentrates on many other European issues including the future of the European Union, the Eastern Partnership, the EU in the democratic debate, this is logical given that in less than two months' time Estonia will assume the EU presidency for the first time in its history. In foreign policy terms, a true milestone. We of course take on our presidency with a strong sense of responsibility, but also with enthusiasm. And we have set ourselves some ambitious goals, notably the horizontal digital aspects of basically all EU core policies.

Finally, let me finish by sincerely thanking the organisers of the conference – Riina, Jüri, the entire team at the ICDS. As always, you have done a wonderful job! Or actually, we Estonians say - this is normal. I wish all of you a successful conference and a wonderful stay in Estonia. Let's keep up the normalcy.



# **Robert Kingsep receives Award of Merit from Estonian Foundation of Canada**

**Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta**



**Bob Kingsep receives Estonian Central Council in Canada Award of Merit from Brigid (Soide) Zurock, Vancouver. Brigid also received the Award of Merit, presented to her by a Vancouver-based member of the Estonian Central Council in Canada.**

Former Alberta Estonian Heritage Society president, Robert Kingsep, was awarded the Medal of Merit by the Estonian Central Council of Canada/ Eestlaste Kesknõukogu Kanadas this past February. Bob is the fourth Albertan to receive this award, the others being Dave Kiil – 2011, Helgi Leesment and Eda McClung – 2004.

Bob Kingsep, as we all know him, was a well appreciated president of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society for six years. Those years, 2007 to 2013, were highly productive for the Society as it began its creative documentation path with the making of a half-hour DVD telling the story of Alberta's Estonians. Next came two websites, one for the Society itself,

another containing much of the historical material gathered for the DVD, followed by a 300-page book, a logo and an allocated space at the Provincial Archives of Alberta for things Estonian plus multiple product launches and presentations. Bob supervised everything with a constant sense of humour, maintaining a high level of enthusiasm among his colleagues. He travelled to Estonia (his first ever trip there) and Los Angeles, as needed for related events. He took a month off from his own computer consulting firm to create the AEHS website and updated it a few years later.

This sense of dedication follows in the footsteps of his grandfather, Hendrik Kingsep who was the first known Estonian pioneer settler in Canada and Alberta, and a longtime leader among the Estonian community in west-central Alberta during the very early part of the 20th Century.

Bob's involvement with the Alberta Estonian community began with the 1999 Centenary of Estonians in Alberta, where he was asked to be a co-master of ceremonies. Until

that time, Bob had barely been aware of his Estonian roots. That involvement, along with other factors such as the year 2000 visit of then Estonian President L. Meri to Alberta, played a major role in the eventual founding of the AEHS in 2005. Bob Kingsep along with Bob Tipman, Evelyn Shursen and Otto Nicklom were among the Albertans hosting President Meri in July 2000. Lennart Meri truly appreciated meeting these descendants of Estonians who left their homeland in the 19th and very early 20th centuries, as he was a historian prior to becoming a national president, and remained deeply interested in the long-term fates of those compatriots.

Bob and his wife Annette retired to Victoria, BC where they now reside. As a result, they travelled to Vancouver to receive the Central Council's Award of Merit at the Estonian Independence aktus-concert at the Meie Kodu Estonian house on February 26, 2017. Brigid Soide-Zurock, BC representative on the Central Council board, made the presentation.

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## **Bob reflects on receiving the Award**

Eda McClung, Edmonton, Alberta

In Bob's remarks following the award, he commented that "maintaining interest in our heritage

can be a challenge". He described his pioneering grandparents and their community



as “immersed in a culture of survival. Trappings of traditional culture had



***Receiving the Award, Bob quipped “some hardware for the software guy”.***

to wait. For their children many traditions made no sense in this new world, except a few wood-fired saunas and a smattering of rye bread holdouts.

When Bob was asked to MC the Alberta Estonian Centennial, “I found out that in 1899 my Grandfather was the first Estonian to register a

homestead in Alberta. It was news to me! That personal connection drew me to the Society, provided a finite connection to my roots and piqued my interest in details that determined who I am.”

“AEHS re-connected me with friends from my early school years as well. One in particular was Allan Posti. Time moved along and eventually I delivered his eulogy. Part of that presentation described the typical antics of young school boys in rural Alberta. After the funeral, my friend Juri Kraav said he found it intriguing how different my childhood had been compared to his as a young immigrant in a large Canadian city. His comment initiated an idea that accumulating notes and vignettes of our life experiences will provide the vision and mindset that ties our children to our generation, and through our Heritage Collection, to

Connecting the dots of our lineage is route to cultural exposure. Perhaps it is in the personal paths, decision points and direct relationships that initiate interest in preserving culture”.



# Photojournalist Leah Hennel wins prestigious national awards



Calgary Herald and Calgary Sun photojournalist Leah Hennel has been recognized by two prestigious organizations for her work in 2016.

Hennel won a National Newspaper Award (NNA) in the Feature Photo category for her shot of a lone rider on the range near the Lazy U Ranch near Pincher Creek. (Above.) It was Hennel's second win in the category, having also been recognized in 2013. She also received a citation of merit in the Sports Photo category for a shot from the 2016 Calgary Stampede rodeo. (Right.)

The photo was also awarded first place in the Sports Action category at the News Photographers Association of Canada (NPAC) 2016 National Pictures of the Year awards. Hennel was nominated as a finalist in four categories, including Photojournalist of the Year.

*(Reprinted from the Calgary Herald.)*



# AEHS makes presentation to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta



**Photo: Helgi Leesment**

***L-R: Janice Paasuke, Marlene Sestrap-Sorensen, Toomas Paasuke, Jim Sorensen, Glenbow Director of Library and Archives Doug Cass, Rein Paasuke, Kelly Schuler, Helgi Leesment, Glenbow Senior Librarian Lindsay Moir***

In May, 2017 AEHS members participated in the presentation of three AEHS publications, to the Glenbow Library and Archives in Calgary:

- the book *Freedom, Land, and Legacy: Alberta's Estonians 1899-2009*, published 2010,
- two copies of the 30-minute DVD *Alberta's Estonians*, published 2007,
- and the book *Alberta's Estonian Heritage: Collection of Historical Records, 1899-2012*, published 2017, which is a hard copy compilation of approximately 1000 pages from the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society website's heritage segment.

In addition to hundreds of hours of volunteer work by Alberta Estonians, grants for the creation of these materials have been generously provided over the past twelve years by the Canadian, Estonian and Alberta governments, the Estonian Foundation of Canada and the Estonian Credit Union in Toronto.

Together this trio documents the early settlement of Estonians in Alberta's rural areas as well as the accounts of later arrivals mainly to the cities. The gift was enhanced by a custom made accompanying card

providing a convenient one-page summary of these accounts.

The Glenbow Museum is Canada's largest non-governmental library and archival repository, having extensive holdings of published books and magazines, as well as unpublished documents and photographs related to the history of Western Canada, with a focus on southern Alberta. It works in conjunction with the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton to avoid duplication.

On May 10, 2017, seven AEHS members met Doug Cass, Director of the Library and Archives, and Lindsay Moir, Senior Librarian who have both been at the Glenbow for 40 years. They welcomed the AEHS delegation and provided us a tour of the Library and Archives, showing among other items, some of the 5.5 kilometers of archival shelving filled with materials about southern Alberta families, organizations and businesses. The Library section there is also substantial, consisting of approximately 100,000 books with the focus on published material by and about southern Albertans, although wider areas are also covered. However, other than some newspaper clippings and journal articles, until the donation of the three items this year, the Library had no substantial material about the province's Estonian community.

AEHS President Kelly Schuler began the presentation with a brief overview about this ethnic group, after which Marlene Sestrap-Sorensen, Rein Paasuke and Tom Paasuke each presented one of the three items to Lindsay Moir. Opening those books generated a lively discussion which continued at a restaurant lunch following the event. Others present were Jim Sorensen, Janice Paasuke and Helgi Leesment.

The gifts were most appreciated. Later, over lunch, many questions by the two Glenbow staff were answered by referring them for further details to various parts of the gifted items -- proof for the need for this material to be located in a place where interested people can come to research otherwise difficult to locate information materials.



## **“The Journey: a Reinson Family History”, by Donna Reinson Koper**

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

Congratulations to Donna Reinson-Koper for publishing her extended family history! *The Journey: a Reinson Family history*, 312 pages, was completed and printed early 2017 and is an example what can be accomplished utilizing 21st Century communication technology. The book is written in an easy-to-read chatty style, with pertinent personal opinions interspersed, and lots of humour along with tales of hard work, good luck, bad luck, sadness, joy and the strengths of positive family ties. When reading, one feels as though Donna is sitting right there, pleasantly conversing with a cup of coffee in hand.

*The Journey* mainly features biographies of members of the various branches of the Reinson family in Saskatchewan, in Calgary and Barons, Alberta, and where information was available, of ancestral members in Crimea and Estonia. These stories are enhanced by family tree diagrams, a lineage chart with index, various brief histories/background explanations/travel accounts, copies of documents and hundreds of photos carefully selected to tie in with each story at hand.



Photo: Lori Andrews

**Donna J. Reinson Koper, author of “*The Journey: a Reinson family history*”**

To celebrate the publication of *The Journey*, Donna and her husband Larry hosted 145 relatives, including 25 children, at a book launch this year in May at their home west of Calgary. For many this was their first opportunity to taste beer imported from Estonia. The clan members present were descendants of 1903 immigrant brothers Martin and Gustav Reinson, notably relatives from all nine branches of Gustav’s family. They travelled to the Koper ranch from all

parts of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and one from San Salvador, Central America.

Donna began her research 37 years ago, when the main method of corresponding was hand-written letters. Her motivation blossomed when she joined the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society in 2006. It further increased during her 2008 visit to Estonia and subsequent aid she received from a highly helpful archivist at the University of Tartu.

Over the span of those 37 years, Donna Reinson-Koper has done a post-graduate-thesis-worth of research, starting with a summary of ancient human migration routes



*Photo: Lori Andrews*

**Front row: L-R: Donna Koper Reinson, Audrey Akerman, Mavis Davidson, Bob Reinson; second row, L-R: Don Reinson, Bud Reinson.**

as have been established by myriad formal studies based on hundreds of thousands of DNA sample studies. Donna and another family member had their DNA examined and confirmed that the Reinsons belong to the common north European peoples' groupings.

