

ALTIJA

Cultural History

Lahemaa National Park



Women of Altija cleaning nets in the 1950s

Rootsipea, the cape of Altija, was mentioned for the first time in 1465 as a fishing site at the mouth of the Oandu river, belonging to the Annikvere manor. Since 1838 the whole village belonged to the Sagadi manor. There have been many names for Altija: Wandemunde, Jõesuu, Rootsipea, Kärba, Altija, Kerbann, Hallia, Haidja, etc.

About two thirds of the village names in Lahemaa area can be explained by old personal names. Some villages may have received their names after the first settler. Around 1618 Finnish peasants, a father and his son, settled in this area. The place of the farmstead or a part of the village was henceforth called after their family name as Kerbann. It is probably from that period, that the lower reaches of the Altija river got the name Kärpseeoja. In 1678 a man called Hälti Jahn lived in the village, who could have given the name to the village.

There were three village pubs at Altija in 1857: Mustoja, Paarma, and Aitkõrtsi or Vanakõrtsi (Old Tavern). The present Altija Tavern was built by the Lahemaa National Park in 1975-1976, based on the photos and plans of Kõrve tavern. The latter belonged to the Palmse manor and was situated by the Viitna-Palmse road. It is actually a traditional type of taverns by roads, not typical of pubs in fishing villages. The Altija tavern is open year-round.

Altija was known as a village of seafarers and shipbuilders. The transport of firewood and salt smuggling brought wealth to the villagers. This money was used for buying and building sailing vessels. Shipping started to bloom. The main cargo – firewood – was transported mainly to Tallinn; grain, apples and bricks to Finland and St Petersburg.



At the end of 19th century the potato trade to Finland gave a good income in spring and autumn. At the same time the shipbuilding started at Altija. There were three shipyards: at the tip of the cape, on the coast at the Jaanirahva Koplimägi, and in the Kõrve yard. Three families were primary shipowners and shipbuilders: Kõrve, Paarma ja Jaanirahva.

The first ship of Altija was bought by Johannes Uutmann in 1888 from Russia, the brigantine "Syaytoi Nikolai". In 1901 he built a three-masted fore-and-aft schooner named "Marta".

Another major shipowner, Gustav Rommann from Paarma built a three-masted fork-schooner "Suits" ("The Smoke") in 1901-1902 on the isle of Vergi. The ship was run aground in an autumn storm near Võsu in 1925. The same storm drove the two-masted "Arens" and "Rosine" onto the rocks of Altija.

Jakob Less from Jaanirahva owned a two-masted schooner "Viru". In the beginning of the 20th century the Less family built some more two-masted ships.

In the 19th century two manors had summerhouses on the beach. The Käbinõmme summerhouse belonged to the Sagadi manor. The summerhouse of the Vaeküla manor was located with its stables and a boathouse on the far bank of the river, near the beach of Laiakari. The Altija-Mustoja Educational and Cultural Society was founded in 1923. At the very beginning the Society held its gatherings in Toomarahva barn-dwelling ("rehielamu" in Estonian). A barn-dwelling, a traditional Estonian farmhouse, is nearly a thousand-year-old type of building.

Theatre troupe of the Altija-Mustoja Educational and Cultural Society



Altija küla

94 (4282)
LAHEMAA

LÄK JÄRVA-LÄÄNE-VIRU
REGIOONI RAAMATUKOGU
15923

About the village:
Toomarahva Turismitalu
www.toomarahva.ee
tlf: +372 50 50 850

Management of Lahemaa NP:
Environmental Board
+372 32 95 535
45435 Palmse
www.keskkonnaamet.ee
www.lahemaa.ee

Visitor Management of NP:
State Forest Management
+372 32 95 555
45435 Palmse
www.rmk.ee

Text by:
Ülle Tamm/Tiina Teng-Tamme
Design: Tiina Teng-Tamme
Photos: Rakvere Museum
Carl Sarapi fotokogu
©Environmental Board 2009



View of the Cape of Altija in 1934. The man in the middle is young painter Richard Uutmaa

There are two types of buildings in the Altija village, traditional log buildings like Uustalu and Toomarahva and the so-called captain-houses built in the 1920s-1930s.

