

VI BALTIC HERITAGE NETWORK (VIRTUAL) CONFERENCE

No Topic Conference

September 15–16, 2021

Abstracts



2021

VI BALTIC HERITAGE NETWORK (VIRTUAL) CONFERENCE
„NO TOPIC CONFERENCE“

PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, 15.09.2021 / THURSDAY, 16.09.2021 IN AUSTRALIA

14:00-14:30 Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)
21-21:30 Eastern European Summer Time (EEST)
4:00-4:30 Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST)

Baltic Heritage Network Annual General Meeting

14:30-15:45 EDT / 21:30-22:45 EEST / 4:30-5:45 AEST

Session 1

Chair: Birgit Kibal

- Piret Noorhani (Baltic Heritage Network), *Opening remarks*
- Anne-Ly Reimaa (Estonian Ministry of Culture), *Estonian diaspora policy – more customer-centric approach in policymaking*
- Kadi Sikka and Aap Tepper (National Archives of Estonia), *Digital expansion in a time of physical distancing: Large-scale digitisation projects at the National Archives of Estonia*
- Sven Lepa (National Archives of Estonia), *Teaching the computer to read: First steps in handwritten text recognition at the National Archives of Estonia*

Q&A

16:00-17:15 EDT / 23:00-24:15 EEST / 6:00-7:15 AEST

Session 2

Chair: Piret Noorhani

- Marin Laak (Estonian Literary Museum), *A game of Ludo: Virtual tours of the Estonian Literary Museum*
- Evita Feldentale (Latvian Occupation Museum), *Improvement of the availability of photo collections within the audiovisual archive of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia*
- Dalia Cidzikaite (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania), *The international project “Migration in Art and Science”: Creating a Lithuanian segment of a new thematic collection in Europeana*

Q&A

VI BALTIC HERITAGE NETWORK (VIRTUAL) CONFERENCE

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PROGRAM

THURSDAY, 16.09.2021 / FRIDAY, 17.09.2021 IN AUSTRALIA

14:00-15:30 EDT / 21:00-22:30 EEST / 4:00-5:30 AEST

Session 1

Chair: Kristine Bekere

- Rein Viira (Association of Estonians in Sweden), *How the archive group of the Association of Estonians in Sweden is collecting and describing old photos*
- Piret Noorhani (Museum of Estonians Abroad), *VEMU's leap into the digital world*
- Inese Kalniņa (Latvian National Archives), *Latvian exile (diaspora) archive in Münster from the archivist's point of view*
- Maira Bundža (Western Michigan University), *Latvian collections in major US research libraries: A report from the ASEEES 2020 conference*

Q&A

15:45-17:15 EDT / 22.45-24:15 EEST / 5:45-7:15 AEST

Session 2

Chair: Piret Noorhani

- Ave Maria Blithe (Estonian Archives in the US), *Covid restrictions – history repeating itself*
- Kristi Barrow (Estonian Archives in Australia), *Starting a social media program*
- Maie Barrow (Estonian Archives in Australia), *Sharing our archive with the world*
- Ann Tündern-Smith (Canberra & District Historical Society), *Sharing Baltic research with the world by blog*

Q&A

Estonian Diaspora Policy – more customer-centric approach in policymaking

Anne-Ly Reimaa (Estonian Ministry of Culture)

The Estonian community abroad is an invaluable resource in diplomacy, science, business, economics and other policy areas. Maintaining and developing global Estonianness is a priority policy area for the state.

Estonian state's diaspora policy has moved away from being culture-centred towards a more business-focused initiative. The policy has undergone few changes during the last decade. An important shift is taking place in the provision of Estonian language courses and cultural programmes to support returnees and their non-Estonian family members. Since January 2021 the diaspora policy is in the portfolio of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

One of the key issues of Estonian diaspora policy is how to keep the expatriate Estonian community connected with Estonia and increase the contribution of the expatriate Estonian communities to Estonia's development. Until now, Estonia has cultivated dominantly language- and culture-focused diaspora policy, as well supported the *return to Estonia* and activities of the *Estonian Archives Abroad*. Technological developments and changes in business and economical models make possible to turn various digital solutions and new employment opportunities in favor of diaspora policy, including the involvement of Estonians abroad through Internet channels and web solutions. COVID-19 has forced us to use technology as an increasingly important part in our everyday life.

