Remembering Territory families

‘The Katherine Express’

Nadia Pascoe, who was born in Estonia in the Baltic States in 1915, arrived in Katherine in 1936. The journey south to Katherine – and arrival – was quite an experience.

Yes, it was two of us girls from Harbin. Mrs Tokmakoff and myself, and our husbands was telling us that there is a Russian colony in Katherine so when we landed they will meet us on the railway station. So when we come to Katherine Station – mind you before we left Darwin they tell us we’re going on the Katherine Express. We got in that Katherine Express and – boy oh boy – we only went few miles south of Darwin, all of a sudden – train stop.

We said, ‘What’s the matter?’ Oh they reckon the driver wanted to have a glass of beer. So away we go again and we come to Pine Creek and the train stopped. They said, train is not going any further. We’re going to sleep in Pine Creek.

So, of course, we couldn’t speak English, the two of us girls and seeing Aborigines in Pine Creek we got that scared, because never see Aborigines in my life. Anyhow we come to Pine Creek Hotel, all galvanized iron, dark, hot, flies, mosquitoes, just about eat you alive! Anyhow we camped there overnight, then in the morning back to the train again.

The carriages was very dirty, full of bulldust and very hard seats, no toilets and the water bag hanging outside for a drink of water. Neither of us knew what that is because never see water bag before in my life. Anyhow water was nice and cool to drink and then we come to Katherine must be about twelve or one o’clock, and when our husbands tell us our Russian colony waiting for us only one look on the Russian colony scare me to death! They were all dark even if they are white Russian, but from sunburn they’re all dark. Everyone got straw hats, khaki shorts, khaki shirts…

[Northern Territory Archives Service NTRS 226, TS471 and NTRS 219 TP 608, Nadia Pascoe]