



## Who left these footprints here?

### Footprints in Raeküla

#### 1. Riia Street 273 - the residence of the Päts family

The history of Raeküla is long, the region was first mentioned as a part of Pärnu town as early as 1265. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century instead of the suburbs a forest with few farmhouses layed here. In 1882 builder Jakob Päts moved to Pärnu. His move played an important role in the development of Raeküla. Päts moved to Pärnu from the nearby Tahkuranna parish with his wife Olga and five children. One of the children was the future first president of the Republic of Estonia Konstantin Päts. Three years later Jakob Päts bought a little bit more than ten hectares of land in Raeküla between Järva and Lembitu Streets. He cut the forest and divided the land into several properties. Onto some properties he had houses built that he rented out for people who had moved to Raeküla. This division into smaller properties was the beginning of today's suburbs in Raeküla.

A long-time Raeküla habitant August Edgar Peet remembers a fun story about an unusual moving. There had been a house in Järva Street that was not very strongly attached to the foundations which was typical to that time. The Raadik family lived in that house. Compared to the town government Jakob Päts took higher rent. So, one time a bunch of men were on their way home from work in the Waldhof cellulose factory when the Raadik family got a brilliant idea - let's move the house from Päts land to town government land! All of them together lifted the house up from the foundations and carried across the street, thus escaping the higher rent asked by Jakob Päts.

The red brick building in front of you was built in 1891. On the ground floor there was a tavern and the upper floor was rented out. Instead of the Riia Street you can see now there was a beautiful garden with a fountain in front of the house. During the Soviet times the building was used by the local collective farm for fishermen and at that time additional parts were added to the building. At the moment the house is a private property.

In 2011 a memorial plaque was attached to the house. In addition to Jakob and Olga Päts it lists their children's names contribution to the society. By the end of today's journey you have discovered also other ways how the Päts family has influenced the development of Raeküla. Enjoy the tour!



## **2. Riia Street 269 - headquarters of Vaal**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the main source of income for the habitants of Raeküla was fishing. Some people worked in Waldhof cellulose factory, sawmill Lennuk, Sindi broadcloth factory or Sindi-Lodja brick factory. The fishermen were the most well-off of all trades.

The fishermen's association Laine was founded in 1919. Riita Tõniste writes in the first issue of the local newspaper Raeküla Sõnumid in 2010: "At the beginning the aim of the association was overall cultural work, mutual help in case of accidents, acquiring the supplies necessary for the fishermen, exploring the fish of Pärnu Bay and Pärnu River, adding fish to Pärnu Bay and Pärnu River, also increasing the economical well-being of the area. Regardless of the difficult post-war times the first year of activity was successful: traps, ropes, tar, fyke thread and much more was ordered from Tallinn, Germany and elsewhere. The fish were exported to foreign countries through the association which made the association the first in Estonia that had foreign partners in the field of fish trade."

The fish were kept cool in ice cellars. It is said there were five ice cellars in Raeküla - three private cellars, one belonged to the fishermen's artel founded in 1931 and the fifth was the association Laine's ice cellar built in 1928. Laine's cellar was situated in Haraka street between the headquarters of Vaal and the pathway to the current local kindergarten.

During the Second World War many fishermen escaped to Sweden and further through there. The decrease in the number of fishermen influenced the fishermen's association Laine, as well. The decrease led to ending the association's activities in 1946. A couple of years later the artel Vaal was founded. Vaal began its work on the basis of the statute of the fishermen's collective farm. Riia Street 269 building, also known as the headquarters of Vaal, was one of the first new post-war buildings in Raeküla. The white building was finished in 1948.

## **3. Järva 2 - Pärnu Raeküla kindergarten**

There was a kindergarten in the same building with the school at Lembitu 1 already in 1931, the current Pärnu Raeküla kindergarten was opened in 1966. At that time it was called the 16<sup>th</sup> Daycare Centre of Pärnu. One of the two nursery groups was open around the clock. During the 1970's specific groups for children with speech impediments were created. There is one blending group for children with speech impediments and specific developmental disorders since 2004.