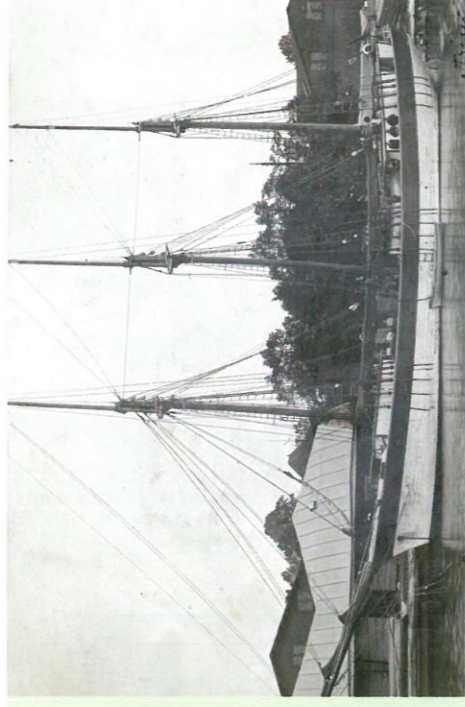
The Lahemaa National Park restored the complex of Uustalu at the beginning of the 1970ties. An old sauna was brought from Esku. In the yard there are two wells, a cellar, cow-shed and 2 storehouses, one of which was relocated from Finland already in the middle of the 19th century. It is known that there was a house between the year 1795 and 1811 on the land of Sagadi manor. In the map of Haldja from 1844 Uustalu belonged to a man named Ustallo Josep. Currently the homestead is in private hands.

Toomarahva was the second farm complex to be restored by the Lahemaa National Park. The barn-dwelling house was brought from the village of Lauli, and a new sauna was built. There is also a cow-shed and a storehouse in the yard. In 1732 the owner of the homestead was Hallia Thomas. The Toomarahva threshing room is a meeting place for the Altija Women's Society, founded in 2001. The homestead is in private hands and operates as a B&B.

In the 1970s, the Lahemaa National Park rebuilt the boat sheds and net sheds on the cape as well as a traditional swing in the centre of the village. It has become a popular village green for people to celebrate national holidays.

In Kõrve homestead was born the painter Richard Uutmaa (1905-1977), who has depicted the life and daily work of the coastal people. The Altija coast

G. Rommann's ship "Arius"



There is a large room for threshing grain at one end and two rooms (a living-room and a bedroom) at the other end. In the centre, there is a big kitchen that was used for kiln-drying grain. In the kitchen of Toomarahva a choir singing was practised and plays were staged. They performed in the nearby villages too.

