

# **The State Historical Archives of Latvia as a Source of Estonian Educational History**

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A collection of archival materials relating to Estonian students at Latvian educational institutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been preserved at the State Historical Archives of Latvia.

The following educational institutions in Latvia have been particularly important in relation to Estonia's educational history:

- 1) the Jānis Cimze Seminary, established in Valga in 1839 on the basis of the Valmiera Teachers' Seminary;
- 2) the Riga Theological Seminary, established in 1846;
- 3) the Riga Polytechnic, founded in 1861;
- 4) the Ainaži Nautical School, established in Heinaste in 1864;
- 5) the Baltic Teachers' Seminary, founded in Riga in 1870.

For the researcher of education history, archival materials from educational institutions where prominent Estonians have studied have been of particular interest. Some of the information from the archival materials stored at the State Historical Archives of Latvia has been used in articles and different publications. Historians have mainly been interested in Riga Polytechnics, which was founded in 1861 to further the technical education of that time and was transformed into a higher educational institution in 1898.

In 1912, the voluminous and thorough "*ALBUM ACADEMICUM des Polytechnicums zu Riga*" was published, giving an overview of the students at the institution during the years 1862-1912. 250 students were from Estonia, mostly young Estonian and German men. The album also gave the students' biographical data. This publication can be found in Estonian and Latvian libraries, but also in Vilnius and elsewhere. The Academician Jānis Stradiņš, vice president of the Latvian Academy of Sciences and others have referred to this album in both

Latvian and English academic publications when publishing their research on the history of chemistry.

The history of the Riga Theological Seminary (1846-1918) has been described in many publications. A monograph about the Estonians who studied at the seminary has been published in Estonian, and an autobiography in Latvian has been written by seminary graduate P. Gruzna.

2008 saw the publication of the anthology “*Eestlased Lätis*” (“Estonians in Latvia”), which featured the article “*Eestlased Balti Õpetajate Seminaris*” (“Estonians at the Baltic Teachers’ Seminary”). Ms. Leili Utno and Ms. Alīda Zigmunde have exhaustively documented the archival materials at the State Historical Archives of Latvia concerning Estonian students at the seminary, featuring the students’ names, and the years they studied as well as biographical data known or mentioned in the literature.

It is remarkable that the Estonian literature has focused so little on the founding and activities of such a unique Baltic educational institution as the Ainaži (Heinaste) Nautical School. The Ainaži Nautical School (*Ainažu jūrskola*) began its activities on the 23rd of November 1864. The nautical school was founded thanks to the endeavours of famous Latvian educator Krišjānis Valdemārs to create an educational institution on the shores of the Baltic Sea for the boys of the coastal villages whose parents’ life and work were closely connected to the sea. (Valdemārs 1997)

Valdemārs’s correspondence with influential officials of the Russian Empire concerning the establishment of the nautical school is worth mentioning: the correspondence has been arranged and published as one book with texts in Latvian, German and Russian by scholars at the State Historical Archives of Latvia. The book contains references to important events in what was then the Russian Empire and its neighbouring countries, and testifies to how these events were perceived at the time. The bringing together of official and personal correspondence in one voluminous book in the three local languages of the time is an excellent example of how applications for popular education were submitted and is – not to forget – enjoyable both as a source for the history of popular education and as a handbook in sophisticated communication (Šimanis 2005).

This well-designed publication tells us that the Saint Petersburg Latvian and renowned figure in the Latvian national awakening Krišjānis Valdemārs, then an official at the Russian ministry of finance, corresponded with important Russian officials in the hope of persuading

them to allow the establishment of a nautical school for Latvian and Estonian youths. He thought it important that the school should be a free school where the studies would not depend upon the students' financial situation.

The fact that the school's starting capital of 475 rubles came from donations gathered by the Ainaži farmers Juris Veide, Atis Veide, Andrejis Veide and the brothers Mihkelson, who had gone to Saint Petersburg to sell potatoes is interesting. After the gainful marketday by the Neva, the men visited Krišjānis Valdemārs on Vasilievsky Island; Valdemārsi donated 25 rubles. Gathered in his apartment, the men agreed that the purpose of the Ainaži Nautical School should be for the education of sailors for the merchant fleet and, if possible, the issuing of master's licenses. The head of the school would preferably be an experienced sailor who could teach core subjects and spend the summers sailing with the students.

The school found rooms in quarters owned by the wealthy farmer Juris Veide. On the opening day the Ainaži Nautical School had just two students, but a week later on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December they numbered 13. The school statutes tell us that in order to be accepted at the school, students had to prove that they could read and write and that they had been at sea on at least the level of cabin boy on a fully laden sailing ship.

The abundance of core subjects taught at this – at first view – modest school is also worthy of note. During the first school year, general subjects were taught in the preparatory class. The language of instruction was Latvian or Estonian, depending on the students' mother tongue. During their second year, students were acquainted with their specialty and also studied mathematics, geography, local languages, navigation, astronomy, ship building, English, admiralty law and first aid.

Despite Valdemārs's intense correspondence with influential officials, the Ainaži Nautical School had to operate without the tsarist government's licence. We know from archival publications that governor Lisander who was informed about the situation did not hinder the school's activities because the founder was known as an authoritative person.

Krišjānis Valdemārs studied at the University of Tartu during the years 1854-1859 and finished his studies at the faculty of philosophy and history. During these years, he became a kind of spiritual leader among the Latvian students at the university. Apart from his written and spoken works in Latvian, German and Russian, his letters to friends and fellow students at the time are interesting historical sources. They were sent to people all over Russia, including distinguished Estonian leaders Johann Köler and Carl Robert Jakobson.

