

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5411

Hurtzig, Klara Luise

(1878 - 1978)

Born 13 October, 1878, Dorum Niedersachsen Germany

Died 16 May, 1978, HildesheimHildesheim Niedersachsen Germany

Summary

During World War One the Australian government interned Frau Luise Hurtzig as an enemy alien together with her husband Captain August Hurtzig, an officer with the Norddeutscher Lloyd shipping company, and their two younger daughters Hanna and Lore. Initially the Hurtzigs were interned in Brisbane and then Enoggera before being moved to the Berrima Concentration Camp, New South Wales in 1915, and then to the Molonglo Concentration Camp, Fyshwick, Canberra in May 1918. They were finally released on 22 May 1919, and repatriated to Germany on the SS Kursk, sailing on 29 May 1919.

Details

Klara Luise Von Hanffstengel was born to Margarethe Bredenkamp and Cornelius Gustav von Hanffstengel in Dorum, Niedersachsen, Germany on 13 October 1878. She married August Wilhelm Herman Martin Hurtzig (1870-1938) on 11 Jul 1902 in Wulsdorf, Bremerhaven, Germany and gave birth to three daughters in Wulsdorf – Eva Margarethe Anna Klara Hurtzig on 20 August 1904, Hanna Meta Cornelia Hurtzig on 17 December 1908 and Lore Agnes Luise Hurtzig on 12 January 1912.

In 1914 Luise Hurtzig, with Hanna and Lore, accompanied Captain Hurtzig on a voyage from Bremen in northern Germany to Australia via Singapore. The eldest daughter, Eva remained at home with her grandparents so she could attend school. The family intended to be back in Germany in time for Christmas but when Britain declared itself at war with Germany in August 1914, soldiers boarded German ships in Australian harbours, seized them as prizes of war and detained German nationals on board. Among the ships seized was the Prinz Sigismund, a Norddeutscher Lloyd vessel captained by August Hurtzig who was detained along with his wife Luise and daughters, five-year-old Hanna and two-year-old Lore, who had sailed with him for a family holiday. Initially the Hurtzigs and other German nationals were detained on board the Prinz Sigismund, a comfortable ship originally built as the Kaiser's private yacht, moored in the Brisbane River off the Botanic Gardens. (Simons, 25-27). During this time Frau Hurtzig began a diary which she continued during the long years of the family's detention – on board the ship (1914), at Enoggera Concentration Camp, Queensland (1914-1915), Berrima Concentration Camp, New South Wales (1915-1918) and then the Molonglo Concentration Camp, near the new federal capital at Canberra (1917-1919). She recorded day to day life, delight when receiving news of Eva and anguish at being parted from her, grief when her brother Otto was killed in action on the Western Front near Reims, details of their moves from one camp to another, and life as an internee.

In October 1914 the family were moved from Brisbane to Enoggera Concentration Camp, west of Brisbane. Here those senior merchant marine officers with families were permitted to live outside the camp with their families as long as they reported to the camp once a week. Luise recorded that her family was able to share a house with two other couples and three older men and that the military paid them each one shilling a day in living expenses which she noted they were able 'to manage quite well on' (Simons, 56). Authorities permitted internees to return to their ships to collect clothing, bedding, furniture and other personal possessions and Brisbane's Lutheran community helped with outstanding needs.

Around August 1915 the Hurtzigs were moved to Berrima, New South Wales along with other interned members of the German mercantile marine, mainly officers from German merchant vessels caught in Australian ports at the outbreak of war and officers from the SMS Emden, a light cruiser sunk by the HMAS Sydney off Cocos Island in 1914. The men were required to live in the Berrima gaol, which they named Ahnenschloss (Castle Foreboding) in light of the basic facilities. They could visit their wives and children and were free to move within a two mile radius of gaol area during the day as long as they returned in time to be locked up at 5.30 pm. Women had to find rental accommodation, which was scarce, for themselves and their children. Frau Hurtzig was dismayed to have to share a house with the store manager's wife, the quarrelsome and moody Frau Glinz. Having not been permitted to take their furniture with them from Enoggera, the internees pooled

resources and talents and made it themselves. Creative in their approach to the difficult circumstances, they established a canteen from which they raised funds to rent ground and buy seeds so they could grow their own food. They established art and music classes, theatre groups, an orchestra, built recreational huts on the river banks, organised festivals and sporting events on the nearby river and established a school for the girl internees, including Hanna and Lore Hurtzig.

Soon after their arrival in Berrima, local police required three of the other German women to leave while Frau Hurtzig and other internee wives were permitted to stay on condition they swore on the bible that they 'would not raise arms against England'. Her children played with local children although the local schoolteacher had forbade it. By Spring 1915 word of the bridge the Germans had built over the river, their huts and general activities was drawing large crowds of visitors. Frau Hurtzig wrote: 'They come by horse, motor bike, car, dray and omnibus. They are all anxious to see the Germans, the "Huns". They admire the cabins and the picnic places which they then use, leaving behind heaps of paper and rubbish' (Simons, 83).

The Hurtzigs were delighted to be told in late 1916 that they would soon be repatriated to Germany, but having packed their belongings and seen them taken away in the expectation and promise they would be leaving on 7 February, the family's hopes were dashed. Luise's spirits slumped and as a result she seldom wrote in her diary which she had previously written each Sunday evening. Her occasional entries expressed sadness at deaths of family and friends on the battlefronts, concerns about her husband's health and his bouts of depression and that of his colleagues, and the resumption of Frau Glinz's abusive and neurotic behaviour. Although they had some freedom, they remained prisoners in a foreign country.

In August 1918, authorities relocated married men and their families, including the Hurtzigs, to Molonglo Concentration Camp near Canberra that had originally been constructed to hold German and Austrian nationals from China and East Africa, however overtures by the German government and threats of reprisals on British internees in Germany meant the plan did not go ahead. Poor conditions in the Bourke Concentration Camp in western New South Wales, and the death of an internee from sunstroke, led to the removal of families from that camp to Molonglo. At the same time, authorities relocated most of the families from Berrima.

There is a gap of more than a year between Luise's diary entries from August 1917 to October 1918. Her first entry from Molonglo 14 October 1918 records excitement at news that hostilities had ceased. The following day Luise's hope were again dashed – she wrote of her disillusionment and despair that fighting had resumed. After that she recorded only happy times and these were few, however in her final entry on 9 March 1919 Luise expressed apprehension about the future for her family and her country.

On 29 May 1919 the family sailed on the Russian ship, SS Kursk, described eighty years later by Lore, then an 87-year-old Second World War widow, as 'a slow, filthy, chartered Russian tub' (Simons, 205). Eighteen passengers died after contracting Spanish influenza on board and Captain Hurtzig became ill with encephalitis which later paralysed him, rendering him a helpless invalid. He died in 1938. Of the rest of the family, Eva Hurtzig, separated from her family for five years by war and internment, married Wilhelm Dieckmann in Wulsdorf, Germany in 1925; Hanna married Martin Witte in Madras, India in 1935; and the same year Lore married Ernst Junghans who died in 1942 fighting for Germany. Lore died in 2013 in Hildesheim, Germany.

Frau Luise Hurtzig died in Hildesheim, Germany on 16 May 1978 and was buried in Wulsdorf.

Published resources

Book

The enemy at home: German internees in World War I Australia, Helmi, Nadine and Fischer, Gerard, 2011

'Prisoners in Arcady': German mariners at Berrima 1915-1919, Simons, John R., 1999

Site Exhibition

Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

Niki Francis

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