



“TRACING THE BALTIC ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE IN DIASPORA ARCHIVES”, 30 JUNE-2 JULY 2015 IN LATVIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, RIGA

A quarter of a century has passed—or is soon to pass—since the breakthrough events which led to the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States: the “phosphorite war”, the Heritage Movement, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact AEG movement, the “Singing Revolution”, the Baltic Way, the August putsch.

The path to independence did not begin at the end of the 1980s. The political struggle of the Baltic diaspora communities for the independence of the Baltic States, in opposition to the recognition of the Soviet occupation lasted throughout the period of exile, and received new momentum in the new winds that were blowing in the homelands at the end of the 1980s. Up until the present, interest in Baltic diaspora archives and museums has mostly coincided with interest in wartime and post-war Baltic exile. However, the Baltic diaspora archives, museums, and libraries also enable research with respect to the history of the Baltic States themselves, particularly their road to restoring their independence and the state building and reconstruction in the post-occupation period.

- What was the contribution of countrymen living abroad to the maintaining of the de jure recognition of Baltic states in the West, to restoration of the independence of the Baltic States, their political and economic rebuilding?
- What kinds of campaigns were organized to preserve historic heritage and to create public interest in the Baltic cultures and history? What kind of contacts were initiated, responded to, and maintained with the homeland?
- How was the strive for freedom and the following restoration of the independence of the Baltic States reflected in the media abroad?
- Which archival collections of the Baltic diaspora might pique historians' interest in conducting research on topics of recent history?
- What kinds of historical sources connected with the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States should we be actively collecting today than we have before? How could this be accomplished most effectively?

We look forward to presentations on these (but not only these) topics from representatives of Baltic memory institutions and communities in the diaspora, from professionals representing the memory institutions of the Baltic States and host countries, and from academic researchers.

Conference participation fees (includes conference folder, lunches, reception and cultural programme):

30 EUR (Baltic Heritage Network members)

50 EUR (non-members)

For more information, please see: www.balther.net

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A Note from the Editor:

The submission deadline for the next issue is 1 September 2015. We welcome news articles, conference information, calls for papers, new publication information, and images. Please send articles in English with high quality images to:

Kristina Lupp - kriss.lupp@me.com

The Non-Profit Association Baltic Heritage Network was founded in Tartu on January 11, 2008. NPA BaltHerNet was established to foster cooperation between national and private archives, museums, libraries, and institutions of research, public associations and organizations collecting and studying the cultural heritage of the Baltic diaspora. It aims to facilitate the preservation and research of the historically valuable cultural property of the Baltic diaspora, as well as to ensure accessibility of these materials to the public.

NPA BaltHerNet is also committed to the organising of conferences, seminars and workshops, and to developing and administrating the electronic information website Baltic Heritage Network, a multilingual electronic gateway for information on the cultural heritage of the Baltic diaspora.

The Baltic Heritage Newsletter is distributed quarterly, on-line. The newsletter is compiled and edited by Kristina Lupp. Please send all related enquiries and submissions to Kristina Lupp:

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www.balther.net

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EVENTS IN TORONTO COMMEMORATING THE MARCH DEPORTATIONS

In Toronto the calendar for the end of March was filled with events that recalled and commemorated the victims of Soviet repressions. The core event was an international conference entitled “Repressions and Human Rights” on March 27th, where the two main guest speakers were Bill Browder and Sofi Oksanen.

The main invited speaker of the series was Sofi Oksanen, a writer with Estonian-Finnish origins. She arrived in Toronto on Wednesday evening, March 25th, and the following day gave interviews to Canadian media. Later that day, together with the conference moderator, Göran Lindblad, she was given a tour of Tartu College by chief archivist Piret Noorhani, who showed them VEMU’s collections and travelling exhibition.

On the evening of March 25th, a reception was held at Tartu College, jointly sponsored by VEMU/Estonian Studies Centre and the Estonian Foundation of Canada. Invited to the reception were supporters of both organizations, speakers at the



Photo: Taavi Tamtik

conference, and other sponsors (The Estonian Central Council of Canada, the Estonian Credit Union, The Estonian Embassy in Ottawa, The Finnish Embassy, The Latvian National Federation of Canada, the House of Anansi Press, and UpNorth Magazine). The candles were lit to commemorate the victims of the deportations.

On Friday, March 27th, the conference “Repressions and Human Rights” was held in University of Toronto’s Isabel Bader Theatre. It was almost a capacity audience, with 300 people in attendance. Those who were not able to attend in person could watch the direct broadcast of the conference on-line. (<https://youtu.be/jVBjbKWVLCM>).

