

ROCKY RIVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A Centennial City

1903-2003

March 2021 Newsletter



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LET'S GO TO ERIEAU!

by Gay Christensen-Dean

Business Section, Erieau, Ont.



Business Section,
Erieau, Ontario, Canada
Circa 1924

The Lighthouse, Erieau, Ont.



The Lighthouse,
Erieau, Ontario

Let's go to Erieau! (Continued)

Prohibition (1920 – 1933) did not stop people from drinking. They just found other ways of obtaining it. A popular source for Rocky River residents and others in the surrounding area was to motor across Lake Erie to Erieau, Ontario, a distance of 50 miles. It was important to carry fishing paraphernalia with you, and even some fish, to show any revenuers if you got stopped.

The stash of liquor would be loaded into canvas bags in Erieau and then hidden in the boat under tarps and your fishing gear. Some meager fishing could be tried on the way back to possibly replace your well-seasoned catch that you had originally taken with you.

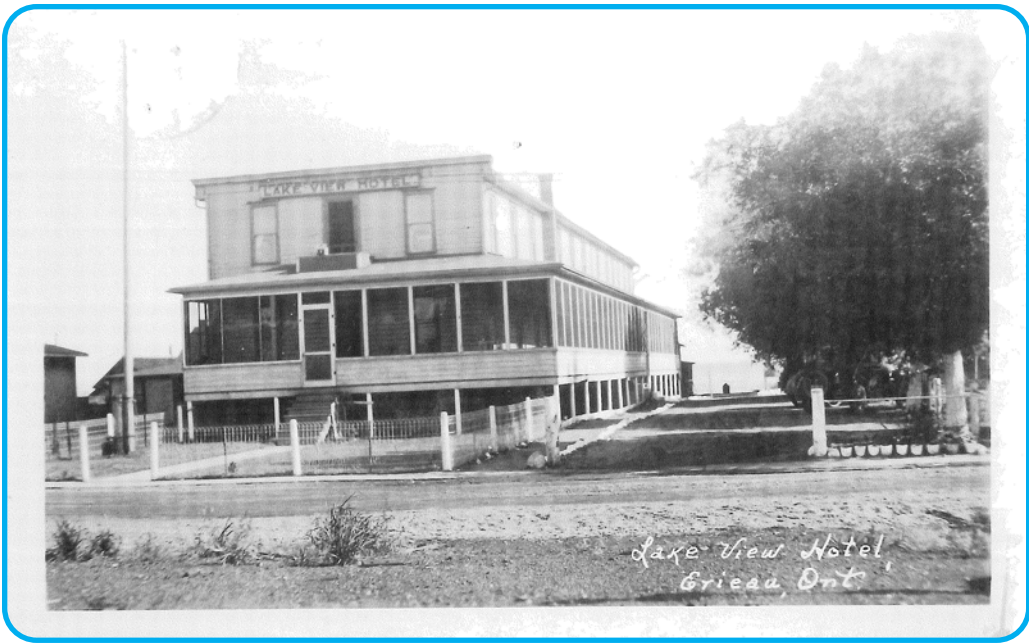
Arriving back in Rocky River on the southern shore, it was best to dock at Oakwood Beach. There was a chain hanging down in the water under the dock to which you could attach your prize of canvas bags. Then, you could nonchalantly motor into the Rocky River with your fish "catch", where the revenuers patrolled. After finishing your day of "fishing" you could sneak back via land to Oakwood Beach to get your canvas bags.

Actually, Erieau was also known for a second attraction. It was a great fishing location and a very pretty place to spend time in that endeavor. The Wind family, of Winfield Drive fame in Rocky River, talked about the whoppers that they would haul in during their trips there – pike.

So, Erieau was a very popular place in the early 1900's, and still a charming place if you read about it in its more recent years.



Erieau, Ontario from the water



Lake View Hotel,
Erieau, Ontario
Circa 1923



Lake View Hotel Drive,
Erieau, Ontario

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Coming to America A Rocky River Resident Shares Her Story: “Lost Childhood” By Lia Staaf



One of my first memories is being in Tallinn, Estonia railroad station with my father dressed in his police uniform, and my mother. We were there to greet a Gold Medal winner in super heavyweight wrestling, Kristjan Palusalu, from the Berlin Olympics.

In 1939, the Soviet Union negotiated a naval base in Paldiski at the Baltic Sea. In June 1940, I looked out of our apartment window onto the residential street in Rakvere, Estonia and I saw a foreign soldier marching with a rifle. My mother explained that he was a Russian soldier and that they were occupying our country. Next thing that happened was that our living room was taken away from us to house a Russian army officer. Then, all Estonian policemen were fired and became jobless. My father applied for different jobs but he would be dismissed soon because ex-cons that he had previously arrested would complain.

I began first grade. A large picture of Stalin was on the wall of our classroom. Also, our music teacher was arrested in front of us children, because he was a patriot and loved the Estonian Republic.

The following June my parents trusted me, at eight years old, to take a bus to visit my grandmother. My mother followed the next day. A few days later we saw trucks containing arrested Estonian people. At their arrest they were told to pack a suitcase. Since it was summer, they took summer clothes. The arrested people were put in cattle cars, without sanitation or food. The destination – Siberia, for slave labor. My father had been secretly warned about this and he rode his bicycle 40 km at night without any lights to my grandmother’s farm. He hid there for 2 months to avoid arrest. I had to learn to lie in order not to betray my father’s whereabouts.

