

# **The Significance of Diaspora Archives for Lithuanian Historical Research**

**Linas Saldukas**

Lithuanian Emigration Institute

Since the beginning of the Lithuanian mass emigration to the U.S. in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, traces of Lithuanian emigrants' activities have accumulated in the form of written documents, collected and released books and periodicals. The period leading up to and following the First World War saw much activity among the emigrants and many organisations were formed but unfortunately, we only have very limited documents from that period. This is due to circumstances; many Lithuanian emigrants were illiterate and had no possibility of understanding the importance of their documents. Their descendants might have perceived the archives as unnecessary bundles of paper. This is how the old Lithuanian diaspora archives were irretrievably lost. The history of Lithuania and the Lithuanian people contains some pages which will remain white or, in the best of cases, perhaps grey. Researchers no longer have these archival sources to rely on, but only published literature and source material.

The period after the Second World War when most Lithuanians emigrants had reached the countries of Western Europe, the USA, Canada or Australia was better for archival records. During this period, the emigrants were far more conscious, better educated and had a much more responsible approach to the preservation of archives. Many from this generation put a lot of effort into creating the main archives of Lithuanian emigration – the American Lithuanian Cultural Archives in Putnam, Connecticut, the World Lithuanian Archives in Chicago, the Lithuanian Institute of Culture in Germany, the Canadian and Australian Lithuanian archives and others in many different countries.

In this article, I will try to give an overview of how the émigré archives could help serve researchers of Lithuanian history and Lithuanians, regardless of whether these archives are stored in the diaspora or in Lithuania. One cannot artificially separate the two branches of the Lithuanian nation; the emigration archives do in a sense also present the history of Lithuania. Some topics concerning the history of Lithuania could not be studied as a whole without researching the archival materials collected by emigrants, because there is no alternative in Lithuania. Even the history of the new wave of emigration cannot be fully understood or studied if we do not research these archival collections. There is now an

abundance of various means of communication, and even travel possibilities are for most people limited by finances only. Researchers studying emigration problems in depth need to use the archives.

The World Lithuanian Archives attracts the most attention from the research community because of its range of archival materials; these materials do not only cover Lithuanians in the USA. Nowhere else in the world can boast such a rich collection of records from the DP period, a short but very important period for all post-war generations of the Lithuanian diaspora. Many young researchers from Lithuania are interested in this period, especially after the long Soviet occupation when it was painted in dark colours. The World Lithuanian Archives also holds archival records of interest to researchers interested in the American Lithuanian Council, the Lithuanian Writers' Society, the Lithuanian Lawyers Society, the Lithuanian Journalist Union, the Lithuanian History Society and a number of Lithuanian organisations in not only the U.S. but the entire free world. Undoubtedly, the archives also hold archival fonds of many other organisations, communities or individuals representing the interesting and productive life of American Lithuanians.

The American Lithuanian Cultural Archives in Putnam, Connecticut, also hold records of importance to researchers of the history of emigration. The archives hold 220 named personal and organisational archives portraying the life of emigrants, including archival material of the Head Office and the European Branch of the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America, the Freethinker's Library and Archives from Brockton, MA; the Archives of *Ateitininkai* (The Future organisation) from refugee camps in Germany, Lithuanian music sheets and monographs on Lithuanian music, as well as several thousand programs and descriptive materials of concerts, meetings, conferences and related materials.

In some cases the researcher will need to acquaint themselves with materials of both archives mentioned, especially when researching organisations such as the Supreme Committee for Lithuanian Liberation. It is only there that one can access records from the old Lithuanian emigrant organisations of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the material from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is still awaiting researchers. Personalia fonds stored in either archive can provide important information about not only a person, but also about the organisation they belonged to.

Many Lithuanians as well as historians from other countries first come to the World Lithuanian Archives, where access to the archival materials is better suited to the needs of

scientific research. It is a pity that some researchers, especially from Lithuania, are detained from travel due to financial, organisational or other problems. The solution to this problem is facilitated by the publishing activities of the Lithuanian Research and Study Center, the „roof“ of the archives. Published scientific monographs and articles also form a very valuable background facilitating further investigation for researchers. Since 1980, more than 50 books have been published, and the amount has increased since the year 2000. One of the books published, William Urban's "Tannenberg and After"<sup>1</sup>, gained international recognition and appeared on the list of the 30 best history books in 2001. A lot of information from the World Lithuanian Archives is of importance to those interested in Lithuanian education. Valuable large and informative books dedicated to Lithuanian education have been published in the last decade, for example "Lithuanian Education in North America"<sup>2</sup>, "Lithuanian Emigration Pedagogical Thoughts"<sup>3</sup>, "The Status and Prospects of Lithuanian Studies in the U.S."<sup>4</sup>, and "The Lithuanian Education Institute 1958 – 2003"<sup>5</sup>. With the surge of new emigrants to the U.S., Lithuanian education and studies in the USA has become one of the most urgent topics of not only the community, but of some Lithuanian state institutions as well.

