

Ilmar Radfeldt
Estonian Immigrant
Aquitania
November 22, 1949



Our journey to Canada, Ilmar and Miralda Rakfeldt and children, Helle, Tiia and Jaak Rakfeldt began on Nov. 12, 1949 from Stockholm to Göteborg, Sweden, from there to London, England where we arrived Nov. 14, 1949 and departed from Southampton Nov. 15, 1949 on board the AQUITANIA to Halifax, Nova Scotia, arriving there on Nov. 22, 1949.

I think Immigration and Customs officers came on board the ship somewhere before Halifax. Those passengers who were given the OK to land were able to take the train that very same night to their new destinations. Our family had to overcome an obstacle before we could continue our journey. Our Passports didn't mention any workplace or living quarters. We were therefore detained for further questioning.

It was later at night when the women and children were separated from the men and were taken to different rooms. These rooms were quite cold at first and we and others like us were apprehensive. I didn't take it too seriously and had faith and hope that I would be re-united with my wife and children and that this obstacle would also be resolved.

I was struck with the curious thought that this was the first time in my life that I was in a room with bars at the windows and had been locked in from the outside. The Russian GPU had tried but had been unable to corner me, and yet here I am.

We were 20-30 men of different nationalities thus separated from our families and locked in. Some men took it very hard and when steam started to leak from the cold radiators, many thought that they were with certainty in a gas-chamber. They started to bang on the door and make a great deal of noise. I don't remember that anybody came to calm them. We, two Estonians, tried to calm them and explain that we were just getting heat in the room, nothing else from the radiators.

Next morning I was given permission to call my brother in the USA who lived approximately 45-50 klm. from Niagara Falls. He told the Customs officer that a house had already been rented for our family in St. Catharine's, Ont., and after I showed papers that proved that I had almost \$4000.00 in a bank account in Toronto and assured him that I

was with certainty able to find work for myself; my family and I were able to resume our journey by train onward to St. Catharine's.

The train was a mixed freight and passenger service train and was quite slow. We changed trains in Toronto and we all remember being impressed with the marble and stores at this main station even though our train was off schedule and we finally arrived in St. Catharine's on Nov. 25-6th (?) 1949.

Our reason for coming to Canada and leave Sweden was mainly that I had a brother who had been living in the USA since 1924 and we could be reunited again as a family. We had had visa applications to immigrate to the USA since 1945, but in Sweden we had to apply as quota immigrants and not as DPs and the Estonian quota was 116 persons per year. We lost hope and because of our fear of the nearness of the Soviet Union and its possible treachery we applied for a visa to Canada. We wanted to be as far as possible from the Soviet Union.

Our stay in Canada wasn't very long. We got visa to immigrate to the USA in August 1950. This time we only had to cross a great river. Our daughters, Helle and Tiia began their education in Nov. 1949 in a Canadian school and the friendliness and support of teachers and fellow students helped them to adjust to new land, and new customs. Myself and my family as well as the tens and tens of thousands who like us had lost their homeland, would like to extend our humble and heartfelt thanks to the Government of Canada for its liberal and broadminded immigration laws.

The third row of name inscribed on the Sobey Wall of Brick on Pier 21 is that of my eldest brother, Arnold Rakfeldt and his wife, Heli, who came from England to Kitchener, Ont., Canada in 1951. He moved to Toronto, owned a house there and a cottage in Consecon, Ont. They were both in their early 50s when they came to Canada and in spite of their age and lack of language were able to prosper in Canada before their demise at the age of 87 and 90 respectively.