From there her tale goes to the area of Europe now known as the nation of Estonia, to Järvamaa county in the north-central area of the country, to Järva-Madise parish, and zooms in on Albu Estate. That luxury

palace-home is where Reinson ancestors toiled as serfs and slaves for German landowners for hundreds of years. Eventually, as laws were reluctantly changed, giving the local peasants a little control over their lives, the Reinsons took advantage of the opportunity and trekked by foot, 2000 kilometers to Crimea in 1862 along with other hopefuls. It was tough leaving their farming area as the landlords illegally demanded departure cash payment or flogging as punishment; the trek was even tougher as many of the 200 or so in the group died enroute. Once in Crimea, most government promises failed to be implemented. The Reinsons stayed working Crimea's previously farmed land for about 40 years, as did many other Estonian families. At the turn of the 20th Century, the political prognosis for peace did not look good in Crimea, and Estonian and Latvian families emigrated to North America. The Reinsons arrived in Halifax in 1903, rode the train to Saskatchewan, staked their homestead claims in the Birmingham/Melville area and, once again settled into farming. This time they had to fell trees and clear land in order to create fields for crops, vegetables, fruits, berries and animal feed. And build homes (big-box commercial home construction materials stores did not exist). This time government promises were kept. There were lengthy times of great difficulty, including the Great Depression, but the innovative Reinsons kept their spirits up, supported each other and kept going. Donna's father was a Reinson Estonian and the black sheep among his siblings, later abandoning his wife right after Donna and her twin brother Donald were born. Donna's

Norwegian ancestry mother is to be especially commended for raising eight cheerfully happy children as a single mother despite tiny irregular monetary income - no welfare or medical insurance existed at that time. Her children themselves and rest of the Reinson clan were wonderful support to Donna's family.

*The Journey* explores Donna's Estonian-side ancestors going as far back in time as records exist. She hired professional genealogists and translators, some long term for six or nine months. They too encountered the same problems Donna did: inconsistencies in people and place name spellings; total changes in place names depending on the governing nationalities of a given period in Estonia's complicated history, i.e. German, Swedish, Russian, Estonian - none of which Donna speaks; illegible documents, lack of names on old photos, and past deliberate destruction of vital documents.

Nevertheless, Donna persisted, obtaining hundreds of birth, christening, confirmation, marriage and death certificates, as well as property purchase and sale records, school certificates and report cards, newspaper clippings, personal correspondence. One way or another, all the major history resources were tapped: Canadian federal, Saskatchewan provincial & various municipal statistics bureaus, land titles offices, court houses, libraries and archives; LDS genealogy resources; Estonian, Crimean and Finnish archives; German, Estonian, Crimean, Finnish & Canadian church records, Ellis Island, New York; Pier21, Halifax; several online commercial

genealogical websites; as well as various individual historians. Obviously, she interviewed nearly every living Reinson she could contact. Thorough! This lady even travelled to Crimea and Estonia to see the places relevant to her family history, despite not speaking the local languages. Courage!

Donna encountered family mysteries along the way. With deeper searching and consulting relatives, she was able to solve many of those mysteries. In one case, there was a discrepancy as to a birth date being 1914 or 1918. Donna could have let it go with the date on one of the documents, but no, she has that Estonian stubborn streak. She dug up several more records until she had absolute proof that 1914 was the correct date and the other had been a fabrication by the young lady so as not to let on to her true love that she was older than him. That's Donna's thoroughness, and just one indication of the fervour with which she approached the compilation of this immense gift to her extended family.

The tale of *The Journey* deliberately ends with Donna's parents' generation, their cousins and her own siblings' childhoods, as the volume reached over 300 pages and dozens of clan members by that point. It is Donna's stated hope that members of the younger generation will carry on with a volume on the later generations. Of course, they have to have that Estonian stubbornness – whoops, I mean persistence, to accomplish this. Donna Reinson-Koper has uncovered the most difficult and complex part of the Reinson clan history. Comparatively, it will be easy for others to create an update Volume Two.



## My Visit to Crimea in 2008 by Donna Reinson Koper

We secured the services of a Guide/Translator, Nadiya, plus a driver before we left home so all was good, or so I thought! Unfortunately Nadiya wasn't going to meet us until the following day.

We arrived in Simferopol on October 5, 2008 in the afternoon. As we came through Customs, an older lady holding a sign with my name on it was there to greet us. Didn't have a clue who she was so went over to her and be darned, she couldn't speak or understand English! With hand gestures we hailed a cab and wouldn't you know it, he did not know English either. On the way to the hotel we simply smiled and said nothing. Thankfully a hotel clerk at the desk knew English so she was able to translate for us. Turns out she was head of the Estonian Genealogical Society of Crimea. She had a granddaughter who spoke English so asked her to come back that evening with her, which she did. She was a very charming woman and had collected photos of almost every Estonian who had ever lived in Crimea, unfortunately the vast majority were not identified. She also loved to sing old Estonian songs and had a beautiful singing voice - taped her singing for me. She came on a few excursions with our entourage once Nadiya was with us. By the way her name was Meeri Nikolskuja and her spoken language was Russian.

As it turned out, Nadiya had pre-planned an excellent itinerary for us whereby we travelled to the places our Great Grandfather Michael had lived. She also let many of the people in those villages know that we were coming. Our first visit was to Konchi Saava for a lavish Estonian/Russian luncheon at the home of Viktor Papelpuu's where 7 of the Papelpuus' were waiting for us (Note: they spell their surname Papelpuu). None of them speak or understand English so a lot of translating was needed. They speak Russian and understand some Ukrainian and Estonian. The meal was amazing to say the least- starting off with Vodka and black caviar and most beautifully presented. Larry and Viktor got along very well and kept toasting each other in Ukrainian with Vodka- so much so they got hammered! The rest of the meal was fantastic and worth noting that they had no running water or indoor plumbing. They have to pay to have their water hauled in. The kitchen was extremely small but somehow they put this meal together. Hospitality abounded with all seven in attendance and they all showered me with gifts. Please see the colored photos in the middle section of this book to see my photos commentating this event. When the meal was over, we were invited to visit the home of Anna & Gregory Papelpuu. I was completely smitten with Anna - she was the oldest woman in the village and spent 35 years of her life as a milkmaid for the Russian government. She wasn't allowed to sit when milking cows- she had to squat- consequently, it had a lasting effect on her ability to walk without canes. After more vodka and caviar, I persuaded them all to serenade me with old Estonian songs which they all knew. At one point, dear Anna told our interpreter she hadn't sung in many many years and that this was the best time she'd experienced in years. As she swelled up with tears, she planted kisses all over my face! I shall never forget this dear lady.

One other very noticeable factor was the gas lines. They were narrow pipes strung out like a clothesline all over the village. In our minds, extremely dangerous. As we were about to leave, a bathroom break was much needed so off to the outhouse I went. Bad move! The stench was so bad I opened the door and promptly left. Oh my goodness! Turns out another rule was: no replacing the hole until the contents were such that it reached the top of the seat! Gross!

Visiting the cemetery did not produce any new results as it was too overgrown to find or see any of the iron crosses. From Anna's we explored the Estonian School that is still active to this date.

The next day we headed off to Dzhurchi and the village of Targhan. Accompanying us was Leongard Salman who I had previously corresponded with and had given much by way of Reinson history in Crimea. We toured the library, community center and several homes of the residents. I guess to put it mildly, due the backward state of these villages, it was like turning the clock back to when our families lived there. No modern conveniences whatsoever. So very different from the privileges we enjoy and take for granted in Canada! In the days that followed we toured the countryside following the emigration of our ancestors. Even stopped and picked mushrooms in the countryside -this is what literally hundreds of people do on the weekends for entertainment as well as nourishment. Many of the locals sell buckets of them on the roadside and do a flourishing business!

We also squeezed in an invitation for dinner at another Pertel relative, Sergi and Lena and daughter Polina. I'll tell you, Estonians know how to cook and present a meal!! It was truly scrumptious complete with a homemade Black Forest Cake.

It truly was an amazing experience to follow the paths of our ancestors and not the usual tourist hang-outs. Thankful that we went- would I go again? The answer would be no. Cherished memories for sure but once was enough.

We left Simferopol for Kiev on October 13, 2008 and from there to Frankfurt the next day then a direct flight to Calgary on October 14. Thankfully we did fly executive class from Calgary and back- don't think these two old souls would have survived otherwise!



*Picking mushrooms in the country*



*Meeri singing old Estonian love songs*

Excerpt from 'My Journey', 2017, pages 283 and 284

## Letter to the Editors

Eda McClung,  
Co-Editor, AjaKaja

Dear Eda,

Huge thanks to two special ladies – Helgi Leesment and Eda McClung for the interest, support and encouragement in getting my recent published book, *“The Journey – A Reinson Family History”*, recognized in various print, including AjaKaja!

Helgi has been my Estonian Mentor throughout my quest by translating Estonian documents and contributing articles in the book. She also kept me on track with all things Estonian. Many thanks to Peeter Leesment also for sourcing out Estonian Beer which was served at my book launch. Helgi and Peeter were my Special Guests at the Launch and all the relatives enjoyed her brief talk and chatting with them both about Estonia.

A copy of my book is being placed in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary in the Estonian Collection on May 30.

I also want to offer my humble and sincere thanks to Eda. A copy of *The Journey* will be placed in The Estonian Collection at the Provincial Archives in Edmonton, thereby making the book available to Albertans.

I encourage my relatives to please join the AEHS – they are simply an amazing group of people. My heartfelt thanks to Helgi and Eda for all their tireless work on my behalf. It is and always will be much appreciated! Aitäh,

With gratitude,  
Donna Reinson Koper



# Life and Weddings of the first Estonian pioneers in Eckville

Written by Linda (Kingsep) Mottus  
for the occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary July 1967

In May 1899, the Henry Kingsep family with two small daughters Linda (3 years) and Salme (1 month) landed here on Canadian soil. The place was two miles east of Sylvan Lake, at the time called Snake Lake. Soon after some more Estonians moved in. There came Henry Kingsep's brother Krist-jaan Kingsep family, Peter Herman family, Kask brothers' families, Neithal family and Wall family with two grown sons Gust and Madis. (Ed.'s note: August Posti with family arrived in 1902).