The draft Global Estonian Program 2021-2025, which is being still prepared, formulates the goal of diaspora policy. The main goal of the programme is that the compatriots are involved in everyday, economical and cultural life of the Estonian society, support the possible return and (re) adjustment to Estonian life.

Portal globalestonian.com was established in 2011 as a citizens' initiative of the Estonian expatriate Community in Toronto. The Ministry of Culture, the Estonian Integration Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have set the goal of further developing the portal to create a large-scale web-based information platform for the Estonian community and Estonian friends abroad. There is a clear need for a common and comprehensive web-based information platform, which would reflect both state information and the activities and contacts of Estonians abroad.



Digital expansion in a time of physical distancing: Large-scale digitisation projects at the National Archives of Estonia

Kadi Sikka, Aap Tepper (The National Archives of Estonia)

The Film Archive of the National Archives of Estonia is carrying out two film related digitisation projects, one of which includes 120 hours of 35mm newsreels made between 1940–1967. The selection covers the peak of the production of Soviet Estonian newsreels when Studio Tallinnfilm produced yearly around 50 newsreels. Digitisation and post-processing in 4K resolution was outsourced to the external partners and completed in May 2021, cataloguing will continue until June 2022. As a result of the project, 50% of the NAE's newsreel collection will be digitised, catalogued and accessible online. The presentation will outline the challenges and outcomes of the large-scale and multinational project during the pandemic.

The photo project aims to digitize early to mid-century Estonian photographic heritage from 24 memory institutions across Estonia. The goal is to preserve, digitize and give access to important collections which open up a unique perspective of a “Estonian experience” throughout a period featuring turbulent times with regime changes and the period of the first Estonian independence. This is a massive logistical and technical undertaking, especially during a global pandemic. Our presentation will introduce the processes of mapping, gathering, digitizing and publicising these special materials.



Teaching the computer to read: First steps in handwritten text recognition at the National Archives of Estonia

Sven Lepa (National Archives of Estonia)

With over more than fifteen years of digitizing work, the National Archives of Estonia have made large amounts of our collections available online. Over the years, the challenge of making the contents of these sources searchable has risen more and more. One novel solution, which has become a reality over the last few years, is the application of artificial intelligence – teaching the computer how to

decipher old handwritings. The National Archives have been testing the platform Transkribus for that purpose. After the first encouraging results, we have now started our first large scale project on the birth registries of Russian Orthodox congregations.



A game of Ludo: Virtual tours of the Estonian Literary Museum

Marin Laak (Estonian Literary Museum)

The last two years with COVID-19 have changed the world. The more local our everyday life became, the more it was assumed that everything would be available digitally. Why is this old book, these documents and photos not on the internet? You have opened an exhibit: could I also view it virtually? These are simple questions, which put museums, archives, and libraries in a complicated position, calling for rapid adjustment to new circumstances. This presentation will consider both the joys and the worries of organizing virtual exhibits. In comparison with international practices of creating virtual exhibits and tours, I will take a closer look at how well we have done with this at the Estonian Literary Museum. During the pandemic three virtual exhibits have been organised by the Estonian Cultural History Archive: writer Jaan Kaplinski, life stories' researcher Rutt Hinrikus and artist Arno Vihalemm. I will also share my experiences as a curator of literary virtual tours, in preparation for exhibits and their presentation.

In the second part of my presentation, based on Google Analytics' statistics, I will analyze the usage of the Literary Museum's virtual exhibits' as a „trip around the world“ – a popular board game of Ludo in Estonian.