Emigration archives, notably the World Lithuanian Archives, and their rich fonds facilitate the publishing of numerous books in not only in the U.S. but in Lithuania as well. It is absolutely necessary to research the political activities of Lithuanian emigration. Not surprisingly, many such studies have been published in recent years because Lithuanian researchers now have the possibility to reach the Western countries and the emigration archives there. It became possible to consider many of the current issues in Lithuania's history on their own merits instead of through a prism of Soviet demagogy, as was the case for a long time. Many publications of Lithuanian researchers, such as "The Activities of the

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<sup>1</sup> William Urban. *Tannenberg and after*. Lithuania, Poland, and the Teutonic Order in search of immortality. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Juozas Masilionis, Stasė Petersonienė. *Lietuviškasis švietimas Šiaurės Amerikoje: penkiasdešimt metų lituanistinei mokyklai, 1949 – 1999*. Chicago: Pedagoginis lituanistikos institutas, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Jonas Dautaras. *Lietuvių išsivijęs pedagoginė mintis*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Jonas Dautaras. *Lituanistinio ugdymo JAV būklė ir perspektyvos*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Jonas Dautaras. *Pedagoginis lituanistikos institutas, 1958 – 2003: 45 metai*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2005.

American Lithuanian Council in 1945 – 1948”<sup>6</sup>, studies on the famous Lithuanian diplomats Bronius Kazys Balutis<sup>7</sup> and Julius J. Bielskis<sup>8</sup> by Juozas Skirius, the study “The Case of Lithuanian Freedom in Western Countries, 1975 – 1990”<sup>9</sup> by historian Juozas Banionis, “Lithuanian Diplomatic Service Activities 1940 – 1991”<sup>10</sup> by Laurynas Jonušauskas, “Lithuania Against the LSSR”<sup>11</sup> by Remigijus Misiūnas and other works would not have been possible were it not for the access to the materials of the World Lithuanian Archives and other Lithuanian archives in America. These and other books depict the very important emigration activities in the political struggle for Lithuanian freedom.

Research of DP life certainly would not have moved forward without the treasures held in the World Lithuanian Archives. No memoirs or studies can substitute the witnesses of the time – the documents – because the DP diaspora generation laid the foundations for the World Lithuanian Community in 1949. The subject is drawing increasing attention from Lithuanian researchers and students. It is of course of interest to people outside the research community as well, and it is no surprise that such popular books as “Barak Culture Books”<sup>12</sup> by Remigijus Misiūnas and “Lithuanian Literary Life in Western Europe 1945 – 1950”<sup>13</sup> by Dalia Kuizinienė – which contain large amounts of data based from records of the Lithuanian Writers' Association held at the World Lithuanian Archives – have been published. More information about this period is provided by Juozas Žilevičius' study “Lithuanian Musicians

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<sup>6</sup> Juozas Skirius. *Amerikos lietuvių tarybos veikla 1945 – 1948 metais: išėivijos pastangos dėl „Displaced Persons Act“ priėmimo*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Juozas Skirius. *Lietuvių visuomenininkas ir diplomatas Bronius Kazys Balutis (1880 – 1967): tėvynei paaukotas gyvenimas*. Vilnius: Vaga, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Juozas Skirius. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891 – 1976): gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Juozas Banionis. *Lietuvos laisvės byla Vakaruose 1975 – 1990: istorinė apžvalga*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Laurynas Jonušauskas. *Likimo vedami: Lietuvos diplomatinės tarnybos veikla, 1940 – 1991*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Remigijus Misiūnas. *Lietuva prieš LTSR*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Remigijus Misiūnas. *Barakų kultūros knygos: lietuvių DP leidyba 1945 – 1952*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Dalia Kuizinienė. *Lietuvių literatūrinis gyvenimas Vakarų Europoje 1945 – 1950 m.: Rašytojų draugijos veikla, kultūrinė spauda, literatūros debiutai*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2003.

in Western Countries”<sup>14</sup> and “Lithuanian Musicians in Germany 1944 – 1949”<sup>15</sup>, prepared by Jūratė Vyliūtė. Some researchers on the DP period have written articles on the Lithuanian diaspora press and defended a number of dissertations on this topic. So the efforts of researchers have already made some of the most valuable parts of the World Lithuanian Archives well known to both professionals and amateurs interested in this transitional period of Lithuanian history.