Three or four years later in 1902 or 1903, Henry Kingsep and family moved from Sylvan Lake to a place about 20 miles west, to Eckville. At this time the place was called Medicine after the Medicine River. There was no Eckville then, not even Alberta. This country around here was called North West Territories.

The country was nicer here along the Medicine River with open water for cattle and lots of fish for the people. But it was brush country with lots of willow brush and poplar trees that had to be cleared off the land by hand to make a living. Not long after, a lot of other Estonians were coming into this country and they were moving in fast. They all took homesteads, 160 acres of land along the Medicine River. In a few years time, about the time Alberta was named, about 40 families of those early Estonians settlers had moved in.



*Linda and Gust Mottos following their wedding, 1917*

Of course the Henry Kingsep family was always the first one to move to a new country and started living here in Eckville in 1903. Then came John Kinna family with four grown children: Fritz, Olga, Minnie, Arthur and Ernest, yet a baby. John Kinna had two brothers, Henry and Sam, and a sister Tiina Kinna with two teenage daughters Emma and Anna. All the rest that came were young married couples like Henry Kingsep at that time with small children.

Then came August Posti, John Varnick, Adam Matheus, Ed Viro, John Teener, Oscar Ossul, John Vares, Peter Perler, John Toomingas, Jaan Maesepp, Daniel Saag, John Ahtman, three Sestrap brothers (Mart, Mike, Gustav) and two Huul brothers (August and Karl). Then there was that big Mottus family of seven brothers out west: Oscar, Hugo, Alex, Ludwig, Johannes, Arthur and Wally, all single at that time except for Oscar the oldest was married. Four Moro brothers (Carl, John, Henry and Jaan), two Raabis brothers (Karl and John), two Koots brothers (Peter and Paul), two Langer brothers (Carl and Paul), three Pihooja brothers (August, Carl and John) and two other Mottus brothers but no relation (Gust and Jakob).

All those early Estonian pioneers of more than 40 families were all at that time on the same level. They all had the same ambition to get ahead in life, to clear their homesteads of trees and brush

to get bigger grain fields, bigger income and to get richer than the other fellow. But this getting richer was so slow going, to clear the land by hand, acre by acre. Early pioneer people were ambitious, had strong willpower and were happy of the fact that they could do it. They all took part in that hard work of clearing land. Men, women, children and all, and the grain fields got bigger and bigger, acre by acre, day by day.

They were proud of the fact that they had accomplished something big, had built beautiful homes for themselves and their families, and had built up the country making roads, building bridges, cities and beautiful parks. They were proud that through their effort Alberta is what you see today after almost 70 long years, that through their effort beautiful Alberta was born. Later, there were changes taking place. Alberta was named in 1905 and the Eckville "Killick" Store and Gilby Store were built.

Around this time, the first Estonian wedding took place, that of Olga Kinna and Karl Raabis. A few years later a second wedding took place, that of Anna Kinna and Carl Langer. Then came the third wedding of Emma Kinna and John Toomingas, then the fourth in 1912 of Lydia Perler and Paul Langer. And five years later, in 1917, there came the fifth wedding, that of Linda Kingsep and Gust Mottus. Their wedding has lasted for 50 years and this is the Golden Wedding of Linda and Gust that we are celebrating now.

Henry and Emilie Kingsep's oldest child and oldest daughter was going to get married. At this time weddings were performed in their own homes because there were no halls. And going to Red Deer was out of the question as it was a long three day trip with horse team on bad roads. As many guests as there was room were invited.

Here is the wedding of Linda and Gust. It happen-

ed to be a nice bright sunny day on this 29<sup>th</sup> of July, 1917. But at night came such a heavy frost that froze all the grain in and around Eckville. The guests came at 4:00 o'clock and the wedding was performed at 5:00 o'clock by the priest Andrew Harju. There were three bridesmaids: Salme Kingsep, Amanda Moro and Anna Posti. There were three best men: Jakob Mottus, Hugo Mottus and Carl Pihooja.



Mottus home in Risula area northwest of Eckville, built about 1915

Now there came that big wedding supper at 6 o'clock, all good Estonian homemade food such as *verivorst* (blood sausage), *veri-kook* (blood patties), *sült* (jelly meat) and all kinds of other meats, and that good fresh smoked fish from the Medicine River. Even the drink was homemade, what they called 'kali', a whole barrel of it to which everyone helped themselves from the top. The dessert cakes were brought from the outside by the guests.

In those times going on a honeymoon was unknown as with no income they could not afford it. The wedding lasted till late the next morning. The sun was already up when the guests left. Now the young couple Linda and Gust had to go too to start their new life together on their own. The horse team was ready, waiting outside. Gust's brother Jakob was driving and the bride's sister Salme sat beside him. The young couple were sitting behind on a democrat. Now the four of them were starting out west to Risula way where



***Linda and Gust Mottus with daughter Emma and husband Archie Huhtala,  
40<sup>th</sup> wedding Anniversarv 1957***

the newlyweds were going to make their home with Jakob at the start.

The house was nicely decorated with young green trees along the walls, there were close neighbours to meet them, singing all kinds of wedding songs and making jokes. Sweet aroma filled the air as the chicken and trimmings were cooking on the stove for the next meal. It was a happy life in those times when people were so friendly, as one family. They were all on the same level, all poor settlers.

Work came first in those days and the young married couple had to start working right away. Gust and his brother Jakob took axes on their backs and went to clear more land the next morning while Linda had to do chores and household duties around the home. The people had their youth, their health, their dreams for a better future. They did not mind the hard work, whenever possible they visited one another and had social gatherings much more than nowadays. They started building halls; they built the Gilby

Hall and the Estonian Hall. Life was progressing fast. They had all kinds of social doings in the hall where Henry Kingsep took the lead. He was the soul of the community, a born social leader and a starter of this early life here in Eckville.

Even before the halls were built, Henry Kingsep formed a social group he called 'Medicine Oru Eesti Selts'. Henry and Sam Kinna had the biggest

house at the time and they welcomed the people to go there for social gatherings. The meetings were once every two weeks. And how happy they all were, mainly to be together, which was so satisfying for their lonely souls. They had choir and drama practice for the program they had at Christmas and Easter. Here again Henry Kingsep took the lead, played his violin to teach songs and he said the most wonderful speeches. There were recitations and debates; the meeting was so much fun. At the end of the program they had that delicious Estonian homemade lunch what each had brought along. And that happy chatter filled the room during the lunch period.

Those were the happy days of the old Estonian pioneers at the beginning of 1900's. So many of them are gone but those that are left still remember those good old times. Some of them might even remember the wedding of Linda and Gust. Their marriage has lasted for 50 long years and has matured into a Golden Wedding in Centennial Year to make it special. It is the Golden Wedding of Linda and Gust that we are celebrating tonight.

***Postscript: Note written by Linda's sister Salme (Kingsep) Pallo***

*This valuable article was written by my sister Linda to be read at the big celebration of her and Gust's Golden Wedding Anniversary on July 29, 1967, the Centennial year. Brother Otto was to read it as he was appointed Master of Ceremonies for that important event. But instead of that happy get together, our joy turned to sorrow as the big family were grieved and saddened by our dear sister's illness and passing on Oct. 28. This article will be a sweet remembrance of her.*

*In loving memory, Salme*



## One hundred years since Kingsep/Mottus Wedding July 1917

### Arnold Mottus, Red Deer, Alberta

I am the grandson of Gust and Linda Mottus (nee Kingsep). This summer is 100 years since their wedding on July 29, 1917. The celebration took place at the bride's home, the large Kingsep house built sometime between 1907 and 1911. As I re-read the speech (see previous article) that was to be delivered at their Golden Wedding Anniversary, I recall wonderful memories of my grandparents, their stories of early years as pioneers and of my own experiences with them growing up near Eckville.



*Log house built by Gust on CPR quarter, with son Rudy Mottus standing in front, 1938*

Grandpa Gust homesteaded on land in the Risula District northwest of Eckville. The home was shared with brothers Jakob, Paul and sister Katherine. Following the wedding, the couple lived there too. Grandpa Gust and his brothers worked to clear land while Grandma was left to tend to household chores. Jakob was killed in a farm accident in 1925. Paul and Katie lived on the Risula farm until it was sold after Katie died in 1964 and Paul moved to a seniors' lodge about 1965.

A son Edward Rudolph (Rudy), my father, was born to them in March 1919. The following year, Gust purchased a CPR quarter north of Eckville and built a log house. They moved there before the twins Emma and Elsie were born in 1923. Linda's mother Emilie Kingsep was the midwife. The twins were kept warm by having them near the oven of the wood stove. This home was added to in stages throughout the coming years.

Land needed to be cleared and back breaking work was the daily routine. I can still see Gust and Linda working on their farm, a yoke across their shoulders and water pails on either side, heading to the garden. Even I packed water but the pails were only partially filled. I recall Grandma teaching me how to plant a garden.



*Gust and little Arnold Mottus at the Eckville house, ca 1948*

We would go mushroom picking and when we went for walks in the bush, she often brought along her violin. I still recall a tune "Metsas soo maasikas" (sp?). Henry Kingsep, her father, was musical and bought two used violins at a second hand store for \$3.00. Linda is pictured with her violin on the inside cover of AEHS book 'Freedom, Land and Legacy'. Saturday evenings, more often during harvest, the old 'steam bath' (sauna) was used as there was no indoor plumbing. On cold winter days, Grandpa would heat rocks, wrap them in blankets and put them in the horse drawn wagon so we could stay warm on the way to visit neighbours.

Around 1947/48, Grandpa built their retirement home in Eckville town. Two lots were purchased so they could still grow a big garden and continue to raise raspberries to sell. My parents Rudy and Myrtle Mottus took over the CPR farm and continued to farm there until the death of my father in 1965. The house was burned down in 1968 after removing enough wood to build a garage.



***Four generations of the Mottus family, 1964***  
***Front, L-R: Linda with great grandson Ryan Davenport, Gust, granddaughter***  
***Helen (Mottus) Davenport, Les Davenport,***  
***Back: son Rudy Mottus, wife Myrtle),***

Grandma Mottus passed away in 1967. She was a wonderful grandparent. Grandpa stayed in Eckville. He was a gracious host to visitors, insisting on serving a glass of wine filled to the top. I recall a pot of fish soup on the stove but

declined a taste when I saw the fish head floating on top! He moved to a nursing home in Red Deer and passed away in 1977. To the end he was grateful for the good care he received and appreciative of the good food. So Esto! The CPR quarter where I grew up has now been sold to a great granddaughter and her husband who farm the land. Gust and Linda would be happy to know it is still in the family and being farmed with much respect for the land.

