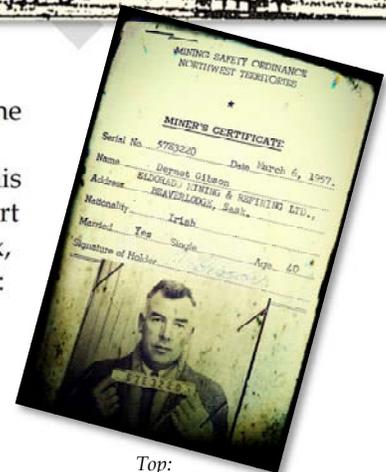


**XVII: LOVE'S GREAT ADVENTURES.
Pt. 2: COLD WAR ACCESSORIES: 1957-1962**

Although I had almost no information on Francis and Margot's Uranium City years when I set out (not even a photograph), the scale of their adventure warranted at least a sub-chapter from my earliest planning. Therefore, I am extremely grateful to the members of Facebook's 'Uranium City Friends' who exchange anecdotes of bygone years on almost daily basis. I am also especially thankful to those among them who helped me reach several of the couple's former acquaintances. Throw in a handful of memoirs, their Canadian adventure is now re-told.¹ Part 2 of this chapter thus elaborates those five years, particularly because this period of their lives in "the last boom town" is both unique and fascinating, especially in a period when uranium became such a valuable commodity globally.

My sleuthing rather began, however, with shipping manifests and immigration records, which helped date departures and reveal next steps. Like Sandor and Hildegard Garas before them,² Francis and Margot's journeys were separated by three months or so. He left the UK on March 15th, 1957³ for their home in Burnaby⁴ – a suburb of Vancouver on Canada's west coast – roughly two months before his stateless passport expired. He sailed from the southern English port of Southampton on a Cunard boat (the 'Scythia') bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia.⁵ His prior and forthcoming occupation was the same: 'miner.' Although the specific combination of letters and numbers preceding that word shown in the extract above isn't particularly meaningful, I presume it was a reference to an existing Eldorado contract or bulk labour program. Certainly, it bears no resemblance to the serial number seen on a fellow miner's certificate, right.⁶ Issued presumably on their first day at work, I imagine employees kept their photo ID's with themselves at all times during working hours in case of accident, but also to enter the mine.



Top:
Question 25 of Francis' immigration certificate made clear his intended occupation.

Bottom:
Upon arrival to Eldorado Mining, he'll have picked up his photo id, like Dermot Gibson.

¹ Uranium City Friends, online at: facebook.com/groups/4168822363

² Both sailed from Liverpool to Quebec, Sandor on July 23rd, 1953 while Hildegard and their two year old daughter Gabriela (born March 7th, 1951) sailed on October 27th. *N.b. The ship's manifest (retrieved via Ancestry.com) reveals Sandor's home address was 222, Blackburn Rd, in Haslingden, Lancashire (renowned in its day for its stone quarrying and cotton industry – see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haslingden). His profession was that of 'Tunnel Fitter,' which his Canadian immigration certificate (No. 296544 of Jul. 31, 1953) also notes, while his wife and daughter's address on departure was 171, Walmersley Road in Bury. Hildegard was listed as a 'cotton worker' in the ship's manifest, which also indicated she and Gabriela held Austrian passports. As for their destination, Sandor was bound for 'IMOP' at Burns Lake, British Columbia, 600km north of Vancouver, still today a hub for the mining industry (see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burns_Lake). Sandor travelled on a stateless passport (issued London, February 16th, 1951 and valid for three years). He travelled across the country via Canadian Railways.*

³ March 15th bears significance because between 1927 and 1951 and since 1989 it commemorates the outbreak of the 1848 Hungarian uprising against the Austrian Habsburgs and is celebrated as a national holiday.

⁴ More specifically 2113 Merritt Avenue. For more on Burnaby, see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burnaby

⁵ Immigrant record No. 257735 of March 24, 1957.

⁶ Courtesy of Marie Gibson/Uranium City Friends at: facebook.com/groups/4168822363/posts/1015720070982364

Francis made landfall on March 24th, after which he continued his journey to British Columbia with Canadian National Railways.⁷ He'll have found his buddy, Sandor, meanwhile had switched from miner to mechanic, while Hildegard had moved on from being a cotton worker to nurse's aid.⁸

Officially, he arrived with 100 CAD in his pocket. But if Francis had travelled with just a little cash, then it was Margot who was meant to bring the life savings. However, not long before she left, tragedy struck when her handbag was stolen. Although the notion of carrying so much money about is surprising nowadays, as late as the mid-1950s, only about a third of the UK's working population had their own bank accounts: deposit banking was for the middle class.⁹

Margot's own passage (on an English passport) followed on June 5th. Her departure point was Greenock in Glasgow, and her destination, the Port of Montreal. She too sailed with Cunard, as a tourist, on the '*Sylvania*.'¹⁰

I wonder what went through her mind as she shut the gate at 39, Grange Avenue where I suspect she had boarded with friends those last few months, a stone's throw from the home she'd shared with Francis in Chapeltown Road, Leeds. Relief, sadness and excitement at the adventure which lay ahead, I suppose. But at the same time, she was leaving a son behind.



Above:
Rendezvous in Edmonton?
The Yale Hotel was a
popular stop-off point.
Shown here in 1944
Source: [Spacing Vancouver](#)



Left:
Love's Great Adventurers, summer 1956.
"She was a lovely lady and Francis a real comedian
at times," future friend, Isabel Ormandy

Whether Francis met Margot in Vancouver or Montreal that June, I imagine he'd already reported for duty at *Eldorado Mining and Refining Ltd.* by April 1st. To get to Uranium City, both he (and she) would have likely taken the railroad to *Edmonton* in *Alberta*. They might just have boarded at its Yale Hotel – a popular stop-off point for miners,¹¹ before flying 500 nautical miles northeast to Uranium City's 'Municipal' or 'Beaverlodge Airport'.¹² Generally, there weren't many alternatives (see textbox overleaf).

⁷ Immigrant record No. 257735 of March 24, 1957. N.b. "Most Canadians, between 1930 and 1960, relied on the railways and highways to move around." *Eldorado. Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 351

⁸ Ancestry.com, which also indicates they were registered voters in 1962 whilst living at the same address.

⁹ *Austerity Britain: 1945-1951*. David Kynaston. Bloomsbury, 2007. Pg. 438

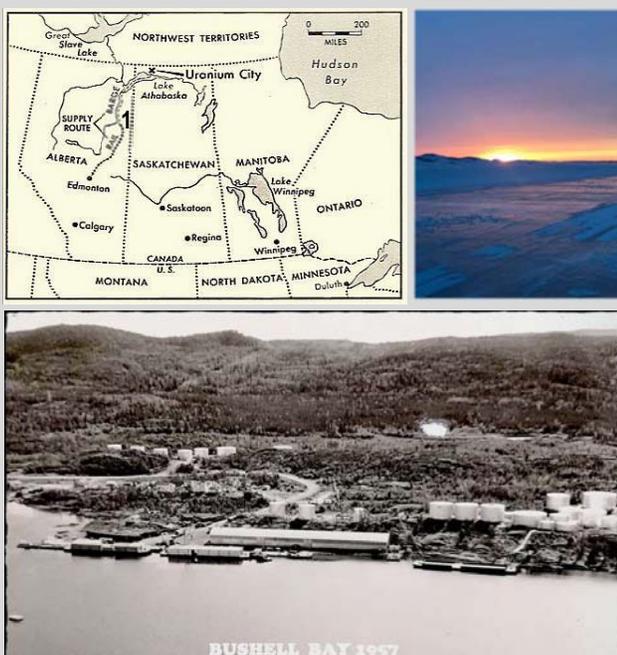
¹⁰ She was one of 728 passengers who sailed via Cobh (Ireland), Halifax and Quebec, the ship having begun its journey in Liverpool. See: pier21.ca/research/immigration-records/ship-arrival-search

¹¹ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 59

¹² See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium_City,_Saskatchewan

17.10: Getting into - and out of - 'UC'

Besides flying, there weren't (and still aren't) many alternatives for reaching Uranium City. It really is that remote! There is no all-weather road connecting the township with the main highway network and railways are an irrelevance in the Canadian north. From Edmonton one could ride the train 300 miles north over 12 hours until the railhead at 'Waterways' (see '1' on the map). But then one needed a boat or a barge. That would bring you as far as Bushell (Black) Bay (pictured right), about six miles southwest of Uranium City,¹ while a taxi completed the journey.² But the water was only navigable between June and September, while October marks the end of navigation north for the next seven or eight months,^{3a} while overland entry only becomes possible once the 50 mile winter ice road,^{3b} which transits Lake Athabasca opens up – a nerve wracking experience according to locals. Strictly speaking then, between freeze-up and break-up, getting to Uranium City required an airplane.^{3c}



Sources:

1. *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 22
2. *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake*. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 155
3. *Eldorado*. Canada's National Uranium Company. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 353 (a), 351 (b), 368 (c)

Images:

Top Left: Uranium City at the 'top shelf' of Saskatchewan, retrieved from: *The Uranium Rush is on in Athabasca*. LIFE. Vol. 33, No. 7, Aug. 18, 1952. Online via Google Books [here](#). Pg. 16. Top Right: Lake Athabasca ice road, photographed Feb. 2020 by Richard Powder and shared via Uranium City Friends. Facebook group, online at: [facebook.com/groups/4168822363](https://www.facebook.com/groups/4168822363)
 Bottom: Uranium City's port (including oil tanks) in 1957 at Bushell Bay just off Lake Athabasca (shared via Uranium City Friends)

By the time of their arrival, Uranium City and District boasted a population of some 4,400 inhabitants¹³ and "was a very respectable little town with all the necessary amenities to provide a good living environment for the family," recalled Rita Holmgren Anderson.¹⁴

It was not always like that, however. In the early days, she continues "Living in a mining town was a bit rough" ... "With three to five thousand miners around the area with only a few young girls ... on a Saturday night there were lonely, hard-working young and old miners everywhere in town."¹⁵

They "came in all sizes, colours and different nationalities from around the world," she continues. "They had left their man-dominated world and were now trying to pick up girls looking for company and an escape from the drudgery of work at the mine ... "Liquor flowed like water ... , cheap wine ... flowed so freely." ... They chased anything with a skirt that looked relatively female - young, old, single, married, unkempt or ugly - they were in pursuit" ... It "was not friendly."¹⁶

¹³ *Gunnar Uranium Mine: Canada's Cold War Ghost Town*. L.L. Schramm. Saskatchewan Research Council, 2017. Pg. 36

¹⁴ *Yesterday. Otaakosihk*. Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 143

¹⁵ *Yesterday. Otaakosihk*. Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 125, 101

¹⁶ *Yesterday. Otaakosihk*. Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 101, 68, 69

According to Ben McIntyre, who wrote *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town* following his time there, it “was... probably one of the last truly frontier mining boom towns ... until more stable family and home life supplanted sterile and lonely bunkhouse living.”¹⁷



Above:
A ‘Western Flyer’ bus which ran between Eldorado and Uranium City.
Source: [Owen Acker](#)

Below:
Eldorado’s (boarded) bunkhouses, shown here in 1989, with Beaverlodge Lake behind.
Source: [The Star Phoenix: Uranium City over the years. Sept. 9th, 2015.](#)



“The development of the new Verna ore body in the mid-1950s added considerably to the mine’s reserves even though the new ore was of a somewhat lower grade.”²² However, it was here, at the Verna mine shaft, that Francis joined the many others in drilling and blasting, according to former colleagues.

The mine at which Francis would soon work – also referred to as ‘The Beaverlodge Operation’¹⁸ – lay seven kilometres east of Uranium City (see ‘1’ on the upper map opposite). It was generally reached by bus – for those who didn’t travel by ski-doo or later by car¹⁹ – that was operated by Uranium City Bus Lines.

However, since senior staff and single employees could also be housed at the mine site,²⁰ I imagine Francis began his tenure in one of Eldorado’s bunkhouses (pictured beneath), located at the company’s townsite at the Beaverlodge Lake shore (see ‘5’ opposite).

The mine’s principal site entrance as well as milling workshops were located along a section of the St. Louis fault known as the Fay shaft (see ‘6’). However, the faultline ran northeast from Beaverlodge Lake (‘4’) on up to the Verna shaft, named after the nearby lake (see ‘8’ in the aerial photograph opposite). “At times the fault was little more than a crack in the rock ... [but] nestled up against the fault was ore.” Needless to say, “the mine was extensive,” although the “ore body ... at Beaverlodge, [was] rambling and irregular.”²¹

¹⁷ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 32

¹⁸ See: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eldorado_Mine_\(Saskatchewan\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eldorado_Mine_(Saskatchewan)) and [.../Eldorado Mining and Refining Limited](#). N.b. Eldorado is today known as Cameco. See also: cameco.com

¹⁹ “In 1959, not everyone in Uranium City owned or had access to a car.”

See: *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 187-8

²⁰ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 78

²¹ *Eldorado. Canada’s National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 317-318, 288.

²² *Eldorado. Canada’s National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 322

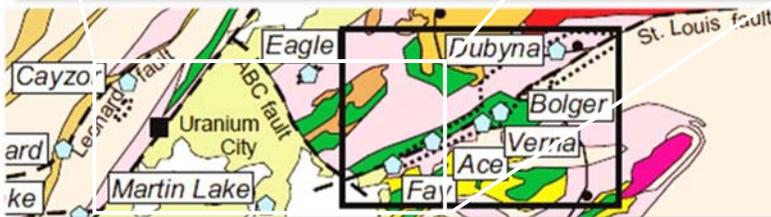


Top:

UC'ers daily commute:

From Uranium City (1), one bussed along the north side of Martin Lake (2), across the portage (3) then the northern side of Beaverlodge Lake (4), past the Eldorado townsite (5) and on to the Beaverlodge Operation: the 'Fay' (6), 'Ace' (7) and 'Verna' shafts. Also note Beaverlodge Airport's runway north of the mine site.

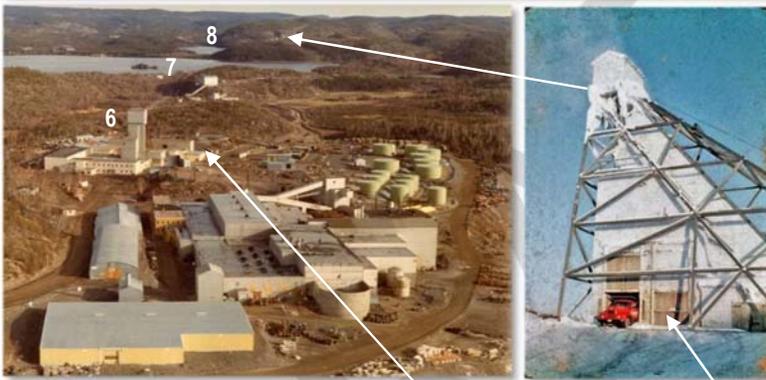
Source: mindat.org.



Middle:

An expanded map showing the vicinity's mines

(and fewer lakes, e.g. Melville). Source: *Bedrock Geology of the Ace-Fay-Verna-Dubyna Mines Area of the Beaverlodge uranium district*. K.E. Ashton & C. Norman. SGS, *Summary of Investigations*. 2012. Vol. 2. Pg. 2. N.b. By 1957 there were 18 operating uranium mines in Canada ... 21 ... in 1958 ... 11 ... operating in the Uranium City area." Source: Schramm, pg. 17.



Far Left:

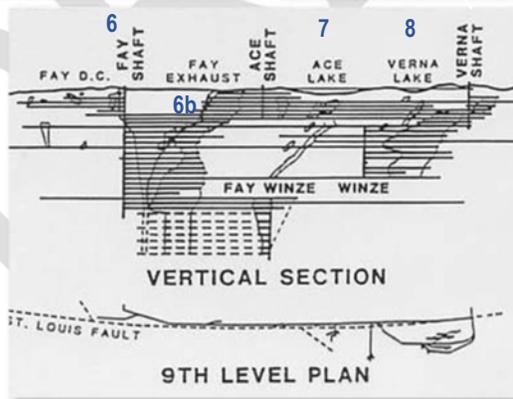
The Eldorado company site and its enclosed Fay shaft headframe (6) - the tall feature to the left of the image surrounded by offices and workshops - with Ace Lake and its shaft (7) visible 'behind' and Verna Lake (8) beyond.

Source: n/a

Left:

The Verna headframe in 1957/1958 which provided shaft access to the mine, down to the various levels. The ice at the top was caused by upcast warm air.

Source: n/a



Bottom:

Cross-sectional view of the Fay, Ace and Verna shafts, also showing Ace and Verna lakes.

Typically, fresh air is cast down a mine shaft for the purpose of ventilation and cooling (see 6a: 'Fay D.C.' - or Down Cast). The air then exits via an exhaust (6b). N.b. The 'winze' eventually connected the Fay, Ace and Verna shafts

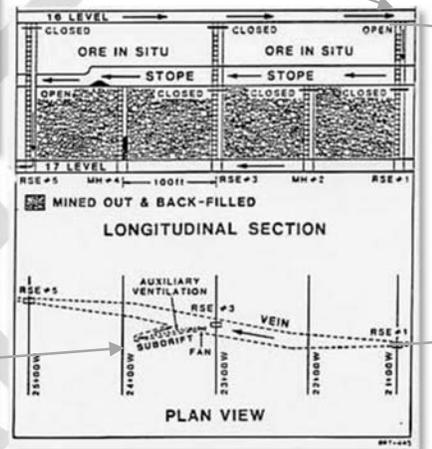
Source: [Uranium City Friends](http://UraniumCityFriends)

I understand that Francis was a 'stope' miner, which meant he would drill holes (like that pictured in the lower image below), plant explosives and create underground spaces (stopes) or near-horizontal passageways (called drifts),²³ with the resulting ore (rock, laden with uranium – also known as 'muck'²⁴) being loaded onto carts and sent up to the surface for milling.²⁵ He worked under a team leader called *Lars Miner* in section '644,' while Frank Fulop, who went on to become a close friend, was in '6B8.' The mine captain was *Herb McDowell*.

Top:
Verna shaft station (unconfirmed), where miners would gather to lunch or in case of an accident or fire. N.b. The graffiti says: "Evil Grows in the Dark." Commented Larry Fiss: "That was painted so us underground slaves didn't turn the lights off and wrap up in some burlap and have a short snooze."



Below:
An abandoned 'drift' within Verna (below), the cart rails evidently removed from the sleepers. Notes Mike Ricks, who served as Ventilation Engineer and later Projects Engineer at Eldorado from 1975 to 1980: "You can sort of make out the daily advance as it was developed, the bumps in the wall are each six foot round drilled, blasted and mucked out." Source: [Uranium City Friends](#)



Above Right:
The upper of the two diagrams illustrates a vertical cross-section of the Beaverlodge Operation between levels '16' and '17,' including a horizontal 'stope' or underground space as well as the vertical ventilation shafts, some 'open,' some 'closed.' The lower 'Longitudinal Section' diagram is an overhead (plan) view of the same uranium ore vein (the grey bracket to the right illustrating the same ventilation shaft in both diagrams).

Generally, the surrounding rock was stable enough not to collapse once the ore had been mined – although accidents still happened. And while some miners brushed off working 670 metres (2,200 feet) underground, in an ITN 'Roving Report' from late 1957, conditions were admittedly "not easy." It was warm and the mine lacked ventilation – and that was before the risks of dealing with uranium were properly understood. One miner in the clip added that down there, he'd "never experienced anything."²⁶ Eventually, "long-term studies of Eldorado miners ... showed a link to lung cancer," however.²⁷

²³ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoping but also: *Gunnar Uranium Mine: Canada's Cold War Ghost Town*. Laurier L. Schramm. Saskatchewan Research Council, 2017. Pg. 65, 143

²⁴ For more on stoping and muck removal see: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underground_mining_\(hard_rock\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underground_mining_(hard_rock)).