Clearly, the research of Lithuanian archives in foreign countries cannot be confined to the largest and most important archives only. Mentioned above are the most available fonds for studies of Lithuania around the world, but Lithuanian archives in other communities are also interesting and of importance to researchers. For example, the Lithuanian Archives in Canada have a large and important collection of documents on the North American Lithuanian congressional campaign which was launched together with Latvians and Estonians with the plea to the Canadian and U.S. governments to recall the occupation of Baltic countries in anticipation of their assistance in the international context. The young historian Giedrius Janauskas from Vytautas Magnus University defended a dissertation on this subject. In 2009, he published the study “Congressional Action: Political Lobbying of Lithuanians in North America in the 1950s – 1990s”<sup>16</sup>, which contains a large amount of data from documents in the archives as well as other collections.

After the restoration of Lithuanian independence, a great number of organisations in the Lithuanian diaspora transferred their archives to public archives, libraries and other archival repositories in Lithuania. In this case, the location of the archival repository has changed, but these archives have remained diaspora archives. One of the Lithuanian archival institutions, the Lithuanian Emigration Institute at Vytautas Magnus University which collects many archival fonds of Lithuanians abroad began to publish collected archival materials and made them available to as wide an audience as possible. An important part of the collection on the President of the Republic of Lithuania Antanas Smetona became the Institute’s first publication (“Antanas Smetona’s Correspondence 1940 – 1944”<sup>17</sup>), contributing with facts on

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<sup>14</sup> Juozas Žilevičius. *Lietuviai muzikai Vakaruose*. Stickney (Ill.): Amerikos lietuvių bibliotekos leidykla, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Jūratė Vyliūtė. *Lietuvių muzikai Vokietijoje 1944 – 1949 m.* Vilnius: Scena, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Giedrius Janauskas. *Kongresinė akcija: JAV ir Kanados lietuvių politinis lobizmas XX amžiaus 6-9 dešimtmečiais*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> *Antano Smetonos korespondencija (1940 – 1944)*. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 1999.

this controversial personality. The growth of the archival fonds at the Institute through the acquisition of new collections also help stimulate the publishing activities. It is very important to introduce new documents for analysis of the Lithuanian diaspora's political activity in the fight for the restoration of Lithuanian independence. This was the intent behind the release of the book “The Supreme Committee for Lithuanian Liberation and the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service in Exile”<sup>18</sup>, after the acquisition of records from the conferences of the Lithuanian diplomatic service and the Supreme Committee for Lithuanian Liberation<sup>19</sup> which were held in Bern in 1946 and in Paris in 1947. The relationship between the two organisations has been complicated for a long time, and the published documents allow the reader to form his own opinion on the approach of both organisations.

The Lithuanian Emigration institute recently started to issue a series of publications on the largest Lithuanian communities in Western Europe – in Great Britain, France and Germany. The series use the archives stored at the Institute of Lithuanian Diaspora and in repositories of communities in their countries of residence. The researchers of the Institute and activists of these communities analyse a wide range of questions concerning the history of Lithuanians in these countries. The first book in the series about the Lithuanian community of Great Britain<sup>20</sup> was published in 2008, and a similar book on the Lithuanian community in France<sup>21</sup> has been published in 2009.

It could be argued that the diaspora archives, wherever they are stored, provide a rich range of materials on the history of Lithuania. Each researcher collecting material on his or her subject, should make every effort to publish the archive materials, as they not only contribute to the specific emigration records, but to studies of Lithuanian history as well. It is probably time to say that the diaspora and the history of Lithuania have become one and that

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<sup>18</sup> *Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas ir Lietuvos diplomatinė tarnyba išeivijoje: Berno ir Paryžiaus konferencijų protokolai*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> The Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania or VLIK was an organisation seeking independence for Lithuania. It was established on October 25, 1943 during the Nazi occupation. After the Second World War, it moved abroad and continued its operations in Germany and the United States. VLIK claimed to be the legal representative of the Lithuanian parliament and government, but did not enjoy international recognition. It was dissolved in 1992 after Lithuania declared its independence.

<sup>20</sup> *Didžiosios Britanijos lietuvių bendruomenė: praeitis, dabartis, ateitis: straipsnių rinkinys*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> *Prancūzijos lietuvių bendruomenė: istorija ir dabartis: straipsnių rinkinys*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2009.

any interest in the archives of the Lithuanian diaspora contribute to the elimination of blank spots in the history of Lithuania.