Visiting the kindergarten's home page it is soon revealed that the surrounding nature (the river, the sea, Raeküla pine woods) is actively used in the learning process and the local community is valued. The kindergarten has several lovely traditions such as hikes in autumn and spring, family day in cooperation with Raeküla Old School Centre, folklore mornings, celebrating national holidays and a folk party in the older group, clean-up day together with the parents during the first week of May.

#### 4. Järva Street 11<sup>a</sup> - Osvald Saulep

Tea Kurvits writes in Kultuur ja Elu: “Osvald Saulep was born in Kehtna, Harjumaa in 1925. He remembers he was rather young when his grandfather took notice of his increasing interest in drawing and taught Saulep to depict animals on the board. During his school years Osvald was asked to show the others how to draw. It seems natural that Osvald later wished to study art and painting. His plans were cut short by the war. Instead of the brush Saulep picked up a gun.” The article describes Saulep's endeavours during the second World War, his post-war bushwhacker's life and forced labour days. Kurvits continues: „After establishing a home in Pärnu, he entered Tartu Art school distance learning division in 1959. He graduated in 1964, receiving a diploma for painting and graphic art. His childhood dream had come true.“

Silvi Kanošina's remarks on the interview at the Saulep residence at Järva Street 11<sup>a</sup> for Raeküla Sõnumid nr 3 also portrays his love for art.

Already on the front wall one can notice a white swan decorating the house, in the foyer the guests are greeted by a wall mosaic compiled of pieces of ceramics on the topic of the adventures of Lembitu, an Estonian folk hero. Even though the artist used several different techniques (graphic art, linocut, oil painting, water painting...), using Saulep's own words he „still had a beef with sculpture“. Regardless of that revelation the bathroom wall is decorated by a mermaid and several small sculptures reside by the pond in the garden.

„I like to paint, I want to continue painting,“ said the artist to Tea Kurvits. Saulep has made over a couple of hundred works in different genres. There are many landscape and nude paintings, also portraits of significant Estonian militarists and country leaders. By the way, the portrait of Konstantin Päts that decorates Raeküla Old School centre is painted by our own local artist Osvald Saulep. Saulep passed away in June 2016.

In addition to painting Saulep sang in the Pärnu military choir led by his life partner Helle Kullamaa for many years.



## 5. Kalevi Street 34 – lines, villages and legends

The next street up to Riia Street is called Lennuki, just as the sawmill that was situated more or less at the end of the same street. Today's names were given to Raeküla's streets in the 1960's by museum employees. Thus it is not surprising that Lennuki is followed by Uku, Lembitu, Vambola etc. These are the names of Estonian folk heroes. Before being named by the museum employees Raeküla's streets were called lines. There were 12 lines altogether. For example, nowadays Lembitu Street was called Line no 2.

Perhaps you have heard that Raeküla is also called Rotiküla (Rat's Village). To be more exact, Rotiküla is only this part of Raeküla you are currently walking in. Raeküla was in fact divided into six „villages“. The land formerly owned by Jakob Päts between present Lembitu and Järva Street were called Pätsi küla, from there towards the town centre until Saare Street was Truše küla, also named after a land owner. From Saare Street to Raja Street lay Kännuküla (Stump village). Since the high buildings of Mai area had not been built yet, the area up to present A.H. Tammsaare Street was all considered Raeküla. The strip between Metsa and Riia Street was called Soolikaküla (Bowels village). From Pätsi küla towards Riga lay Tagaküla (Hind or back village) and the part between Merimetsa Street and the sea – was the infamous Rotiküla.

There are several legends about why Rotiküla is called Rat's Village. These are the most common:

- a) Once upon a time the mayor of Pärnu came to check out what was going on at the suburbs. He saw crops growing and huts with turf roofs. Surprised, he shouted: „You have made your nests here as quickly as rats!“ The locals who heard it began to call their home Rotiküla as a joke.
- b) The second legend speaks of a shopkeep who went to big merchant Ammende in order to refill his store. Upon reaching Ammende the shopkeep noticed a rat with something shiny in its mouth slip into an old wooden pump pipe of a well. The shopkeep got curious and despite the obvious surprise and disbelief of Ammende he bought the pipe. The pipe was full of fortune that the rat had stolen and carried in there. The shopkeep sold the treasure, bought some land in Raeküla and built a beautiful house. Because the money came from the rat, this place was thereon called Rotiküla.
- c) A shorter version of the story speaks of a farmer who saw a rat holding some money in its mouth escape into a pipe near Jeruusalemma tavern. The tavern was situated more or less at the end of present Saare street where now is a petrol station. The farmer went to check the pipe out and





found a treasure inside, which he, of course, took away. The rat was so sad to lose its fortune that it hung itself in the nearby woods.