²⁵ Its average grade was 0.24 percent, meaning it had 2400 parts of Uranium per million parts of rock (the latter including pink calcite, pyrite and quartz). *Bedrock Geology of the Ace-Fay-Verna-Dubyna Mines Area of the Beaverlodge uranium district*. K.E. Ashton & C. Norman. SGS, *Summary of Investigations*. 2012. Vol. 2. Pg. 15. Online [here](#).

²⁶ Available online at:

gettyimages.be/detail/video/the-road-to-uranium-women-interviewed-about-dogs-sot-nieuwsfootage/828047622

²⁷ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 229

For many new arrivals, 'UC' (as it was popularly known) made for a lonely start, not least because you were so far from family. Thanks to my interactions with *Uranium City Friends*, however, I learned that Francis quickly grew popular with his fellow Hungarians, one of whom was *Les Ormandy*. His wife, Isabel (pictured on pg. 980), kindly reached out to me after I posted an appeal to the popular Facebook group which brings together all those with a connection to the community. Originally from the UK, she recalled that Francis had worked alongside her husband, besides a young man called Frank Fulop, and others including Geza (Gus) Rosta, Les Farkas and Mike Horvath.

In those early months, Francis will have passed the time above ground either at Eldorado's recreation hall or improved his strike rate at its bowling alley (because in April it snows every fourth day with as much as 19 inches falling on average that month).²⁸ He may also have exchanged letters at the post office or spent his first earnings at the on-site company store.

Yet for some single men, sometimes the loneliness of bunkhouse living got to be too much. Indeed, at a remote company mine townsite called Gunnar (about 20km southwest of UC as the crow flies, on the shores of neighbouring Lake Athabasca), one Irishman hung himself.²⁹

Thanks to Isabel, I got to know plenty more about Francis, courtesy of Frank Fulop, whom she introduced me to. He'd arrived in UC around the same time as Margot's husband, in March 1957. Just 22 at the time, he was a generation younger than Francis (himself 42), but like him, also hailed from *Ujpest*, north Budapest. Via messaging service, *WhatsApp*, the now 86 year old generously shared his time with reflecting on '*Feri Bacsi*' (Uncle Feri) whom he said "*was a fellow countryman of mine, who talked lots about the family he was from. He was always a good natured chap.*"

Fulop, in fact, had grown up a few blocks away from Francis' own home, adding that "*He was well proud to be from Ujpest.*" Certainly, both had left their homeland under adverse conditions, which gave them plenty in common from the get-go.



Top:

The Eldorado Mine Café, 1957.

Source: [NWT Archives/Bart Hawkins fonds.](#)

Bottom:

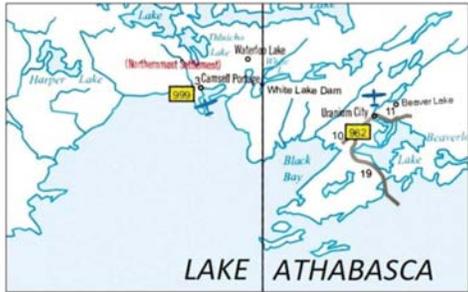
The extent of the Eldorado township, beach and docks, with the same bunkhouses (seen on pg. 932), now seen from the opposite side, in the centre of the picture.

Source: Richard Poworski via [Uranium City Friends](#)

²⁸ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium_City

²⁹ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story.* Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 64

As the map below shows, Beaverlodge Lake is situated close to the eastern end of the great Lake Athabasca, which at 280 kilometres long, 50 kilometres wide and 124 metres deep is Canada's eighth largest³⁰ and the world's 22nd largest. An important



feature of the neighbourhood, its name “derives from the [native] Cree language, and means ‘where there are reeds.’ ... The north was the preserve of the Indians, the fur traders,”³¹ with 350 *Status* – or registered – *Indians* (also known as *First Nations*) and 300 *Metis* living in the entire lake region in 1951. Here in the lake's vicinity, local women created traditional intricately beaded jackets, moccasins and jackets from moosehide or caribou, chewing the hide over two or three days to soften it.³²



Closer to Eldorado, the beach at Beaverlodge Lake hosted a recreation centre (just visible at the foot of the lower image on the previous page), while on the lake's far side (about 10km as the crow flies) was Beaverlodge Mountain (pictured left), surrounded by willows, alders and steep granite slopes.

Above:
Beaverlodge Mountain as seen from the lake of the same name.

Bottom:
Looking out to Lake Athabasca from Beaverlodge Mountain.



Normally the ice didn't break up on Lake Athabasca until late May (and in some areas not even until mid-June), although the weather will have probably been spring-like before Margot's arrival too. But should Francis have ventured for a refreshing swim, or a climb to the opposite 290 metre peak, he'll have gained a view across Athabasca (see bottom photo left), which on a clear day included its sand dunes forming a thin golden line on its southern shore (see image opposite). Spanning one hundred kilometres or so, the dunes make up the “largest active sand surface in Canada”³³ and “contains the largest area of active dunes in the high latitudes.”³⁴

³⁰ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story.* Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 85

³¹ *Eldorado. Canada's National Uranium Company.* Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 278, 279

³² *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story.* Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 131, 67

³³ *Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park.* Saskatchewan Parks, Government of Saskatchewan. See:

tourismsaskatchewan.com/provincialpark/1414/athabasca-sand-dunes-provincial-park#sort=relevancy

³⁴ *History of High Latitude Dune Fields.* S.A.Wolfe, in Reference Module in *Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences*, 2014. See: sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/dune-field

Speaking of Margot, on June 11th, 1957, she reached Montréal, thus returning to north American soil after a hiatus of 26 years.³⁵ Unfortunately I must wait until April 2024 to access her immigration record and learn more of her immediate plans.³⁶ However, together with Francis, she was one step closer to realising their 'American Dream.' Traveling overland, I imagine she'll have reached Vancouver or even Edmonton within a week or so.

If ever there was a good time to move to UC, it was then. Not only was June and July typically snow-free, but the summer is characterised by gorgeous temperatures. Thanks to those extra hours of sunshine, the locale enjoys an average high of 21.3 degrees Celsius in July – in July 1984, UC reached a high of 34.7°C, a record which stood until June 30th, 2021, when 38.0°C was reported!³⁷

"Summers were intense, short and hot," wrote Patricia Sandberg in her memoir entitled *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake*,³⁸ while Cree-local, Rita Holmgren Anderson, complements: "The midnight sun has a way of calling you," adding that "hard-core miners became relaxed in the slow easy-going way of doing business that goes along with living in the north."³⁹ Nights may have been still, with "no streetlights to guide you but a world of nature holding you close."⁴⁰



Top:
Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park.
Source: [ImageRae Photography](#)

Middle:
Flying into Beaverlodge Airport, 1994
Source: Vince Kreiser via [Uranium City Friends](#)

Bottom:
Entering Uranium City – the bridge spanned Fredette Creek (see '1' on the map on pg. 933) as you arrived from the airport side (east). 1957.
Source: [uraniumcity-history.com](#)



³⁵ See: pier21.ca/research/immigration-records/ship-arrival-search

³⁶ That is, 20 years after her death.

³⁷ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium_City#Climate

³⁸ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake*. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 139

³⁹ *Yesterday*. Otaakosihk. Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 120, 62. N.b. Sunset and sunrise on June 21st is at 2238 and 0355 respectively which means that although the sun sets, civil twilight (when the sun is up to six degrees below the horizon) occurs from 2238 until 0013, before nautical twilight (when the sun is between six and 12 degrees below the horizon) occurs until 0219, after which civil twilight returns until sunrise. See: timeanddate.com/sun/@6172763

⁴⁰ *Yesterday*. Otaakosihk. Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 111



The sun looks to have been a regular on July 1st: Dominion Day, while Main Street, which the parade which went up “*was really wide and it made you feel like you were in the old west*” (anon.)

Images: uraniumcity-history.com

July 1st also heralded ‘Dominion Day,’ a parade with floats that was held through the town centre, lending a carnival atmosphere that will have been a great opportunity for making friends. Margot will have certainly come across all walks of life. Ben McIntyre in *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*, referred to “a solid German woman” named *Frau Storm*, who hosted the only hotel, bar and restaurant in the early days of the city on Second Street North (see map on pg. 940). The restaurant had a long grey counter with red stools where miners would drift in and out all afternoon. I daresay Margot also got to exchange a little Yorkshire dialect with UC’s postmaster, Arthur Hardman, who hailed from Leeds and managed the ‘Canada Post’ office (indicated on pg. 940 as No. 17) throughout her tenure.⁴¹ That said, writing remained Margot’s weak point, Amsterdam-based niece Irene recalling she would mail her sister once every other month or so, typically a card with “*All’s fine.*”

Within Part 1 of this chapter, I’ve already explained how Margot and Francis were part of a wave of white Europeans that emigrated to Canada that decade. Between 1950-1957, that list was topped by British, Italian and German citizens.⁴² Many displaced persons were invited by companies in the resource industries to travel ‘under contract’ or ‘bulk labour’ programs, through which workers generally committed to a specific period and pre-set wages – often lower than industry standards.⁴³

Nevertheless, it was a time when “*The boom was in full flight,*” according to Harold Grasley, who grew up in Uranium City and is one of the few left, responsible today for its airport and highways. He continues:

“Many people displaced in Europe saw the mines as a great chance of starting over ... show[ing] up here with no more than a shopping bag for luggage. Many thought this would be a cash windfall to return to their homelands. But as with all of us, we fell in love with the country and the people.”

⁴¹ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 256. N.b. He moved to Canada in 1930, i.e. several years before Margot arrived in the UK, and managed the post office between 1954 and 1970.

⁴² See: prezi.com/ifvxz6z-gkix/immigration-to-canada-in-the-1950s-and-1960s. N.b. Patricia Sandberg observes that Italians and Germans were ‘enemy aliens’ until 1947 and 1950 respectively, after which the rules were relaxed and they too could apply to immigrate to Canada. *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 101

⁴³ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 101

Margot and Francis' arrivals were perfectly timed in the context of Uranium City's short history too. "In October 1953, ... estimate[d] ... reserves and annual production by the six most likely mines in Ontario and Saskatchewan [anticipated that] deliver[y] ... of uranium oxide to the Americans ... would rise [until] ... 1958, peak for a couple of years, and then dwindle ... in 1962 – the last year in which the United States Atomic Energy Commission guaranteed purchase."⁴⁴

Theoretically set for five prosperous years, the first thing the couple must have done was to set up home. Scouring the annotated picture at the top of the following page, I gleaned a clue as to one possible billet: Building No. 8 occupied by 'Damgaard Offices and Apartments.' The site would certainly have been ideal, given its location in the commercial heart of the city: opposite the post office, also the waiting room and terminal for those taking the (several times daily) bus to Eldorado – a godsend, because until mains water arrived, it was the only place to take a hot shower!

Lauraine Syvenky, a Uranium City Friends' member, kindly lent some detail: she and her parents had lived briefly in one of the building's four apartments in September 1957, having arrived in July of that year. Clearly intended as temporary digs for newcomers (with a shared bathroom no less), she added that their family moved to a house after three or four months. Twelve years old at the time, upon asking, Lauraine also confirmed, Margot "looks familiar."⁴⁵

Alternately, the couple may have taken advantage of rental accommodation which "would prove extremely important to the future of Eldorado and of other local mines" as it helped ensure "a stable inner core of employees."⁴⁶ At any rate, Frank Fulop confirmed that together, the pair had never been based out of UC, at the Eldorado company town site.⁴⁷

It won't have taken Margot long to get acquainted with the settlement's shops and entertainment facilities, even if "by 1958" they served a population of "5,500 inhabitants (some of whom lived outside the town at mine sites)".⁴⁸ The city's two movie theatres must have been a particular hit, the Aurora – being sister to the Roxy theatre (and No. 5 in the annotated picture overleaf)⁴⁹ – lay opposite the Hudson's Bay Company store (No. 23), which was a magnet to locals. All manner of goods could also be ordered from the 'Simpsons-Sears' outlet. There were also three weekly local papers to choose from, including 'The Uranium Era', the 'Northland News' and 'The Uranium Times,' which will have been useful for seeing what's what and who's who.



Two of Uranium City's three local papers, April 1957.

Source: uraniumcity-history.com

⁴⁴ Eldorado. *Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 336

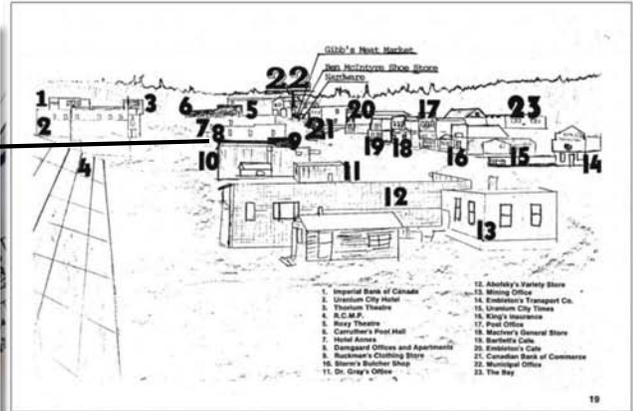
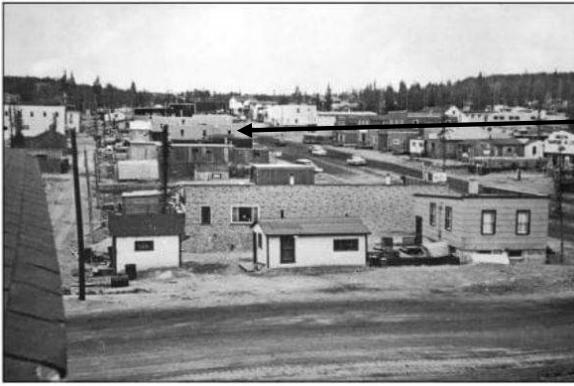
⁴⁵ Commenting on a Uranium City Friends' post of February 13, 2020, online [here](#).

⁴⁶ Eldorado. *Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 304

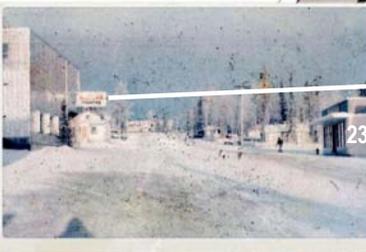
⁴⁷ Personal correspondence of April 21, 2019

⁴⁸ Eldorado. *Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 304

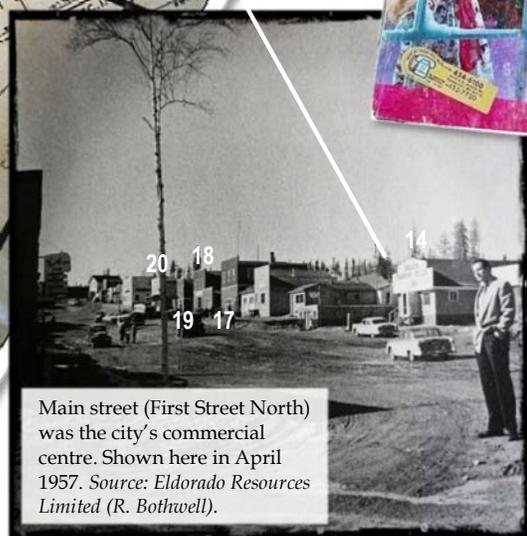
⁴⁹ See: cinematreasures.org/theaters/23576



Top Left and Right:
Looking northwest from Fredette Road (see 'X' on the map, far right) at the properties between Main Street (First Street North) on the right and the alley that lay behind those units along Uranium Road.
Source: 'The History of Uranium City and District.' Pg. 18-19. Online [here](#).



The hotel went up in flames on October 10th, 1958.
Source: [Prairie-Towns.com](#)



Main street (First Street North) was the city's commercial centre. Shown here in April 1957. Source: [Eldorado Resources Limited \(R. Bothwell\)](#).

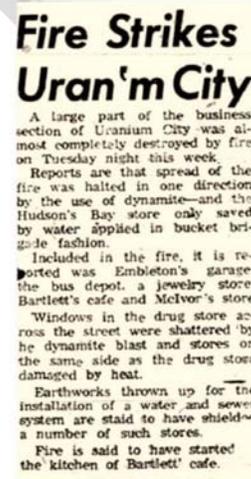
Sources: [Andrea Fiss](#) via Uranium City Friends (Sears store), [Andy Schultz](#)' Flickr collection of city photos [here](#), and others.

By September, the threat of winter lay just around the corner. Nevertheless, that was not the only phenomenon to observe in the late summer that year: namely, the downtown streets were torn up to install water pipes.

According to McIntyre, Uranium City's location was "selected because it was a level sandy area, free of perma-frost, where basements could be dug and sewer and water lines could ... be laid below the frost-line."⁵⁰ When that time came, however, getting from one side of the street to another meant a detour of almost 500 metres to an untouched intersection, because of the size of the trenches.

"The inconvenience was endured without rancour by most residents, who looked forward to water coming from a tap rather than dipping it from a 45 gallon drum in the kitchen," continued McIntyre. "What's more, the prospect of flush toilets replacing a trip to the outhouse in minus forty degree weather was looked forward to with something approaching uninhibited delight!"⁵¹

Come mid-September, Margot and Francis probably got their first real taste of 'wild west' living, when a serious fire broke out at a café called Bartlett's (pictured to the left in the lower photo on pg. 938 and No. 19 in the annotated picture on the previous page), followed by the Uranium City Bus Lines building. After that, the fire brigade's water trucks ran empty. Lauraine Syvenky said she remembered it well, having "lived across the street in Damgaard building." Another store called MacIver's was then lost (pictured to the right in the lower photo on pg. 938, also No. 18), followed by the so-called Embleton Building (the Café at No. 20). Ben McIntyre, who witnessed it all, wrote: "The updraught of super-heated air from the blaze sent fiery brands high into the air. Small fires began appearing in several places throughout the town ... On the roofs of every building across the street from the fire, and in a one block radius, people stood with buckets of water and mops, and immediately doused any sparks which chanced to land."⁵² Thanks to the endeavour of Albert Embleton, the city's Post Office (adjacent to MacIver's) was narrowly saved.



Wild West Living
Source:
News of the North,
Yellowknife publication,
Sept. 5, 1957
Source:
[Uranium City Friends](#)

Not long afterwards, the UK's ITN were in town to film its 'Roving Report: The Road to Uranium.' Within that clip, which I've been privileged enough to view, one can also see the trenched streets. The newscast aired on October 16th, 1957,⁵³ and features Uranium City's beer parlour, lumberjacks at work, street scenes, hotel, citizens' views on the virtues of living so far north, including the opportunity to make money from mining. There is also an interview with 'Mr. Uranium' himself – Gus Hawker – who is also the subject of the textbox overleaf.

⁵⁰ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 51

⁵¹ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 179-180

⁵² *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 180-181

⁵³ See various rushes from the report online at this [link](#).

17.11: 'Mr. Uranium' – the Cotswolds-born outspoken local

Margot and Francis will surely have run into the outspoken, eclectic and philosophical, *Augustus Hawker*. Born in the Cotswolds in the UK in 1901, 'Gus' arrived in Montreal after a ten-day sail in the early 1920s with not much more than ten cents in his pocket, having deserted his fiancé.

He tried farming and settling down in neighbouring Alberta during the depression, but after his crops failed (and another would-be marriage), he tried trapping squirrel. In 1950, he moved to Goldfields, southeast of Uranium City and set up a store. He lived with a woman for eleven years and her five kids, before marrying the eldest (the marriage lasted only a short while).

Obviously, Gus was never afraid to try something new. He was always where the action was. After hearing about the uranium strikes being made in the area in 1951, he moved in, opening Uranium City's first store – in a tent, trading with the native Indians and prospectors. By the time Margot and Francis arrived, he was based in an original log building, covered with plywood (shown below). His general store sold everything from fur pelts to gas, vegetables and meat, handicrafts and trinkets, coffee and sugar. But he also staked and sold properties – and established several mining companies too.