The opening remarks were given by one of the two main organizers of the conference, Marcus Kolga, who thanked the organizers and sponsors, and reminded the audience that Operation “Priboi”, referred to by Estonians as the March deportations took place 66 years ago. He shared his concern that Russia has seemingly learned no lessons from history, since its actions today were just like they were decades ago.

The Estonian ambassador to Canada, Gita Kalmet spoke of the candles lit in memory of the victims of the deportations, and used a striking analogy: an extinguished candle can be relighted, but the same is not possible with an extinguished human life. We have a moral responsibility to speak out about what happened in the past: we must not forget our history. In this context, it was especially

saddening to see the current debate about the memorial to victims of communism in Ottawa. Indeed, building such a memorial would be a very important statement that what happened in the past should never happen again. The memorial would also help those peoples whose freedom is slipping away.

The next speaker was Markus Hess, president of the Estonian Central Council and one of the initiators of Black Ribbon Day. He thanked those present at the conference and introduced the panelists. The moderator of the panel, Göran Lindblad, is a former member of the Swedish Parliament and current president of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience.



Conference organisers
Marcus Kolga and Piret Noorhani
Photo: Taavi Tamtik

The first panellist was University of Toronto Chair of Estonian Studies professor Jüri Kivimäe, who spoke of the historian’s task of deciphering and understanding, rather than judging history, and gave an overview of the Soviet Union’s repressions in the Baltic states. The next speaker was Karl Altai, acting chair of the Estonian American National Council, who wore a Ukrainian blue and yellow ribbon and gave details on the demonstration at the White House in support of Ukraine as well as other similar events planned in the USA in the near future.

Ludwik Klimkowski, chairman of Tribute to Liberty, an organization devoted to the Canadian memorial to the victims of communism, as well as vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress emphasized that communism has not disappeared, because after the fall of the Iron Curtain, there was no “Nuremberg trial” for communists. Today they have become apparatchiks and oligarchs, who exert their power in Europe in many different ways. Bernard Trottier, a member of the support group for the Baltic States in the Canadian Parliament stressed the educational value of the planned memorial to the victims of communism, and urged everyone to visit the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg (Manitoba), where the universal topic of human rights is extended and elaborated at various different levels of generalisation.

Bill Browder, the first of the two main keynote speakers is known in the western nations as Putin’s “Enemy Number One”. He is a former top investor in Russia, and currently a fighter for human rights. He spoke of the tragic death of his friend Sergei Magnitski, which provoked the black deeds of Putin’s “mafia” and incited Bill Browder to write his own book, “Red Notice” to reveal these human rights violations. Today, largely thanks to Irwin Cotler (who introduced Bill Browder at the conference), the Canadian Parliament has adopted the so-called Magnitski act, which declares that in Canada all of those guilty for Magnitski’s death are murderers. After his speech, Bill Browder signed autographs for his book, “Red Notice”.

After the intermission, writer Sofi Oksanen gave her keynote presentation. She recalled her childhood spent alternating between life in two different realities, where everything connected with the recent history of Estonia was taboo, and memories were deeply personal issues buried in the hearts of individuals. The Soviet system deprived Estonians of their social memory. Those in opposition to the official version of history were eliminated; the

people were kept under a regime of fear. Since Finland was under the influence of Moscow, nothing was said publicly about the deportations and other repressions. After the restoration of independence, a decolonization process began in Estonia, which continues to this day. A national memory had to be created anew; democracy and free speech had to be relearned. Unfortunately, no such changes have taken place in Russia, which after a brief period of freedom was submitted to Putin’s regime. If one is living in a western society, this is difficult to understand, since it is almost impossible to imagine such thorough brainwashing. In addition, Russia continues to interfere with how the history of its formerly occupied territories is represented, having initiated a propaganda war and implementing an imperialist policies. Russia’s tentacles are long, and the puppets of its propaganda war often include respected citizens of other nations: people are more willing to believe their own fellow citizens, and the West has lost its vigilance with regard to Soviet-era rhetoric and manipulations.

In the concluding remarks, sponsors, participants and organizers were acknowledged and thanked. The second of the two main organizers of the event, the chief archivist of VEMU/Estonian Studies Centre Piret Noorhani spoke of the importance of memory and of the helplessness caused by the loss of memory, which happens to both individuals and peoples in crisis situations. History keeps repeating itself, and we should learn from this. Piret Noorhani emphasized that in “wars of monuments”, which always tend to turn political, the most important element should not be forgotten: the human being.

After the end of the conference, Sofi Oksanen signed copies of her most recent novel, “When the Doves Disappeared”, freshly published in English translation by House of Anansi Press.

The commemoration of victims of deportation continued on March 29th at Tartu College, where results of VEMU’s most recent collection campaign were discussed, and viewing the 2014 Estonian film about the 1941 deportations, “In the Crosswind”.

