

Eva Rennie
German Immigrant
Samaria
April 16, 1939



I travelled from Liverpool to Halifax with my mother, Mrs. Erna Keilson (originally from Hamburg), and her sister and brother-in-law Mr. and Mrs. Martin Margoninsky. My father (Hermann Keilson) had been a physician, but had died in 1938. Canada had no official refugee immigration - we arrived on a Minister's permit after waiting in Germany for a year. All during the voyage, on the Cunard White Star liner Samaria, there was speculation as to where exactly we would be able to land. We were originally scheduled to sail up the St. Lawrence River, right to Montreal. However, due to the earliness of the season (April), there was the possibility that the river would still be frozen that far upstream, in which case we would disembark at Quebec City. As it turned out, the river was indeed still frozen, not only at Montreal but as far down as Quebec City! So we eventually landed at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on April 16, 1939.

In order not to make a bad impression on our new country, we travelled First Class, and our tickets included Pullman accommodation, in case we were not able to get a boat directly to Montreal. Due to the fact that we arrived First Class and had to catch a train, we were speedily processed at Pier 21. I do not recall any delay or difficulties but I think our case was not a typical one: we already had about 15 relatives living in Montreal. When I learned that our train trip to Montreal would take 22 hours, it boggled my mind. I was sitting beside a lady who was going to Vancouver and asked her how long that trip would take her. She said five days and five nights. I was even more stunned.

Also on the train, but not in our car, were a number of men and women in babushkas. We were told that they were immigrant farmers going to Saskatchewan. The countryside we sped through abounded in lakes and forests, all covered with snow, and it seemed amazingly empty to us. On watching the snow-covered landscape slide by, my aunt remarked that she could not comprehend the vast emptiness: "In Europe they would have built some houses here!"

We arrived in Montreal, at Bonaventure Station, and our relatives were there to meet us.