

# Mrs. Luther Tells of Easter In Native Land of Estonia

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Mr. and Mrs. Fred Luther and their two sons, Lars and Holgar of Devola, are natives of Estonia, a small country on the Baltic Sea and a part of Russia.

The Luther family were forced to flee their home in 1939 before the onslaught of Bolshevism and for almost two decades they were a part of the great uprooted, running and wandering across Europe until they arrived in this country in 1955.

"In our homeland, Easter was one of our biggest holidays surrounded with many traditions for members of both the Protestant and the Greek Orthodox Church which was then the state religion," Mrs. Luther said.

"During Lent the members of the Greek Orthodox Church went on a very restricted diet eating no meat or butter and living largely on fish, sunflower oil and "fruit" sugar."

Part of the refining process of regular sugar, it seems, has to do with bone meal which made it unfit for Lenten meals.

"Then, from Palm Sunday until sunrise on Easter, they observed a strict fast eating nothing but bread and water the whole week," Mrs. Luther added.

## Services Started Saturday

The Easter services started Saturday evening with confession. During the service everyone carried a candle and a part of the traditional observations consisted in carrying a coffin in solemn procession around the church to symbolize the dead Christ.

At sunrise, the priest announced to the congregation in a triumphant voice, "Christ is risen," and all the church bells in the city rang out the glad tidings.

Mrs. Luther remembered with particular nostalgia the sound of the bells from the great "boomers" to the small, silver-throated ones.

This was a happy time. Everyone turned and greeted ev-



Mrs. Fred Luther

eryone else with, "Christ is risen," to which the answer was, "Indeed He is risen."

At this, each kissed the other on the cheeks, first one side and then the other, three times symbolizing the Holy Trinity.

And now, the long fast was broken with plenty of rich food, certain dishes of which were traditional and must always appear on the Eastern menu.

One of these, a finely ground cottage cheese, was prepared with almonds, sugar, eggs, cream and candied fruit. The mixture was pressed in a mold the shape of a pyramid, without a capstone, which left it flat on top. Pressed into the food by the mold was the initials of Christ, and the flat top was decorated with one red rose.

The name if this dish as near as it could be Anglicized would be "Pacha," Mrs. Luther said.

Each table must also have a "Baba," a huge, bee-hive shaped cake made with yeast which was often three feet in height and which was sliced horizontally. Recipes for the Baba varied, but all were rich,

and one, Mrs. Luther remembered calling for 120 eggs.

## Priest Blessed The Food

The priest went to the home of every parishoner and personally blessed and tasted the food and wine before the family partook of the meal.

"It was customary to give him a gift and he would have one or two helpers along to help carry them," Mrs. Luther said, adding that before he had covered his parish he was a tired, well filled and heavily laden man.

"It was also the custom on Easter for everyone to go from house to house to eat," she said. "Then the doctors took over," she laughed.

The Easter Holiday in Estonia lasted until Wednesday with church services on Monday and Tuesday and special traditions observed during the entire time.

The Protestant Churches, to which the Luthers belong, observed many of the same customs in celebrating the Easter Holiday.

The dietary observances were not so rigid, nor did their minister come on Easter morning to taste and bless the food, but "we all, always, had Pacha and Baba and some of the other Easter food," Mrs. Luther explained.

Mr. and Mrs. Luther told of many other Easter customs of their native Estonia such as the raised buckwheat cakes, called "Blini," which were served with black caviar, sour cream, and anchovies.

Blini was the traditional dish served at the beginning of lent.

## Green Thursday

The day before Good Friday was called, "Green Thursday," and was faithfully celebrated by devout Protestant families by taking a long walk through the country regardless of weather.

"On Green Thursday we ate a green soup made from the tender shoots of young herbs, hard boiled eggs, and fried potatoes," Luther said, adding that this was one of the most

special days of the Easter season in his family.

In Estonia there was an Easter bunny, colored eggs, and candy, for the little ones much like we have here, and a game called "Rolling Eggs," which the children played and which both Mr. and Mrs. Luther remembered with merriment.

What is it like in their little, much fought-over Estonia today? From behind the Iron Curtain, who knows for sure what goes on.