Lea Kreinin

THE VOICE OF ALDONA STEMPUŽIS PRESERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS



Aldona Stempužis’ first concert as a solo vocal artist. Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago, October 26, 1963

The voice of Aldona Stempužis, the renowned Lithuanian mezzo-soprano, whose impressive career spanned decades, has now been preserved for future generations. Her multifaceted musical career began with the Čiurlionis Lithuanian National Art Ensemble in post-war Germany, and progressed in the United States where she sang leading operatic roles, sophisticated interpretations of traditional Lithuanian folk songs, and avant-garde works of contemporary Lithuanian composers. Her performances, many recorded on audiotape, constitute a significant archive of post-war Lithuanian music and its cultural history in the United States.

Unfortunately, magnetic tape deteriorates. Even if stored under ideal conditions, the medium can become brittle causing audio information to drop out. The singer’s son, Linas Stempužis, understanding the value of his mother’s sound recordings, realized that the only way to preserve this audio archive was to transfer it to a digitised format. Thus began an exhaustive and systematic four-year project, which



Čiurlionis Ensemble at Carnegie Hall on August 31, 1958.



Aldona was a featured soloist.

resulted in the digital version of the entire Aldona Stempužis archive. The archive encompasses not only Stempužis’ concert performances but also program books, photos, and related concert materials. Aldona Stempužis was closely involved in this project, supplementing the existing material with recollections, stories, and critical background information.

The value of this personal archive cannot be overestimated. It not only preserves the works of Aldona Stempužis, but also offers insights into the dynamic musical culture of the Lithuanian American community. Most of all, it underscores the unrelenting yearning of Lithuanian Americans to retain their culture as a means of restoring a free and independent Lithuania. This is apparent when one reviews the milestones of Aldona Stempužis’ musical career.

Aldona Stempužis was born in 1926 in the village of Skirsnemunė on the banks of the legendary Nemunas River in Lithuania. From an early age she sang in local choirs. Taking note of her apparent talent, her parents planned to move to Kaunas so she could study at the Juozas Gruodis Conservatory. Aldona’s dream was to one day sing in the Kaunas State Music Theatre.

All hopes, however, were shattered with the onset of World War II. Her father was arrested and deported

to Siberia during the first Soviet occupation in 1940. When the Soviets occupied Lithuania again in 1944, Aldona and her family had no choice but to flee from the approaching Soviet army.

After the war ended, Aldona set her sights on joining the esteemed Čiurlionis Lithuanian National Art Ensemble in Germany. Competition was fierce, especially since membership offered free room and board. After several auditions, Aldona was selected as a dancer, and soon began to perform as a vocalist as well.

Given the economic instability and social upheaval brought on by the war, the ensemble lasted only a few years in Germany. With the growing shortage of food and supplies, relief services urged refugees to emigrate from Germany. Aldona’s mother had two sisters living in New York, who sponsored the Stempužis family and helped them secure residence in the United States. Within a few days of arriving in New York, Aldona was already employed, not as a singer, but as a labourer in the local chocolate processing facility. She was determined not to be a burden to others.

By 1950 the Čiurlionis Lithuanian National Art Ensemble successfully regrouped in Cleveland, Ohio,

and Aldona was invited to join. Aldona was also active in numerous competitions. In 1955, she was awarded “Best Woman Vocalist of Ohio”. She also won the Silver Medal in the vocal competition at the Chicagoland Music Festival.

Aldona’s talents were noticed. She was invited to perform at several important venues. On August 31, 1958, she performed with the Čiurlionis Ensemble at Carnegie Hall during the World Lithuanian Community Conference in New York City. This concert presented Aldona Stempužis as an emerging artist to the Lithuanian émigré audience. Here, she established much needed contacts with known Lithuanian performers, composers, and community leaders.

The concert that had the greatest affect on Aldona was a performance of Verdi’s Requiem and Bruno Markaitis’ The Bells of Vilnius on June 13, 1965 at the Arie Crown Theater in McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois. This concert was a solemn commemoration of Lithuania’s 25-year struggle against the Soviet occupation. Aldona performed with members of the Lithuanian Opera Company of Chicago and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. This performance received a glowing review from the Chicago Tribune.



Juratė and Kastytis: Opera performed on September 17, 1996 in Kaunas, Lithuania with members from the Lithuanian Opera and the Chicago Lithuanian Opera Company. Aldona Stempužis [as The Mother] singing with Virgilijus Noreika who played the role of Kastytis. Photo by Jonas Dainiūnas.

With Lithuania shackled behind the Iron Curtain, Aldona served as an ambassador for its freedom by introducing Lithuanian culture to the world. One of her most memorable concerts was in Bogota, Colombia on October 28, 1960. She performed classical and Lithuanian songs with tenor Stasys Baras (Baranauskas) at the Teatro Colon. The Orquesta Sinfonica de Colombia with Olav Roots conducting accompanied them. At the reception, much to Aldona's surprise, the members of the orchestra pulled out their instruments and played an old Lithuanian shepherd song, "Piemenų Raliavimas."