In 1952, the British newspapers dubbed him *Mr. Uranium* during his return visit – to see the Queen. In 1957, he found himself featured in ITN's *'Roving Report: The Road to Uranium.'*

During the late 1960s, Hawker completed a book about his time in Uranium City, "telling exactly how life has treated me and not how I would have liked it to be." It was to be called either *'Blood, Flesh and the Devil or The Undaunted North'* and was slated to be published after his death (July 1979) – so that those mentioned in the book couldn't sue him. It has yet to be released. Meanwhile his 'museum' store was torn down in the late autumn of 1981. In his obituary, it was noted that Gus had led enough lives for half a dozen people.



Sources:

'Pioneer with a Dream' by Therese Jarzab as well as 'Gus Hawker' both in 'X. Uranium City Oldtimers,' within *'The History of Uranium City and District.'* Candu High School (Class 10B), Uranium City, 1982. Pg. 60-61. Online at: uraniumcity-history.com/memorabilia/history-uc-district-booklet.

Images:

Top: *The Uranium Rush is on in Athabaska.* LIFE, Vol. 33, No.7, 18 Aug. 1952.

Online [here](#). Pg. 17; Bottom: Gus Hawker's store at the foot of Uranium Road, retrieved from: gwot.accesstomemory.org/n-1992-254-0341



With the nights rapidly growing longer than the days, it wouldn't be long before the region's many lakes froze over. Typically, that happened at the end of October, which also drew to an end the 15-week barge season.⁵⁴ Lake Athabasca normally froze over completely in December,⁵⁵ which saw a resumption of the delivery of supplies, thanks to the ice road, which helped to diversify one's diet once more.

That first winter at civilisation's frontier will no doubt have been a test of stamina for our intrepid couple. Wikipedia tells me that November would typically see 48.3 inches of snowfall (usually it snowed every other day), while temperatures would average a low of -31.9°C in January (the coldest ever recorded was -48.9°C on January 15th, 1974 – and again on February 7th, 2021).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Gunnar Uranium Mine: Canada's Cold War Ghost Town.* L. L. Schramm. Saskatchewan Research Council, 2017. Pg. 28

⁵⁵ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story.* Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 135

⁵⁶ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uranium_City

Being located nearby a large lake – some even called it an ocean⁵⁷ – the city also experienced constant winds, which meant wind chill was also a prominent factor in the winter months. Indeed, Uranium City recorded one of the coldest wind chill factors of any Canadian location, with -74°C being recorded on January 28th, 2002 (while an average of 34 days a year recorded wind chill below -40°C).



Northern Lights, Jan. 26, 2021.
Source: Samantha Louise, [Uranium City Friends](#).

Sunrise in the dead of winter meant it was up after 9am, and down by 1530.⁵⁸ To compensate, residents could savour the Northern Lights on clear nights.

Margot and Francis had literally let themselves in for a ‘cold war’! If summer had been bliss, winter brought a same everyday darkness and extended fog-dreary days that will have surely helped them understand why it was said “Canada lay outside Uranium City.”

Eventually, however, as Rita Holmgren Anderson noted, “The stuffed dormant air indoors during the long winter nights pushes the door open to the warm days.”⁵⁹ And when the time came, that must have been quite a relief for our pioneering couple, a year or so after their arrival.

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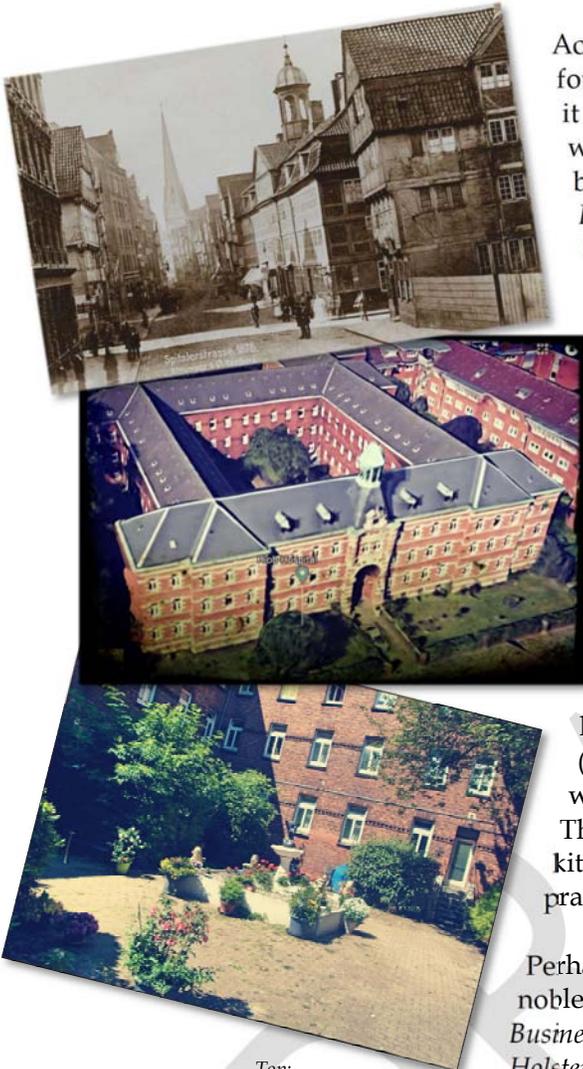
Turning back the clock to just over a year before Margot and Francis’ departures, in April 1956, Margot’s 72 year old mother left behind her Hamburg-based lodgings in *Landwehr*. In any one year during that decade, three million Germans moved house,⁶⁰ so it’s no real surprise that twelve months later, she was off again, from neighbouring *Elisenstraße, 11* into what appears to have been a freshly built apartment in nearby *Lubeckerstr. 15 e* – the same street she’d resided in back in 1941. Not many months later, in September 1957, she asked the *Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse Hamburg* (i.e. the city’s health insurance fund) what support she could expect for funeral costs. Clearly thinking ahead, but perhaps acting on medical advice too, within a further half year – February 1958 – she moved into the *Hiobs Hospital*.

⁵⁷ See: www.ominocity.com/2013/09/04/ghost-town-saskatchewan-uranium-city-photo-essay/

⁵⁸ Note that sunrise on December 21st is at 1012 and sunset is at 1612. See: timeanddate.com/sun/@6172763

⁵⁹ *Yesterday. Otaakosihk.* Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 120

⁶⁰ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 73



According to Wikipedia, the ‘hospital’ is a charitable foundation whose origins date back to 1505. In 1824, it was converted into a residential home for elderly women. Then, in 1884, it was rebuilt as a four-wing brick complex at *Burgerweide 25* in the district of *Borgfelde* (pictured below left) and has been a listed building since 2005.⁶¹

Nanny Tyralla’s home lay a kilometer or so due south of her last, close to the regional railway servicing *Bad Oldesloe* – her father’s birthplace – and *Lübeck*. Staying in that locale she’d more or less been in since 1939 surely brought her comfort, as well as the fact that the *Berliner Tor* S/U-bahn station – ideal for heading downtown – took just 10 minutes or so on foot.

Curiously, the move also heralded *Frau Tyralla’s* appearance in the city’s address book, with the 1959 issue telling us that her flat lay on the first floor of *Haus D* (pictured left). Hers was one of 40 or so whose sizes ranged from 25-45 square metres. These included a bedroom, living-room cum kitchen plus bathroom, modestly and practically equipped.

Bürgerweide	
Ein Gelände, das ehemals den Bürgern als Schmelzweide diente. (Ben. 1868)	
Bz.:	Hmb-Mitte, Stl.: Borgfelde ☒ 26
25 + Hiob-Hospital ☒	
Haus D:	
Hagena, Wwe., H.,	
Rentn. E	
Schoss, Gertr., Rentn. E	
Jührs, Emilie, Rentn. E	
Klöpper, Elise, Rentn. E	
Tyralla, Nanni, Rentn. I	
Burmester Wwe., F., Rentn. I	
Faber, Hedw., Rentn. I	
Gossen, Anna, Rentn. I	
Brommann, Chr., Schloss. II	
Rodewald Wwe., B.	II
School, Adele, Rentn. II	
Weber, Hermine, Rentn. II	

Perhaps she felt the miniature ‘castle’ befitted her noble senses – as historian *Hermann Hipp* wrote in *Business, Culture and Town Planning on the Elbe and Holstein*, the simple external appearance of the red-brick building and structure rekindles the memory of castles, town halls and Dutch neo-Renaissance.⁶²

The characteristic bell tower has its own story to tell, having belonged to the original hospital building (pictured above) in *Spitalerstraße*, close to Hamburg’s centre. More morosely, when I met the housekeeper in February 2000, he told me the bell typically tolled when a resident passed away. One can only wonder how that made incoming tenants feel!

Top:
Spot the bell tower: The *Hiobs Hospital* as it stood in *Spitalerstraße* in 1874.
Source: wiki.de/Hiobs-Hospital

Middle:
The reconstructed hospital – with the original bell tower – now at *Burgerweide 25*
Source: [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps)

Bottom:
The inner courtyard and *Haus ‘D’*, where *Frau Tyralla* had a first floor flat from 1958.
Source: wiki.de (Pauli-Pirat)

⁶¹ See: de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiobs-Hospital

⁶² Unconfirmed source: *Business, Culture and Town Planning on the Elbe and Holstein*. Hermann Hipp. Dehio, 1994

Although I imagine occupants' rents in Frau Tyralla's day were covered by the city of Hamburg (as it was when I visited in 2000), her move might also have been aided by Chancellor Adenauer's revision to West German pension policy. In January 1957, his administration had index-linked the level of old-age pensions to current wages and salaries, resulting in a massive one-off rise in value of 60-75 percent.⁶³ This enabled pensioners – an expanding proportion of the population – to automatically participate in the growing prosperity of the post-war boom.⁶⁴ And yet, Frau Tyralla's youngest granddaughter – Margot's niece, Alice – recalls how even during those years, coffee and butter were wrapped up in parcels that were sent to 'Mama' in Hamburg from her home in Amsterdam.



Left:
Alice pens a note in 1957, perhaps to her grandmother

Internationally speaking, West Germany grew in stature too, playing a major part in the process of European economic integration and the founding of the so-called Common Market in 1957, a European *Zollverein*, which helped to promote high trade growth (much as the Prussian customs union had done a century before).⁶⁵ The Treaty of Rome, which set up the European Economic Community (EEC) with six member states in March that year, was an historic event almost comparable to the unification of Germany in 1871. As West Germany cultivated closer ties with the USA, it also helped ensure America's commitment to the defence of Europe.⁶⁶ And as the leading power in the west, West Germany also developed a particularly close relationship with France too.⁶⁷



Below:
Brimming supermarket shelves in West Germany in 1958. By the end of the decade, the quantity and quality of food consumed rose greatly, with more money spent on fresh meat, good cheeses and sausages.
Sources: Rehder, Pg. 53 (image). Logemann. Pg. 80 (text)

Around the same time, however, West German public opinion grew more alarmed by the escalating arms race and the decision by the Americans and British to equip their forces in West Germany with tactical nuclear weapons – pointing East. Especially given that come the autumn of that year, Russia's own impressive developments in its nuclear and missile capabilities – with its arsenal thus pointing West – gave it apparent immunity from an American attack.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 59

⁶⁴ *After the Battles: The History of East German Society and its Sources. German History. The Journal of the German Historical Society*. Vol. 36, No. 4, OUP, December 2018. Pg. 614

⁶⁵ *Economy and State in Germany in the twentieth century*. Richard Overly. In *Germany Since 1800: A New Social and Economic History* edited by Ogilvie and Overly. Arnold Publishers, 2003. Pg. 268

⁶⁶ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 46

⁶⁷ *Questions on German History. Paths to Parliamentary Democracy*. German Bundestag, 1998. Pg. 363

⁶⁸ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 47

Concurrent with these developments – and having spent just over a year in the UK at RAF Bawdsey –in spring 1958, Margot’s eldest niece, Tiny, and her husband, Walter, learned that he was now going to be posted to West Germany, that is, *Rheindahlen*, just across from its border with Holland.

It almost sends a shiver down one’s spine, thinking about how Walter would be associated with missiles filled with uranium – conceivably mined by Francis – that were pointed toward *Leipzig* – and other former Tyralla haunts – and its residents. That would have included, for instance, Margot’s second cousin, *Vera*, and their family.



An 18 month-old Michael, in his mother’s childhood bedroom, while his parents await married quarters in conjunction with their next posting. Spring 1958.

While they awaited married quarters, Tiny returned to Amsterdam with 18 month-old Michael. Alice, now seven, played big sister to him, while Tiny very much remained the big sister to her. Not surprisingly, Michael’s Dutch flourished, although he also discovered his mother’s copy of ‘*Struwvel Peter*’ which Frau Tyralla had given as a gift in the 1930s. “It lay around at home,” recalled Alice, who told me: “It actually gave me the creeps, what with the long nails and fire and so on” (the main reason why I’ve not yet read it to my infant daughters)!

That summer, little sister, Alice, accompanied her mother on a visit to West Germany. Although it had been Tiny and Walter’s idea to take a short sight-seeing trip down the Rhine river, it was eventually paid for by a relative of the girls’ father, who visited from the US and chose to accompany them too. Sadly, it became memorable for all the wrong reasons to Alice. At the same time, it became a rather inauspicious return for Margot’s older sister, also named *Nanny*, to her *Heimat*.

Right: Alice and Nanny join Cor’s Carré Jubilee celebration, pictured here in the theatre’s *Koffiekamer*, November 1957 – an occasion also widely covered in the Amsterdam media (see below)



Husband Cor skipped the three-day family cutting (and not for the first time had he bailed on a family event, his and Nanny’s 25th wedding anniversary a year earlier – July 1957 – passing by unnoticed). On the other hand, his devotion to the day job was celebrated by his employer, who hosted his *Carré* jubilee in November 1957, and presented him with a television while the famous comedy duo, Snip and Snap gave him a radio. As for him visiting West Germany, comments he made in one of a series of articles that reflected on his long career with the theatre, made pretty clear what he thought of its people:

"Prior to the war, one had a lot to do with Germans as stage manager here at Carré, because they thought of themselves as the boss. But now they are even more aloof. Recently, I had trouble with a German during one of our revues on ice. The audience could see he was not doing his bit. So I told him: 'Get a move on, do you want the audience to see you slacking off?' He gave me a look as if to say: 'It's nothing to do with you.' But I am the stage manager after all and it's up to me to ensure the smooth running of things, something that by November 18th, [1957] I will have been doing in Carré for the last 25 years. 'He will not demean Cor Ridderhof,' I said to myself. 'He will do as he's told.'"⁶⁹

To be fair, Nanny *"did not want to go to Germany at all either,"* middle daughter, Irene, told me. *"I think much of this was due to the fact she was not that close to her mother."* Also, she'd departed Leipzig at 15.

Nevertheless, the excursion took in a slew of castles between Köln and Koblenz. Along the way they passed Düsseldorf too, where Nanny had lived briefly in 1922.⁷⁰ But there was no *"This was once my homeland,"* or *"I lived here for a short while, training to be an acrobat, before heading to the US."*



*Am Rhein.
Nanny
and Alice,
summer
1958*

I wondered whether Nanny had spoken German with the boat staff or locals, but I'm told it was Dutch with her family and a bit of English with Walter or the Ridderhof relative, *Fred Eikelboom*. For all intents and purposes, she was a tourist. If Margot had received a postcard, might she have been more intrigued? Or envious?

I came across an interesting story in March 2017, wherein the American author, whose Prussian grandmother – like mine – had grown up in Saxony would often be told that her origins were 'Prussia' rather than 'Germany' – because it did not carry the same stigma after the war.⁷¹

It certainly lends some insight. For instance, when the author would ask her mother for family history stories or details about her origins, she would say that their family was not important and would rather avoid speaking about its German heritage. She even got lashed out at, registering for ancestral membership because *"being German would never mean anything or have any advantages."*

Lilli Palmer, the German actress living in England, made a more joyful return in 1954, after a 20 year absence. Naturally I was curious how her experiences compared to Nanny's. She too faced great uncertainties about returning and found herself challenged not to cross-examine her former acquaintances and colleagues and ask whether they had been members of the Nazi Party or involved in some way in Hitler's evil regime. She also found that her ability to speak German had rusted, preferring to say (and believe) she was 'formerly German.' Perhaps most amusing of all, however, was when she drank real German coffee under a thick cosy and ate its apple cake. *"I haven't tasted that kind of apple cake for twenty years!"* she joked.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Cor Ridderhof trekt 25 aan de touwtjes in Carré*. November 1957 (specific source unknown).

⁷⁰ Nanny Tyralla's Leipzig-based *Einwohnermeldekarte*

⁷¹ *Reclaiming one's German heritage*. Elizabeth Ferguson. *The Leipzig Glocal*. March 30, 2017. Online [here](#)

⁷² *Change Lobsters - And Dance*. Lilli Palmer. Star Books, W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd, 1977. Pg. 245-255

Was there anything Nanny had particularly missed about Germany after she left or enjoyed upon her return? “Nothing” was Irene’s impression. I guess that by 1958, Leipzig too bore little meaning to her – even if it had been her and Margot’s birthplace. *Onkel Fritz* had only passed away as recently as 1952, but going further back, she had lost her brother, *Theo*, in 1929. Margot had even less connection to Leipzig, having moved to Berlin at the age of 13, before joining her sister in the US and then Holland. Now the sisters’ hometown lay on the far side of ‘the Iron Curtain.’ And as for Frau Tyralla’s perspective that summer, clearly, she too felt there was little left in the way of family, as her ‘Last Will,’ copied below, reveals.

17.12: *Mein Letzter Wille*

Hamburg, 28.8.1958

Ich Frau Nanny Erdmuthé, Frau Tyralla, geb. Hinsch bin am 27. September 1883 in Leipzig geboren, kein Sachse sondern Preusse. Früher wohnte ich in Berlin u. bin am 1. Februar 1939 von Berlin nach Hamburg gezogen, um näher am Hafen zu sein.

Ich bin in der Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse Hamburg, Verwaltungsstelle Borgfelde, Hamburg 26 Bethesdastr. 40 von der Landesversicherung aus als Kreigeswitwe u. beim Versorgungsamt Hamburg Altona, Palmaille 71 als Kriegswitwe vom 1. Weltkrieg. Zeichen: R II/4 Grundlichr. 285814

Auf meine Anfrage vom 7.9.57 hat mir die Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse Hamburg, am 11.9.57 mitgeteilt, dass ich D.M. 194,20 Sterbegeld bekomme.

Da meine Töchter im Ausland mit Ausländern verheiratet sind, so bekommt derjenige das Geld, wer die Rechnungen vorlegt, wenn ich tot bin. Das Rentenzeichen ist 30/1738 W/1883 bei der Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse Hamburg.

Meine ganzen Sachen, Kleider, Mäntel, Wäsche, Betten, 5 Koffer, Elektroherd, Elektro Raumheizgerät u.s.u. überhaupt alles, was ich besitze, gehört Frau Frieda Engelking, kein anderer Mensch hat ein Recht darauf. Da ich viele Schulden bei ihr habe und da sie so freundlich ist, mich verbrennen lässt u. beerdigen lässt, alles alles gehört Frau Frida Engelking, Hamburg 34 Am Gojenboom 39 I, I. Telef. 655908.

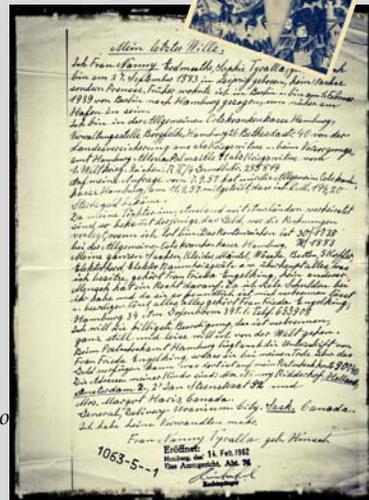
Ich will die billigste Beerdigung, das ist verbrennen, ganz still und leise will ich von der Welt gehen. Beim Postscheckamt Hamburg liegt auch die Unterschrift von Frau Frida Engelking, so dass Sie bei meinen Tode über das Geld verfügen kann, was dort ist auf mein Postscheckkonto 90740.