- d) The last legend also ends with hanging a rat. The story takes place at the time when the future president Päts's father Jakob had a tavern. Some of the city boys visited the tavern and of course they liked the rosy cheeked suburban girls. Local fishermen's sons, however, would not stand city boys hitting on their girls, so naturally they chased the city boys back to the centre. The humiliation of the defeat angered the city boys so much that once upon finding a huge rat they brought the rat to Raeküla and hung it to a tree by the tavern so all of the travellers could see. Hanging the rat made the city boys feel a little bit better, but the name Rotiküla stuck to Raeküla. By the way, when angered, people would curse: „Those damn ratvillagers!“

Choose your favourite legend and tell others about it!

## 6. Lembitu Street 55 – Gunnar Aarma

The last by the sea – so was called the famous house that hosted many visitors and received many letters in its own time. Every taxi driver that was working during Gunnar Aarma's Pärnu-period knew the Aarma house. Healer and esoteric writer Aarma hosted fasting hikes during the late 1970's. Those hikes were sometimes also called hunger hikes, however they brought together people from Pärnu and further away. The life of Aarma was difficult. He grew up in Tallinn and spent many years in Russia upon being deported there with his family. After returning to Estonia Aarma moved to Pärnu where he built a house in Raeküla. It was the last house in Lembitu Street for a long time – thus the nickname stated at the beginning. Aarma mainly worked as a music teacher. In 2001. Silja Joon wrote in Pärnu Postimees: “Gunnar Aarma was the most well-known for his healing methods and wise advice, however his interesting trips and exclusive meetings with prominent people before World War II deserve no less attention. For example, he had met Hemingway as well as Franco's wife and even Hitler himself, just to mention few of the famous people Aarma has had the chance to meet eye-to-eye.”

Aarma has written and published several books and articles, Maria Tilk, Aarma's daughter has put down his biography in the book „My father Gunnar Aarma“. Ingvar Luhaäär has compiled a compendium based on his interviews with Aarma. The last years of his life before passing away in 2001 Aarma spent in Tallinn.



## **7. Merimetsa Street 64 (behind the house in Lembitu Street) – the fire brigade’s square**

Social and societal life has always been active in Raeküla. The school building at Lembitu 1 slowly turned into a cultural centre where – especially in the 1930’s – profitable dance evenings and concerts were held, a theatre group practiced, gymnastics competitions were held, a jazz ensemble practiced and many more activities took place. In 1924 the Red Cross Youth organization and club „Lootus“ were founded, there were also sports association „Tervis“, health association „Vaprus“, youth association „Koit“ and unions „Noored Kotkad“ and „Kodutütred“.

Thus it is not surprising that in 1924 the Pärnu Volunteer Firefighting Association Raeküla division began its work. At first the fire station was situated on the corner of present Merimetsa and Olevi Street, but in 1939 a new department building was built on the corner of Merimetsa and Lembitu Street.

August Edgar Peet shared his memories in 2018: „There was this square, still is, and there were outdoor parties there. On the corner of Merimetsa and Lembitu there was the fire station building, such with a tower where the firemen practiced climbing up and down and where the fire hoses were laid to dry. And then there was the garage and the truck. And such a flat, with a telephone inside. My grandmother on my father’s side was a guard there. When fire broke loose she sounded the siren so that the whole Raeküla echoed back. Then the driver and the firemen ran together and drove out to extinguish the fire.“

A life-long inhabitant of Raeküla, Eili Laanela had noted that the fire brigade was an important promoter of local cultural and social life. There was a tradition of spring and autumn parties. At these parties the firemen demonstrated their skills and invited men from the audience to try out their strength.