Aldona Stempuzis frequently sang lead roles with the Chicago Lithuanian Opera Company reprising such roles as Carmen, Aida. In the 1960s she expanded her repertoire by collaborating with the promising young composer Darius Lapinskas, known for his contemporary and experimental music. Later she worked with the famed Lithuanian composer Jonas Švedas.

It was only in 1989, that Aldona returned to her homeland for the first time after the war. A special homecoming concert was organised in the capital city of Vilnius, where other soloists and choristers joined her. Music of expatriate Lithuanian composers was exclusively featured at this performance.

Aldona's childhood dream, to sing at the Kaunas State Music Theatre, was finally realised in 1996. She sang in Kazimieras Banaitis' opera "Jūratė and Kastytis", which was performed by the Lithuanian Opera Company and included members of the Chicago Lithuanian Opera Company. It was a full house and the performance culminated with a standing ovation at the final curtain call.

Aldona kept a detailed account of all these events, which can be now be found in her archive.

Linus Stempuzis is considering placing the archive online and making it available to the vast Internet audience. "This is an

important aspect of our lives, as there is such a need to remember our past, especially the recent past, and to pass its richness on to future generations".

He hopes the archive can serve as a preservation prototype for similar projects such as family histories. In addition such archives serve to document a particular generation, belonging to a specific time and a place. According to Linas, these small-format archives might be more easily accessible to people who hesitate to visit large archives, but still want to know the history of their community.

When available online, the archive will be accessed from: www.aldonadiva.com.

Helga Merits

THE INDEPENDENCE QUOTES

Virtual Exhibition „No, My Friends, We Won't Go Slow". The Restoration of Lithuania's Independence in the Pages of the World Press in 1990



A quarter of century had passed since the restoration of Lithuania's independence. How did the Western world react to Lithuania's desire to set itself free? An opportunity to leaf through the pages of newspapers and magazines of that time is presented by a virtual exhibition No, My Friends, We Won't Go slow. The exhibition, which is available through the website of the National Library of Lithuania (www.lnb.lt), contains quotations from the Western press about Lithuania in 1990.

The title of the exhibition was inspired by Jonas Mekas' a Lithuanian American artist, essay, "No, My Friends, We Won't Go

Slow," published in the New York Times at the end of March of 1990. An essay, which is a playful Mekas' reaction to the observations by Western journalists that Eastern Europe should slow down the pace on its way to freedom. By using the Lithuanian folk tale, Mekas compared Lithuania with the beautiful princess, kidnapped by a foreign king. In order to visit her elderly parents, she has to complete a variety of tasks. "Ah, we all know how many beautiful princesses have died young," writes Mekas.

In spring of 1990, all major Western newspapers mentioned Lithuania's name almost every day, and very often -- on front pages. The exhibition presents quotes from the press of 14 countries, from distant Australia and Brazil to Scandinavia and neighbouring Poland. Quotations are complemented by references to full articles and information about their authors available online.

At that time, Lithuania was a very important subject in the articles of the most famous journalists and political commentators. For example, A.M. Rosenthal firmly supported Lithuania's independence in his NYT column. Some young authors, whose articles are quoted in the exhibition, today are well known journalists. One of such authors is David Remnick, who at the time was the Washington Post's correspondent in Moscow, another Maureen Dowd; today both of them are the Pulitzer Prize winners.

However, the events in Lithuania were covered not only by major newspapers and magazines. The exhibition shows that the regional press also wrote about Lithuania. For example, Gießener Allgemeine, small German newspaper, compared Lithuania with the hot potato, which is too hot to hold, yet too valuable to drop.

During this politically intense period, Lithuanians living abroad and Lithuanian friends collected the clippings about Lithuania. Some of them even found it necessary to underline the most important phrases and sentences of the articles.

A very interesting clipping from the Los Angeles Times was sent to President Vytautas Landsbergis by Juozas Brazauskas with the post-note, where he advises the President “to caution his people ... to think before they make statements to the press.” The article quotes a young volunteer from Canada who says “we have a music professor for a president, we have a bunch of intellectuals for a parliament, and our government information centre is run by a bunch of college kids.”

The National Geographic described the situation in Lithuania somewhat differently (two copies of the issue dedicated to the Baltic countries are stored in the Lozoraitis' Family Collection at Lituanica Department): “Behind the doors of government, the heat was on. Declarations, telefaxes, formulations flew between committees of tight-lipped delegates and newly minted founding fathers. ... All three [Baltic States] were moving, in their own way, toward separation from the eastern empire.”

The exhibition, which was created by Lituanica Department of the National Library of Lithuania in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, is available in English as well.

Valdonė Budreckaitė

DIASPORA RESEARCHERS GATHERED AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF LITHUANIA

For the second year in a row, the Lituanica Department invited diaspora researchers to the seminar. During the one-day event, the participants heard three presentations about Lithuanian diaspora. Dr Ramūnas Čičelis, the lecturer at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), talked about the philotopic aspect in Jonas Mekas, an American Lithuanian artist; Akvilė Šimėnienė, who studies in the doctorate program at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, shared her findings about Dr Birutė Ciplijauskaitė's literary criticism; and the doctorate student at the Lithuanian Academy of Arts,



*Diaspora researchers at the National Library of Lithuania.
Photo: Seville Charsika*

Jolanta Bernotaitytė, discussed the representations of the Lithuanian American art in the 20th century during the sixties and nineties.

Vilnius University historian Dr Tomas Balkelis, who spoke about the international aspect of diaspora and migration studies, urged the seminar's participants to write their articles and books not only to a Lithuanian, but a foreign reader as well and their research to look for Lithuanian connections with other nations and communities.

The Head of the Lithuanian Literature Department at VMU, Assoc. Dr Dalia Kuizinienė, noticed that a lot of important research in the field of the Lithuanian diaspora had been carried out over the past 25 years. However, she noted that there are still quite a few holes and gaps remaining. She agreed with Assoc. Dr Žydrone Kolevinskienė, dean of Lithuanian Philology Faculty at the University of Educational Sciences that not a lot has been done to research the most recent Lithuanian emigrant literature, Lithuanian foreign press, as well as theatre and visual arts.

At the end of the seminar, a book presentation, The nostalgia and mimicry: Lithuanian and Latvian post-war diaspora novels by Laura Laurušaitė (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore), took place. Guests, Dr Manfredas Žvirgždas, Assoc. Dr Kuizinienė and Dr Čičelis, stressed the novelty of the book, especially the methodological tools, comparative and postcolonial perspectives, and their successful adaptation for Lithuanian and Latvian emigrant novels. The author of the monograph noted that one of her main objectives while writing the

book was to introduce Lithuanian readers to a rich Latvian diaspora prose, especially bearing in mind that not a single work from more than 400 Latvian diaspora novels published in post-war is available in Lithuanian language.

Dalia Cidzikaitė

ALBERTA ESTONIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY (WESTERN CANADA) - TEN YEARS OLD!

In its 10 years, the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society has blended and achieved. Spring 2015 marks a decade since the inauguration meeting in Red Deer, Alberta where official government forms were signed to create the AEHS as a registered non-profit organisation and set its purpose. The popularity of the Internet, email, and websites had reached the point where a society could function in a relatively cohesive manner despite having members located hundreds of kilometres apart. Even when the bylaws were updated eight years later, we retained our basic purpose:

- Provide for the recreation of the members and to promote and afford opportunity for friendly and social activities.
- Promote and preserve Estonian heritage and culture in Alberta.
- Facilitate contact and current awareness among persons with an interest in Estonian heritage and culture in Canada, Estonia, and elsewhere.



Alberta Estonian Heritage Society's third and current president, Ave Peetri, with the second ex-president Bob Kingsep at a Board meeting in Calgary, 2013.

Photo: Helgi Leesment

The inaugural meeting saw the coming together of Albertans of Estonian heritage from different backgrounds, ranging from recent arrivals to descendants of Estonians who migrated from their homes over a century ago. That is the 'blending'.

There is richness in such blending: people bringing stories and ideas from diverse backgrounds further enrich each other's knowledge, understanding, and friendship. After all, despite commercial efforts to have us believe that physical possessions equal happiness, it is our relationships with other people that are the basis of happiness and a sense of belonging.

AEHS social functions and major resource achievements have fostered a gentle sense of belonging and perhaps even validated the past where individuals were previously vague in knowledge of their own family history. Albertans of Estonian descent have met others with similar cultural heritage and have become more aware of their own family histories. They were motivated to look for family photos and artefacts, and generously provided these to the AEHS, resulting in a wide-ranging history website, a half-hour documentary DVD, a 300-page book, a special collection at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, a six-panel display depicting the story of Estonians in Alberta and highly commended issues of *AjaKaja* magazine, published twice annually.

AjaKaja, in particular, is the unique platform for Alberta stories that do not fit other publications; our editors honour this niche well. These remarkable achievements were accomplished in a surprisingly short time span.