Die Adressen meiner Kinder sind:

- Mrs. Nanny Ridderhof, Holland, Amsterdam Z., 2' Jan Steenstraat 92 und
- Mrs. Margot Haris, Canada, General Delivery Uranium City, Sask. Canada.

Ich habe kein Verwandten mehr.

Frau Nanny Tyralla, geb. Hinsch



The document, despite its brevity and candour, has been a boon. It makes an identity statement. It refers to a close friend. It indicates when and why she left Berlin and moved to Hamburg. It shows that by summer 1958 she prepared to leave this life as a war widow. It reveals her possessions. And as mentioned above, it shows that besides her daughters, Frau Tyralla felt she had no other family left. Plus, it showed me that while my German origins feel for the most part distant – like the previously mentioned author – the family that had lived there had been nonetheless very real. And it illustrated how Margot could be reached.

The reference to *Frau Frida Engelking* – who was to handle Frau Tyralla's finances and meagre possessions after her funeral expenses had been settled meant I was able to determine she'd been my great grandmother's acquaintance from as early as 1951.⁷³

Perhaps most important of all, however, is Frau Tyralla's mention of her being Prussian and not Saxon ("*ich ... bin ... kein Sachse, sondern Preusse*"). In no uncertain terms, that reference to identity – which at the same time conveys character (see page 1 of this book) – ultimately gave me the title of this work: *Wandervögel – A Prussian Family's Passage Through Leipzig*.

Before Frau Tyralla would take leave of this world, however, there remained one milestone to be reached. A reunion with Nanny.

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It took until December 1958 for Tiny and Michael to catch up with Walter at JHQ (*Joint Headquarters*) *Rheindahlen*, in *Mönchengladbach, Nordrhein-Westphalia* – the main headquarters for British Forces Germany, which also served the NATO Northern Army Group.⁷⁴ This twist of fate, which saw a new generation of the family return to the *Heimat*, would lend their grandmother's twilight years more than a little sparkle.



Never one to shy away from the camera: 'Mutti' looks well at 75 (with or without glasses), in 1958. Decipherers please, for the last but one line! "98 XXX ich zur mich."

Nanny and Cor thought "*Nothing special*" of her move, however. "*It was work and that was that.*" Tiny's grandmother (who disdained the word '*Oma*') on the other hand was rather more excited. They had remained in touch since their reunion in Leeds eight years prior and just a month or so after completing her will, mailed the adjacent photo to Tiny, scribbling the following, somewhat undecipherable, text on the reverse: "*Meine Lieber Tiny, Walter und Michael, zur Eurigen Erinnerung, Eurige liebende Mutti. 98 ... mögt ich mir mich. Hamburg, den 19.IX.58.*" Perhaps her cover note will have been a reminder: "*You'll see. It's better here than in the UK!*"



Certainly, Tiny and family couldn't have moved to West Germany at a better time. Stable prices, impressive export growth and high levels of internal investment "turned the German economy in ten years back to the trajectory of high growth interrupted in 1914." And thanks to the constant flow of refugees from East Germany, the highly trained and willing labour force was constantly being boosted, meaning that full employment was reached in 1958. Between then and 1962, wage levels actually rose faster than productivity.⁷⁵

⁷³ See Part I, page 890. N.b. *Frieda Engelking's* address, according to Frau Tyralla's will – Am Gojenboom 39a – was not listed in the city's *Adressbücher* until 1960, when Ernst was listed a '*Tabakovertreter*.' From 1963, only Frieda was listed, but at Am Gojenboom 39b. Between 1967 and 1970, Ernst's listing reappears at 39a, where he is listed a '*Handelsvertreter*.' The telephone number is unchanged to that which Frau Tyralla lists in her will. Neither of the Engelkings are listed from 1973.

⁷⁴ See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/JHQ_Rheindahlen

⁷⁵ *Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 75, 74. N.b. Stalin's annual 'gift': DM 2.6 bn worth of trained labour ultimately providing the greatest capital input to the West Germany economy, although, labour shortages were still a subsequent and major problem until 1973, partly solved by recruiting '*Gastarbeiter*.'

By the late 1950s, a growing abundance of material goods had become central to the experience of everyday life in West Germany,⁷⁶ which meant that come the early 1960s, the country's citizens enjoyed the highest standard of living in Europe in terms of rising wages, price stability, disposable income levels and working hours (with the exception of the Scandinavians).⁷⁷

Of course, Tiny and family lived a somewhat sheltered, campus life, set apart from the everyday German existence. Nevertheless, she'll have observed the stability and improving quality of life about them – and participated. The Adenauer period was not just one of accelerated economic change, but also social, comparable to the years of 1870 to 1914. By the end of the fifties, a 'qualitative jump' into the 'consumer age' had taken place. Cities with their new skyscrapers became increasingly Americanised, while the spread of car ownership led to the growth of satellite towns, again on the American model.⁷⁸

This exciting period can also be compared to the 'Roaring Twenties' in America. American influence on both the organisation and culture of post-war West German industry was profound too, with American literature particularly sought after in the 1950s. Through films, jazz, rock 'n' roll, fashions, modern design, advertising, e.g. Coca-Cola and Lucky Strike cigarettes, American culture was all pervasive. Little wonder that by the end of the 1950s, a 'special path,' a cultural *Sonderweg*, was "an almost impossible one to follow" for West German youth, observed British historian, writer, and lecturer, David G. Williamson.⁷⁹

Jan L. Logemann, however, believes "Westernisation more accurately explains German transformation, than Americanisation." He notes that many German consumers rejected the promise of America's growing middle market well into the post-war decades, finding that increased material consumption was not the path to self-esteem or social respect.⁸⁰

Certainly, middle class Germans' ethos of consumption was more '*bürgerlich*', emphasising restraint, saving and buying only a few, high-priced but quality goods.⁸¹ Yet, it was not only the middle class's private savings that expanded dramatically at this time. Those belonging to old age and lower income groups did too (judging by her will, Frau Tyralla was the exception). Among younger generations, saving was no longer equated with frugality: instead of foregoing consumption, saving often meant to anticipate it.⁸²

⁷⁶ *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 73

⁷⁷ *Social policy and social welfare in Germany from the mid-nineteenth century to the present*. Peter Stachura. In *Germany Since 1800: A New Social and Economic History* edited by Ogilvie and Overy. Arnold Publishers, 2003. Pg. 244

⁷⁸ Car ownership was hardly a widely-shared consumer standard in West Germany, even by the early 1960s. Only by 1970 did a small majority of its households own a car. In 1955, the ratio of automobiles to inhabitants was about ten times higher in the US and in 1970 it was still roughly twice as high. *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 79

⁷⁹ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 74, 79, 80

⁸⁰ *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 4, 69

⁸¹ *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 9

⁸² *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 115-6

Such philosophy reminds me of my own upbringing: hardly surprising given that Nanny herself was both frugal and always financially accountable. Margot too had dedicated herself to saving while in the UK. I was struck therefore by the remarks of the president of the German savings bank association who in 1954 spoke out publicly against installment credit and a debt-centred lifestyle, which he regarded as 'unbourgeois.' "Prussia," he proclaimed, "grew through saving and not through consumer credit." The occasions I took credit to make a purchase requiring anything more than a month to pay back can probably be counted on one hand!

By invoking the language of Prusso-German nationalism in the era of the Wilhelmine empire, his statement suggested that not only class, but also national identity was seen as being threatened by an expansion of consumer credit. For many middle-class Germans, credit financing carried the notion of being something foreign, something "American."⁸³ Like Frau Tyralla, Nanny and Margot hadn't shaken off their Prussianness either then, I mused.

While in Rheindahlen, Tiny held down various jobs: at the camp school, for instance, in the local cinema as an usherette during the matinee sessions, or at the souvenir department of the NAAFI⁸⁴ in the late evenings. She would often take Michael along with herself too. The posting also enabled Tiny to rejuvenate her conversational German.

Six or so months later, in June 1959, Tiny and family were joined by sister Irene, who had been on long-term leave from *de Gruyter* – the local supermarket where she'd worked herself to the top – since September 1958. Like Tiny, she too found herself local work.

Lilli Palmer, the German actress I've already mentioned, had herself been encouraged to return to her homeland. Prior to accepting work there, she had asked an acquaintance, "Should I go to Germany?" to which she was told, "It isn't a question of should you go, you must go. Bridges have to be built. We must all help to build them."⁸⁵ And so it was that Tiny embarked on some bridge building of her own.

In July 1959 therefore, she and Irene made a one day, 900km round trip to Hamburg to visit Frau Tyralla. They got a lift with one of Walter's friends (since Tiny and family did not own a car until around 1962). After enjoying themselves a spot of *Kaffee und Kuchen*, the idea was hatched to reunite Frau Tyralla and their mother at Tiny's home that summer, together with Alice.

⁸³ *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 127

⁸⁴ The NAAFI - The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes in full - was the official trading organisation that serviced British Armed Forces with retail and leisure. See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navy,_Army_and_Air_Force_Institutes

⁸⁵ *Change Lobsters - And Dance*. Lilli Palmer. Star Books, W. H. Allen & Co. Ltd, 1977. Pg. 250

The *Turm Hotel*, where Irene, Tiny and family stayed before bringing Frau Tyralla to Rheindahlen, summer 1959



When the time came to bring 'Mutti' to their home, Tiny, Walter, Michael and Irene took the journey in somewhat more relaxed fashion, lodging in Hamburg for the night at a place called the *Turm Hotel*. It took quite some Internet sleuthing to finally place the hotel, thanks to this old photograph and an address on its reverse. The main reason being that the rather novel lodging was sadly razed in 1965. Located at Berliner Tor 26 in quiet

Lohmühlenpark, it was just 800 metres and a ten minute walk from Frau Tyralla's flat. Staying there then was not only logical, but pretty cool too.

Michael, not yet even three, remembers the venue: *"I recall looking out one of the single bedroom windows. There was a dressing table where mum had her cologne – 4711. I slept in a, probably small, single bed that was against the curved wall. It was where I first came across milk soap."* Irene too recognised Frau Tyralla's flat at the Hiobs Hospital, *"a small dark place, where I sat in its kitchen,"* while Michael recalls something akin to a bedsit.

They brought Frau Tyralla back to Rheindahlen for what was eventually several months,⁸⁶ while Nanny and Alice themselves arrived for a shorter stay, travelling by train. To make room – since Tiny and Walter's quarters were admittedly cramped – Irene boarded at her boss's place.

The reunion, which lasted a fortnight or so that August, shows touching sentimentality. Ultimately, it was the only time Alice met her grandmother, and one of the few occasions she met her great grandson, Michael. He added *"I remember 'Mutti' as a smartly dressed, grey haired, older lady who very kindly taught me German on her knee."*⁸⁷ Walter meanwhile chased her around the flat in a gesture of affection. She must have relished the attention.

For Nanny, however, the occasion was filled more with apprehension than excitement. Although it was intended as a welcome surprise, tension had lingered between her and her mother for decades. Her visit to Amsterdam in 1942 was at best inconsiderate, in 1932, she had 'refused' Nanny her identity papers in order to get married and lest we forget, at 15 she was packed off to work. On the other hand, she was somewhat fortunate in not being sent off into care quite as often as Margot or Theo.

Despite Nanny struggling to *"show much sign of emotion,"* the family had its fun which Nanny thought was 'nice.' And her German, albeit rusty, flowed well-enough for her to converse with her mother. If only Margot had been around to join the party, I mused – one I suppose she only learned of much later.

⁸⁶ Personal conversation with Tiny, May 11th, 2019

⁸⁷ Email correspondence of February 6th, 2014

As for Alice's impressions, it was next to impossible for her to hold down a conversation with Frau Tyralla because they had no common language. She was also quite deaf, carrying a body-worn hearing aid – maybe one of the first all-transistor devices that came onto the market in early 1953. But it also struck her that Mutti – despite that monicker – was neither very child-oriented. These impressions – and the watering can she received a gift – remained with her long afterwards.



Left:
Strike a pose!
Irene, Nanny and Frau
Tyralla (Left to Right),
together again.

Below:
The 'Prussian' with
Alice, her third
generation namesake.
Summer, 1959

Typically, Tiny would take Frau Tyralla to the NAAFI and the other shops, cafés and amenities within the military base, even if she'd grown less fond of sunny terraces. "It sets my heart racing," she complained.



Assembling the family in Rheindahlen must have been a challenge. But what if they'd found the means to venture to Leipzig and stumbled upon second cousin, Vera, who Nanny and Margot had last met in early 1931 (and Frau Tyralla in 1945). Or sidestepped east to meet *Tante Hedy* in *Giessen* and learned that her cousins were in *Frankfurt* or *Neustadt an der Weinstraße*? Perhaps that would have been too much emotionally. After all, they were understood to have been murdered by the Russians at the end of the war.

Vera was now a mother of three, her third son, *Uwe Herbert Walter*, having been born about the same time that Tiny and family arrived in West Germany, on December 29th, 1958. That same year, the Försters had moved to a new address in Nanny and Margot's birthplace and childhood backyard, Gohlis: *Hamburger Str. 46* (pictured to the far right). The address was about 15 minutes walk from where Margot (and probably not by chance, close to Vera's husband's original family address of 1949: *Hamburger Str. 27 I*).⁸⁸ To Nanny (notwithstanding the war damage), it might have seemed like time stood still.



Die Meyer'sche Häuser in Leipzig Eutritzsch, home to Vera, Nanny's second cousin, from 1958 with residents' allotments in the inner courtyard. Source: Google Maps

⁸⁸ *Leipziger Adressbuch*, 1949: adressbuecher.sachsendigital.de/suchergebnisse/adressbuch/Book/list/leipzig/1949

The family's new home was part of a residential complex that consisted of 39 buildings and approximately 321 apartments, forming a large block of houses – the so-called *Meyer'sche Häuser* – that had been built at the turn of the century.⁸⁹ They can be seen from afar due to its corner towers with curved domes. Much like Frau Tyralla's home in Hamburg, a green space is visible within an inner courtyard in the accompanying satellite picture. There the family had a small plot that was used to grow vegetables to supplement their diet.

A reliance on leased garden plots for such purposes was typical among all working class families in East Germany, although by 1959 they could at least expect to eat food that had only floated through their dreams five years earlier. According to Donna Harsch in *Revenge of the Domestic*, East Germans experienced a 'wave of gobbling' (*Fresswelle*) into the late 1950s, after butter, sausage and the consumption of eggs reached pre-war levels in 1954 and 1955, followed by the appearance of fruit, chocolate and coffee.⁹⁰

Comparing East and West Germany in 1960 and 1961, the baskets of those in the east typically contained more bread and potatoes (and less eggs). Furthermore, consumers there spent 55 percent of their budget on food and 45 percent on other consumer goods. In West Germany, that ratio was reversed.⁹¹

Ruins above and modern shopping below. The *Handelsorganisation (HO) "Geschäft - am Brühl"* in 1957, that same street where Frau Tyralla's husband, Paul, had worked in 1900.



Sources:
Guldemann, Pg. 63
(image).

Obviously, the two Germanies grew rapidly apart during the 1950s, with radically different legal, political and educational systems. Although both entities peoples could be described as 'work societies,' the factory centred-society of East Germany was very different from that of its western counterpart, where work and leisure were two distinct worlds. And while the GDR may have been a workers' state, it was hardly a workers' paradise. Wages and the standard of living were much lower than in West Germany. There were also frequent shortages of products which for everyday life, such as bicycle valves or children's clothing. Otherwise, the shops were full of shoddy mass-produced goods which nobody wanted.⁹²

⁸⁹ de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meyer'sche_Häuser

⁹⁰ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic.* Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 183, 182

⁹¹ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic.* Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 182, 278/9

⁹² *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 115, 104

On the positive side, state subsidies kept the prices of rent, food and transport low, while there was no fear of unemployment since job security was guaranteed. By 1955, the standard of living in East Germany was the highest in the Comecon countries (that economic organisation that existed from 1949 to 1991 under the leadership of the Soviet Union and comprised the countries of the Eastern Bloc). Yet the financial capacity of the population to buy more consumer goods than the regime could supply was a constant source of frustration that drove many westwards.⁹³ Those that stayed spent thousands of marks on West German clothes and housewares, while continuing to face intermittent shortages in basic provisions.⁹⁴

Part of the problem was that the communists did not recognize the growth-generating potential of individual consumption, and by extension, consumer services and industries. Donna Harsch observed that they were genuinely bewildered by the unprecedented prosperity, technological innovations and commercialised services that flowered in the regulated market economies of Western welfare states, including West Germany.⁹⁵

East Germans thus fell victim to the philosophical confrontation that occurred over consumption – which carried great symbolic charge – because systemic rivalry between socialism and capitalism was entangled with a race for national legitimacy⁹⁶ (and many saw Chancellor Adenauer as the natural leader of a united country). Thus, it was only by raising the standard of living in the east that defacto GDR leader, *Walter Ulbricht*, could defeat the magnet-like pull of its counterpart in the west. Thanks to the economy's growth in 1958-1959 and plentiful food supply, the SED could at least abolish ration cards and subsequently raise wages for most of the working population.⁹⁷

Another distraction was to increase the employment rate of married women. Even "Responsibility for young children no longer exempted a single mother from wage labour," which meant "Women moved out of the family circle and into paid labour in large numbers from the mid-50s into the early 60s."⁹⁸

I was curious whether I could find out more about Vera's vocation at this time. Talking to her in May 2011, I recalled how her grandson, Daniel (born 1981) had emphasised she had always craved work as long as he'd known her. I as therefore grateful to her sons, *Uwe*, *Herbert* and *Konrad* who got together on my behalf to discuss their situation back then. They certainly confirmed she worked, adding: "As far as we can remember, she was mainly employed in the catering industry or in larger companies as a cook."

⁹³ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 104, 97

⁹⁴ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 236

⁹⁵ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 165

⁹⁶ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 166

⁹⁷ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963*. D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 114, 98

⁹⁸ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 135, 84, Pg. 99

For sure, the preponderance of females over males in the GDR meant they were the main labour reserve but at the same time, they occasionally met with hostility from their male colleagues, for instance, when they took on jobs which had traditionally been occupied by males.⁹⁹

It's an interesting point because I can only wonder whether career overlaps might have become a thorn in Vera and her husband's sides, Herbert having previously worked as a chef. In any case, in early 1960 they separated, which led in turn to a custody battle that sadly saw all three sons sent to children's homes. Uwe, now a year old was sent to *Rittergut Möckern* – the Möckern manor, which is today a hotel¹⁰⁰ and lay about an hour away on foot while brothers Konrad (11) and Herbert (10) were stationed farther away in *Grimma* (where Margot herself had been sent as a child in 1922).

I asked the brothers: *"How long were you there for?"*

"None of us can remember exactly. [But] one thing stuck. Konrad was only a short time in the children's home and we a little longer," Uwe replied.

Most East Germans agreed that the mother was the natural nurturer and so it's unsurprising that two stayed with Vera, while the eldest, Konrad moved in with their father. Incidentally, he changed jobs too, becoming a driver for Stadt Leipzig's cleaning services.



Dessauer Str. 38, where Vera and her two younger sons resided from 1960 to 1973. Today the building is listed.

Source: Google Maps

Probably as a consequence, Vera, Uwe and Herbert moved to *Dessauer Str. 38* – five minutes and a few blocks from away from their last address. As the adjacent image shows, their new home was rather monolithic – and an annex to a warehouse at that – that had been built around 1929-1930 (and today is a cultural monument).¹⁰¹ The family remained there until 1973. Back in the late fifties, however, good apartments came at a premium; the five-year plans of the decade had invested almost nothing in housing so as late as 1961, central heating could be found in just

2.5 percent of homes, while only one-third had a toilet, and 22 percent had a bath. Apart from the 10.5 percent of East German housing that had been constructed after 1945, roughly half of the remainder dated back to the turn of the century, while the other half was built before 1900.¹⁰² The family were probably delighted then with their digs.

⁹⁹ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 105

¹⁰⁰ See: michaelis-leipzig.de/en/we-operate/herrenhaus-mckern

¹⁰¹ See: [de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Kulturdenkmale_in_Eutritzsch_\(A-J\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Kulturdenkmale_in_Eutritzsch_(A-J))

¹⁰² *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic.* Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 175

Surprisingly, poor housing did not become a political issue because conditions tended to improve owing to the flight of so many.¹⁰³ In West Germany too, the immediate housing crisis had been overcome by 1957. Some 3.8 million housing units had been built since 1950, which meant in comparison with the East, 25 percent of all West German apartments were *Neubau*. By 1959, 95.2 percent of newly constructed housing had a full bath.¹⁰⁴

West Germany sustained the prosperity, growth and full employment of the miracle years until the onset of the worldwide recession in 1973-1974.¹⁰⁵ Had Nanny's path crossed with her cousins in West Germany, she'd have found them enjoying this 'wave of affluence' to varying degrees. The youngest of them, Hans, remained in Frankfurt, some 250km away from Rheindahlen. He had since remarried, this time a classy, effervescent woman called *Ilonka Raabe*, whose son, *Michael*, curiously changed his name to *Hans-Michael*.

The eldest surviving cousin, Martin, had continued to host an oriental tea business 70 kilometres to the north, in Giessen, supported by his wife, *Anna-Marie*. Their eldest son, *Wolfgang*, now 24, before long emigrated to Melbourne, Australia while their daughter, *Christa* (a year younger) had already left for Thunder Bay in Canada in 1953, leaving youngest son, *Rüdiger*, approaching 16 in 1959, to inherit the family business.¹⁰⁶ Martin was not the only Hinsch close to Giessen, *Tante Hedy* (the late *Onkel Fritz's* former wife) and husband, *Walther*, were still living at that locale where the family themselves had been reunited in late 1945.

The last of Nanny and Margot's childhood playmates included cousin, *Heinz Hinsch*, whose eldest daughter, *Irene*, we have followed most closely. Sadly, the second half of the 1950s was particularly unsettling. Although she would have preferred to stay at school, he insisted she start an apprenticeship. She did this from 1955 to 1957 in a bookshop in a small town called *Speyer*, about 25km from their home in *Neustadt an der Weinstraße*.



Above Left:
Theo, Nanny and
Margot with
Tante Hedy in
their birthplace,
Leipzig, on the
eve of The Great
War.

Above Right:
Tante Hedy with
Walther Martin,
probably during the
mid-1950s, in Giessen.

¹⁰³ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 175

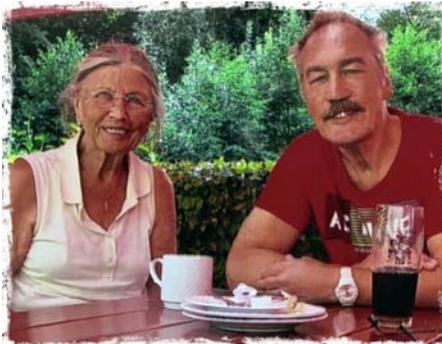
¹⁰⁴ *Trams or Tailfins: Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States*. Jan L. Logemann. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pg. 151-2

¹⁰⁵ *Social policy and social welfare in Germany from the mid-nineteenth century to the present*. Peter Stachura. In *Germany Since 1800: A New Social and Economic History* edited by Ogilvie and Overy. Arnold Publishers, 2003. Pg. 244

¹⁰⁶ Martin's wife, Anne-Marie passed away in June 1964 (aged 55). His father remarried and established a China Emporium in Mannheim which went on to become a successful enterprise with Rüdiger very much involved.

Their family drama, however, unfolded during Christmas 1957. *"It was ruined after father confessed he'd fallen for one of our neighbours: my girlfriend, Christiane,"* Irene, then 20, told me. *"He proposed a menage-a-trois, but mother was having nothing of it."* Heinz remarried in 1958 after a bitter divorce, moved to Munich and started a new family.

In 1959, Irene then sprung her own surprise, falling pregnant and giving birth to *Ferdinand*. She sought her father's help when his father abandoned them and her own mother chose to ignore her. She put him into foster care, working to cover the cost. In 1962, he was moved to the *Antroposofen*, that same charitable group that had cared for her and her brother in the immediate post-war years.



Irene and Ferdinand. Munich, summer 2021

Irene's fortunes improved in 1960, when she met *Friedrich Traumann* in the bookshop where she worked. Like her parents, he too was a sales representative for several reputable publishing companies and in a short while, she and *'Finia'* were happily married – in fact they had already unknowingly met during her earlier apprenticeship in Speyer. A successful partnership of many years followed, building their own book business whilst travelling the length and breadth of the country, selling new editions from their Volkswagen Beetle. Today, Irene lives not far from Munich, while Ferdinand, with whom she remains close, is in Berlin.

The 'Rheindahlen' reunion – for which I have nothing but praise for Tiny for orchestrating – was the first and last occasion that the 'Tyrallas' were all together. Even after saying goodbye, however, the family matriarch was not forgotten, Michael telling me of occasional weekend trips to Hamburg throughout 1960. For instance, bedding down one night in Frau Tyralla's flat, *"The pump to inflate the air bed was not only used for this purpose. We would blow air up Mutti's skirt, Marilyn Monroe style"*, even if overnight stays were not strictly allowed by the site manager (*"there were rules in Germany for everything, even when to hang out one's washing and when not"*). *"She swore that my father and I would give her a heart attack!"*

Evidently appreciative of the company, Frau Tyralla encouraged Tiny and Walter to move to *RAF Lübeck*. Not all stations, however, suited Walter's line of work.



Michael
after a
school day.
Ballykelly,
Northern
Ireland.
April-May,
1962

As Tiny and her family's Rheindahlen gig drew to a close, she and Michael returned to Amsterdam at the end of 1960, until married quarters became available at their next port of call: *RAF Ballykelly* in County Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Their arrival in April 1961, marked Tiny's seventh year on the move (they would be there until December 1962). She was still relishing that life, including all the packing and unpacking that went with it, she told me in May 2019. Michael, the next generation Wandervogel meanwhile entered into the UK school system.

There's one more traveller's tale to tell, however, before we return to UC to catch up with Margot and Francis. Some months after the family reunion, Irene returned to Amsterdam. In early 1960, she went back to work for *de Gruyter*, although she had no intention of being with the company for much longer, since she had decided to move to the US. In fact, she was only waiting for her US green card application to be approved.

To understand why, we have to turn the clock back to summer 1958, before Tiny had even moved to Rheindalen. At that time, Fred Eickelboom (the Ridderhof relative) had encouraged Irene to come to the US, having made various promises of financial support and assistance. Thus, in September 1958, her family had waved her off from Rotterdam harbour, her final destination being Orange City in Florida. One could almost say she was following in her mother's footsteps.

Being based near Daytona Beach, Irene occupied herself with odd jobs as well as a three month travel to the likes of Jacksonville, Florida, where a former colleague was then based. Another time she lodged with a former classmate and long-term friend who had emigrated years before to New Jersey. She even put a foot inside Canada (although Irene confirmed a meet up with Margot and Francis was never on the agenda - "*money was insufficient for that, as was time*").

Nonetheless, while in the US, Irene had considered making a more permanent move. She told me:

"I liked the lifestyle, the Americans' attitudes. My friends' experiences inspired me – moreso than those of Margot and Francis, although that of course counted for something."

"For good?" I asked.

"Well at least ten years or so," she told me.

Clearly international travel was becoming the norm within our family!



Surprise! Irene celebrates a birthday milestone, flanked by a shell-shocked mother and younger sister, and a rather more composed Tiny and admirer, Enzo. August 1960



US Next Generation: Irene odd-jobbing close to Daytona Beach, Florida. Autumn, 1958.



Rotterdam
Return:
Irene
flanked by
her family,
and on the
outside
right, a
friend, upon
her return
from the US.
March, 1959.



But to emigrate permanently, Irene needed a sponsor. After matters soured with 'Onkel' Fred, a baptist minister in Jacksonville promised to support her. So, having submitted her application, she returned to the Netherlands in March 1959 – before heading on to Rheindahlen three months later.

After six months back at her day job, the green card duly arrived. However, when she put the move to her parents that summer of 1960, both of them outright discouraged her from going the *Wanderoogel* 'way.' Tiny had already flown the nest (rather regrettably – it transpired – in their view), and so they convinced her it would be a shame to throw away a promising career (having said a similar thing when she'd had opportunity to tour the Netherlands as an acrobat).

Cor
Ridderhof
has the last
laugh. Late
1960, with
Tiny and
Walter just
visible in the
background.



"So, with my dad getting on in age, "he 'bribed' me to stay put – with a scooter," Irene joked.

Irene would understandably regret not moving to the US – which perhaps explains why it is a favourite vacation spot of hers today. One couldn't say that about another 'child' of Nanny and Margot's generation, the son of Nanny's former fellow acrobat, whose own move to the US is told opposite. Meanwhile, it wouldn't be long before another would return to Europe.

17.13: When Dietrich Came to Town

On May 28th, 1960, the infamous Marlene Dietrich visited Amsterdam. Not Cor's *Carré*, unfortunately. Rather the *Tuschinski-Theater*. By now she worked almost exclusively as a cabaret artist. Having moved to the US in the 1930s, from there she'd clocked up film after film success. During the war she had entertained Allied troops on both sides of the Atlantic, and after Germany's defeat returned to films. Although she never fully regained her former screen profile.

Following annual releases until 1952, between then and the mid-1970s she performed as a cabaret artist in large theatres in major cities worldwide (although between 1956 and 1961 she managed another four features including *Witness for the Prosecution* in 1957 and *Judgment at Nuremberg* in 1961.

Despite aspects of her earlier career having paralleled Nanny's (and reported in Chapters VI and X and XII), Irene assured me that Dietrich's visit to the neighbourhood passed by unnoticed. A pity. It would have been great to say their paths eventually crossed – in her husband's theatre.

A glimpse of Dietrich's performance can be viewed online at: [youtube.com/watch?v=1EVUF-N2ciA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EVUF-N2ciA)



17.14: Son of a Gun!

Elisabeth Marenbach, also known as 'Miss Lissi,' was one of the five other female acrobats with whom my grandmother, then Nanny Tyralla, toured the US between 1923 and 1927. In November 1961, Harald, her 21 year old, Leipzig-born son, set off to seek his own destiny in the US.

"My departure, rather like your aunt Irene's, was also family-inspired," Harald told me. "My sister, having married a GI soldier while on duty in post-war Germany had gone to Dearborn, Michigan. This started a rather active correspondence between us." Harald, who was sixteen at the time, added: "The more she wrote, the more enticing and interesting it became. Lots of brochures about fancy automobiles, Inge's family growing, nice clean neighborhoods, etc."



One cannot be surprised at his enthusiasm, having lived through the war and having grown up in Cologne - 61 percent of it in ruins in 1945.

"I wanted to explore this big country" he recalled. "But I didn't have the funds to support myself for an extended period of time. That is, I needed to work while there. So, my brother-in-law sponsored me. My mom was very sad. I promised her to be back within one year. My fiancée, Elke, and I boarded a train headed for Bremerhaven in November 1961. She accompanied me all the way on board the S.S. United States. But there we parted ways."



Upon arrival, Harald took a train to his sister in Detroit but ended up back on the eastern seaboard, making a living in Hartford, Connecticut, thanks to the kind assistance of a couple of Germans he met on his New York-bound ship. Within 10 months of joining them, he had moved into his own apartment and bought a car.

It wasn't long before he met his future wife, which in turn meant Harald didn't see his mother (nor Elke) until 1968. By that time, he, his wife and daughter had already experienced American 'living' in places as diverse as California, Georgia and Michigan, of course.

During the 70s and 80s, Harald got to travel to Europe regularly as a liaison for the automobile tooling and equipment start-up, Dominion Technologies, before retiring in the late noughties to Arizona.

And not long after, while researching *The Six Rockets*, his mother's and Nanny's acrobat troupe, he stumbled on me. And the rest, as they say, is now history!



Images:
Top: Harald in Bremerhafen, accompanied by Elke, his fiancée, preparing to board ship on November 1, 1961.
Middle top: Harald and a rather covetable American icon - the 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air Turquoise/White 2-Door Hardtop - in Hartford Connecticut, April 1962, where he boarded for 10 months with the family he'd met on the ship going over to the US (the car was theirs).
Middle bottom: Material like the 1959 Saturday Evening Post, whose cover captured the new American dream, convinced Harald and many others that the US was the 'go-to' destination.
Bottom: Harald today, at home in Anthem, Arizona!

Nevertheless, had Irene moved to the US, her path would certainly have crossed with that of Margot and Francis. "I liked him and them," she told me. But while Irene's ambitions had been curbed, let's see where Margot and Francis' would lead.

#####

*Mrs. Margot Haris, Canada.
General, Delivery Uranium City, Sask. Canada.*

If any of the family had written to Margot all those thousands of kilometres away, informing her about the family reunion that had taken place, then the above clipping, extracted from Frau Tyralla's 1958 will, shows us the address they'll have used.

Alone, however, it leaves little clue as to where Margot and Francis lived come August 1958. I turned again to *Uranium City Friends* in case they might be able to help in pointing to a specific residence.¹⁰⁷



Isabel Ormandy reacted: "A lot of people got their mail ... General Delivery. It was free but one had to pay for [the deposit] boxes."¹⁰⁸

That at least tells us Margot will have visited the local post office to collect her mail. But as fortune would have it, Isabel was able to connect me with the wife of Francis' former colleague, Geza (Gus) Rosta. Marella was another former friend of Margot and Francis who went on to tell me that the pair had rented from a couple named Ursula and Roman Dac. My luck went even further when I was brought in touch with Ursula. She told me her husband too had worked for Eldorado at the time, while she – a Berliner no less – had moved to UC after spending some time in Edmonton.

She very kindly answered a number of my questions,¹⁰⁹ and started by saying: "We always liked this couple! There were parties every weekend in UC during the six-month long winter. We mostly danced, sang – and they drank!" What a start, I mused.

Thanks to Uranium City's 1960 phone book, I determined that the Dacs' home was located at 192, Rix Crescent, within 'sector 7', that is, at the edge of Uranium City, off Eldorado Street.¹¹⁰

Dear friends of Margot and Francis – and great aides to me: Marella and late-husband Geza Rosta (top, retrieved from *Andy Schultz, Flickr*) and Ursula and Roman Dac (bottom)

Ursula went on to confirm the Haris's had lived in their house – which she and her husband had built in 1957 – in its basement suite, from about 1959. She was also kind enough to send along a picture of their home, which can be seen opposite, together with its approximate location according to the street map and aerial image.

¹⁰⁷ Online at: facebook.com/groups/4168822363/posts/10155319965962364 (June 30, 2018)

¹⁰⁸ Personal correspondence, August 5, 2018

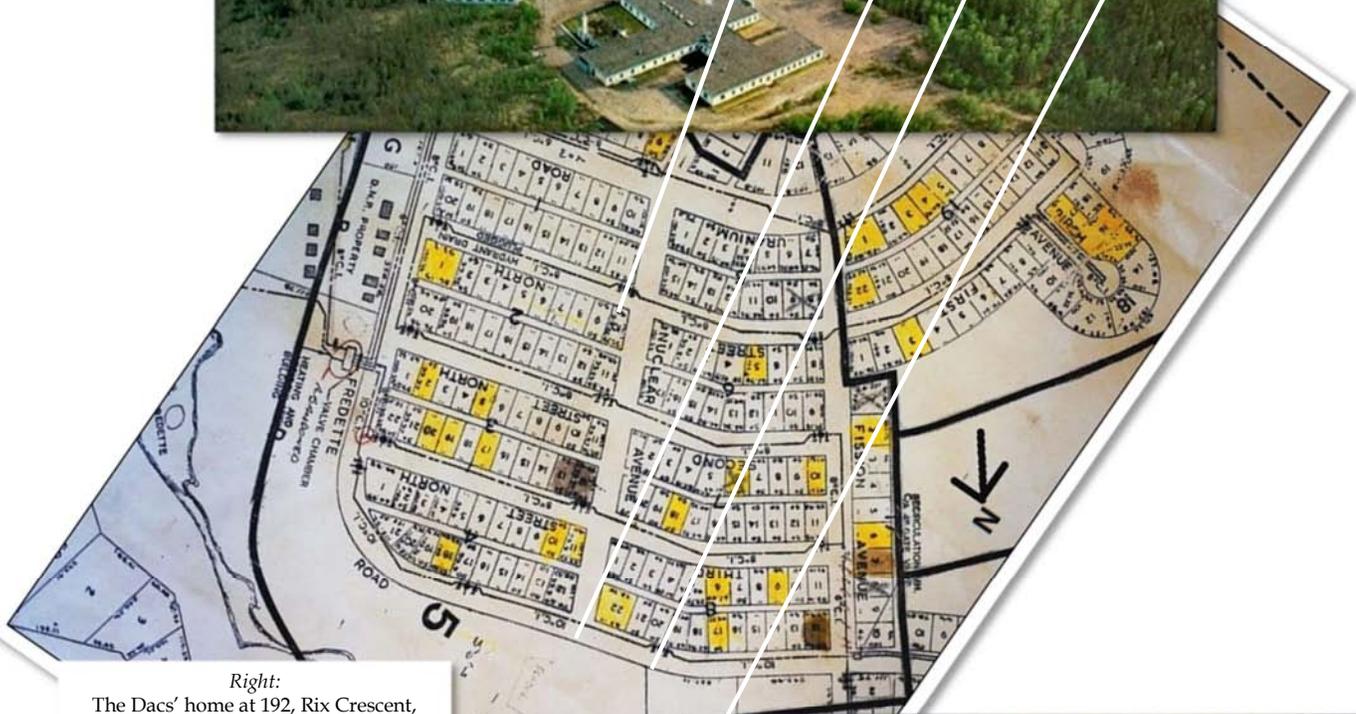
¹⁰⁹ Personal correspondence, September 18, 2018

¹¹⁰ During the Facebook clip posted by Edgar Oliver at the link which follows, at around 4'55 one can see the corner of Rix Street and Eldorado and behind the overgrowth, 192, Rix Crescent:

facebook.com/edgar.oliver.5686/videos/988821851291633/?query=Rix%20Crescent (retrieved August 12, 2021).

Within a second clip, also posted by John Chodzicki, from 0'35 the view is head on toward 192, Rix Crescent, which lies behind the white picket fence. One then has a driver's view of Rix Crescent until 1'15:

facebook.com/john.chodzicki/videos/10154586398480159 (retrieved August 12, 2021).



Right:

The Dacs' home at 192, Rix Crescent, around 1957, prior to Margot and Francis moving in to its basement (the top of which is just visible by the white band beneath the level of the front doorsteps).

Middle & Top:

The street plan points to the location of the city's Catholic church (middle right arrow), Shannon school (middle left arrow) and the Hudson Bay store (left arrow). The 'Welcome to Uranium City' (see pg. 937) sign is indicated by the short arrow while the city's hospital, which went into use around March 1956, is the large building at the foot of the upper photo. Source: [UCF](http://ucf.ca)



According to Andrea Melzer, who later lived at 192, Rix Crescent, there were no windows to the front (south-facing side) of the basement suite. Rather, there were just two narrow skylights at the back where one would also access the basement suite. A spring treat, however, was the array of crocuses that would bloom on the hill behind the house.

I asked Margot's former friends whether they could shed any light on her professional activities. Had she worked, and if so, where? Her nieces, Tiny and Irene, were pretty sure she had been employed at one of the local stores. Between Ursula, Isabel and Marella, it was the first of those who could fill in the blanks – particularly because Margot they had become colleagues at the Hudson's Bay Company during the summer of 1959 (pictured on pg. 940).¹¹¹

"It was the biggest store in UC," Frank Fulop told me, adding that "Margot had worked in sales."¹¹²

Hardly surprising, given the social person she was. Of course, Margot's experience in the Leeds' gown shop was an obvious plus.

In their reflections on Facebook, the *Uranium City Friends* remarked on a January 15th, 2020 post about the store:

*"You could get everything you wanted at the Bay, food, cloths, hardware, boats, skidoos." "Dry goods on the right, grocery on the left." "The chocolate bars were behind the cashier," "it was *the* drug store." "Bought my first record there" and "bought lots of Barbie's there...!!" "Blown glass candy cane Christmas ornaments." "The ladies department." "We bought furniture there too."*

Given that Ursula had not only lived above Margot and Francis but also worked with her, what other memories could she share? Thankfully she didn't hesitate to divulge:

"Margot was a very outgoing lady with a big smile and heart. She loved people and animals, especially 'Scampie,' my dog. She also enjoyed a good game of cards very much." Regarding Francis, she ventured "He loved to dance, especially the jitterbug [and] jive."¹¹³

"Socializing was our entertainment" complemented Isabel, "since there was no TV and telephone."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ I identified two former colleagues of Margot's whom I hoped could share something of their working experience. The first was a lady who had worked at the Hudson Bay Store until 1958, the mother of Brenda Wasylenka (and later mayoress). Brenda told me her mother didn't personally recall Margot, but could confirm she started the following year. The second was a chap called Wayne Vollans. He responded in 2018 to my open invitation for feedback on the couple, adding that he had known Margot (commenting in a Lois Brothwell-created Uranium City Friends' Facebook discussion thread [here](#) that started November 2016). Vollans, believed to have been born in 1949, had managed the store in 1976 (according to a comment made by Dennis Kiser in a separate discussion thread [here](#) from November 2013 created by Roger Deranger). Despite several attempts to follow up, Vollans (profiled at LinkedIn [here](#)) did not further respond.

¹¹² Personal correspondence of March 19th, 2020

¹¹³ Personal correspondence of August 30th, 2018

¹¹⁴ A telephone line or circuit shared by two or more subscribers.

Although local phones connected the city – the April 1956 directory listing 201 numbers – long distance telecommunication remained the domain of the ‘radiogram’ and ordinary mail.¹¹⁵

“Up till 1967 we had party lines,” – a telephone line or circuit shared by two or more subscribers – Isabel continues, “while physical get togethers often involved the married couples entertaining the single men, as there were quite a few of them. Miners were always having the single fellows for dinners etc.”

Which is how Frank Fulop, Francis’ colleague (who was later one of UC’s taxi drivers¹¹⁶ and also cooks), got to know Margot so well. What was special to him about Margot, who he told me Francis always called ‘Honey’?

“Margot was a very nice friendly lady. She was very patient, tolerant and an understanding, fun-loving Dutch person. We were good friends.” He told me he especially appreciated Margot’s patience, because he and Francis would while away time in their native Hungarian. *“You can be proud of your aunt, I liked her.”*

Sadly, of all Frank’s photos of their time together, he told me he left them behind when he himself left Uranium City in 1982!

Further accolades followed. Of Margot’s cooking, Fulop recalled less (rather citing Ursula Dac’s sandwiches, nicknaming her a sandwich *művész*, Hungarian for ‘artist’). But he also cited other Hungarians’ contributions to their community, including ‘Rozsi’ and ‘Piroska Néni’ (*Néni* means ‘Auntie’), who would usually take over the Haris’s kitchen in their *“nice little apartment,”* Frank told me.

Harold Grasley, a long-time UC resident and ‘Friends’ group member got in touch to tell me he rather suspects Francis was the one with culinary expertise:

“If it’s who I think it is, he really liked using a lot of paprika and cayenne powder in his cooking!”¹¹⁷

Certainly, this lends weight to our own family members’ recollections that Francis had served as a chef or cook during his time in Leeds. *“I don’t remember hearing anything about him being a cook,”* countered Fulop in 2018!

Clearly the Hungarians spent a lot of time together. But what of those of German origin? Ursula told me that she and Margot would converse in their native tongue. Naturally I wondered whether Margot ever mentioned her Leipzig years, or any others prior to her arrival.

“Margot and I had a somewhat similar life during the war years. I was born in Berlin but [was] evacuated to different parts of the country because of the bombing. We did not really discuss it in detail, it was too traumatic.”

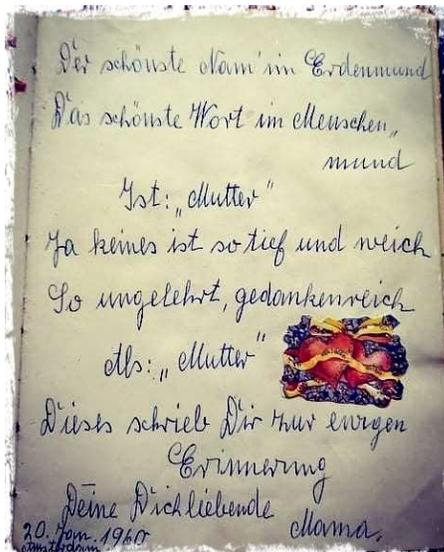
¹¹⁵ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 208

¹¹⁶ Frank Fulop had one of Uranium City’s few cars in 1962, confirmed Isabel Ormandy.

¹¹⁷ Received as a comment on August 4, 2018 within a Uranium City Friends facebook post of June 30, 2018: [facebook.com/groups/4168822363/posts/10155319965962364](https://www.facebook.com/groups/4168822363/posts/10155319965962364)

Isabel recalled that the Haris's had joined UC's 'Friends of Berlin' club,¹¹⁸ together with Ursula and others.¹¹⁹ "They all had a good time." Explains Ben McIntyre, "This club was composed initially ... of people of German or Austrian origin... [and] affiliate[ion] ... with the larger parent organization in Edmonton ... allowed members to participate in charter flights from Canada to Europe." The club's dinner dances occurred monthly while "membership was restricted to approximately 100 couples ... because of the size of the hall ... Each December a Christmas party [also took place while] the New Years Eve celebration ... was the adults ... big night."¹²⁰ Perhaps even before the *Friends of Berlin* was formed, Margot and Francis hung out with these Germans. Harold Grasley recalled Francis was a close friend to a couple who went by the family name, *Kainberger*.¹²¹

I had suspected Margot took less issue with being deemed German than Nanny. However, it seems she was the one who was more typically considered Dutch. Indeed, Frank Fulop had not even known that she was German, until I mentioned it in 2018. Much of this seemed connected to the fact that her closest family was in Holland – but also because Margot had herself lived there.



Nevertheless, while it seems likely that the two sisters corresponded in German – which will have helped keep Nanny's language knowledge fresh – I was particularly chuffed to recently be shown a verse she wrote in a poem book kept by her daughter, Alice, for school. Entitled 'Mutter,' it was inserted in January 1960. The text I discovered was originally composed by Carmen-Sylva – the literary name of 'Elisabeth of Wied' – the first Queen of Romania who lived between 1843 and 1916.¹²² She'd written a host of poems, plays, novels and short stories in German, which gives us a clue as to the kinds of material that probably passed through Nanny's own schoolbook. Or lips, since it was also a popular rhyme saved for Mother's Day.

Mutter

Der schönste Nam' im Erdenrund,
 Das schönste Wort im Menschenmund
 Ist: Mutter!
 Ja, keines ist so tief und weich,
 So ungelehrt, gedankenreich
 Als: Mutter!

The most beautiful name in the whole wide world,
 The most beautiful word that rolls off the tongue
 Is: mother!
 Yes, none is so deep and soft
 So natural, so thoughtful
 As Mother!

¹¹⁸ Which later evolved into its German Club after 1963, according to remarks made by Maria Eibich via her son Svend, in response to the post cited in footnote 119.

¹¹⁹ The driving force behind the club was some of the original German/ Austrian members, notes Ben McIntyre (see next footnote). Among those were Eddie and Huberta Koenigshofer, as were Hans and Maria Eibich, Olga and Joe Kainberger. Others included Kusbik, John Schmidt, Herb Webber, and the Gaidas – all names received via personal correspondence.

¹²⁰ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 265-266

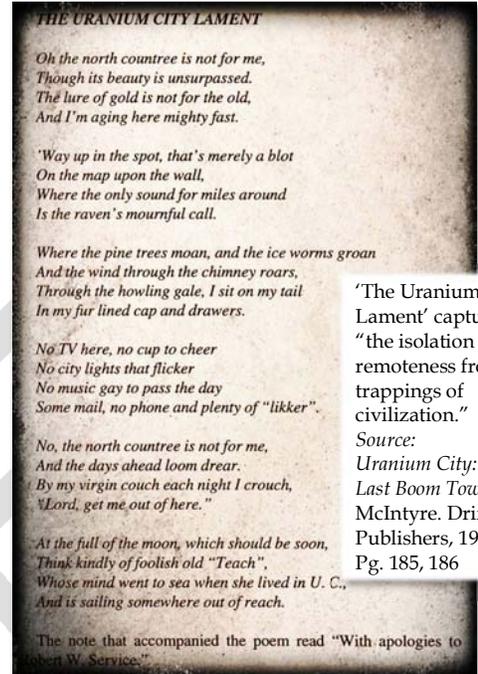
¹²¹ According to Harold Grasley (see footnote 119), the Kainburgers were known to have last lived in Spruce Grove, Alberta, but in 2018 appeared to be beyond reach.

¹²² See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_of_Wied

Margot and Francis had been in UC roughly two years by the time they moved in with the Dacs. Despite the very vivid community spirit and friendships that existed, staying in touch with the 'outside world' was equally important. I daresay the twosome often took advantage of the mining company's offer of frequent breaks.

"We had free air flights ten times a year to Edmonton as that was the only way to the 'Outside' (and back in). People came and left there regularly on the DC-3. They couldn't stand the isolation," wrote Isabel.¹²³

Not surprisingly, one of UC's residents put pen to paper, capturing that loneliness in verse that was published in the *Northland News* on April 4th, 1959 and is shown right. Edmonton on the other hand was Alberta's colourful capital. Situated on the North Saskatchewan River, besides having served as a 'Gateway to the North' since World War Two, it also meant diversity – its population being one of European ethnicities. It was known especially for its natural scenery, food, history and also served as a hub for Alberta's petrochemical industries, earning it the 1940s nickname: the 'Oil Capital of Canada'. Rapidly expanding, it had a population of almost a quarter of a million in 1956 that reached 281,027 by 1961.¹²⁴



"The Uranium City Lament' captured "the isolation and remoteness from the trappings of civilization." Source: *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 185, 186

The opportunity to frequently get away meant Margot and Francis were neither strangers to their Vancouver-based friends, the Garas's. Indeed, Gabriela confirmed many pictures of Margot, Francis and the group were also taken during their Canada years. Even Frank Fulop recalled meeting 'Sanyi' Garas, still a garage mechanic, proving that he too tagged along.

Returning to the north's peace and solitude will have no doubt been a struggle – made all the more challenging by so called 'air pockets' - air that flows marginally in an upward or downward direction which alters the plane's flight path accordingly and could for instance mean dropping a couple of hundred feet. Some savoured the thrill. Others hated it. *"I don't think we ever had a smooth flight and air pockets – I swear sometimes we dropped from the 87th floor to the fourth floor in a millisecond!!"*¹²⁵

At least the couple's visits were at least once reciprocated. Sandor's daughter, Gabriela, told me that during summer 1959 she herself joined Margot and Francis in Uranium City: *"When I was eight, I visited them for a week. I remember Margot used to show me how to do cartwheels ... all was a good memory."*¹²⁶

¹²³ By 1962, Pacific Western Airlines (PWA) had graduated its three times a week service into a daily operation, while Saskatchewan Government Airlines (Saskair) operated a service between Prince Albert and Uranium City on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, according to a Uranium City Chamber of Commerce advertisement of 1962 that appeared in the Prince Albert Daily Herald of June 18, 1962 (see pg. 981).

¹²⁴ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmonton#History

¹²⁵ Harold Grasley responding to Les Oystryk's post of Jan. 18, 2021. [Uranium City Friends](#).

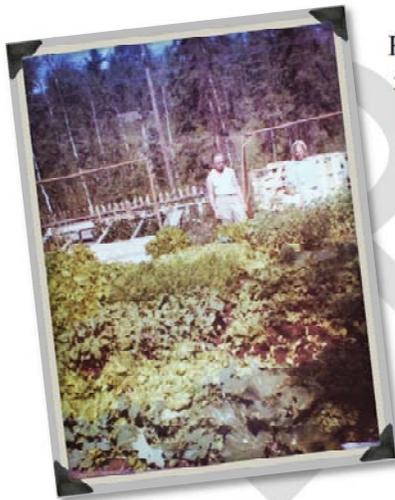
¹²⁶ Personal correspondence with Gabriela Trixner via email, March 18, 2018.



The summer 1959 Royal Visit to Uranium City, sans Queen Elizabeth. Source: John Woroniuk via [YouTube](#)

Gabriela must have only just missed the Great British royal visit, perhaps the biggest event ever to happen within the booming mining community. On July 20th, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and Queen Elizabeth were scheduled to visit UC as part of their Canadian tour. Well, she would have accompanied him, were it not for the fact the Queen felt a little blue – she had just fallen pregnant with Prince Andrew!

Summertime meant a welcome return to outdoor activity, a time when one could forage for raspberries, blueberries and blackberries and make jam or jelly. Berry picking was neither just for jam, especially among the central Europeans, although Frank Fulop couldn't recall that Francis had ever distilled his own *palinka*, a traditional fruit spirit that is popular in Hungary and its neighbourhood. Local Saskatoon berries (resembling blackcurrants) were also popular, typically ending up in Saskatoon pie – a prairie ritual. Although none of my Canadian acquaintances had ever heard of that, it is often served with vanilla ice cream. "The flavour of these berries is like no other", while the name itself is derived from the Cree word "Mis-sask-quah-too-mina."¹²⁷



For some there was also fresh vegetables to be had from the garden. Although gardening near the sixtieth parallel might seem impossible with such a short season, the intense summer sun helped everything grow briefly.

Neither Margot nor Francis struck me as the type to till soil, besides which, the garden in Rix Crescent was not theirs to maintain. But it was nevertheless a real hobby for some. Uranium City Friends told me that Austrians like John and Mary Schmidt would grow huge vegetables in their gardens, including tomatoes.¹²⁸

A "Short but furious growing season" spawned "Lots of amazing gardens in Uranium City/Eldorado." prompting Dietmar Weber to comment of John and Mary Schmidt's vegetable patches:
 "It seems all the Austrians had green thumbs."
 Source: [Uranium City Friends](#)

But according to Isabel Ormandy: "They never ripened outside. We had to cut the whole bush during the last week of August and hang them up in our basements to ripen. We ate tomatoes until November some years. The soil sat on top of permafrost and was more like peat and moss."

¹²⁷ Valerie Lugonja has plenty more to say about the berry and the pie online at: acanadianfoodie.com/2011/08/18/traditional-canadian-prairie-saskatoon-berry-pie
¹²⁸ Online at: [facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10153393928943595&set=gm.10153175845437364](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10153393928943595&set=gm.10153175845437364)

Given the vast amounts of water in the Canadian north, and with the benefit of a photograph of Francis taken some years later in San Francisco in which he hoisted a fish half as tall as he, I couldn't help but wonder, had he fished around UC too?

"Almost everyone in the north, at some time or other, fishes for fun or for food. Quite often, both go hand in hand," wrote Ben McIntyre,¹²⁹ while Frank Fulop filled me in once again, noting Francis had, albeit "not very often."

Pikes, trout, Arctic grayling and pickerel fish were all fished from lakes nearby and others farther away, some of which could only be reached by taking a light aircraft from the northern shore of Martin Lake (see '2' on the map on pg. 933). Fishing was obviously most popular between spring and autumn and was also a draw for American fisherman.¹³⁰

The romance of this remote location isn't lost on me. In 1977, Uranium City celebrated 25 years of history. One former resident who returned for the occasion was Ella Woroniuk, whose letter sent to the Uranium City Weekly News after the event Ben McIntyre particularly reflects on. In it she speaks of "the great scenery, the waterfalls, the beautiful lakes and the fishing."¹³¹



The northern lights over Tazin Lake
(whose name inspired my daughter's: Tamsin),
25km northwest of UC.

Source: [Uranium City Friends](#) via JJ. Bougie

In a short survey that McIntyre undertook a number of years later as regards what residents liked best and worst about living in Uranium City, he reports that for some it was "the call of loons on a soft summer night,"¹³² or "the dazzling display of northern lights during the long cold winter nights." A number relished "the challenge, the feeling of 'frontier,'" while for others it was the fact that "friends, became synonymous with family ... On the down-side," he continues "the most often expressed bad things were the mosquitos and blackflies, which could make outdoor living a misery."¹³³ Others ... mentioned the disadvantage of living in a one-industry town." Still "to others, it was the amount of drinking that went on in the community."¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 195-196

¹³⁰ Further reading: *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 196-197

¹³¹ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 299

¹³² Loons are aquatic birds found in many parts of North America and northern Eurasia that issue a long mournful, haunting wail. Listen to the eerie call of the common loon, which echoes across the clear lakes of the northern wilderness at: [youtube.com/watch?v=EFpU22rTqPc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFpU22rTqPc) or [youtube.com/watch?v=4ENNZjy8QjU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ENNZjy8QjU)

¹³³ Sometimes called a buffalo gnat, turkey gnat, or white socks, they depend on blood to lay their eggs. See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_fly

¹³⁴ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 302

As 1959 closed, Margot and Francis were halfway through their envisaged tenure of UC. That year had also been “the height of the boom ... The pay was good ... but earning was gruelling ... Of the 17 ... uranium companies in Canada, only Eldorado was authorized to deal in uranium; all the others sold their product, milled or not, to the crown company, which ... sold the uranium to the USAEC” (United States Atomic Energy Commission).¹³⁵

The last year of the decade was also watershed year. Canada’s uranium had been crucial to solving the American shortage and so it had been the country’s “principal mineral export.” But while “the contracts ... between ... Eldorado and the [USAEC] ... were intended to deliver uranium ... no later than the 31st of March 1962, ... paradoxically, [it went] from being a solution ... to ... a problem, as shortage turned into surplus, and surplus into glut ... By July 1958, the American market was no longer expanding.” Belatedly, Canada also had “a growing sense of ... virtue in the face of a world where armament programmes were said to be running amok,” with “sales to the Americans the British ... becoming an anachronism ... Under the circumstances, Canada was anxious to diversify its uranium markets.”¹³⁶

As for Eldorado, it “could go out of business with the expiry of its American contracts” ... which “would in all probability also spell the end of Uranium City.” Or it could look to sustain its mining business, one way or another. “The Stretch-Out Plan announced on 6 November 1959 ... prolong[ed] deliveries to both the US and UK without increasing the amount of uranium to be delivered.”¹³⁷ That would certainly see Margot and Francis through until their planned departure in early 1963. As Christmas approached, I imagine this then was among the news which Margot shared in her despatches to her mother, sister and nieces, as the scattered family looked toward a new decade.

#####

Tiny and family’s departure from West Germany one year into that new decade occurred on the eve of one of the most significant events in recent history. The Cold War was at its height and West Berlin was infiltrated by Soviet and East German spies. Were it not for the presence of American, British and French forces, the Capitalist island would have been submerged in the Communist ocean.¹³⁸

In late 1958, however, the Soviet Union, buoyed by its successes in the field of space exploration, pushed its luck and demanded the withdrawal of the Western powers from the former German capital. Its aim had been to force a recognition of the GDR.