At the 1999 Centennial celebration in Stettler, Elsie (Mottus) Brewer spoke. She is one of the twin daughters of Gust and Linda. She implored the younger generation to question older relatives about their roots and document the stories of those who came before. I

am pleased to play my part. We owe a debt of gratitude to our pioneer ancestors for their hard work and sacrifice to make a better life for the generations that have come since.

## **Launch of revised AEHS website**

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

The revised AEHS website will be operational this summer with a dedicated launch function in the fall followed by information sessions to help members in using it. I was coopted to the task at a board meeting last September as I knew just a tiny bit more about websites than other board members who were available. I highly recommend that in future the AEHS budget

include a qualified individual to monitor and manage the website. AEHS was extremely fortunate in the past to have Bob Kingsep set up and maintain our previous and currently still functioning site, with all of us benignly unaware of the amount of time and technical knowledge required for what appears, on the surface, to be a reasonably simple internet product.

# Alberta Baltic people celebrate “Canada 100” in 1967

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

Members of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society reading this issue of AjaKaja are all immigrants to Canada or descendants of immigrants. All of us, including immigrant ancestors who have passed on, are or were immensely grateful to the opportunities provided by this country. True, not every person of Estonian extraction who arrived in this country, found economic and social success. Some returned to Estonia to live after a few years here. But, by far, the majority has stayed to take advantage of what Canada has to offer, and to contribute to its food production, technology, sports, culture, business and all other aspects of life here.

Canada’s democratic political and economic stability, along with its hugely varied opportunities for education and work in an ever growing variety of careers, are the mainstays of this wonderful country. One also has to add to this list Canada’s powerful landscapes ranging from mid-latitude rain forests to deserts, lakes, waterfalls, islands, eternal ice territories, mountains of every size and beckoning farm lands plus all its magnificent trees, flowers, birds, animals and other forms of wildlife. Productive farmland was the main attraction for the first known Estonians to settle in Canada, specifically in central and southern Alberta.

This year, 2017, marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada. Celebrations are underway in every part of the country much as they were in 1967 for its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. How did some of Alberta’s Estonian communities celebrate Canada’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 50 years ago?



**Cover page of 1967 Baltic Festival Program**

Calgarians joined their fellow Balts, the Latvians and Lithuanians, in a tree planting project initiated by the Centennial Ravine the country, much as they were in 1967 for its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. How did some of Alberta’s Estonian community-Park Society. All types of community groups were encouraged to participate by purchasing trees and then on

May 13, 1967 jointly digging the holes to plant them in Centennial Park, stretching westward from



***Estonian Birch tree planted in Centennial Park, Calgary, 1967***

14<sup>th</sup> Street. The exact location is just off Canmore Road by 26<sup>th</sup> Ave This three-country group, organized by long-time Calgary Estonian Society president Otto Laaman, planted a total of 30 trees true to the types that grow in the Baltics: 5 cherry, 5 birch, 5 mayday and 15 crabapple. Some of those trees continue to flourish today.

Designating the hillside area where these saplings were placed is a tiny plaque on a low angular post, stating “Estonian and Latvian Societies and Lithuanian Community of Calgary”. The official opening and dedication of Confederation Park took place on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

The Edmonton Balts took a different turn to celebrate Canada’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. They organized a Baltic Festival comprising a major concert, symposium, arts exhibition, folk festival and elegant ball on the weekend of Oct 6-7, 1967.

The Friday evening concert performers were soprano Maret Pank, a former lead soloist with the Estonian State Opera, then living in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Lithuanian violinist Helena Kuprevicius from Columbus, Ohio; Latvian baritone Andrejs Kurmins from Los Angeles, California. Well known Edmonton piano teacher and active member of the local Estonian community, Lydia Pals accompanied all three artists. This formal concert, held at the Victoria Composite High School Auditorium, drew an attendance of 700 and garnered a highly favourable review by music critic Anne Burrows in the Edmonton Journal.



*Maret Pank, soprano and Lydia Pals, concert pianist and music teacher, 1960s*

Red Deer resident, Rita Matiisen along with USA soprano Maret Pank, participated as Estonian representatives at the Baltic Symposium at the Macdonald Hotel, venue for all of Saturday's events. The Arts Exhibition featured paintings, sculpture, ceramics, woven articles, jewelry, leathercraft and literature by Alberta Baltic artists and writers. Apparently all known Alberta Estonian artists were represented, although the surviving documents unfortunately do not name names. However, another associated document lists a few recognized in these fields: Mrs. Koot, Mrs. Koppel, Galina Koddo, R. Koddo, Helmi Munz, Greta Carter, Sylvia Boehrnsen and Helga Kriik. Presumably they, along with others, were among the exhibitors. The Folk Festival included a 32-member, three-nation "Baltic Canadian Choir" directed by Edmonton Estonian Mrs. Ludmilla Kivi, a Latvian double quartet "Dzintars", folk dancers (including a local Edmonton Estonian group plus another all the way from Vancouver), two Latvian

and Lithuanian solo singers and the Estonian "Idla Rhythmic Gymnastics" group also from Vancouver. The formal Ball, attended by 500 at the Macdonald Hotel, featured Preston Manning, son of then Alberta premier Ernest Manning, as guest speaker.

A set of national costumes, one from each of the



*Eva (Kivi) Weir, 1967*

three countries, was presented to the future Alberta Museum, then in the final stages of construction in Edmonton. According to one document, the set of gifts was graciously accepted by Alberta Minister of Agriculture Harry Strom at the Ball; whereas another document states that the recipient was Bruce McCorquodale, head curator at the new Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, possibly at another time. One of two presenters was "Mrs. Ilmar Pals" as cited in the Thorhild Tribune newspaper, otherwise known as Lydia Pals.



The two-day Baltic event was attended by Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and guests who drove in from all parts of Alberta. Fifty years ago, the cost of admission to the concert was \$2.00 per ticket, the banquet and ball \$6.00 per person, while the art exhibition, symposium and folk festival were free of charge.

At that time, effort was made to create an Alberta Baltic Federation, which held a meeting in the Eckville Estonian Hall on August 13, 1967. The organization especially thanked Estonians Mrs. Rita Matiisen (central Alberta), Mrs. E. Valters (Edmonton area) and Mrs. Pauline Snieckus (Calgary area) for advanced publicity in the local papers. There was also an active Baltic Art Committee participating in the centennial. Among other events, they arranged for a television session discussing Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national costumers on the Virginia Show, CFRN Channel 3, on September 21, 1967. Current contact with former Barons residents implies that Estonian folks in that area continued with their normal family gatherings and other social activities during Canada's centennial year.

In 1967 Stettler folks got out their tools and machinery to restore the Estonian Cemetery near Linda Hall, which had overgrown with brush and a few trees. Crosses were righted, aligned and cleaned. The little chapel was brought a couple of hundred yards westward, onto the designated cemetery property. The grounds and chapel have been well maintained since then and have been the sites of various special services and tours, including Estonia's President Meri's visit much later in July 2000. Also in 1967, Linda Hall hosted their usual annual summer picnic which had its start by the Estonian community several decades earlier.

Information for this article was gleaned from issues of *Baltic Centennial News*, the Baltic Centennial events program, typed background notes, an article written by then Calgary Estonian Society president Ottomar Laaman for the Toronto Estonian newspapers, the Thorhild Tribune, documents in the archival files of the Calgary Estonian Society, also thanks to Ron Hennel and Evelyn Shursen for their contributions.

*Very happy 150th Canada Day and Year to all!*



*The Baltic Centennial Choir in 1967, directed by Ludmilla Kivi in centre of front row*

# Memories of Surviving the Bolshevik Revolution

Nurmi Simm, Edmonton, Alberta

My father Aleksander Simm was born in 1890, mother Marta Elias in 1894. At this time Estonia was a province of Russia largely governed at the local level by Baltic-German barons. Aleksander and Marta both grew up on farms in Estonia and met when they were mature students at the



*Aleksander and Marta (Elias) Simm, and daughter Karin in Tartu, 1934*

University of Tartu. They married after they both graduated. Marta had been a country school teacher, Aleksander was a veteran of the Estonian War of Independence. Aleksander and Marta and their two children Karin and Nurmi fled Estonia in 1944 and spent four years in refugee camps in Germany before they were able to emigrate in 1948 to Peace River in northern Alberta.

During the thirties they both wrote extensive biographies of their early lives. These autobiographies were left behind. They were given to me when I visited Estonia in 1998. I brought these memoirs to Canada and translated them into English and made copies for his sons and his niece, who do not speak Estonian. The originals were returned to the family in Estonia.

What follows are edited excerpts from these memoirs, supplemented by relevant historical context. They are presented here to give some taste of life in Estonia in Czarist times.

Aleksander writes: "I was drafted into the Czarist army when I was twenty and served near St. Petersburg in the 88th Petrovsky Regiment. My two-year enlistment expired before the First World War and I was able to

return home."

After the Bolshevik revolution erupted in 1917 Lenin was fighting a civil war on many fronts and was not able to give much attention to Estonia. But local communists supported by small Red Army units disrupted life in Estonia. They killed Czarist officials and seized strategic places like railway stations and county offices, and did their best to prepare the way for a communist take-over.

Estonian patriots, many with military training like Aleksander, immediately opposed them. A small-scale guerrilla war broke out with many local skirmishes.

Aleksander writes: "One day I was running from a skirmish we had lost, and was pursued by a squad of Russians. On a country road I encountered a farmer with a horse and wagon pulling a load of hay. The farmer immediately hid me in the hay. A few minutes later the Russians arrived and questioned him. After much shrugging by the farmer the soldiers allowed him to proceed and continued searching for me in the opposite direction. Nobody had thought to probe the hay with bayonets.