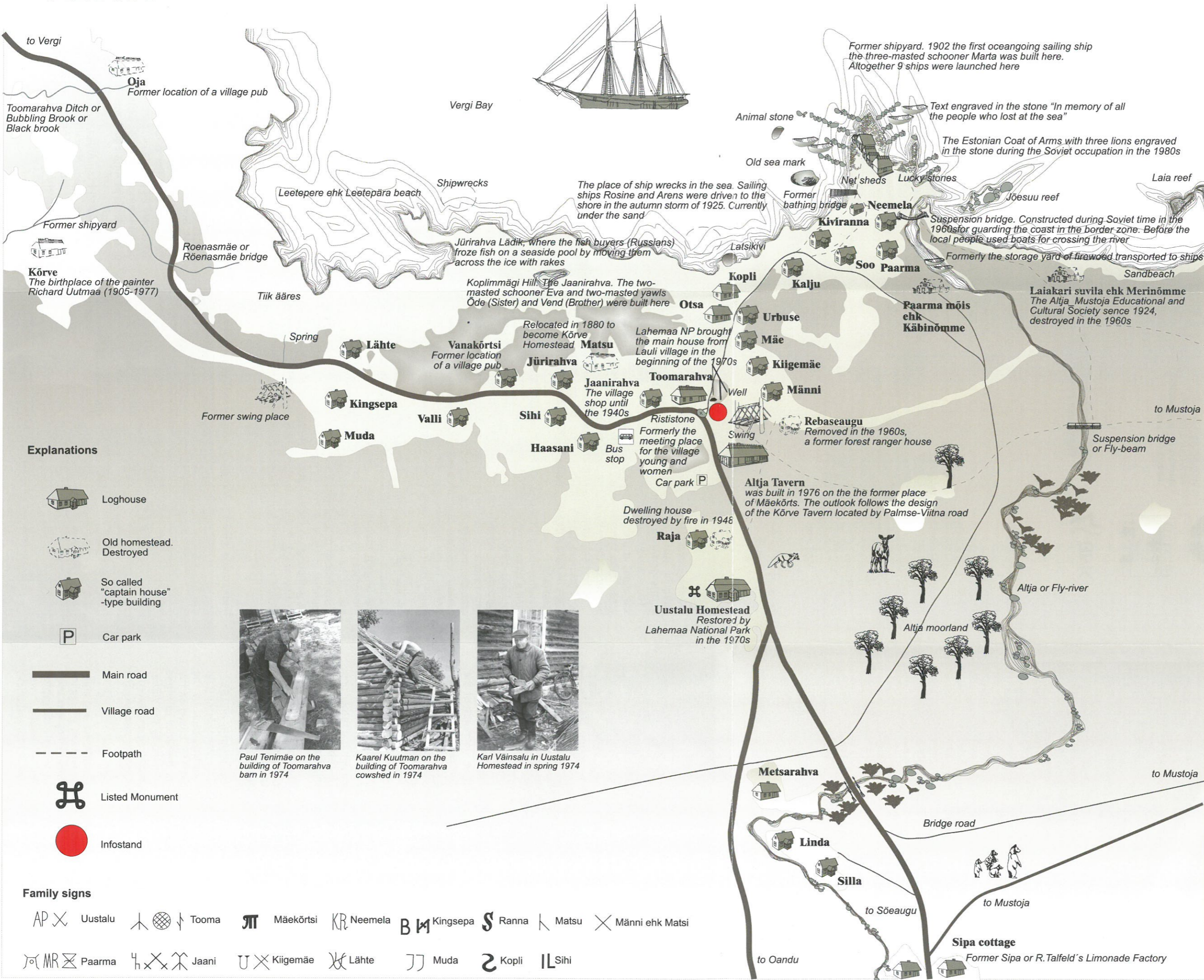
In 1924 the Society bought the dilapidated Laiakari summerhouse, renovated the house and renamed it Merinõmme.

During World War II, the building went out of repair and Soviet border guards used the building for firewood. Now the foundation could only be seen. The Altija-Mustoja Educational and Cultural Society was re-established in 2003.

During the Soviet occupation the traditional village life came to an end. The residents were closed off from the sea by a border zone, there was a barbed wire fencing and a strip of harrowed area along the coast. Some of the boats were sawn in half, others were taken to Vergi. Many a family escaped to the West, some of the villagers moved to towns. In 2009 only 24 people live permanently in the village, but for example the 1782 Census gives the number of residents at Altija and it was 103.

The children from Altija could go to school to Vergi, Vihula and Sagadi. Now they go to Võsu basic school. In the Middle Ages, the dead from Altija were buried in the graveyard of Pihlaspea chapel, since 1845 in the cemetery of Esku.

ALTJA map of Cultural History



Carl Sarap's photo "Dilapidated Net Sheds" 1936



Carl Sarap's photo "Altja" 1931



Carl Sarap's photo "Mouth of the Altja River" 1932



Carl Sarap's photo "Altja the fishing village" 1931



Carl Sarap's photo "Altja the fishing village" 1930s



Carl Sarap's photo "Altja Net Shed" 1930s