¹³⁵ Eldorado. *Canada’s National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 322, 329

¹³⁶ Eldorado. *Canada’s National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 383, 432, 417, 399, 382. N.b. Demand in 1959 for Canadian uranium came from three principal sources: i) the US; ii) the British (some of whose contracts ran beyond 1963) and iii) various countries who required uranium for civilian research (contracted until 1966). See Pg. 423

¹³⁷ Eldorado. *Canada’s National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 418, 427. N.b. “The British ... [who had already] committed to the purchase of 10,500 tonnes of Canadian uranium before the end of March 1963 ... were interested in buying 3,000 tonnes a year ... [after] the Suez incident of November 1956” (in which the country went head to head with Egypt, and then was forced to withdraw until early 1957). Pg. 397

¹³⁸ *The German Democratic Republic: Studies in European History*. Peter Grieder. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pg. 50-51

"Berlin is the testicles of the West..." Khrushchev had said. "Every time I want to make the west scream, I squeeze on Berlin."¹³⁹

The ultimatum, however, was met with an unequivocal refusal from the West. The growing international tension over Berlin, plus the domestic problems in the GDR (now aggravated by the forced collectivisation of agriculture), led once more to a dramatic rise in refugees.¹⁴⁰ In 1960, 199,000 exited through Berlin's open frontier.¹⁴¹

In January 1961, Ulbricht told Khrushchev, "the booming economy in West Germany, which is visible to every citizen of the GDR [thanks to television, the radio, relatives' letters, day trippers, shoppers, etc.] is the main reason that over ten years about two million people have left our Republic."¹⁴²

Then, in the six months to June 1961, a further 103,000 departed by which time, reports were pouring into government offices from the *Stasi* of unrest and discontent in the factories. Scores of critics, dissidents, ambitious young workers and trained professionals chose to leave, rather than stay to oppose the SED.¹⁴³ Economic functionaries estimated that the working-age population would have shrunk by ten percent by 1965 compared with 1960. Border officials anxiously tallied the numbers of fleeing farmers, engineers, medical personnel, teachers and academics.¹⁴⁴

This torrent made the closure of the frontier in Berlin inevitable, if the GDR was not to collapse. Once Khrushchev agreed in early August to Ulbricht's demands to seal off East Germany's borders in Berlin, Erich Honecker planned its implementation through 'Operation Rose.'¹⁴⁵ Khrushchev himself was terrified of provoking a war, which is why he instructed Ulbricht to proceed gradually, first using barbed wire to block access. He was only to begin building a wall if the Western Powers had not reacted after several days.¹⁴⁶

The Berlin crisis effectively ended with the wall's construction on August 13th. Around two in the morning, the international news agencies began their newsflashes the world over.¹⁴⁷ When notified, the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, commented "nobody is going to fight over Berlin," while President Kennedy remarked it was "not a very nice solution but... a hell of a lot better than a war."¹⁴⁸

Although it was deeply unpopular, East German security forces prevented any repetition of the June 17th, 1953 uprising, with protests being reduced to sporadic and ineffective individual actions that could easily be contained. The textbox overleaf explores some of the reasons for this muted response.¹⁴⁹

¹³⁹ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 48

¹⁴⁰ *Questions on German History. Paths to Parliamentary Democracy.* German Bundestag. 1998. Pg. 371/3

¹⁴¹ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 93

¹⁴² *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 98

¹⁴³ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 93, 115

¹⁴⁴ *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic.* Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 238

¹⁴⁵ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 93

¹⁴⁶ *The German Democratic Republic: Studies in European History.* Peter Grieder. 2012. Pg. 53

¹⁴⁷ *Trümmer - Träume - Tor zur Welt. Die Geschichte Hamburgs von 1945 bis heute.* Uwe Bahnsen, Kerstin von Stürmer. Sutton, 2012. Pg. 110, 112

¹⁴⁸ *The German Democratic Republic: Studies in European History.* Peter Grieder. 2012. Pg. 53

¹⁴⁹ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 93

On the other hand, the crisis marked an international turning point on the German question. The US made clear it was dropping the ritual incantation of German unification for a more realistic acceptance of the status quo. From now on, it would only defend West Germany, West Berlin and Allied rights of access.¹⁵⁰

17.15: Die Mauer: East Germany's 'Second Chance'

The closing of the frontier on August 13th, 1961 was a major turning point in the history of East Germany and was secretly regarded by the party faithful as its foundation day. It at last guaranteed factory managers would retain their workforces, and enabled General Secretary, Walter Ulbricht, to push ahead with his economic reforms and modern socialist vision.¹ The price for that, however, was that Berlin's wall became the most dangerous border in world history, even if the situation in the city eventually became more stable and tensions abated.²

Ostensibly built 'to keep western Fascism out of eastern Germany,' the accepted view today is that it was more to keep potential East German migrants in.³ The wall and barbed wire barrier eventually stretched the whole length of the interzonal border. With the division, over 60,000 East Berliners lost their jobs in the West.

Why was there no large-scale resistance to the wall? Fear of communist repression was the most important factor. But citizens of the GDR also dreaded another war. There was also widespread political apathy. Many Germans on both sides of the Iron Curtain felt helpless, since ultimately their fate was in the hands of the wartime allies. From the perspective of the provinces, the event was of less importance. Also, the secrecy with which 'Operation Rose' was conceived and the suddenness of its execution took the whole country by surprise, making resistance seem pointless.²

Of course, the Berlin Wall was a propaganda disaster for the SED because it advertised the fact that socialism could only be built behind barbed wire, concrete and watch towers. From the outside at least, the GDR now looked like a prison or concentration camp. But in reality, it was only an act of aggression against those among East German citizens who wished to travel or emigrate to the West and against West Berliners who wanted to visit their friends and relatives in the GDR. Ultimately, "the inhumanity of the 'anti-fascist protective rampart' did more damage to the country's reputation than anything else," writes Peter Grieder.²

The new wall sliced through the heart and soul of the city. People living on opposite sides of the same street now found themselves in different political universes, light years away from each other. Ordinary people could adapt to all of these changes or retreat into 'inner emigration.' Most did some of both. They hankered after life in the West, but adjusted to life in the East and took advantage of improved opportunities for qualification, consumption and leisure. Having no 'voice' and no 'exit,' East Germans had no choice but to accommodate.⁴

The Berlin Wall brutally solved the border question until 1989. But it also allowed the GDR a second chance to engineer a miracle of its own.¹

Sources:

1. *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 94, 98
2. *The German Democratic Republic: Studies in European History.* Peter Grieder. 2012. Pg. 54, 56, 57, 44, 58
3. See: bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14514916
4. *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic.* Donna Harsch. Princeton and Oxford, 2007. Pg. 237

Images:

Top: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall; Bottom: Source not known



How the Wall went up in 1961

Chronology of the building of the Berlin Wall:

- 13 August 1961 East Germany sealed off the border between East and West Berlin and between West Berlin and the surrounding East German territory. Only 13 official crossing points were left open. Between 1949 and 30 June 1961, 2,600,000 refugees had fled into West Germany. In the six weeks before 13 August, over 45,000 had crossed into West Berlin. In spite of the sealing of the border, 1,500 refugees escaped that day. An official announcement accused West Germany of preparing a civil war. The measures, it said, "were in the interests of peace in Europe and of the security of the GDR" and would remain until a peace treaty was concluded.
- 14 August 1961 The Brandenburg Gate was "temporarily" sealed by armed police and armoured cars.
- 17 August 1961 In the night Communist shock workers erected a 6-foot high concrete barrier topped with barbed wire in the Potsdamer Platz. Similar barriers were erected at other points.
- 22 August 1961 A "no man's land" 100 metres wide was declared and crossing point reduced to six. Visas were imposed for West Berliners. The Wall was extended to surround the whole of West Berlin.
- 23 August 1961 British and French troops patrolled the boundaries with tanks and armoured cars.

¹⁵⁰ *Germany from Defeat to Partition. 1945-1963.* D. G. Williamson. Pearson Education Ltd., 2001. Pg. 50

Nanny and Margot's mother was herself something of a Berliner. As the map right shows, she had lived in *Charlottenburg* in the 1920s, *Mitte* in the 1930s, and *Tiergarten* briefly in 1942. Now *Mitte* was surrounded by the Wall on three sides. What's more, the district now hosted one of the most important East-West border crossings: Checkpoint Charlie on *Friedrichstrasse*, an avenue whose one end was just a few minutes walk from Frau Tyralla's former home in *Albrechtstrasse*.



Above:
Three decades of Frau Tyralla's homes either side of what became The Berlin Wall.
Left:
Hamburg's mayor addresses protestors on August 18th, 1961 at *Rathausmarkt*, opposed to the building of the Berlin wall.
Source: *Trümmer - Träume - Tor zur Welt*. Pg. 110, 112

The country had almost turned full circle now. Not long before Frau Tyralla saw the light of day, in 1883, Germany itself had been founded, uniting north and south. Yet after the loss of the eastern territories, the division into East and West, and now the enclosure of West Berlin, it found itself a nation in pieces and at the centre of a cold war. Such was the price for its belligerence. Could she ever have imagined all that would have occurred in her lifetime. Or that East and West would one day be united again?

Plenty still did, and Frau Tyralla certainly can't have failed to notice Hamburg's reaction to the wall. Protest rallies showed cross-party support to the harried Berliners. More than 100,000 streamed into the *Rathausmarkt* on August 18th, demonstrating against the wall's construction. The public address system carried the Berlin freedom bells while the mayor, Paul Nevermann, brought Hamburg's citizens hope, "Berlin must remain free, and the zone must be free!" The Berliners responded: "We won't give up on reunification! Therefore, a free Berlin is the first step."¹⁵¹ And so it eventually was.

Six months after the wall went up, seven months short of her 80th birthday, Frau Tyralla's heart stopped beating on February 7th, 1962.¹⁵² Before collapsing, an alerted neighbour arranged for her to be taken to the *Allgemeinen Krankenhauses St. Georg*, some ten minutes from her flat.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *Trümmer - Träume - Tor zur Welt. Die Geschichte Hamburgs von 1945 bis heute*. Uwe Bahnsen, Kerstin von Stürmer. Sutton, 2012. Pg. 110, 112

¹⁵² Around 1400 hours, according to her death certificate, Nr. 254/1962

¹⁵³ Lohmühlenstrasse, 5 according to her death certificate, Nr. 254/1962

Irene took the news, and because Nanny was in hospital herself,¹⁵⁴ she conveyed it personally. She was not visibly upset, she recalled, and not because of her condition, reminding me that the distance between her and her mother went all the way back to her childhood. Irene also spoke to Tiny in Ireland and sent a telegram to Margot.

Top:
There goes Prussia! – and a piece of Silesian heritage:
Erdmuthé Frau Tyralla Nanny Tyralla,
27.9.1883 - 7.2.1962



None of the family made it to Hamburg for *Mutti's* funeral, largely due to the cost and distance – although if Tiny had still been in West Germany, I daresay a party would have journeyed to Hamburg. Ultimately, flowers went instead. With the Hiobs Hospital's tower bell tolling, I imagine she didn't leave the world quite as quietly as she had foreseen in her will – "*ganz still und leise.*"

Middle:
Wilhelmsburg, situated over several Elbe islands in Hamburg Mitte, saw the worst of the February 1962 floods.



I assume the ceremony took place ten or so days later, which it turns out wouldn't have been a good time to travel anyway. On the night of February 17th, a storm surge in the German Bight – the bay to the northwest of Hamburg – pushed a formidable wave of seawater toward the city, upon which local water levels reached record heights. Dykes broke in more than 60 places, rapidly flooding around a fifth of Hamburg. Thousands worked to assist those whose lives were in danger, while ten thousand individuals took to their roofs, attics or even trees. Some 20,000 were evacuated, while ultimately 60,000 homes were damaged.¹⁵⁵ For many, help arrived too late,¹⁵⁶ with some 315 lives being lost, 207 of which were in *Wilhelmsburg* (pictured left).

Bottom:
Looking across the frozen Binnenalster from under the Lombardsbrücke, the Jungfernstieg – where Frau Tyalla was photographed eight years earlier – in the background
Image sources:
Geo Epoche Panorama Nr. 7.
Pg. 174



Strangely enough, ten days before those floods occurred, Nanny dreamt of being lost at sea. Perhaps it was a premonition of what was to come. Frau Tyralla always knew how to dodge a crisis, I mused.

As indicated in her will, Frau Tyralla was cremated. A memorial stone was laid in Hamburg's *Ohlsdorf* cemetery, where it sat for the next 25 years or so –

certainly I had no chance of seeing it when I visited in 2001. Two or so months later,¹⁵⁷ as winter turned to spring, Frau Tyralla's close friend, Frida Engelking, forwarded the few possessions of any real value on to Nanny in Amsterdam. Among them was a watch she was always known to have worn – Nanny's gift to her once upon a time.

¹⁵⁴ Nanny had been ill and was hospitalised in Purmerend – which at that time was only accessible by boat – spending three weeks there for a prolapse repair.

¹⁵⁵ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea_flood_of_1962

¹⁵⁶ *Geo Epoche Panorama Nr. 7. Geschichte in Bildern. Hamburg. Der Geschichte der Stadt in historischen Fotos.* 2016. Pg. 122

¹⁵⁷ Formal notification, according to the reverse side of the will, must have been sometime after March 26th, when it was officially forwarded.

For her last ten years, Frau Tyralla had lived in the vicinity of her father's *Heimat*: Schleswig-Holstein – in his day, part of Prussia. Yet Mutti also loved to be by the sea, Tiny told me. Hamburg, being a city on water, sandwiched between the Alster and Elbe, criss-crossed by fleets and canals, was also *das Tor zur Welt*!¹⁵⁸

Hamburg was at something of a crossroads by the time Frau Tyralla passed away: for the Scandinavians heading south, and for the south Germans and residents of the Mediterranean travelling north, whether they were visiting the opera or theatres, shopping in *Mönckebergstrasse*, or visiting the clubs in *St. Pauli*.¹⁵⁹

Its *Reeperbahn* in particular was a controversial and lively stretch that her daughter, Nanny, together with Margot, had first visited way back in late 1927 and early 1928, back when elegant *variétés* lined the street. Although more than half of its buildings had been destroyed through Allied bombing, cheap high rises had quickly substituted the rubble remains of the *Gründerzeit* architecture. Once again it was a bustling meeting point, with beer halls and clip joints – nightclubs or bars that charge exorbitant prices. Striptease joints and prostitutes' grottos complemented the sights and services. Not that I supposed Frau Tyralla had ever ventured there – “the classier Hamburgers don't go, but 'he' allows himself on occasion.”¹⁶⁰

We can't leave Hamburg for ever without noting that in the vicinity of the *Reeperbahn*, there were many new music clubs too. And that it was at '*Indra*' that The Beatles' career was launched. Every night the five of them performed dance music for a wage of 30 Marks (GBP 2.50) each, typically before prostitutes and their suitors. The alcohol inspired them while stimulants kept them awake.¹⁶¹ More of their adventure is told in the textbox overleaf.

Frau Tyralla's passing was the last of our family's known living links to Germany – and so it remained until almost 40 years later. It was also the last occasion the name Tyralla would be heard for a great many years. And so with her passing, our connection to Leipzig, Saxony and also Silesia disappeared.

¹⁵⁸ *Hamburg. Bewegte Zeiten – die 50er Jahre*. Mathes Rehder, Wartberg Verlag, 1999. Pg. 46, 59, 60.

¹⁵⁹ *Hamburg. Bewegte Zeiten – die 50er Jahre*. Mathes Rehder, Wartberg Verlag, 1999. Pg. 40

¹⁶⁰ *Hamburg. Bewegte Zeiten – die 50er Jahre*. Mathes Rehder, Wartberg Verlag, 1999. Pg. 46

¹⁶¹ *Geo Epoche Panorama Nr. 7. Geschichte in Bildern. Hamburg. Der Geschichte der Stadt in historischen Fotos*. 2016. Pg. 119

17.16: Hamburg: From a City of Vice and Criminal Activity to a Pop City with a Global Reputation – with a little help from five friends

On August 17th, 1960, five young lads from Liverpool, the youngest, 17, the oldest, 20, stepped onto the stage of Hamburg’s neighbourhood club, *Indra*.

In the 1960s, Hamburg was a small Anglophile island in West Germany. It had already begun to encourage music and lifestyle journalists to visit a country known otherwise mainly for its classical music. But at the beginning of that decade, it began to transform into a pop city with a global reputation.



In fact, the process started with the end of post-war austerity and the transformation of West Germany into an affluent consumer society, which meant that by 1955, ‘a majority saw leisure no longer as a luxury.’ The period up to 1958 thus spawned the golden era of Hamburg’s Rock ‘n’ Roll scene which lasted until 1964. Julia Sneeringer, Professor of History at the City University of New York, refers to Hamburg in the early 1960s as a ‘laboratory for democratisation’.¹

Although the Hamburg that had grown out of the ruins of World War II had established a reputation throughout Europe as a city of vice and criminal activity, in contrast to an economically depressed post-war Liverpool, it was a wealthy city.²

At the same time, Indra’s owner, *Bruno Koschmider*, hoped to lure hard-drinkers in with *the Beatles*. Whilst performing there – in a side street off the *Reeperbahn*, the *Grosse Freiheit* – the band experimented to find their own style. George Harrison later stated: “*The gigs at Indra were the most important in the band’s history. Our high point as a live band was reached in Hamburg. We had to be already good as a band, to be able to play eight hours every night.*” John Lennon added, “*I might have been born in Liverpool - but I grew up in Hamburg.*”²

The conditions accompanying these magical moments might have been paltry – the band came by little sleep in former military bunks in a windowless room of a neighbouring cinema while the men’s toilet was their washroom – but the band quickly became a local sensation.

Young women were especially enraptured. I can’t but help recall my mother’s old Beatles seven inch singles, the first of which, *Twist and Shout*, was released in July 1963.

In December 1960, the Beatles headed back to the UK before returning to Hamburg from March to July 1961 and again in April 1962, to appear at the legendary *Star Club* once it opened.³

Might the band have pricked Alice’s grandmother’s ears first, I wonder?

Sources:

1. Review of *Rock’n’Roll in Germany: Hamburg from Burlesque to the Beatles, 1956-1969*. Julia Sneeringer. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. By Felix Fuhg. Humboldt University Berlin and Centre for Metropolitan Studies, Technical University Berlin. *German History. The Journal of the German Historical Society*. Vol. 37, No. 1, OUP, March 2019. Pg. 136-7

2. See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beatles_in_Hamburg

3. *Trümmer - Träume - Tor zur Welt. Die Geschichte Hamburgs von 1945 bis heute*. Uwe Bahnsen, Kerstin von Stürmer. Sutton, 2012. Pg. 106

Image:

The Beatles: John Lennon, George Harrison, and Paul McCartney together with Stuart Sutcliffe (bass) and Pete Best (drums) at the Hamburger Dom. *Geo Epoche Panorama Nr. 7. Geschichte in Bildern. Hamburg. Der Geschichte der Stadt in historischen Fotos*. 2016. Pg. 119

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News typically took its time to reach Uranium City. Although the dailies arrived twice a week from Edmonton, that still meant the headlines reached UC'ers three days late.¹⁶² The isolation anyway meant the urgency of news rarely impacted one so far north. Nevertheless, once the word was out about the 'anti-fascist' wall, I suppose UC's 'Friends of Berlin' will have looked on in either disbelief or nonchalance. The exceptions to 'late' news were notices of births, deaths and weddings, which would be delivered via radiogram, that is, a telegram sent by radio. With the news from Germany arriving with certain regularity in 1961 and 1962, I imagine Margot, who had lived in Berlin with her mother from 1925-1927 as a young teen, must have felt the heartstrings being pulled.

With the earlier news that the United States Atomic Energy Commission would not pick options on uranium contracts expiring in 1962-1963, although Eldorado secured a stay of execution, seven of the city's mines closed down in 1960. This had a knock-on effect on Uranium City's population, which having peaked at 4,600 in 1959, fell to 3,725 by August 1961.¹⁶³ The Stretch-Out Plan that was signed for Eldorado slowed production right down, so that instead of delivering in 1962, it would deliver on contracts until December 1966.¹⁶⁴ "Eventually, to preserve the industry, the government began stockpiling uranium ... Eldorado, however, as a crown company, received a loan to keep it in business."¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, by 1961, only Eldorado - and Gunnar to the south - were still operating.¹⁶⁶

By the end of 1961, "the entire Uranium City area had fallen into decline,"¹⁶⁷ with the loss of workers and their families. School classes began to thin out, which had consequences for some of the schoolteachers, whose contracts were not renewed.¹⁶⁸ From 1960, "Eldorado allowed its work force to drop, mainly by attrition, to a low of about 250 employees from a previous 500 ... [so as to] reduce their payroll," wrote Ben McIntyre.¹⁶⁹ "Morale in the town and at the Crown owned mine, was at an all time low."¹⁷⁰ "Houses were abandoned, businesses failed or closed up, and mortgages were foreclosed."¹⁷¹ Comparing photographs from the the 1957 building boom to the early sixties decline, one can't fail to notice how properties that had burnt down were not rebuilt, opening up vacant lots, downtown on Main Street.