Nowadays the station building with a tower has been replaced by a detached house, the square behind the house in Lembitu Street that the locals call the Linden park due to the linden trees planted there is still there. It is said that the firemen that planted the trees had put notes with their names under the trees while planting.

## **8. Kalevi Street 82 – Margus’s net shop**

Do you notice the wooden sculpture in the front yard of Margus’s shop that depicts a rat and a perch? This piece of art is made by Urmas Margus. The perch



symbolizes the importance of fishing in Raeküla and also that catching perches was one of the most profitable jobs. The rat, of course, symbolizes Rotiküla (Rat's Village).

Throughout history the sea has been vastly important for Raeküla – for decades it provided food on the table and work for people. Today the beach attracts vacationers among locals as well as from further away. At the end of the extension of the nearby Hirve Street a beach with a small parking lot and a line of sand awaits the bathers. Those who love nature are greeted by the bird watching tower at any season.

Look towards the sea and imagine that not more than half a century ago instead of the present forest-park there was a cattle range where local people herded their cows. In fact, during those times there were households similar to farms with farm animals and growing crops instead of today's private houses in Raeküla. The detached houses with their small beautiful gardens were mostly built during the 1960's.

The animals kept here were pigs, chickens, cows, sometimes sheep. Every fisherman's family had a horse that helped carry the boat and the load, also move the fishermen on ice in the winter. A long-time habitant of Raeküla, Ilmar Mänd remembers the time after World War II: „There were three big cattles here. These cows belonged to the locals. Two people herded the cows at the same time. The owner of each cow had to provide a herder after a certain period of time. Either they went themselves or they sent their children, this is how the circulation worked.“ His wife Inga adds that at a certain time of the day the cattle came home by their own initiative. Ilmar Mänd confirms this:“ The herders had no problem at all. The animals came down one street. The herder didn't know which cow was whose. The avalance of cows came and every cow found their own house.“ Ilmar has been a hearder himself.

## **9. Merimetsa Street 96 – Sepa square**

On the corner of Merimetsa and Hirve Street there is the Sepa (in English: Smith's) square that has been named after the Sepa farm next to it. Similarly to the fire brigade's square and the school building Sepa square was a place of social activity. Leonilla Sutt Kannussaar writes in Raeküla Sõnumid no 7: „The most beautiful midsummer bonfire with the firemen's brass band and a confetti stand was at Sepa square.“

Since every household had a patch of farm land in addition to the farm animals, every autumn a threshing machine was ordered by the community. People came together to Sepa square to do the threshing.



The owner of Sepa farm, Peeter Jantson writes in Raeküla Sõnumid no 10: „In its own time Sepa farm was very famous and active. Not only utility tools were made there, they also compiled hunting rifles. In addition to that the local theatre group practiced there. The performances were held on the Sepa square next to the farm. Somebody remembered that they were sitting in the fourth sector on the seat 123. It must have been some theatre!“

In 1995 Sepa farm was taken under protection as the only fully remained 19th century fisherman’s farm in Pärnu.

### **10. Hirve Street 11 – Elfriede Nikolai**

The house at Hirve 11 was the home of folk dance teacher Elfriede Nikolai for a long time. Elfriede, who is from Tartu county, has been given many honours, among others the Carl Robert Jakobson prize, the annual prize from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the Order of Pärnu town. In 2006 Nikolai received the V class Order of the White Star from President Rüütel.

Elfriede Nikolai has been a distinguished distributor of folk dancing and folk culture in Pärnu. She worked in Pärnu Koidula Gümnaasium (a local high school) for more than 30 years where her pupils grew into the well-known dance group Kägara. She also worked in the local Raeküla school, sharing the dancing fever to our local pupils as well.

Her remarkable contribution is being the creator of Pärnu county children’s folk dancing festival. Nikolai is also well-known as the director, host and organiser of „Pärnumaa pirand“ concerts. The groups directed by her have performed in numerous folk festivals, among which are the Estonian folk dancing festival and performances in Poland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary and Germany.

