

# **The Web-Based Database “Estonia-Related Archival Sources in Foreign Archives”**

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## **1. The purpose of the database.**

The purpose of the database is to facilitate the use of archival collections deemed to be of historical significance for Estonia and its people, making them accessible for both academic as well as genealogical or local historical research.

Firstly, the database helps make available Estonia-related material held in foreign archives without the researcher having to travel to an archive abroad. Secondly, electronic searches are considerably faster than working with printed archive inventories. Thirdly – this only applies to the Latvian State Historical Archives (<http://www.arhivi.lv/index.php?&16>) – , the contents of files are further specified under “comments”. The Latvian State Historical Archives (henceforth LVVA) display the headings of the files in Estonian, which saves time: instead of having to type the search term in four different languages, one will do. This also helps break down any language barriers, since Latvian isn’t a widely spoken language in Estonia.

## **2. Why is Estonian archival material in Latvian and Russian archives?**

The answer to this question also reveals what kind of information can be found there. Estonian records can be found in Latvia mainly because present-day southern Estonia and northern Latvia belonged to the Governorate of Livonia from the 17th century to 1917, with Riga as the capital. Attempts have been made at dividing fonds between the Latvian and Estonian Historical Archives on territorial basis. Some very interesting fonds are still being stored in Riga, for example fonds of the Consistory of the Livonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Livonia Finance Office (*Livländischer Kameralhof*), the Livonian Court of Appeal and the Livonian knighthood.

The amount of records concerning Estonians who have lived, studied or worked in Latvia or the areas now part of Latvia is much more modest.

Estonia-related archival records can be found in Russian archives because:

- 1) present-day Estonia constituted a part of the Russian Empire for a couple of centuries (1710-1918) and we were ruled from the capital (archives of central offices);
- 2) numerous Estonians lived in different places in Russia, particularly due to intensified emigration in the 19th century. Their numbers were especially high in Saint Petersburg and the surrounding province;
- 3) a part of present-day Estonian territory belonged to the Governorates of Russia (such as Narva).

### **3. Archives.**

The database contains information from four archives in Saint Petersburg, three in Moscow, two in Pskov and one in Latvia. It only includes Russian and Latvian archives since they have lacked electronic archival information systems or good overviews of their material up until now. This way, they will more readily available to the broader public.

The database comprises information on records from the 16th century to 1918 (sometimes even later years) relating to Estonia and its peoples regardless of their ethnicity, and to a smaller extent Estonians who have lived and worked outside of Estonian ethnic territory.

How much Estonia-related material from these ten archives does the database contain? Currently, it has some 35. 000 entries, half of which concerns records in the LVVA and half in Russian archives.

The database covers 40% of the LVVA's Estonia-related records. There are no plans to continue the work on a large scale. The Russian archives have been covered to different extents: the Pskov archives have been exhaustively described, as have the archival collections in the Saint Petersburg Central State Historical Archives. About half of the records in the Russian State Historical Archives have been described. The largest part of the work in the Moscow archives still awaits. Faster progress is hindered by the large amounts of Russian archival material, by the

fact that it is scattered, and that it has become more difficult to gain access to archival inventories and records. At present, the work has come to a halt due to lack of funds. If the Compatriots Programme continues the project we hope to update the Russian part in an efficient manner.

What isn't in the database? As far as the Latvian materials go, we haven't included parish registers, revision lists or the 1897 census materials which are available online: <http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html>. Neither are there any entries showing the parish registers of Lutheran parishes in the Russian provinces (from the fonds of the Saint Petersburg Evangelical Lutheran Consistory); they are available in digital format at the following web address: <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html#w=;p=2;c=1469151;t=browsable>.

#### **4. The search system.**

How to search? Searches can be performed in either Estonian (for Latvian archives) or Russian (for Russian archives). There are two ways in which to retrieve information from the database: simple search and advanced search. The simple search only has one search field, and calculates the search results in two different fields (heading and comments). The detailed search option uses more precise search parameters.

For instance, information on archival records can be searched for using their headings. Any words or names can also be used – a family name, the name of a town or village or search terms relating to the type of record such as “map”, “correspondence”, “minutes”, etc.

When searching for fonds one might come across institutions or individuals whose records are held in the archives. This type of search is useful if one knows which institutions were involved in the question one is researching.

#### **5. Access to archival records.**

Information about the archives' location, opening hours and terms of usage are to a certain extent available on the web page. The database and the Estonian National Archives' web page have references to a Russian archival webportal from where one can move on to different archival webpages: <http://www.rusarchives.ru/>.

At the LVVA, archival records can be read in the reading room. However, the researcher must first submit a personal application to the director. The files are brought out within three days (it is possible to make a reservation via telephone or e-mail). It is possible to order up to 10 files (or up to 1000 pages). It is more complicated to gain access to the records in the magistrate fonds in Riga: since they are stored in a different building, it might take longer.

The Russian archives are even more complicated. Rules and to an even larger extent certain conditions vary from archive to archive. Getting acquainted with the archive's web page is generally of no use. How many files can be ordered at a time, how long it will take for them to reach the reading room and such becomes clear only on location – it might also pay to listen to the experiences of previous visitors. Most of the time the archives will require a letter of recommendation (*otnoshenie*) from the dispatching institution. At the Saint Petersburg Central State Historical Archives, a personal application will suffice. The letter must be supplied with the specific purpose and theme of the research; it is prudent to phrase the latter in a broad manner, so no questions about whether or not the researcher is sticking to their theme arise when it is time to order archival records. The Central State Historical Archives of Saint Petersburg allow for one or three files to be ordered at a time, depending on whether or not the researcher is able to produce an *otnoshenie*. At the Russian State Historical Archives up to five volumes can be ordered at a time. The waiting time is up to three days.

It is of utmost importance that the order form is filled out in a correct manner. Failing to give the right date for a file might result in it not being brought out. The Russian State Historical Archives previously didn't allow the same researcher to use the same file more than once during a period of six months. It is always possible to come to so-called personal agreements. It is also good to keep the size of Russia in mind – there tends to be more researchers than there are seats in the reading room, and queues outside the archives are not an uncommon sight, particularly in July.