But achievements go beyond the electronic, the artefacts, and the hardcopy text. Through these means AEHS has enabled people to create or add to their own family trees and to travel to specific villages and farms in Estonia from where their ancestors came, and to Estonian settlements in Crimea. Some have reconnected with long lost relatives. Through various print media, AEHS has informed Estonians throughout the world of Alberta's unique Estonian story, something that was generally not known previously. We are providing genealogists, archivists, librarians and other researchers with rich resources. With additional publicity, Albertans beyond AEHS will become better aware of these resources, adding to information about this western Canadian province. We know from attending Baltic Heritage Network international conferences that Australians, North Americans and Europeans are accessing AEHS materials. Thus AEHS's achievements and blending perfectly complement each other to the benefit of many in Alberta as well as elsewhere.

What is next?

Perhaps if we take a page from our own accomplishments we will see

that the answer lies in ourselves. The first generations of Estonians to Alberta did not set out to make history. But they did. Current generations did not enter this world with a goal to make history, but we are. Enjoying participation in AEHS-organised events and recording our personal anecdotes and images, new or old, are some of our options for carrying on the celebration of Estonian culture as we have adapted it in Alberta. To that end, we have adapted to and will continue to adapt to the technology offered by the World Wide Web.

We have the means; we can reach all interests; we can continue to build our heritage.

Helgi Leesment, Calgary, Alberta,
with input from Bob Kingsep

AEHS HERITAGE PROJECT COMPLETED

The AEHS Heritage Project consists of a number of deliverables listed below.

All items, printed or electronic, are available onsite or online.

- Alberta's Estonians. 30-minute documentary DVD. 2007. Copyright Alberta Estonian Heritage Society.
- Freedom, Land, & Legacy: Alberta's Estonians 1899-2009. A 298 page illustrated book about Alberta's Estonians. Compiled by Dave Kiil and Eda McClung, 2010. Copyright Alberta Estonian Heritage Society.
- AEHS website: www.aehs.ca, then click on Heritage under Menu Option and on the images, i.e. "Alberta's Estonian Heritage." Each image contains organised and searchable historical material about Alberta's Estonian heritage.
- Estonian Archival Collection is stored and available at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) in Edmonton.
- PAA website: <https://hermis.alberta.ca>: In 'Search the Archives', type in AEHS to open the Estonian Collection. There are 213 results, each with a title and brief description of file's content.



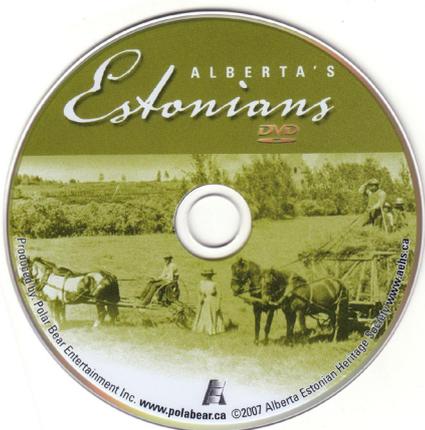
Alberta Estonian Heritage Society's Jaanipäev bonfire at Gilby, Alberta with members of Toronto's Ööbik Choir among the guests. June 2012.

Photo: J. Laansoo

- Alberta's Estonian Travelling Exhibit. The display is comprised of six lightweight 3' by 4' panels telling the story of Alberta's Estonian community from 1899 - present. The panels are stored at the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton and available for display at archives, museums and special heritage events.

- AjaKaja has been published since 1989 and is distributed to AEHS members and others. It contains information, including family histories, about Estonian pioneers and immigrants who settled in Alberta since 1899. All published issues have also been archived digitally and will be available to AEHS members (1989-2004) and globally (2005-2014) on new AEHS website under development.

MAJOR AWARD TO A DESCENDANT OF ESTONIAN PIONEERS



30 min. English language DVD telling the story of Estonian pioneers in Alberta, produced in 2007 by the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society.

Bob (Robert) Kingsep, grandson of the first known Estonian pioneer immigrant to settle in Alberta in Western Canada, was awarded by the Estonian government as “long-time Chairman of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society, for preserving and promoting Estonian identity and heritage”. This announcement was made in November 2014 and the certificate was presented to Bob this spring at his British Columbia home where he is enjoying retirement. During his six year presidency,



Bob Kingsep, right, receives the Estonian Government award from Karl Robertson, on behalf of Honorary Consul to Estonia in Alberta, Christine Robertson, Spring 2015.

Photo by Annette Kingsep.

Bob judiciously guided and led the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society through its very productive years when it developed its history website, an AEHS member website, a logo, a documentary DVD, a book, a place in the provincial archives, and continued publication of its twice yearly magazine AjaKaja. In this regard Bob follows in the footsteps of his grandfather who was a long-time leader among the Estonian community in the west-central area of Alberta during the early part of the 20th Century. The framed certificate reads: “Letter of Thanks. The Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Government of the Republic of Estonia thanks you, Robert Kingsep, for preserving and promoting Estonian culture in Alberta”; signed by Keit Pentus-Rosimannus, Minister of Foreign Affairs. This is the fifth time the Estonian government has given formal recognition to “civil diplomats” in various countries around the world.