Hitler declared war on the Soviet Union. Two months later we were occupied by Germans, who re-hired the Estonian policemen including my father. Once school began in October back in Rakvere, the classrooms now had large pictures of Hitler. The troops were to be fed; our food was rationed. We raised rabbits and had a vegetable garden. Luckily, a cousin of my mother’s was married to a forester who brought us venison.

By the fall of 1943, the Russians were advancing and my father took us to live with his cousin and her family on a farm to avoid the bombs, while he continued working in town. These last nine months were a real lost childhood. I had no friends; had a long walk to school. My only good memory is cross-country skiing across the fields with the farm dog.

In August 1944, my father came to visit and said that we would have to flee now. The three of us got on a train to the island of Saaremaa, where my father was born. The Soviets were shooting at us from a small airplane. Luckily, we made it to the island. My father and two of his sisters hired a fisherman to take us to Sweden. However, the Germans confiscated the boat.

Later, we got on a ship to Germany. Now, the Americans generally do not understand this! We wanted to be as far from the Soviet Union as we could be. The German occupation was nothing like the Soviet one. However, people were arrested discreetly. Now, the real horrible parts of my lost childhood began. The ship docked in Danzig (Gdansk now.) We were put on a train which went through all the bombed places.

We were sent to Oberlahnstein near the Rhine and Lahn rivers. We were living in temporary barracks between a munitions factory and a closed paper factory. There were many bundles of old paper around. The old postcards became my playmates. There were no other children among the foreigners. Next door, the factory director's daughter was kind to me and loaned me a book of saints. Soon, she and her mother were sent to the country to avoid the bombing.

The first Sunday that we lived there, we went for a walk by the Lahn River. Soon, an airplane flew low and shot at us – no more walks. We were on the direct route of the Allied bombing missions, four times every 24 hours. My father and the other men had to daily clean up the debris from the bombings, and the women worked in the kitchen to prepare soup for the soldiers on the trains. My mother peeled potatoes six days a week. During the day, I went underground when we had the bomb warnings. This lasted until March 13. Then, the Germans kicked us out from the underground and we stayed in an old stone wine cellar for shelter. We had no food, either.

The Americans were shooting cannon fire at us for several weeks. They hit the locomotive of a train passing us. After the native Germans plundered the train, the Estonian men found sacks of wheat grain and a can of syrup. That was our food for the next two weeks, for us 27 Estonians. The grain was cooked outdoors in a large kettle on an open fire, as we had no access to a kitchen.

Once the Americans arrived, many displaced nationalities could return home, but since Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, we had no home waiting for us. The first day, we were sent to a vacant school and given three loaves of French bread! The next day we were taken to Trier. My father found a job in the kitchen, for the weekly payment of a can of American coffee. My parents went on Sundays to barter with German farmers for eggs, milk, or whatever. My mother and I went to steal some apples from an orchard and ran into two Moroccan soldiers from the French army, who conveyed bad intentions regarding me, a young girl, so we went away.

Two of us Estonian families heard about an Estonian refugee camp in an old hunting lodge in the American occupation zone, and received permission to move there. After two years, we had a real school, Lutheran Church and garden plots. The Red Cross started uniting families and we found out that two uncles and an aunt had made it to Sweden. They started sending us packages of food, clothes, books. The Americans gave each family a beautiful blanket. All mothers made winter coats for their daughters!

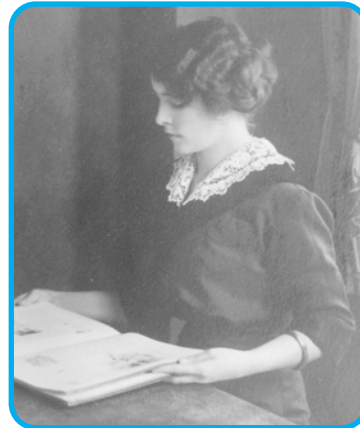
From the old hunting lodge in Kleinneubach, we were sent to Aschaffenburg, to some beautiful, stone army barracks. Each family had their own room. My father was hired to work for the American army in Kaiserslautern.

The Soviet Union was allowed to send army officers to entice us to return to occupied Estonia, but in reality, we would have been sent to Siberia as punishment for escaping. The Americans, allies of the Soviets during the war, did not understand why we did not want to return. Luckily for us, the Displaced Persons Act was passed in the U.S. Congress in October, 1948. We were chosen among the first families destined to the U.S. My father was given a job to work on a farm in Ohio. We boarded the former troop ship, USS Tiger, and sailed for ten days to New York, arriving February 27, 1949. I was 16 years old. In the evening, we were put on a train to Toledo. Our new life began. And after finishing my education, marriage and two children, my husband and I moved to Rocky River. We thought that Rocky River would be a good place to raise our family. I became a citizen in 1955.

MYSTERY PHOTOS

Can you identify any of these photos from our archives?

If so, contact: ginnigoing@gmail.com



Close-up view of the photo on the dresser seen above.

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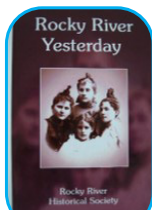


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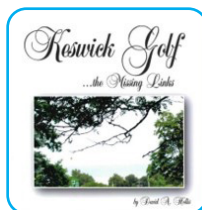
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