After the October 1917 Revolution there was a period of disorganization in which Estonians were able to form a government and declare independence in February 1918. The new government immediately organized an army to oppose both the Bolsheviks in the east and the Germans in the south. After November 1918 the British had a large surplus of war materiel and were happy to sell what they could. When the Red Army finally invaded, the Estonian army opposed them with British weapons and in



British uniforms with Estonian insignia. The irregular fighters largely joined the new army too. Aleksander served in the 2nd Division and fought the Russians in southeastern Estonia.



*Marta (Elias) Simm, 1937*

In Czarist Russia, which included Estonia, children did not start school until they were eight or nine. When they arrived they were expected to know the Cyrillie alphabet and to be able to read Russian. At the beginning of the school year each new arrival was given a reading test to determine their admissibility. Reading was taught at home, usually by grandmothers in the evenings after the children had completed their chores. Books were scarce so most reading was learned from the Bible. As a result many children knew the Bible stories when they arrived at school.

Instruction at school was in Russian and speaking Estonian was prohibited and punished. Class monitors were appointed to report offenders. The language at home of course was Estonian. After a few years of schooling the children were fully bilingual like their parents

before them.

Country children who lived beyond walking distance from their school lived at the school. They would be driven by horse and wagon or sleigh to school on Sunday evening and picked up again on Friday after school. They took with them knapsacks containing food for a week, usually black bread, butter, hardboiled eggs, boiled potatoes, and maybe a piece of cooked ham. They had to manage their food for a week and feed themselves at mealtimes. Drinking water came from a well in the schoolyard. At Marta's school the principal and his family lived in a house on the school grounds. They also boarded single teachers in their house.

Marta writes: "At the end of the school day the children cleaned blackboards and swept the floors. In cold weather the older boys chopped firewood for the next day. In good weather there might be games or sports outside. In the evening there was a quiet hour when students were expected to study their lessons and read books. Sometimes a teacher would teach singing, usually hymns or Russian folk songs. Once a week the local Orthodox priest would conduct Bible study in the evening. Occasionally the principal would demonstrate science experiments that were outside the curriculum. At bedtime desks were moved aside and the children spread their bedrolls on the floor."

On weekends the school was not locked. If everyone left for the weekend the daughter of the principal would make the sign of the cross over the school door and recite a prayer. This would keep out unwanted intruders but would permit access to travellers in distress seeking shelter."

Lenin's October 1917 revolution succeeded and ended Czarist rule. But there was an earlier revolution in 1905 which did not succeed. When this first revolution broke out Marta was eleven and a schoolgirl in a country school near Viljandi. After the revolution was suppressed and the leaders punished, the Czar sent out so-called "punishment battalions" (*"karistus pataljoni"* in Estonian) all over Russia to root out real and

potential revolutionaries.

Marta writes: "When news of the revolution reached us, some of the older boys decided that they too would revolt. They made wooden swords and slashed our school picture of the Czar, smashed inkpots, and did other minor vandalism. When the first fervor subsided the principal assembled the students and asked what they expected from their revolution. The older boys demanded that the school caretaker, whom they did not like, be sacked, and that students be allowed to drink beer in school. The principal tactfully refused both requests. The revolutionaries had exhausted their agenda and there were no more demands. The vandalism was repaired and the school soon settled down to its normal routine.

"And then one day a troop of about twenty Cossack (\*) cavalymen rode into the school-



*Alexander Simm, 1937*

*\*The Russians used Cossacks, the East Slavic speaking people, extensively in military actions.*

yard. While the men watered the horses the sergeant in charge ordered the principal to assemble all students and teachers in the yard. He then asked the principal if there were any revolutionaries in this school."

"At this time in Russia there was no extensive penal industry except in Siberia. There were courts and judges of course who dealt with criminal matters and with civil disputes. If convicted, minor offenders were usually whipped and sentenced to a period of hard work for the local baron. Major criminals received the death penalty. Medium-level offenders were often sentenced to a twenty-year enlistment in the army and were posted far from home, often across the Urals. This system removed criminals from the community and provided the army with a steady source of recruits. When their enlistments expired, few of these men returned home. Most found local work, married Russian women, and assimilated into Russia. The few who did return home were not welcome. Their parents were elderly or deceased, their brothers ran the farm, their sweethearts were married women with families. These rejected men soon drifted away."

"The schoolchildren knew all this. The young trouble makers were white as sheets and shaking. If pointed out as revolutionaries they would be immediately arrested. At the very least they could expect a whipping, or they might be turned over to the army without any goodbyes to family or friends. Many of the girls were crying. But the principal was not about to betray his community. He did not finger the vandals. He declared that everyone at this school loved the Czar and was loyal to him. The sergeant thanked the principal and the troop rode away. That principle never again had any discipline problems in school. The Cossacks then rode to the village and ordered everyone to assemble in the village square. The sergeant posed the same question: 'Are there any revolutionaries here?' After a moment of silence a voice from the crowd shouted: 'So/And/So is a Social Democrat!' This was a death sentence, suggesting disloyalty to the Czar. The named individual was immediately fished out of the crowd, stood against a wall, and shot. There was no trial, no witnesses, no defense. The task of the punishment squad was not to dispense justice. Their task was to make examples



to demonstrate the consequences of disloyalty to the Czar. The local baron made a short speech exhorting love and obedience to the Czar and then ordered the crowd to disperse. The Cossacks mounted up and rode on to the next village.

In 1917 Marta was twenty-three and a schoolteacher in a country school. When Lenin pulled Russia out of World War I the Russian army simply disintegrated. Men just left the front and straggled home, some joined the newly forming Red Army. Word was received in the village that a unit of Estonian boys was returning from the front. They were weary and hungry, some were wounded. The villagers rejoiced that the war was over and their boys were coming home. They determined to welcome them and help them. As these men were still many days away it was decided that a wagonload of food should be sent out to meet them. The whole village baked for a day, and in the morning a wagonload of black bread was assembled, topped with cabbages and rings of sausage. A farmer donated a horse and wagon for this mission. In the collective enthusiasm Marta and another young teacher volunteered to drive this wagon to meet the boys. They left on their mission of mercy on a cold winter morning.

Marta writes: "We plodded eastward for days, shivering on the wagon and sheltering at night in farmhouses along the road. On the afternoon of the fourth day we saw a country schoolhouse a little way off the road. There were many men in the yard huddling around bonfires. Deciding we had found our destination, we turned into the schoolyard."

"But these men were not Estonians. They were Russians, about eighty of them. They rejoiced at the sight of this wagonload of food and immediately seized it. Our protestations that this food was meant for a different unit were brushed aside. These men were hungry. They had already shot their Czarist officers and legalities and niceties meant nothing to them. Their bonfires were fueled by smashed chairs and desks from the schoolhouse. Most of the men still carried rifles to shoot pigs and cattle along the way to feed themselves."

Marta continues: "We were not molested, and were sincerely thanked. We had been unexpected angels of mercy to men in distress. It was getting dark now and it was too late to start back. The only warm place was the schoolhouse, where a fire in the wood stove was fuelled by smashed furniture. The men lay down on the wooden floor to sleep in their greatcoats. There was no other place to sleep, so we too lay down on the floor in our overcoats. As more men crowded in we were soon wedged cheek to cheek between dirty soldiers. We did not sleep much in this crowd of coughing and snoring men."

"In the morning, when they were all up and had eaten, the men began to straggle eastward in a long, ragged column. A sergeant ordered us to return home the way we had come. We had to go on foot because the men kept our horse and wagon to move their wounded. We struggled through the snow for five days, again sheltering with roadside farm families. To this day I am amazed that we were not gang-raped and maybe killed. I can only speculate about why we were spared. Perhaps it was because we had helped, or perhaps even in these turbulent times the Russian peasant still had



respect for women."

*Ellen, Nurmi and Stephen Simm in  
Estonia, 1992*

Marta's memoirs go on to describe life in independent Estonia, then under Russian occupation and finally under Nazi occupation. They break off when the family fled Estonia and the manuscript was left behind.

# Estonia regained independence:

## Exciting Days 25 Years Ago

Rein Pääsuke, Calgary, Alberta



*Rein Pääsuke during his presentation at the 2016 Summer Social at Linda Hall.*

I believe that every Estonian is more or less familiar with the story of the singing revolution – how Estonia re-established its independence 25 years ago, as poet Heinz Valk said, “ignoring past injustice, and not in hate and fury, but singing and laughing made a revolution.” Starting in the late 1980s Estonian song-writers and performers like Tõnis Mägi, Alo Matiisen and his best friend Jüri Leesment – apparently no relation to our Alberta Matiisens and Leesments - composed protest songs, first against the ecological rape the Soviets perpetrated on Virumaa in northeastern Estonia, and then the political and colonial system. The three Baltic states carried out a relay race taking turns asserting their rights against the Soviet oppression. On 23 August 1989, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which divided eastern Europe between Hitler and Stalin, two million people formed a 600-kilometre human chain from Tallinn in Estonia to Vilnius in Lithuania. Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost made these advances possible.

In the summer of 1988 a singing celebration in Tallinn’s Town Hall Square (Rackoja Plats) drew too large a crowd for the square, and someone suggested going to the Laulupidu or Song Festival grounds, resulting in couple of hundred thousand people gathering to sing old patriotic songs. In September, a formal event of singing and political speeches attracted over 300,000 people, including politicians of all stripes, including Vaino Väljas, the head of the Estonian Communist Party.

When my daughter Linda and I arrived for our first visit to Estonia in 1989, along with Tom and our mother, our cousin Ants’s first words were: “Tom, things are different from your last visit here.” There was much more freedom, and the blue, black and white Estonian flag was again allowed to be displayed.

Two years later, in August 1991, our family – Jan, our three teen-aged children, Linda, Mark and Elizabeth, and I – visited Estonia, staying in the Viru Hotel in Tallinn. On Monday, 19 August, we had planned to go to Otepää in southern Estonia with our cousins to stay there overnight. Early in the morning I got a call from my cousin Ants, who told me that there had been a coup against Gorbachev in Moscow. We discussed the advisability of travelling in the country, and decided that being outside the capital city would probably be safer, so off we went, travelling in several cars.

The weather was uncertain, like the political situation, a downpour one minute and bright sunshine the next. We had our ears glued to the car radio. Estonian radio was the only one in eastern Europe broadcasting news.

Ants' 9-year-old daughter Katrin sat in the back seat with Jan, translating the news to her.