Helgi Leesment

MEMOIR COLLECTION BY VEMU ON THE GRAND ESCAPE IN 1944

In autumn of 1944, as the war was coming towards the end and the Soviet army was approaching, many inhabitants of the Baltic States decided to flee their homes. To commemorate this, VEMU announced an initiative last year to collect memoirs from this period.

Similar collecting campaigns have been organised by VEMU before on a smaller scale, however, almost 60 different objects were submitted this year: artefacts, photos, albums and diaries, memoirs written in Estonian and in English as well as printed books. Amongst the donations were also war medals, two suitcases that were used to flee Estonia in 1944 and a wooden model of a fleeing ship.

The jury (VEMU chief archivist Piret Noorhani, University of Toronto history professor Jüri Kivimäe and University of Glasgow research fellow Lea Kreinin) were pleased to see such a high level of participation. However, as all works were of very different scope, level and nature, it was difficult to announce the ultimate winners. All participants received a letter of honour for their contribution. The jury decided unanimously to give the monetary prize to the Estonian School in Toronto where students have been collecting their grandparents' memoirs over many years. The prize money will hopefully be used towards publishing those memoirs in print. The four youngest

THE 27TH INTERNATIONAL BALTIC CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE IN RIGA AND JELGAVA

October 1-2, 2015

For more detailed information and registration please visit the conference homepage at:

<http://www.mvm.lv/balticconference2015/>.

Main topic: LEARNED SOCIETIES, SCIENCE ACADEMIES, ACADEMIC COMMUNITY IN THE BALTIC

We welcome abstracts of 3000 characters

DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACT'S SUBMISSION - September 1st, 2015

Payment of the registration fee (40 EUR) or 20 EUR for students should be completed by the 1st of September, 2015 the latest.



Eneli Mölder, a young participant.
Photo: Taavi Tamtik

participants, all of them pupils of the Toronto Estonian School, received special prizes.

For an archive, getting original documents, diaries and photos has always been very important. A unique historical document, Leo Puurits's logbook from 1949-1972, contains information about the Baltic University and the student corporations, events, presentations, events participants' remarks, photos and newspaper cuttings as well as original drawings and even a German train ticket. The second remarkable donation is documents and diaries of Estonian lawyer and journalist Aleksander Peel. The diaries, which cover from leaving Estonia in 1944 until living in Canada in the mid-1970s, contain over 1600 remarkable pages written in real time which give a very detailed insight into a refugee life.

The memoirs submitted for the competition were of different nature and scope. There were whole life stories, interviews made with parents, grandparents and relatives, copies of diaries etc.

Estonians used different routes to escape the war and the approaching Red Army. People from the North-Western part of Estonia and from the islands mostly left by small boats for Sweden. Amongst memoirs sent

to VEMU, the majority were about fleeing to Sweden and not so many about being evacuated to Germany. It was interesting to see how the same journey was remembered differently by different people – it all complemented towards creating a fuller and more vivid picture.

Researchers (for example Jürgenson) have noticed that in case of the Second World War escape stories, dangers of the escape route and good luck which saved people from death are emphasised. Stories of leaving are social, collective events. In refugee communities, these stories are often compared and revised collectively, therefore they are often similar. Without doubt, it was a difficult time both for leavers and for those who were left behind. In those memoirs, people usually talk about their escape, describing very precisely their routes, some of them giving very detailed descriptions, place names and other facts.

People experienced different aspects of loss during their escape journey – the material aspects mentioned loss of personal valuables, property and wealth, the socio-psychological aspects of loss can be seen in losing their secure and customary environment, the stress on dislocation, losing their relationships with family, relatives and friends,

as well as losing their dignity and self-esteem in a new situation, the physical aspects of loss can be viewed as loss of security, different threats to people's health (abuse, hunger, possibility of getting wounded or killed) and threats to freedom.

For example, Lembit Liblik remembers the escape from Saaremaa as follows:

The storm and rain got worse and water was everywhere. My mother was squatting beside me with my brother on her lap and trying to shelter him from the cold water. He was three years old. While I was swept overboard by the next wave, my dad saw me in the nick of time and grabbed me back from the sea and pulled me back into the boat. Then in a very loud and strict command he said: "if we are to save ourselves, throw everything in the sea to lighten the boat." Before he could finish the sentence, all the luggage was thrown overboard.

One can only imagine how tragic an experience it could have been to a little boy to leave his home, losing his family and friends, his belongings and also, almost his life.