The Ainaži Nautical School lacked an examination commission, so students who had successfully finished their studies went to Riga for their exams. Only three students received their diploma from the school during the first examination year, but after this Valdemārs held a direct speech to the Admiralty, and the school was licensed.

On the 27th of June 1867 the tsar approved the law of nautical schools created by Valdemārs, which made it possible to accept students without restrictions in regard to their financial situation or age, and where the education was free of charge and given in the students' mother tongue.

Valdemārs himself wrote: "The Ainaži Nautical School is of great importance to Latvia and all of Russia, since without it we wouldn't have a law of nautical schools" (author's translation from the book by Gints Šimanis "*Krišjānis Valdemārs, Apgaismibas centieni*", Riga, 2005).

Valdemārs published a book for the Estonians of the coastal areas in order to advocate the school. It was in Estonian and carried the following title: "Our Sailors and Sailor School/ An Appeal to the Estonian Coastal People/ That They Would Begin To Take Part in the Work/ on the Merchant Ships Which Sail/ the Far Seas/ Written by/ K. Woldemar/ in Viljandi 1878."

Study aids were scarce at the nautical school. The students did study in their mother tongue, but had to sit their exams in German. There was a lack of text books in Estonian and Latvian for the compulsory education needed in seafaring until 1881, when Valdemārs published a dictionary in Estonian and Latvian covering terminology and concepts for nautical schools.

Thus, the school's first 15 years were spent with the teacher as the only source of knowledge.

The school's first headmaster and teacher of navigation was the experienced deep-sea navigator captain Christian Dahl (1839–1904), a graduate of the Nautical School in Riga and a speaker of ten or so languages (which of course included Latvian, Estonian, German and Russian). The Ainaži Nautical School was in Dahl's care from 1864 to 1893, after which he

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*Meie laevamehed ja Laevameeste koolid/ Kutse-kiri Eesti ranna-äärse rahvale/ et nad kauge meresõitudest/ kaubalaevade peal/ osa võtma hakkaksivad/ Kirja pannud/ K. Woldemar/ Wiljandis, 1878. (– Translator's note)*

became the head of the nautical school in Liepāja. In 1870, the Estonian N. Raudsepp (1848–1920) became a teacher at the school. He compiled both curricula and study methods and constantly supplemented them.

In 1870, a new school building was finished and the school was granted the rights of a nautical school of the second category.

The success of the Ainaži Nautical School increased the possibility for students to sit their final exams in Pärnu, where the commission handling the examinations had met every spring from 1875.

In the holdings of the State Historical Archives of Latvia there are exam lists with information about the students' backgrounds (LVVA fond no 6130, item no 1). For instance, one exam list from 1875 states that Jaan Grants, Mihkel Grants, Jaan Metsaots, Andres Weide and Martin Weide had all passed the examination with flying colours. Their places of residence are marked as *Alt-Salis* (Kuivastu), *Reval* (Tallinn), *Orrenhof* (Orajõe) and *Neu-Salis* (Uus-Salatsi). The exam list from 1877 contains many names of Swedish origin as well as the names of the diligent examinees Andres Eichen, Mihkel Silling, Jaan Laiwing and Jaan Kraukle, whose places of residence are Estonian settlements with the place names given in German. On the exam list from 1880, the place of residence for Andrei Kallas, Mats Klein ja Jürri Johanson is stated as *Orrenhof* (Orajõe) in Häädemeeste parish.

In 1880, the Ainaži Nautical School was appointed a deep-sea navigation nautical school of the third grade and received the rights of a category three nautical school. Some 100 young men were continually studying there. Despite the financial difficulties, the school had a relatively good library spanning 306 volumes in the academic year of 1887/1888. In addition to three globes, the students also had access to 19 navigational tools which was a real hoard at the time.

Sailing practice was given on board the sailboat „Katarina“ under Christian Dahl's guidance from the first year of study, and brought the students to many ports in Western Europe. The Ainaži Nautical School's 1876 and 1877 expedition was to the lower course of the Ob river and to the Arctic Ocean.

The Vidzeme nautical centre reportedly took shape thanks to the Ainaži school's good reputation. The Vidzeme centre built more than 50 sailing ships during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 248 register ton sailboat „Georg“ sailed in the Atlantic in 1869, and was

later followed by the „Matador“ and the „Rota“ built in Lielupē. Their sea-sailing properties clearly showed the importance of local oak and pine.

Between 1864 and 1898, the Ainaži Nautical School had 2261 students. 741 of them graduated with captain's and helmsman's diplomas (among them was the grandfather of Estonian ambassador Jaak Jõerüüt). In 1903 the nautical school moved into a new wooden building which later perished in the storms of the time.

In 1915, during the First World War, the Ainaži Nautical School was evacuated to the shores of the Black Sea near Kherson in southern Ukraine. The school moved back to Ainaži in 1919, but in the current wind of political and financial change it was no longer considered necessary to continue the school's activities. The increasing importance of steamships also influenced the Latvian government's decision to close the school in 1919.

Altogether, more than a thousand deep-sea captains and helmsmen received their diplomas at the Ainaži Nautical School, with the students predominately hailing from the Estonian and Latvian coastal populations. The students of this institution laid the foundation for fruitful cooperation between Estonian and Latvian mariners in the independent Baltic republics.

A museum was opened in the school building in 1969, displaying various collected materials reflecting the history of this educational institution which was of such importance during its time.

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