

Letters offer a glimpse of a time long lost, or never known, when the East Coast offered refuge during WW II

Dear Francis Marie

by Sandra Phinney

"I, FRANCES MARIE Keddy, born July 28, 1914, at Forties, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia—a pretty country village—was one of a large family, six brothers and four sisters. When I finished school I put my name in to train for a nurse. Classes were filled for over a year, so I went to Lunenburg to be a companion to Mrs. Gardner, a lovely lady who was not well. I belonged to the "Air Detection Corp" when war was declared. That meant we watched and reported to Halifax the colours and markings of any planes we saw. I was in Lunenburg when the Norwegian boats arrived. I attended the Civic Reception for the Norwegians. We were then considered introduced, and were asked to show respect and kindness to them."

SO STARTS a handwritten memoir scribbled by Frances Keddy on a large, lined notepad. By her own admission, Francis would need to live another 94 years to write all the memories she associates with the war years—especially about Camp Norway.



When the German army invaded Norway on April 9, 1940, there were more than 1,000 Norwegian ships at sea including tankers, merchant marine ships and whalers. With their nation under invasion, thousands of men couldn't go home; Lunenburg became their home away from home, in part because the town had shipbuilding facilities, and the Norwegians set up

living quarters called "Camp Norway." As their ships were refitted for battle, the men also prepared to return to sea—this time, as warriors.

Frances was 26 when she attended that first reception, and took to heart the urgings of the mayor to befriend the Norwegians—although at first she drew the line when invited to go to a dance with Alf Thorsen, a married man.

BARRINGTON PLACE SHOPS

Shoes
Shoes
Services
Services
Food & Beverages
Food & Beverages
Gifts & Furnishings
Gifts & Furnishings
Clothing & Accessories
Clothing & Accessories
Accessories

BARRINGTON PLACE SHOPS



SHOPRightdowntown

DOWNTOWN HALIFAX
AT THE DELTA BARRINGTON:
Barrington and Duke Street

INDOOR PARKING AT SCOTIA SQUARE PARKADE

ENTRANCES:

- Barrington Street • Granville Mall
 - Across the Pedway from Scotia Square Mall
- T. 902.429.3660

Dear Frances Marie!
 m.w./-Lost Lt. has arrived
 this port today, all well on-
 board. We haven't lost a man,
 I am quite sure. It is a very
 good boat. The trip was very
 interesting and wonderful. I think
 but too short. Plenty bandy and
 and enough.
 Young captain
 H. Aas.

Her employer, Mrs. Gardner, was aghast. "How do you think those men are going to dance? They've got no sweethearts, no sisters, nobody here. Our daughter is going with Commander Sorrensen and I'm sure he's a married man. So if Alf calls the house again, I'll tell him you're going!"

Frances did go to the dance with Alf Thorsen, and that was the start of a lifelong friendship. But there were scores of others whom she also befriended, and when her minister advocated from the pulpit to correspond with the men, she also took this to heart.

"I spent every penny I had on paper and stamps, and all my free time writing letters," she says.

And the men wrote back. Hundreds of letters and newspaper clippings stuffed in bulging albums provide a window into a time long lost—or never known.

Like this letter from Einar Aas:

Dear Frances Marie!
 I am longing for a picture of you. I love seeing your smiling face. It makes life more glorious and wonderful. I don't like this hunting so well. Now I am on board the well-known ship—and there is a price for my head today—and also for the ship... I am afraid it is a hard job....

The context of these remarks is that after Hitler invaded a certain part of Norway, the captain of a whaling ship returned to find his village destroyed and most of his family dead. The captain swore revenge. As Hitler took over plants in Norway and set them up to further his cause, this captain and his men sailed into port at night and destroyed the enemy's fortifications. Knowing the fjords inside



out, the Norwegians were able to escape without getting caught, and the "phantom ship" gained notoriety.

Around that time, 19-year-old Einar had received a scholarship to the British Navy Academy and left Lunenburg, but within a few weeks he wrote Frances to say he had abandoned the British Navy for a more noble cause. On the back of one picture he says, "The rig (uniform) is different, but I'm doing more now than I ever did before."

Frances later discovered he had signed up for duty on the 597-ton Norwegian torpedo boat *Sleipner*, serving on this ghost ship until the war was over. He then married, as did Frances, and they stopped corresponding.

Then in 2001, some 60 years later, serendipity stepped in: Frances became in touch with Einar's daughter via the Internet, and she sent her old friend's daughter copies of his letters.

Oh the memories!

Frances never let go of the memorabilia. Clippings, files, letters,

roots & folks: history



Lunenburg's Camp Norway, operating from 1940 to 1943, had barracks for 800 men, a mess hall and other buildings. Townsfolk were told to befriend the Norwegians. Left: Frances Keddy.

albums and boxes are everywhere in her rambling homestead. It's even a challenge to find a place to put a cup of tea on the dining room table.

Questioned on this, Frances confesses that she started her habit of collecting things when she was shorter than a shovel handle. When her brothers went rabbit hunting, she extracted a promise from them that they would save all their spent shell casings for her. She's been collecting ever since.

Out of the blue, Frances says, "Do you know why this place is called the Forties?" Her eyes twinkle as she explains that years ago, when the lots were surveyed between New Ross and where she now lives, 20 were designated in one area and 20 in another.

Combined, that region was called "Forties." Growing up, folks who lived there were often the brunt of jokes, and Frances was constantly asked how Forties got its name.

"One night while I was in Lunenburg, the capital of the county," she says (with a hint of sarcasm), "I came up with the answer. The town of Lunenburg decided to survey the mentality of the people, and when they got back in the sticks they found that people there had 40 per cent more sense than anywhere else in the county... so they called it the Forties. I never got asked again!" 🐾

COACHMAN INN

Mid-Week Summer Discount





10% off

Mention this ad and receive 10% off your entire stay!

**For rates and availability
call 1-800-824-6183**

380 US Route 1
Kittery, Maine 03904
www.CoachmanInn.net

Available Sunday-Thursday Only. Cannot be combined with other offers.
Some restrictions may apply. Expires August 31, 2009.



The Power To Live Better.

You worked hard and invested wisely. You earned the right to your quality of life. Why let an unreliable power system interrupt your life?

With standby power from a *Sommers Signature* generator system, you can enhance your life with the confidence that your home will never be compromised by power outages. Enjoy the comfort of having just the right generator system for your home.

Call 1.800.690.2396. **"Live better"** with generator systems built and backed by Sommers.



SOMMERS
Generator Systems

1.800.690.2396
www.sommersgen.com
Authorized **WINGO** Distributor



Sentinel
Remote Monitoring