On the other hand, many of the memories of war-time refugees focused on positive things, most commonly the kindness of people they met on their way and a strong sense of belonging together, sharing things, helping each other and creating a sense of community. For example, many memories are about sharing food or practical tools, helping each other with little services. Soon after getting the elementary things sorted, Estonians started to organise their cultural and education life in the refugee camps. Later diasporic activities in many countries were based on the connections and skills learned in those camps.

Positive elements can also be found in the wartime escape if we look at the adventurous aspect of it. However traumatic and negative it was at the society's and nation's levels, at an individual level it was often also regarded as an adventure, a way of getting away from home, seeing new places.

For example, Imre P. wrote about his memoirs:

In the description [of escape], one can feel a slightly adventurous tone. The reason is that these are memories of a child! It was a big adventure – long train journeys, new places and towns to see. In the eyes of an adult it was much more tragic – leave your sisters, brothers, parents, your home behind.

Many other memoirs have also praised the possibility to see foreign lands, and stressed Estonians' general cultural interest towards places they passed on their way.

Hardship continued for some years after the Big Escape. Many people had to make a further trip from Germany and Sweden to UK, America, Australia, Canada or elsewhere later.

However difficult the times had been to the wartime generation, people managed to get on with their lives and build a new future for themselves and their families abroad.

This year's competition is about music in Estonians' life. VEMU is looking forward to receiving memoirs, documents, photos, film and audio recordings about this topic.

Lea Kreinin

VEMU'S EVENTS MARCH-MAY 2015

On March 10th, Dorothee M. Goeze from the Herder Institute in Marburg gave the lecture "In Front of Camera: Daily Life of Estonian DPs in the Hintzer Collection".

On March 18th, Susan Barber Kahro gave the lecture "Regilaul (Runo Song): Cornerstone of Estonian Culture". Long-time music teacher Susan Barber Kahro is now working on her PhD thesis about Estonian music traditions in Canada. Olavi Kelle and Dace Veinberga performed examples of regilaul. Mark Julson performed some intriguing regilaul improvisations.

On April 1st, Tõnu Tõsine gave a lecture on Estonian narrow gauge railways.

April 9th saw the third "Cooking with Susi"-workshop. Eighty attendees

prepared traditional Estonian kringel. Susi Holmberg also taught participants how to make pasha.



Cooking with Susi
Photo: Taavi Tamtik

On April 15th, Ene-Liis Martens gave the lecture "How NOT to Write a Book!" inspired by the writing of the book *Ilmar, His Story - The Life Story of Ilmar Martens*. All participants received a copy of the book "Ilmar, His Story" as a gift from Ene-Liis Martens.

On April 18th, VEMU and the Estonian National Museum's travelling exhibition "Food: A Treasury of Estonian Heritage" was opened at the Latvian Centre in Montreal. Piret Noorhani gave a talk, which was followed by the film screening "Makers of Food. Historical Estonian Food Businesses in Toronto" (VEMU / Estonian Studies Centre & Kaisa Films 2014). The audience got to meet with the director Kaisa Pitsi after the screening.



Photo: P. Noorhani

On April 22nd, Tiit Aleksejev gave the lecture "1944: The Meaning of Remembrance". Tiit Aleksejev is the author of the play *The Legionnaires (Leegionärid)* that was played by Rakvere Theatre at Tartu College on the following weekend of April 24th – 25th.

On April 29th, Scott Diel discussed the post-independence role for *väliseestlased* (Estonians abroad). Scott Diel is an American freelance journalist and author who has been living in Estonia for some time. He has been publishing sharp-witted articles in the Estonian press as the enigmatic Vello Vikerkaar. He also talked at the VEMU fundraising dinner on May 2nd ("Dangerous Rainbows: Outing the Dastardly Vello Vikerkaar"). The theme of this year's dinner was "Baltic with a Twist". Ingo Karklins, the well-known and acclaimed chef at the Latvian Centre, prepared the dinner. Eric Soostar & the Northern Stars provided music.



Photo: P. Noorhani

On Wednesday, May 6th, Margit Kilumets talked about being a journalist, filmmaker, and biographer. On Saturday, May 9th, the Estonian Embassy in Canada and VEMU/the Estonian Studies Centre held a screening of the documentary "Pöide, Silent Witness". The screening was followed by a discussion about the past and future of the medieval church. Juhan Kilumets, art historian and restorer and Margit Kilumets, journalist and film scenarist led the discussion.

From May 11th to May 14th, Mihkel Salusoo's workshop "Weaving of Traditional Estonian Belts" took place at Tartu College.

The busy winter/spring season will end with the opening of the Estonian National Museum's photo exhibition *Pick a Place Wherever You Can...* (Otsi kohta, kus sa saad...). The exhibition will be on display at Tartu College until September 10th.