

EFANA: Estonian Film Archives in North America Project

Marcus Kolga

Realworld Pictures

Initiated over a year ago, the EFANA archival film project aims to locate, identify and catalogue films of historical importance to the Estonian Diaspora in North America and Estonia.

Over the past 60 years, Estonians living in North America have established strong communities in various urban centers across the continent. While the process of arrival and construction of community infrastructure and institutions has been well documented on paper and in photographs, footage of this process also exists and is often overlooked. Shot by amateur and semi-professional camera operators, footage exists in the basements and attics of community members and in the forgotten corners of community archives.

The EFANA archival film project is designed to collect footage from personal and institutional archives to identify content and create a database of these films for archivists, researchers and the community in North America, Estonia and elsewhere.

The project is supported by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (Compatriots Program) and in limited partnership with the Library and Archives Canada.

Project scope

The aim of this project is:

- 1) To locate and identify footage of historical significance to Estonia and Estonians in Canada.
- 2) To establish a partnership with Library and Archives Canada to ensure a safe research environment.
- 3) To view footage in a professional and safe archival environment at Library and Archives Canada.
- 4) Inspect and assess the condition of footage - for shrinkage, damage, brittleness and act accordingly.

- 5) View and catalogue footage.
- 6) Create a comprehensive catalogue of available footage
- 7) Publish catalogue to constituents and on the internet along with clips of sample footage.

Finding and approaching archives in Canada:

- 1) Estonian Central Archives in Canada
- 2) Private Archives
- 3) Tartu Institute's Dr. Endel Aruja Archives and Library
- 4) University of Minnesota archives (in the future)

The main objective of this project - to assess the conditions of and catalogue footage - stemmed from our understanding that several film archives existed in the Toronto area that may or may not have included footage of Estonia and Estonians in Canada.

As a summer intern at the Estonian Central Archives at the Estonian House in Toronto from 1992-1993, I became aware of several German and Russian newsreels and perhaps a few reels of historical national importance that existed there. Even then, they were stored in less than adequate environs, with exposure to fluctuating levels of extreme humidity, temperature and were exposed, from the information we've gathered, to occasional flooding. In 1992-1993, the footage was stored directly on the floor of a closet in the centre section of the archive. Aware that these films existed, and the conditions they were being stored in, this was the first collection that we would aim to inspect and catalogue.

However, after approaching the archive several times to suggest a co-operative effort to save and catalogue their footage, we encountered what could be characterized as institutional resistance and hesitancy towards this project, despite having organized funding and resources to carry out significant research in a safe archival environment at the Library and Archives Canada.

We were also told that the Estonian Central Archives would be conducting its own research using antiquated 16mm projectors and a screen, from which the footage would be telecined to an

SD prosumer video camera. Due to resistance by the Estonian Central Archives, our attempts to establish a partnership to assist them with their film archives were abandoned in 2008.

By the end of 2008, word of our project had spread in the Toronto Estonian community and we were approached by a few private archives who were interested in co-operating with our research project.

The family of a prominent Estonian-Canadian cultural figure, Rein Andre, contacted us through Bishop Andres Taul.

Rein Andre was a proficient camera operator in addition to being a leader in the Estonian émigré arts community in Sweden and later in Canada.

Mr. Andre's daughter, had discovered several boxes of 16mm footage, both black and white and colour her parent's basement after her father had passed away. They gave us permission to view, catalogue and if necessary, restore any significant footage in the archive. This is the first group of films that we researched and highlights of some of the reference footage will be shown later.

In early 2009 we were approached by Edgar Väär, a prominent cameraman with Canada's national broadcaster, CBC through the 1960's and 1970's. Mr. Väär has an extensive collection of footage that he has personally filmed - both professionally and privately - of cultural activities and events in the North American Estonian communities including various early ESTO festivals, cultural gatherings and social and political events. An elderly gentleman, Mr. Väär's concern was the eventual destination of his archives and requested that we assist in finding a home for them, in a proper, professional archival environment, such as those in Estonia, the Library and Archives Canada or - once renovations are completed - the Tartu Institute's Dr. Endel Aruja Archives and Library at Tartu College in Toronto.

Finally, we were made aware of the mainly 8mm film archive at the archives at Tartu College by Piret Noorhanni and Andris Kesteris. We approached the archive director, Dr. Roland Weiler, who gathered the available films - as the archives are undergoing renovations.

I should note, that we were made aware of a significant film archive of Estonians in the United States at the University of Minnesota (Immigration History Research Centre), that has yet to be catalogued and may contain significant historical footage. There also exists, to the efforts

of the Estonian Heritage Club in Toronto, an extensive library of interviews with Estonians living in Canada that has been meticulously catalogued and described. This library is available at Tartu College in Toronto.

Partnership with Library and Archives Canada

Viewing and researching footage in a proper archival environment was paramount to our project in order to avoid possible permanent damage to original films of historical significance. After approaching several institutions, including the CBC, Television Ontario and other possible partners, all of whom had discarded their viewing equipment and editing tables, we discussed our project with Andris Ķesteris of the Library and Archives Canada, who suggested that we contact State Archivist Ian Wilson and LAC director, Ingrid Parent. After several meetings and exchanges, Mr. Wilson and Ms. Parent agreed that these films could be of historical value to Canada and the Estonian community in Canada and agreed to assist in making available to view and catalogue the film at LAC facilities in Ottawa. In return, we agreed to make available our catalogue and research to LAC so that they may investigate possible footage for acquisition to their collections from archive owners.

It should also be mentioned, that our research and catalogues will be shared with all other stakeholders and participants and will be made available to the public on the internet.

Preliminary research at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa

After several months of negotiating an appropriate time with LAC, we arranged our first research session for mid June. The Rein Andre collection was targeted as the first group of films to be catalogued.

With the invaluable help of LAC archivist, and Latvian-Canadian, Andris Ķesteris, we began to inspect the footage, which had been stored in a dark and dry basement for several decades. Much of the footage had shrunk, some by up to 10% and was rather brittle. Much of the footage was carefully rewound onto new cores from existing deteriorated reels and then run through a 16mm Steenbeck editing table.

The collection included several old newsreels and films that were of limited or no historical

significance.

However, the collection included 5 unedited reels of Kodachrome colour footage of the Estonian community from the early 1950's, including footage of Estonian summer camps, scout camps and cultural events. All of which were spliced together onto a new core.

The collection also included 2 remarkable colour reels from Estonia in summer 1939. One reel contained historically significant unedited colour footage of the Estonian Games in Kadriorg park as well as random footage of Pirita beach and footage depicting life in Estonia in 1939. The other reel contained a colour documentary film called "Estonia" with footage of Tallinn and cultural events from the summer of 1939.

Ongoing research

Another, week long session at LAC is planned for autumn 2009, when we hope to conclude research on current materials.

After this session we plan to assemble existing research, publish our findings and create a webpage with clips and catalogue for public viewing and research.

We hope to continue our work in 2010, by selecting significant footage for digital telecine at the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa.