

## Introduction

The international conference on the archives of the Baltic diaspora "Accessing the History of the Baltic Diaspora", was held at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia on the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009. It followed from the previous conference, which had been held at the same venue in 2006.

The time between the two conferences has been active. The contacts made in 2006 led to the founding of a new organisation in January 2008, the non-profit organisation the Baltic Heritage Network. The aim of the organisation is to facilitate co-operation between national and private archives, museums, libraries, institutions of research, public associations and organisations which collect and study the cultural heritage of the Baltic diaspora, to facilitate the preservation and research of the historically valuable cultural property of the Baltic diaspora and to ensure the accessibility of these materials to the public. The Baltic Heritage Network has tried to bring to life ideas and plans which were met with approval at the conference in Tartu in 2006. It was also decided that the next conference would take place in the summer of 2009, again in Tartu. In the meantime, Estonians from Estonia and abroad gathered at the summer schools "*Eestlaste kultuuripärand võõrsil*" ("Estonian Cultural Heritage Abroad") in Koke in 2007 and in Käsmu in 2008.

The 2006 conference mainly focused on mapping the terrain in order to obtain an overview of the cultural heritage of the Baltic diaspora; what could be found in the different communities and what their situations looked like. The 2009 conference took a closer look at what has been done in the different communities in terms of preservation of Baltic cultural heritage, how accessible the archives and collections are to researchers, what they contain and how they can be made more available in the future. 102 participants from 13 countries partook in the conference (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Brazil, Australia, the Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, USA and Russia). The four days saw 29 presentations given by speakers from archives, museums, libraries, universities, cultural societies, etc. in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, USA, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany and Russia. Among the speakers were users of archival collections as well as those who maintain and preserve them.

The conference was arranged by the Baltic Heritage Network in co-operation with the Estonian National Museum, the Estonian Literary Museum and the National Archives of Estonia.

The event was supported by the Compatriots Programme (the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research).

This collection of articles and presentations testifies to just how varied this subject is. We will be provided with an overview of how the Republic of Estonia has supported the preservation of the cultural heritage of Estonians abroad through the Compatriots Programme (A. Adamson's, J. Viikberg's and J. Viller's article) and what the activities of the Baltic Heritage Network have looked like (P. Noorhani).

You will also find the first summaries of the different collection- research- and co-operation projects supported by the Compatriots Programme (K. Karu-Kletter and K. Labi, V. Mahtina, M. Kolga, K. Lust, D. Necas and others). Researchers share their experiences from their work with diaspora communities and their archives (H. Siemen, A. Korb, K. Kumer-Haukanõmm, T. Tamman, L. Saldukas). We will also get to know how the work with the archival collections in the diaspora communities has progressed (E.-M. Michelson-Holland, M. Barrow, A. D. Kiil, M. Hinkle), and read about different aspects of the history of the Baltic diaspora (A. and E. Andronov, B. Bela, R. Hinrikus, A. Pacevičius and others). From these writings, we clearly see how the existence of (or lack of) sources influences diaspora research.

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