Francis and Margot retained their jobs, although they too found themselves on the move in late 1960 or early 1961, not long before Ursula gave birth to triplets.¹⁷² I asked her if she recalled where the couple went, to which she answered, "They lived in a little house near the Hudson's Bay, where we would visit them."¹⁷³ (See the maps on pg. 940 and 963).

¹⁶² Source TBC

¹⁶³ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*. Aug. 8, 1961

¹⁶⁴ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 210

¹⁶⁵ *Eldorado. Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 428

¹⁶⁶ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 206

¹⁶⁷ *Gunnar Uranium Mine: Canada's Cold War Ghost Town*. Laurier L. Schramm. Saskatchewan Research Council, 2017, Pg. 95, citing Hanion, M. *Freeze Brings Uranium Town Bleak Option*. *Toronto Star*, Jan. 23, 1962. Pg. A14

¹⁶⁸ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 214

¹⁶⁹ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 239, 240.

¹⁷⁰ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 214

¹⁷¹ *Eldorado. Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 428

¹⁷² They all arrived safely on February 11, 1961

¹⁷³ Personal correspondence of September 18, 2019

The couple needed to state at least until late 1962, however, to reach the requisite five years they needed on Canadian soil in order to secure citizenship — and with that, the golden ticket to the US. I imagine the uncertainty over Eldorado’s future in late 1959 caused them some anxiety. And then, according to family lore, Francis also injured his leg, spending as many as two years on sick leave. If that were so, his accident ought to have happened around the time he and Margot moved out of the Dac’s basement apartment.

I checked this malady with his former acquaintances, and while Frank Fulop, acknowledges Francis limped before he left Canada, he assured me he continued to work in the mine. Isabel Ormandy agreed: *“I don’t think [he] could have been on sick leave as long as two years. In those days, if [one] couldn’t work they had to leave. Also, there was no such thing as early retirement, and he would not have been there long enough to get a pension.”* She supplemented: *“I don’t remember Frank being hurt, although if he was, he would have been entitled to workman’s compensation.”*

When Francis Haris (third from left) was awarded Canadian citizenship, all of Uranium City was informed
Source: Northland News Aug.1962. Vol.8. No.17



By 1962, UC’s population had further fallen to 3,000.¹⁷⁴ Yet from August of that same year, the couple’s San Francisco dream came a step closer to reality, when Francis received Canadian citizenship — five years and five months after setting foot in Canada. This was good news for Margot too, as she could also now qualify as his wife — the Citizenship Act of 1946 granting nationality to a foreign woman married to a Canadian man after one year’s residence as a landed immigrant.¹⁷⁵



Nevertheless, it looks as if she formally received hers in late 1962, having arrived three months later than Francis.¹⁷⁶

Some say Donaldson Lakeshore, others Fredette (which feeds the creek of the same name that enters Martin Lake at ‘Kiwamis Beach’). Its autumn either way and found within 10-25 minutes of UC

Source: Herbert Weber via [Uranium City Friends](#)

As they wound down the clock, what activities might the couple have checked off their bucket lists? Hunting grabbed the attention of some. Lake Athabasca had been part of a fur trapping trail in the nineteenth century,¹⁷⁷ and although the beavers had long since died out, in the fifties and sixties would-be hunters went in search of caribou (the north American term

¹⁷⁴ *Gunnar Uranium Mine: Canada’s Cold War Ghost Town*. L.L. Schramm. Saskatchewan Research Council, 2017. Pg. 36

¹⁷⁵ See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Citizenship_Act_1946

¹⁷⁶ Enquiry submitted for a similar announcement for Margot to the [Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan](#) on Aug. 29th, 2021 via its [online enquiry](#) form (rather than info@archives.gov.sk.ca).

¹⁷⁷ *The History of Uranium City and District*. Candu High School (Class 10B), Uranium City, 1982. Pg. 16.

Online at: uraniumcity-history.com/memorabilia/history-uc-district-booklet

for reindeer), which the native Cree Indians would serve in the form of “caribou meat suppers” while at other times “rabbit stew, fresh fish, bannock [a variety of flat quick bread] and tea.”¹⁷⁸ At the western “end of Lake Athabasca ... nearby bison roam, mingling with the caribou herds from the north.”¹⁷⁹

In Francis’ shoes, I would have hiked up Beaverlodge Mountain to take in the views in September. That’s when “night time frosts” transform “the leaves of the birch, alder and wild berry bushes (raspberry, pincherry and red and black currants) from green to shades of gold and crimson,” wrote Ben McIntyre of his first visit in 1952. “Spread before us was a beautiful panorama of colour. The deep blue of pristine lakes contrasting with the dark almost black green of jackpine and the autumn colours of the deciduous trees and bushes.”¹⁸⁰ From that vantage point, he recalled half a dozen lakes being visible. The only downside were the notorious swarms of blackflies.

If neither of those pastimes grabbed Margot and Francis’ attention, there was always the much-favoured picnics and barbecues, which Isabel told me all about. Despite the short summer season, they were often held at the nearby lakes. Even those held in June, when the days were at their longest, still allowed one to put their beer in the snowbank to keep them cool.



In June it was never difficult to find a beer cooler by the lakes! Snow at Lake Athabasca’s edge.
Source:
Richard Poworski via [Uranium City Friends](#)

Isabel confirmed Margot and Francis relished such occasions. Although she and her husband, Les, only knew them for a short time, having themselves arrived in Uranium City in the summer of 1962,¹⁸¹ she too recalls how the pair:

“were lots of fun to be with - dances, parties, visits. I well remember being at the dances with them and several others, including Frank Fulop. Eldorado Mine, for example, had big buffet dances for the miners and wives every Christmas or New Year and gave all the miners a turkey for Christmas.”

Frank Fulop agreed that “Margot was a very good dancer.”¹⁸² Thanks to Isabel, I was fortunate to receive the photo overleaf, which shows the group on New Years eve in 1962, at Eldorado’s Recreation Centre, where one also found a gymnasium, curling rink, library, café, movie theatre, games room and squash court.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ *Yesterday. Otaakosihk.* Rita Holmgren Anderson. Indian Life Books, 2015. Pg. 80

¹⁷⁹ *Eldorado. Canada’s National Uranium Company.* Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 278

¹⁸⁰ *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town.* Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 10

¹⁸¹ Isabel Ormandy was a resident of Uranium City between 1962 and 1976. She was born in the UK in 1939 while her Hungarian husband, Les, was born in 1935.

¹⁸² Personal correspondence of March 19, 2020

¹⁸³ Date confirmed by Andy Schultz via email on April 16, 2020



Where friends become family. UC's 'Dinner and Dance' with Francis, Margot (bottom right), dear Frank Fulop (in the party hat, left), Isabel Ormandy smiling at the camera with husband Les alongside. The couple at the back are Andy and Marg(aret) Schultz (she later worked at the Hudson's Bay Store).
Source: Isabel Ormandy

Now knowing a little better the couple I never met, I could hardly imagine they'd leave UC without a farewell party. And if confirmed, hoped that would help pinpoint the precise date of their departure – and subsequent arrival in San Francisco.

Ursula Dac told me: *"There was a farewell for Margot and Frank, the couple having talked excitedly about leaving for the U.S. I think they left in the spring of 1963."* While Marella Rosta confirmed that after their departure, they were missed: *"I knew the dear couple, although just a short while. Margot was a kind-hearted soul whom everybody loved."*¹⁸⁴

Once gone, however, Margot and Francis – perhaps not surprisingly – never returned, although that is not to say they never looked back. For the many who stayed on, most strove to make Uranium City a better place. Indeed, Frank Fulop, later a taxi driver, was one of the last to leave, when Eldorado finally closed in 1982.

It seems incredible to think that the mine continued to operate as late as then. But even the suddenness of that decision took the remaining 2,500 residents by complete surprise – the conclusion to which is told in the textbox opposite (which also features a more recent photo of the Dacs' – and Margot and Francis' home).

With love's great adventurers' tenure of Uranium City at an end, what was their financial gain? According to the ITN's *'Roving Report: The Road to Uranium'*, Francis should have earned something in the region of 700 Canadian Dollars per month or 40 dollars per day.¹⁸⁵ That was in 1957 and commensurate with his experience.¹⁸⁶ Not counting inflation over the next five years, he ought to have scooped some 42,000 Canadian Dollars. One Canadian Dollar in 1957 is now worth 9.34 in late 2021 which Francis earned around 392,000 Canadian dollars (263,000 Euros).¹⁸⁷ Even if a portion of that had been used for living expenses, they still had a handsome sum to take to the US.

¹⁸⁴ Personal correspondence of August 5, 2018 (in Hungarian): *"Ismertem a kedves házaspárt de csak egy rövid ideig. Margót nagyon megnyerő és kedves, teremtés volt es mindenki szerette!"*

¹⁸⁵ At neighbouring Gunnar mine, hourly wages were said to be among the highest in Canada: CAD 2.09 for a labourer per hour and CAD 2.75 for a longhole blaster. Underground workers also earned bonuses on production. A mill labourer took home CAD 1.61 per hour. *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*, Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 51, 55. *N.b. The CAD 1.61 rate is confirmed by Bothwell on Pg. 322*

¹⁸⁶ Online at: gettyimages.be/detail/video/the-road-to-uranium-women-interviewed-about-dogs-sot-nieuwsfootage/828047622

¹⁸⁷ See: inflationcalculator.ca

17.17: Uranium City: From Boom – to Bust

On December 3rd, 1981, Eldorado Nuclear took everyone by surprise when it announced it would close the 30 year old mine and mill – as early as June 30th, 1982.² Especially because a raft of new capital investments had been completed by Eldorado, making the decision all the more bewildering. That included mine rehabilitation and expansion, a hydro dam and power generating plant, housing plus a brand new office building.¹ Decommissioning was planned to last until June 1983.²

Yet in 1974, after further contract extensions, the perspective for the mine was that it would continue operating until at least 1985. CANDU High School was just brand new and entrepreneurs and individuals took out loans to host new businesses and set up new homes. “No home-owners, even those employed by Eldorado, nor any business people, were ever indemnified for the loss of home and business. Eldorado paid the moving expenses, up to a maximum of CAD9000 per family for their own employee. Eventually this scheme was extended to cover non-Eldorado employed residents and was paid for by the Provincial and Federal Governments. No other compensation was received.”¹



With the closure of the mine, Uranium City became a ghost town. The following year, the population fell to 800 from 2,500 in 1981.² “Entire families packed what meager belongings they could from their homes and turned their backs on the rest behind, which was either scavenged or left to rust and rot.”³ By 1986, there were 200 residents left and today, just 50 inhabit the place – a mix of white settlers, and people of the *Woodland Cree*, *Dene* and *Métis Nations*. 336 homes lie abandoned, alongside two condo projects, an apartment block and at least 22 commercial buildings.

According to Robert Boschman and Bill Bunn, writing in MDPI.com’s *Humanities*, “The rise and abandonment of Uranium City constitutes an environmental history yet to be fully evaluated by humanities scholars.... Decisions rendered by others many years ago still impact the water, soil, air and life forms in this space. Apart from the former mines... its derelict

suburbs and landfill...could benefit from assessment, funding, and remediation ... In the words of current resident, *Ken Mercredi*, a Woodland Cree man who not long ago returned to the place of his birth as a guardian and citizen scientist, Uranium City “is the lesson.”

Sources:

1. *Uranium City: The Last Boom Town*. Ben McIntyre. Driftwood Publishers, 1993. Pg. 314, 315, 321
2. *The History of Uranium City and District*. Candu High School (Class 10B), Uranium City, 1982. Pg. 63. Online at: uraniumcity-history.com/memorabilia/history-uc-district-booklet
3. *Ghost Town, Saskatchewan: Uranium City: Photo Essay by Chris Morin, September 4, 2013* Online at: ominocity.com/2013/09/04/ghost-town-saskatchewan-uranium-city-photo-essay
4. *Nuclear Avenue: “Cyclonic Development”, Abandonment, and Relations in Uranium City, Canada*. R. Boschman and B. Bunn. ‘Humanities’ MDPI. Jan. 2018. Vol. 7, No. 5. Pg. 1, 2, 10. Online at: mdpi.com/2076-0787/7/1/5/pdf.

Images:

Top: Uranium City Chamber of Commerce advertisement: *Prince Albert Daily Herald*. June 18, 1962
 Middle: Looking east along Uranium Road in the mid-1950s (top) and a little lower down in May 1920 (bottom). Note the red arrows pointing to the ‘wall’ in both photos, the reverse of which says, ‘Welcome to Uranium City Hotel’. The hotel (which replaced that pictured on pg. 940) was burned in a controlled fire in the winter of 1997-8). 3M carwash is the lone building that stands today.
 Image sources: Upper photo: Uranium City Friends. Facebook group, online at: [facebook.com/groups/4168822363](https://www.facebook.com/groups/4168822363). Lower photo: Andy Schultz, [Flickr](https://www.flickr.com/photos/andyschultz/). Bottom: The empty shell of Ursula and Roman Dac’s home, February 1, 2020, courtesy of Andrea Melzer.



A Gunnar resident noted in *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake* that many immigrant workers at that mine sent money home to their families.¹⁸⁸ And I understand that even if Margot didn't write so often, she still sent cash to her sister, and I daresay her mother as well. Alice too received a much valued pocket transistor radio that I am guessing probably came through the Hudson's Bay store, or perhaps the Simpsons-Sears catalogue.

Yet I still dwell on the fact that both their earnings were ultimately made from activity that fed off a cold war, that in turn divided Europe — and family. I wonder if the couple dwelt much on that? Were they peacekeepers? War mongers? Or simply cold war accessories? "It took until June 1965 for the government of Canada to announce its policy that Canadian uranium was available only for peaceful use." But it took a decade after "the completion of deliveries on the USEAC contracts ... [before there was] ... substantial demand by the nuclear power industry."¹⁸⁹

At the start of 2018, distant relative Gerard Tyralla recalled to me how in the 1890s in Radstein, Silesia, where Margot's father had been born, "there was maybe just one or a few young men who had the ambition to study more and were brave enough to leave their Heimat and go into the unknown, like Paul Tyralla."

In a sense, Margot had become every bit the pioneer that he — a fur trader — had been in 1896 aged 14, or Nanny had been in 1923, when she sailed for the new world, aged 15. To my mind, however, Margot's journey to its last frontier town, Uranium City, was a cut above that. In this regard, she took after her father moreso than Nanny, who of course eventually returned to Europe. Although that's by no means to say the buck stopped there — daughter Tiny by now having criss-crossed Europe while Irene had been all set to move to the US herself. The family's matriarch, Paul Tyralla's widow, although sounding a tad sorry for herself in her will, should have been proud of her family's achievements (and perhaps she was, at heart).

With Canadian citizenship in their hands, the two 'California Dreamers' from Leipzig and Budapest, left UC, initially for Vancouver — although Isabel was convinced "they went back to Hungary, as no one heard from them after." Nonetheless, Frank Fulop and Ursula Dac both told me they exchanged addresses, so UC will have remained in the hearts and minds of the couple, long after their departure.

Having played a part in Uranium City's history, how would they have looked back on that era? I was touched by the nostalgic reactions of former resident and Eldorado employee, Mike Ricks, who shared his poetic memoir with *Uranium City Friends* in 2019. Although he arrived a good few years after Margot and Francis,¹⁹⁰ I imagine I'd be telling it the way he does. Certainly, his fondness for the locale, shared with his permission in the text box opposite, is obvious, Mike adding, "I wouldn't have missed those years up north for quids." But like him and others, Francis and Margot largely lived for the moment. And in that very moment, it was "California here we come!"

¹⁸⁸ *Sun Dogs and Yellowcake. Gunnar Mines - A Canadian Story*. Patricia Sandberg. Crackingstone Press, 2016. Pg. 125

¹⁸⁹ *Eldorado. Canada's National Uranium Company*. Robert Bothwell, University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pg. 432

¹⁹⁰ Mike explains: "I was at Eldorado from July 75 to Oct 80, worked as a Mining Engineer having just graduated in England. We became Canadian citizens and I took a mining job in Australia intending to live there for a couple years and come back. However, there was a downturn in the mining industry around '82, I was lucky enough to get a job in SE Queensland, and life there proved too comfortable, so we became Australians!"

17.18: The Unforgettable North

It wasn't so much the uranium as the time and place. The ore was not a dirty word in the oil-short 70's. Yellow cake flew south on a DC 4 to make electricity elsewhere in the world. In a bubble of humanity perched on lake shores and sandwiched between the tundra and the prairies in a vast area of the boreal woods our mining settlement thrived on good wages and the best of times.

One channel of TV via a satellite brought a limited view of that other world. The telephone was hardly important, I had a post office box to keep in touch with the country and family left behind, across an ocean. All the people who now seemed to matter were here in the same bubble, miners and geologists and schoolteachers. Total strangers a year or two previously were now best friends to drink and flirt with. My new job, marriage and a baby promised a life that would bring all expectations.

A broad lake glistened with waves in the summer sun or lay motionless under its white ice cap in winter. Both seasons brought their activities, on a toboggan behind half a dozen panting huskies or at the tiller of a thrumming outboard motor. My cabin on a secluded lake shore rose log by log over a summer and kept me warm by my own labours in the next winter's cracking cold.

Teenage girls babysat for our teachers' parties, dances in the rec hall, dinners with friends. Skidoo boots crunching on dry snow, I would walk the babysitter home along silent streets, every house with its plume of furnace steam rising into the frigid air. Under the flickering aurora I used to walk up the hill to feed the dogs with a pail of hot slop, their howls following me back down to the house. In the basement a dory took shape, to be reassembled as the snow left the garden in a rush come spring. The dory joined others, jostling at the T-dock on bright summer days, waiting for work underground to make way for fishing and exploring 30 miles of lake shore bays and islands.

We had one of everything in town, from a bank to the hardware, auto repairs and supermarket. Natives and mounties, teachers and miners, bought their groceries, ordered their mail-order furniture, chose practical clothes from The Bay, left their cars and pick-ups running outside, chatted in the street at 30 below. Kids in snowsuits played out in all temperatures until the dark, or dinner, or Sesame Street tempted them inside. The thunk of a hockey puck sounded in the dark across our community on silent star-studded evenings.

The woods were home to the unseen. In the snow I could spot wolf tracks, snowshoe hare runs, caribou and moose kept their distance, ptarmigan sat still. Only the raven would make their ratchet noise from power poles and sit pondering the heavy lids of garbage cans. For a month or two mosquitoes and blackflies ruled so that you would seek a cool dry breeze, or briefly bless winter. The seasons, and life, raced by like a huge turning wheel and after six full revolutions we left to a different life where everything changed.

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Thirty five years later I sit by a different lake shore. This one is warm, brown from vegetation, the sun is higher and hotter. The children are grown, up and apart in distance and familiarity. Jackpine and spruce, wolf and caribou, are in a different hemisphere. Now paper barks and scribbly gums hide goannas and snakes. Like nearly everyone who lives in this country I am on the edge of a big brown land that merges into the Pacific. There is a faint roar of surf from over forested sandhills and mangroves thrive close by. It is Easter and we get cooler nights as the sub-tropical summer gives up slowly.

In the heat of summer here memories of the deep silent cold of the north come to mind often. Life was an adventure, we had all the gadgetry and technology we needed in the 70s. We just didn't know that there was so much more to come. Embrace the north because it seems that once you leave, like time, there is no going back.



Source: Mike Ricks. Shared on Facebook with Uranium City Friends, 25 June 2019 and reproduced with his kind permission. Online at: [facebook.com/groups/4168822363/permalink/10156038727257364](https://www.facebook.com/groups/4168822363/permalink/10156038727257364)

Images: Mick Ricks, [Uranium City Friends](#). Top: Mike's Beaverlodge lakeside cabin. Bottom: His dory at dawn on Lake Athabasca.

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