We drove into Viljandi in south-central Estonia in a downpour, and went to a gas station to fill up. The line-up was over a block long, rain was pouring down, and we still had enough fuel for our trip out, so we drove on. My cousin Ants' son Imre was driving an ugly green Moskvich behind us. Suddenly we noticed he was no longer there. We turned around, and found him stopped at the side of the road, out of gas. Ants asked him about the spare gas can he was supposed to have put in the trunk before leaving Tallinn. He had "forgotten". Fortunately, Ants had enough for him to get to our destination in Otepää, where we were to spend the night at a rest home owned by Ants' employer, Tallinn's city government).

After supper several of us were standing in front of the house discussing our fuel problem. Ants had found out that there was no gasoline available in Otepää that day. A man riding by on a bicycle heard us, and volunteered to sell us some, as long as we paid in *valuuta*, that is, non-Soviet currency. Although it was illegal, by 1991 a lot of private business in the Soviet Union was conducted in *valuuta*. We agreed to a price – I think it was 5 Finnish marks per litre. We offered to go to his place to pick it up, but he insisted on bringing the fuel us. I guess he was afraid to let us know where he lived.

We spent the rest of the evening listening to the radio. A Soviet tank column had invaded Estonia from Pihkva in the southeast, crossing the country diagonally to the northwest to Tallinn. The mayor of Tallinn had met them on the outskirts, and persuaded the commander to lead his tanks to Soviet army barracks on the outskirts of Tallinn, rather than enter the city. Otherwise, everything seemed to be peaceful in Estonia.

We stayed up until 2 AM listening to the radio, but as nothing seemed to be happening, went to bed.

The next day we returned to Tallinn via Tartu, on the main highway between the southeast corner of Estonia and Tallinn in the northwest. The Russian tank column had traversed the same road, and their tracks had so worn down the tar in the asphalt that the road surface was white from the exposed sand and gravel.

In Tallinn we wandered around in the evening. The streets to Toompea, the hill on which the government buildings are situated, were blocked by huge rocks and semis parked side by side with only a couple in inches between them. The office and studio building of Estonian Radio and Television was surrounded by huge trucks parked bumper to bumper with their carburetors removed to prevent an assault by the Russian army.



***Semi-trailers and stone blocks blocking a street up to Toompea, 20 August, 1991***

Back in our hotel room that evening, 20 August, just before 11 PM, I turned on the TV set, and saw that the broadcast was live from the *Ülemnõukogu* or Supreme Soviet of Estonia – the parliament of Estonia under the communist regime. Debate on the re-establishment of Estonia's independence was ending. Ülo Nugis, the Speaker of the House, called a halt to the filibustering of the Russian deputies, and called for the question to be voted on: "*Lugupeetud Ülemnõukogu, kes on selle poolt, et võtta Eesti Vabariigi Ülemnõukogu (Estonian Republic's Partliamenti otsus Eesti riiklikust iseseisvust?*

*Palun hääletada - viiskümmend kolm häält.*” (“Honourable *Ülenõukogu*, who is for the Estonian Republic’s *Ülemnõukogu*’s resolution for Estonia’s national independence? Please vote – fifty-three votes.” (The *Ülemnõukogu* had 105 members, so a majority would be 53.)

I was delighted to see all the Russian deputies rise and walk out. In the Soviet system, no one wanted to vote „No“, so anyone opposed to the resolution abstained from voting. The voting was done electronically, with the results posted on a screen. Rapidly the number of „Yes“ votes rose to 69, with zero „No“ votes. At 11:02 PM, local time, Estonia was free again! The significance of the Russian boycott of the vote was that it could be reported that Estonia’s parliament had voted unanimously for independence.

As far as we could tell in the Hotell Viru the next day everything was peaceful. We were unaware of the dramatic confrontation between Soviet soldiers and unarmed Estonian civilians outside the Tallinn TV tower – the *Teletorn* – and the stand by a couple of young Estonian policemen who kept the tower’s elevator stopped on the top floor by keeping the elevator door from closing by inserting a matchbox in the doorway, and who threatened to use the fire-extinguishing system in the tower to stop an invasion of the tower itself. The confrontation was resolved verbally. Later that day, 21 August, orders came for the tank column to retreat, and by 1:30 AM the next day, it had crossed the border into Russia.

Forward 25 years. When I realised that our 2016 summer social this year was planned for 20 August at Linda Hall, I thought this would be an ideal opportunity to celebrate the quarter-century of Estonian independence. On YouTube I saw an Estonian film, *19 August 1991*, a fictional account of several of the TV technicians who worked the live

broadcast those exciting days. I was hoping to show a clip from that movie covering the *Ülemnõukogu* vote at 2:00 PM Alberta time, which would be 11:00 PM in Estonia, making it 25 years to the minute from the time of the vote.

Of course, when you deal with electronic equipment and dozens of people, there are inevitable delays, and we were a few minutes late with the show.

My wife Jan suggested that after we viewed the video clip, I play the song that was in the background of the video, *Koit* (Dawn), written and performed by Tõnis Mägi several years before, and is a most fitting background to the video. We distributed the words in Estonian with an English translation. As we watched Tõnis Mägi and the 2014 *Laulupidu* massed choir sing, several people stood up and joined in the singing. By the *crescendo* end of the song, most of the people in Linda Hall had joined the singing. This was followed by the singing of the Estonian anthem, *Mu Isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm*, and then *O Canada*, in recognition of our heritage and our new homeland where our ancestors and we were made welcome.

#### References:

1. The movie, *The Singing Revolution*, gives a brief history of Estonia and a detailed account of the movement to re-establishing independence. The video version is available from [www.thesingingrevolution.com](http://www.thesingingrevolution.com). You may find it on YouTube. Also several AEHS members have copies.
2. The movie *19 August 1991* is also available on YouTube. Unfortunately, the dialogue is in Estonian without subtitles.
3. There are a number of recordings of *Koit* on YouTube. The one I used is labelled *Tõnis Mägi Koit – Laulupidu 2014*, which contains the massed choir singing the song, followed by an encore with Mägi joining the choir.



# Marko Mäetamm: Estonian artist's Huge interactive display in Banff

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

2017 seems to be the year for prominent Estonian artists to visit Alberta. Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet were here in February, as described in another article in this issue of AjaKaja. This May Marko Mäetamm, well known artist in his home country of Estonia, spent two weeks working in Banff, collaborating with two Calgarians on a display scheduled to take place in Tallinn and elsewhere over the next couple of years. He was working with local playwright/artist Ken Cameron and writer/artist Rita Bozi. All three are highly contemporary in their approaches to their individual artistic expression. Mäetamm's style can take the form of cartoons, drawings, videos, mini-sculptures which pointedly show us the bright and dark sides of human relations. [www.maetamm.net](http://www.maetamm.net)

When constructed and implemented, the planned display will occupy roughly the space of a medium size art gallery, where visitors can interact with



*Photo: Peeter Leesment*  
**Marko Mäetamm,**  
**Estonian artist, Calgary**

items exhibited there. The story situation deals with the first meeting in 34 years between a middle-aged man and his beloved elderly father in Canada. It was a happy yet sad and strained, somewhat disconnected occasion because the son Kaljo came from Soviet Estonia in 1978, having no knowledge or understanding of life outside those tightly controlled borders. He didn't speak English and so created his own strange interpretations about what he saw in Toronto.



*Photo: Rachel Gieck*

*One month in Canada installation, Banff, Alberta*  
**L-R: Ken Cameron, Rita Bozi, Marko Mäetamm**



*Photo: Peeter Leesment*

*Helgi Leesment interviewing Estonian artists,*  
**Ken Cameron(L) and Marko Mäetamm (R).**

It actually happened almost as presented. The artist Marko Mäetamm is the real-life grandson of the real-life elderly man and son of the real-life middle-aged man depicted. Titled „One Month in Canada“, the art installation will provide unexpected insights into family relations and Canadian culture. A kind of belated reality show, one might conclude.

## Interactive Light Festival in Calgary featured artists from Estonia

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta



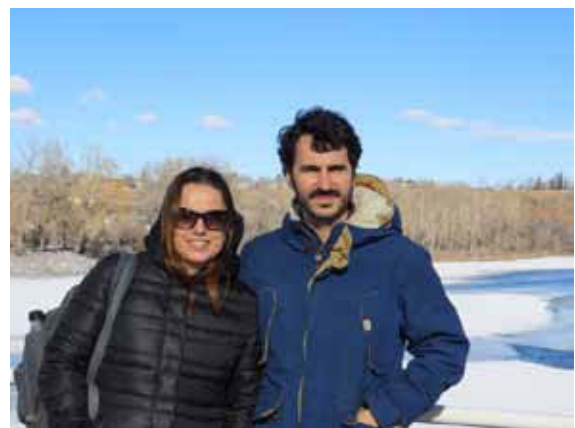
*Photo: Jennifer Weihmann*

*AEHS President Kelly Schuler smiles brightly to cause the interactive “Smile” on the wall to light up. Calgary, February, 2017*

From February 17-20, 2017, the night came alive in Calgary with Glow: a family-friendly interactive light festival held downtown. This free, all-ages event welcomed everyone to warm up winter’s darkest days and kicked off Canada’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration year. It consisted of twelve art installations involving lighting of some sort, often combined with computer programming, where visitors had to push buttons, repeatedly open a door, run in circles on a specially constructed mat, or place their face in a frame in to make something happen. Eleven of the devices were created by Canadians; the twelfth was the only one selected from outside the country. It is called “Smile” and is the result of collaboration between Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, both from Estonia.

“Smile” is one of dozens of Varvara & Mar’s contemporary works which have been displayed in prominent exhibits internationally <http://www.varvarag.info/category/artworks/>. The couple frequently uses tiny LED lights along with innovative design and they manufacture the items in their Tallinn studio. Among their other creations is a large flag comprising several dozen rows of RGB LED lights which are programmed to become the flag of any nation; however, the design of each flag is never quite completed but

mutates, blending colours and shapes. The aim is to communicate the problematic of national identity, belonging and tolerance.



*Photo: Helgi Leesment*

*Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, creators of the “Smile” art installation at the Glow light festival in Calgary*

The work Varvara & Mar brought to Alberta, “Smile”, literally put smiles on the faces of children and adults who stretched their face through a lit hoop. A frowned facial expression netted no action. However, a smile was recognized by custom software on the special hoop, which in turn lit up a huge smiley face on the wall of a nearby building. Returning the human face to a sad or other expression again turned off the wall smile.