### **11. Kõo Street 4 – Pärnu Raeküla school**

March 24<sup>th</sup> 1913 when the Lembitu 1 old school began its work is considered the beginning of the education in Raeküla. The school continued its work until spring 1979, in autumn the school was added to the new Lydia Koidula nimeline II keskkool and moved away from Raeküla. Even though education was not fully banished from Raeküla (after 1979 art school, economics school, adult education and even Pärnu College of University of Tartu used the main building and the „small house“ built next to the old school), offering elementary and basic





education had to wait until 1991 when the new school building was opened at Käo Street 4.

In the late 1980's the town hall had to choose between building a new hospital or a new school. Due to the overpopulation of the rest of Pärnu's schools money was granted for a new school and the hospital had to wait for its turn for a while. Raeküla school started out as a high school, was later renamed Raeküla Gümnaasium and since 2010 serves as a basic school.

Raeküla school has been known for its focus topics, which at the beginning were economy and culture in high school. Nowadays it is possible to learn in a sports-oriented class.

The school's web page states cooperation, traditions, caring and creativity as their main values.

Laine Tõnisson has written a hymn for Raeküla school. In the hymn she honours the more than 100-year-old tradition of education in Raeküla, more about which you can learn in the next point.

## **12. Lembitu Street 1 – Raeküla school**

On the initiative of Voldemar Päts and August Luts Pärnu Eesti Kooliselts (Pärnu Estonian School Society) was born at a meeting in the Päts residence garden in 1911. The biggest accomplishment of the society was founding a school in Raeküla. Konstantin Päts went to Riga in order to get the permit for founding a school. The school building was finished in 1912, however the opening of the school had to wait until March 24<sup>th</sup> 1913 due to the lack of teachers. At the beginning there were only 60 pupils and two teachers.

The beginning was harsh – the impact of the First World War left the school in a dire financial situation. In the 1920's school parties for a fee were begun to be held, the profit of which was used to get school books and necessary equipment.

During the 1930's the school became the centre of the social life. It stayed that for a long time.

There are several memories of the school years during the Second World War told by the previous pupils of Raeküla school. In general the school years are remembered as a fun time of horseplay with classmates (boys as well as girls!). For example the colourful story shared by Eili Laanela: „In the morning we were told there would be a doctor and we would get shots. Our class was nice and united, so we thought - we won't stand the injections, we will run away! One or two cowards cannot run away, they would get punished. But the whole class. So



we did. During the break we quietly took our bags and belongings and as soon as the bell rang, we sprinted out the door. There, where now the graveyard is, used to be a nice forest and meadow back then. So we went to the forest and we had a wonderful day. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining and somebody had brought a ball and we had lots of fun. I know that only four pupils remained in the classroom, they were the „teacher’s pets“. So we spent our time in the meadow until lunch when it was time to go home. The next day when we arrived at school we heard that the doctor hadn’t come at all the previous day. Well, of course our masterplan wouldn’t have worked twice, however they weren’t able to punish the whole class either. So, the next day we all got our shots anyway.“

Through different times the pupils of the school have accomplished remarkable results in woodwork (led by teacher Sergei Menšikov) and in sports (led by teacher Vello Vilipere).

The school also had its own garden, in which vegetables were grown. The pupils often helped the headmaster to take care of the garden – water the plants and pick the weeds. When the elementary school building was built in 1962 (nowadays Lembitu 1a) the school garden was moved a little bit further away, to the corner of Lembitu and Merimetsa streets.

In the 1970 it was found that the half-a-century old school building is worn out and dangerous. By the end of the decade the school was united with the new Lydia Koidula nimeline II keskkool. In time the usage of the building decreased and after the reindependence of Estonia the house was left empty.

Around the beginning of the new century a group of active people of Raeküla took it as their purpose to rekindle the old school building to life. The long journey has brought to us the situation that nowadays the old building hosts a community centre. Raeküla Vanakooli keskus (Raeküla Old School centre) bears the legacy of the initial function of the Lembitu 1 building in its name. The learning (hobby school and training centre) and social (cultural events, exhibitions, hobby activities, youth center) aspects are still alive. You are welcome to step in!