

Sylvia Wilkes
English War Bride
Empire Brent
December 1946

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
PIER 21



It was on December 1946 when my five month old son and I, age 20, came through Pier 21 on my way to Saskatchewan to join my husband, a Canadian soldier. I was one of the 46,000 Second World War brides who came to Canada.

Previously - in August - my husband, Joseph (Jack) Wilkes and my aunt Violet Lesack (nee Haffenden) both had come to Canada aboard the "Aquitania" - (they couldn't socialize while aboard). They passed through Pier 21 as well. Actually I was repeating history since my mother-in-law, Lily Wilkes (nee Lawrence) had married a Canadian soldier in WWI and had come to Canada through Pier 21 with her one year old son (my husband) in 1919.

All I remember of Halifax and Pier 21 was a huge dark shed with the luggage there to identify, some of it broken, and it being dreary and rainy. I was disappointed. I had imagined it would be white with snow and it wasn't. It was rainy and dirty like Liverpool. We had to travel quite a bit inland by train before we saw snow and boy when we reached Saskatchewan was I surprised by the amount of snow!! My husband met me in Regina. I had no winter boots so my husband and I had to go buy some before boarding another train to the small town which would be my new home. My father-in-law met us at the train station in his Model T. The snow was so deep we just drove from the train station to the farm straight across the fields. You couldn't tell where the roads were.

The trip across the Atlantic aboard the "Empire Brent" (originally called the "Letitia" but changed to go into civilian service) was quite an adventure. We gathered in late November 1946 in an awful hostel in London. Our ship was to be the last one until spring, so it was go then or wait until spring. About an hour out, we hit a cattle ship. It was about five in the morning and I was up feeding my baby when I felt this jolt. I went up on deck and saw all the cattle in the water. It was pathetic. Our ship was damaged too much to continue so it was back to port and back home for a couple of weeks. (This tragedy was reported in the Nov. 25, 1946 Halifax Herald). It was December 1946 when we set off again, and boy it was rough. I was seasick for thirteen days and my baby was not well either. A Scottish girl used to cloak me and help me up on deck to get fresh air. Then she'd take me down at night and that's

all I remember of the trip. The last day I started to feel better. I said I would never go back to England again. We didn't think of the planes in those days. No way would I ever go back on a ship! My baby turned out to have T.B. and spent two years in the fort Qu'Appelle sanatorium, and a month after arriving in Canada my husband had to have a hernia operation. Welcome to life in Canada!