*Photo: Varvara Guljajeva*

*Artist and software programmer Mar Canet works with art and technology workshop participants in Calgary, February, 2017*

Varvara was born and raised in Tartu, Estonia. Mar is Spanish from Catalonia. After studying at various universities and art schools, the two met at an art and technology institute in Linz, Austria and have been a duo working with art and technology since then. They have a three-year old daughter who did not accompany

them to Alberta; however she became the featured poster girl for the Glow festival publicity. While here, the duo conducted workshops: one at the Alberta College of Art and Design, the other two via Glow for adults and children to make small throwies from a battery, LED and magnet, as well as slightly larger other creations involving changes in colour and sequence. The workshop participants also learned how to do simple software programming to obtain different effects with their LED lights.

Varvara & Mar are well experienced workshop conductors, having done this in many countries in the several languages they speak between them.

A senior instructor at the Alberta College of Art and Design hosted a Canadian style dinner for Varvara & Mar. Helgi Leesment toured them around central Calgary and Kelly Schuler drove them to see the Rocky Mountains. The couple was greatly interested in everything they saw. Their parting comment was “We

are amazed how friendly people are here!”.

AEHS members were notified in advance of this event; hopefully many made the trip downtown Calgary to experience this cheerful and unique winter festival and its innovative interactive “Smile” designed by the couple from Estonia.



## Estonian beer now available for summer sipping!

Eda McClung, Edmonton, Alberta



Estonian beer is now available in select Alberta liquor stores. Põhjala is an Estonian craft brewery located in Tallinn. Five varieties of Põhjala will tempt a range of beer tastes: *Meri* (Gose), *Must Kuld Columbia* (American Porter), *Rukkikraak* (Rye), *Virmalesed* (IPA) and *Õõ Cassis* (Baltic Porter). Bottles are 330 ml and come in cases of 24 but are available as singles. Check [liquorconnect.com](http://liquorconnect.com) for local availability. In Edmonton, Põhjala beers are available at Liquor International and Sherbrooke Liquor; in Calgary try Willow Park Liquor Store. Cheers!

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## See you at LEP in Los Angeles!



The Estonian Republic will honor an historic event when it celebrates its 100th year. You can come celebrate too and be a part of the biggest North American Estonia 100 Celebration in Los Angeles, August 31 to September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The West Coast Estonian Days will be held at the UCLA Conference Centre. Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas will be a guest speaker

Website: [lalep2017.com](http://lalep2017.com)

Questions: [lalep2017@gmail.com](mailto:lalep2017@gmail.com)



# The Estonian National Museum, making people proud

Helen Wright and Silver Tambur, Estonia

**Introduction.** *The first Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909 and opened in Tartu to preserve Estonian ethnography and folklore. In 1922, the museum moved to the Raadi Manor situated on the same area that the current museum stands. It was destroyed in World War II and used by the Estonian Air Force in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the Soviets after they occupied Estonia in the 1940s. Museum artefacts were stored in churches and other buildings in Tartu. Plans to re-establish the national museum took shape following Estonia's regained independence in 1991. Following a 10-year period of construction, the new museum was opened in October 2016.*

*Excerpts and pictures from articles in Culture:*

*"It's been a long wait – 107 years, to be exact – but Estonia has finally opened its first national museum dedicated to the history, life and traditions of Estonians and other Finno-Ugric peoples. It also has a comprehensive display traditional Estonian national costumes from all regions. In addition, the museum houses a conference space and a cinema."*



*Between its opening in Oct. 2016 and early 2017, the 34,000 square metre museum has had over 100,000 visitors. In addition, over 34,000 people participated in conferences, seminars and carious functions.*

## **"Finno-Ugric peoples and Estonians"**

Today the two permanent exhibitions show different sides of Estonia's history. The first traces the culture and history of Finno-Ugric peoples – the largest exhibition of its kind – and the second focuses on the life and traditions of Estonians from the Stone Age to the present day."

*Speaking about the differences between the two, Tarand, head of museum's public relations says:*

*"They are so different in their build up and ideology it is hard to compare them, but of course, the exhibition of the Finno-Ugric is much more emotional and easy to acknowledge for the children – and they like it. But the subject itself may not be so important for all Estonians, let's say. For the locals, it is not so interesting compared to what we need to know about ourselves and Estonian history. Parts of the Estonian exhibition, let's say, are a bit more demanding."*

## **"The first Estonian flag and book on display"**

Important items on display include the first Estonian flag and the first book written in the Estonian language. Items have been sent to the museum from all over the world and donated by private individuals. "There are offers every day," Tarand says. "But we are very selective." Tarand notes that the museum has also been good for businesses in Tartu and has had a "knock-on effect" oncreasing footfall in the other museums in town. We have not taken their visitors-we have brought them new ones too."



“The main curator, Kristel Rattus, told Estonian World the items making up the exhibits had been donated by Estonians, foreign institutions and archives, and some were taken from their own collection. We have never had a proper whole museum because we have been scattered around different places all around Tartu, so it is a really big thing for us to have this museum”



**Anticipating the 100th birthday of Estonia**



“He says they are hoping to get most done by the time Estonia will celebrate its 100th anniversary. For example, the museum is planning to establish a dedicated theme park on the field surrounding the museum and plant a number of oak trees. The oak has always been the most sacred tree for Estonians and the museum was inspired by the Government Office of Estonia’s [invitation to plant oaks](#) or oak tree parks all across the country and dedicate them to the centenary of the Republic of Estonia.”

### **Estonia’s 100 Oaks**

Through the ages, the oak has been the holy tree for the Estonians, involving several legends, rituals and beliefs. Thanks to the longevity of oaks, our stories and dreams are carried from generation to generation over the years. The oak is a symbol of strength and continuity, which makes it well-suited for valuing the 100th

anniversary of the Republic of Estonia. The representational oak forest of Estonia’s 100 oaks will be planted in Tamsalu. This site is partly special for its magical name as well as its location – Tamsalu (*oak grove*) is situated in the middle of Estonia and one can even take a train to access the park to be established.



*Photo: Riigikantselei*

The museum is the largest and most expensive project Estonia has undertaken. The architects of the French firm DGT won the AFEX ((French Architects Abroad) Grand Prix award. They “worked very hard to make a museum for Estonians.”

“As an important Estonian cultural institution, we always celebrate the important occasions that hold significance for the country and its people, but certainly the program on the centenary year will be more festive than usual,” Tarand adds.”

“The Estonian National Museum is for the people and owned by the people, therefore, the best gift we can give to Estonians for the 100th birthday is to maintain an impeccable service and user-experience here,” Tarand says.”

### **Sources:**

1) Helen Wright in Culture, September 30, 2016. She is a freelance journalist, currently based in Tartu, Estonia.

2) Helen Wright and Silver Tambur in Culture, January 24, 2017.

Silver Tambur is the cofounder and Editor-in-Chief of Estonian World. The article was also published in Estonian World, January 24, 2017.

Images courtesy of the Estonian National Museum.



# Estonia's new ferries 2017

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta

Estonia has four brand new ferries, specifically designed for travel between the west coast main-land and the two major islands. Two were built in the Poland shipyard Remontowa and two in the Turkey ship-yard Sefine between 2015 and 2017, all adhering to the same basic design

accommodating up to 150 passenger cars and 700 persons plus special facilities for 7 wheelchair travelers. Their speed is 15 knots, varying somewhat between summer and slower icy winter conditions.

Visually the new ships are unique in that their sides feature a striking, prominent pattern abstracted from elements of Estonian folk costume and handicraft designs. It is instantly recognizable as traditional Estonian, but not linked to any specific ethnographic region or item. The pattern is identical but the colours vary for each ship. The ferries' names are **Tõll** - blue, **Piret** - orange, **Leiger** - green and **Tiiu** - red; all names belonging to mythical heroes and heroines of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa islands.

**Mythical character Tõll** was so large that when walking through a stormy sea, the waves reached only to his waist. From his Saaremaa home he kept an eye on ship traffic and would run out to help sailors when needed. He worked hard as a farmer and successfully battled entire armies when attacked. He was not a man of many words and loved to work quietly. He took a sauna after a long day's work, beating his tired limbs with a



*Photo: TS Laevad*

*New Ferry "Piret" at Sea*

juniper whisk, for he always cleaned himself up for dinner. Fortunately his wife Piret knew how to cook for his ravenous appetite, including a whole cauldron of soup and six loaves of rye bread every day.

**Mythical character Piret**, who is described as having „broad hips and legs thick as

logs“ was the mighty wife of Tõll. As Tõll tended to be away from home a lot, she took care of the home, food, fields and meadow, and raised their son. Her ox meat pastries received much praise from the other Saare and Hiiumaa ladies. She helped Tõll build their sauna by carrying heated rocks. One boulder fell out of her apron onto her toe and into the ground where it remains today by the Kõiguste Manor. Despite her toughness, Piret was also fragile and cried so hard over the pain in her toe that her tears created the Naestesoo wetlands.

**Mythical character Leiger** was Tõll's brother but lived on Hiiumaa Island. He was a little smaller than Tõll, nevertheless, when he walked through Väike Strait, the water only reached up to half his thigh. However, his weight tended to crush any rock he sat upon. Still, the superior strength of his legs allowed him to run fast enough to keep up with a pack of wolves. He too would help islanders by fighting invaders, hitting them so powerfully with a barn pole or cart beam that 100 men would bite the dust at once. He especially loved his beautiful sauna and often hosted his brother from the other island for a

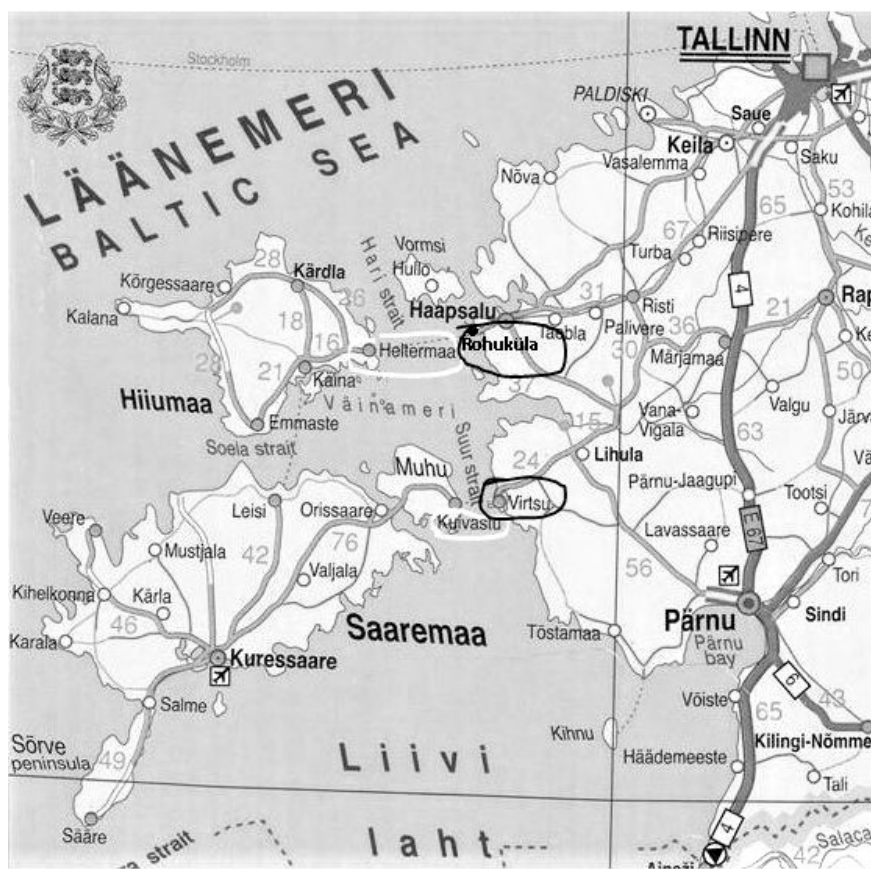
sauna evening. He became a regional hero because he protected the islanders and frequently organized parties, always offering his guests only the best of everything with help from his wife Tiiu.

**Mythical character Tiiu** was Leiger's wife. She was the sister of Tõll's wife Piret, but considerably smaller, and originally went by the name Maret. Once on Hiiumaa Island, she was called Hiiu Tiiu simply because the local folks thought she looked more like a Tiiu than like a Maret. Besides, there is a saying in Estonian that a good person has many names. Tiiu managed the household when Leiger was away, including the apple orchard, rye fields and cabbage patch. She was especially skilled at skinning and baking the moose calves Leiger had hunted, for she had to feed four sons as well, though none were as big as their father, and several daughters. The young ladies eventually all married outsiders but the boys built homes on Hiiumaa Island where they remained and are ancestors of the hardworking,

expeditious, patient yet tender and caring Hiiu folks of today.

As one would expect, the ferries Tõll and Piret traverse the approximately 27 minute distance between Virtsu on the mainland and Kuivastu on Muhu Island. From there one travels by road across the tiny island and over the causeway to the larger Saaremaa Island. In the main town, Kuresaare, one finds a whimsical sculpture of Tõll and Piret almost dancing while carrying a boatful of fish, boat and all. Visitors have fun posing in comical ways for photos with this artwork.

Much earlier, Estonia had another well known ship called Suur Tõll (Big Tõll) or just Tõll. An ice-breaker, it was constructed in 1914, then variously owned and renamed by Russia, Finland, Estonia and the Soviet Union until 1987. It is the largest preserved pre-war icebreaker in the world and is currently moored at Lennusadam, the historical Seaplane Museum harbour in Tallinn. (Personal note from author: That is one of the best museums I have seen!)



*Map showing ferry routes between the Estonian mainland and the two islands Saaremaa and Hiiumaa*

Naturally, the two new boats named for the Hiiumaa Island mythical characters, Leiger and Tiiu, sail the approximately 1 hour and 15 minute route between Hiiumaa island's port of Heltermaa and the port of Rohuküla (near Haapsalu) on the mainland west coast. This is 15 minutes faster than most of the past ferries covering this route.

There is a fifth ferry, the much older Regula, built in 1971, plying the Estonian west coast as of 1997. It is an ice-class ship and currently used mostly as a backup to guarantee uninterrupted ferry service, with 400 passenger and 80





*Photo: Ivo Salmre*

Statue of Saaremaa's mythical heroes Tõll and his wife Piret in Kuressaare

automobile capacity. It may also be put into service during times of extra heavy traffic, such as for mainland folks annually heading to Saaremaa for Jaanipäev/Midsummer Night celebrations in June.

The sea vehicles Tõll, Piret, Leiger and Tiiu provide a comfortable, relaxed ride with cafeteria, vending machines and souvenir shop. Asking persons who have travelled regularly on these routes over decades, they spontaneously declared that the new ferries are „cheerful, bright, roomy and friendly“. They like the kids' play corner, elevators, seats with adjustable backs, and seating for computer users. They are especially impressed with the efficiency of unloading and reloading these ferries in a total maximum of 15 minutes.

The five coastal ferries are owned by TS Laevad OÜ company, a subsidiary of the Port of Tallinn, which in turn is a company owned by the Republic of Estonia. Ferry passage prices vary from 1.20 Euros for a bicycle to 18.00€ for a bus, plus 1.50€ to 3.40€ per individual passenger, depending on the day of travel and whether one is a permanent resident of the islands or lives elsewhere; locals pay reduced rates. Schedules, ticket purchase, images and info are available at [www.praamid.ee](http://www.praamid.ee), also on Facebook at praamid.ee.

As the waters surrounding the islands are shallow, the ferries rigidly follow marked routes which require regular dredging. Winter sailings depend on weather and ice

conditions. Some years, automobiles can ignore the ferries for few weeks and drive the world's longest designated ice-road across sea waters between the mainland and the islands.

The most recently arrived ferries, Piret and Tiiu, were ceremoniously christened this April, the other two earlier in the year. They will all be most appreciated by travellers as traffic to and from the major islands is heavy, especially during the summer tourist season. Previously, car line-ups a few kilometers long were not unusual on summer weekends. The plan and hope are that the four larger, faster, more efficient coastal ferries along with a backup ship, will ease those long waits.

# Alberta Estonian Heritage Society

## List of Members May, 2017

Allen	Dianne	Spruce Grove	AB
Almaas	Sandra	West Kelona	BC
Armstrong	Beverley	High River	AB
Boehrnsen	Sylvia	Calgary	AB
Clark	John	Denver	CO
Collin	Marion	Airdrie	AB
de Launay	David	Peterborough	ON
de Launay	Geoff	Kanata	ON
Derksen	Colin & Linda	Edmonton	AB
Dinning	Shirley	Edmonton	AB
Elvey	Ruth	Sidney	BC
Erdman	John	Red Water	AB
Fodor	Evelin	Calgary	AB
Franchini	Karen	Burnaby	BC
Gue	Anita	Yellowknife	NWT
Gue	Brian	Edmonton	AB
Gue	Kevin	Hornby Isl.	BC
Gue	Lisa	Ottawa	ON
Hall	Gwen	Ashmont	AB
Hennel	Gloria	Myrnham	AB
Hennel	Henry	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Leah	Calgary	AB
Hennel	Lorne & Anne Marie	Calgary	AB
Hennel	Rita	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Rodney & Liz	Stettler	AB
Hennel	Ron W. F.	Stettler	AB
Herman	Liia	Innisfail	AB
Herman	Lori	N. Vancouver	BC
Jaako	Harry	Vancouver	BC
Kaert	Mati & Linda	Edmonton	AB
Kalev	Tiiu	Eckville	AB
Kaljuste	Truuta Kai	Montreal	QC
Kalvee	Betty	Vancouver	BC
Kalvee	Willy G.	Calgary	AB
Kangur	Kulliva	Ardrossan	AB
Kenzle	Alice	Nanton	AB
Kenzle	Susan	Austin	TX
Kerbes	Deane & Irene	Stettler	AB
Kerbes	Richard	Saskatoon	SK
Kiil	Dave	Edmonton	AB
Kingsep	Bob & Annette	Victoria	BC
Kivisild	Livia	Calgary	AB
Koper	Donna	Cochrane	AB

Kotkas	Perry	Calgary	AB
Kraav	Jüri & Helle	Calgary	AB
Krasman	Leslie	Champion	AB
Kuester	Matt	Edmonton	AB
Lecerf	Elizabeth	Parkland County	AB
Leesment	Peeter & Helgi	Calgary	AB
Liikane	Epp	Everett	WA
Maddison	Anneliese	Edmonton	AB
Madill	Anita	Calgary	AB
Magdanz	Karen	Richmond	BC
Matiisen	Arne	Calgary	AB
Matiisen	Janet	Calgary	AB
McElroy	Elve	Camrose	AB
McClung	Eda	Edmonton	AB
McLeod	Grant	Medicine Hat	AB
Munz Gue	Martha	Medicine Hat	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	Oman	UAE
Pilt	Shirley	Edmonton	AB
Pohjakas	Kaljo & Lilian	Lethbridge	AB
Renne	Thomas & Janice	Calgary	AB
Robertson	David & Christine	W. Vancouver	BC
Ruus	Allan	Calgary	AB
Ruus	Lea	Calgary	AB
Ruusauk	Siim	Sherwood Park	AB
Sastok	Helve	Edmonton	AB
Schleindl	Val	Edmonton	AB
Schuler	Kelly	Calgary	AB
Shongrunden	Astrid	Penticton	BC
Shursen	Evelyn	Stettler	AB
Simm	Nurmi	Edmonton	AB
Sorenson	Marlene	Calgary	AB
Tardie	Elizabeth	Edmonton	AB
Tiislar	Enn & Pärja	Canmore	AB
Tipman	Liisa	Calgary	AB
Tipman	Bob & Kathy	Calgary	AB
Ustina	Astrid	Edmonton	AB
Ustina	Stephanie	Victoria	BC
Visser	Igor & Mari	Cochrane	AB
Walters	Sylvia	Rimbey	AB
Wartnow	Floyd C	Delta	BC
Watson	Maret	Spruce Grove	AB
Zach	Inge	Calgary	AB
Zielinski	Michel & Kristine	Spruce Grove	AB



Leah Hennel's photograph of a lone rider on the range near Pincher Creek won a 2016 National Newspaper Award in the Feature Photo category.  
See the full story inside this issue.