Improvement of the availability of photo collections within the audiovisual archive of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia

Evita Feldentale (Latvian Occupation Museum)

The audiovisual archive of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia collects video testimonies of people repressed by Soviet and/or Nazi occupational regimes. The collection consists of 2419 video testimonies. Already from the very beginning specialists have asked people who have been telling their life stories to show photographs of people or events they are talking about. The result is that out of 2419 people telling their life stories around 800 have allowed scanning their photo collections. For 25 years have changed the way museum can obtain and describe photographs due to the availability of technical equipment. This presentation will go through the evolution of the process of working with the photo collections and introduce the extension to our inner database which allows us to improve the availability of the photo collections and their contents.



International project “Migration in the Arts and the Sciences”: Creating a Lithuanian segment of a new thematic collection on Europeana

Dalia Cidzikaite (Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania)

The presentation will focus on the international project “Migration in the Arts and Sciences—A Europeana Migration Thematic Collection” implemented in 2017-2019, of which Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania was part. The aim of the project was to create a specialized virtual thematic collection reflecting migration in the arts and sciences. Curating, editing and disseminating of the material collected during the project were among the six planned parts of the project, which included such activities as selection of material, creation of exhibitions and galleries, dissemination on social networks, websites, blogs and newsletters, creation of the collection-related vocabulary, translation to EU languages, organization of the event “Europeana Migration Collection Day #EuropeanMigration,” and etc. The presentation will focus on the Lithuanian segment of the

project and the documentary heritage made available for public access, as well as the results of the project in general.



How the archive group of the Association of Estonians in Sweden is collecting and describing old photos

Rein Viira (Association of Estonians in Sweden)

The archive group of the Association of Estonians in Sweden has focused on collecting, digitizing, and describing old photos about the Estonian society in Sweden for several years. The photos will not have the same value if we don't know who the people are on the photos, or where and when these were taken. We have realized that we are in a hurry because the people who still remember cannot stay with us forever, their memory will decrease over the years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued our work in hybrid form or virtually. We will share our experiences and challenges in using digital means for recognizing people, events, and places on the old photos. Our activities have had a very positive effect on the members of the archive group (it is always good to recall the memories of youth!). The network of archivists has grown (people look for pictures at home, we pick up these photos, even from other cities). We have been also able to use these photos in the magazine *Rahvuslik Kontakt*.



VEMU's leap into the digital world

Piret Noorhani (Museum of Estonians Abroad)

Together with the rest of the world, VEMU found itself in a completely new situation when COVID-19 struck. We had to move our cultural programming to the web; find work for our staff that could be done from home; explore ways to keep our archival volunteers active; move forward with activities leading to the construction of a new VEMU building. All of this forced us to think outside the box, to acquire new skills, methods, strategies and to rearrange our resources. If you are given a lemon, make lemonade from it. The COVID-19 era forced us to implement ideas that had been so far, waiting on the to-do list and we have tried hard to make the most of it. In my presentation, I will share with you how it all worked out and what we have learned.



Latvian exile (diaspora) archive in Münster from the archivist's point of view

Inese Kalņina (Latvian National Archives)

In November 2019, the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives went to identify Latvian diaspora documents at the Latvian Centre in Münster and in March 2020 began archiving the Latvian exile (diaspora) archives - arranging documents for the Münster Latvian Gymnasium. Unfortunately, the practical work had to be stopped due to the declaration of a state of emergency.

The history of the formation, maintenance and existence of the Latvian exile (diaspora) archive in Münster is inextricably linked to a number of public organizations established and operating in Germany. These are the Latvian Central Council, the Latvian Central Committee, the Latvian Community in Germany and the Münster Latvian Centre. Each of these organizations has left an important meaning in the history of exile, and some of them continue to be more or less active in adapting to modern conditions and diaspora interests.

The Latvian Central Council and the Latvian Central Committee, founded in 1945, undertook to coordinate the various needs of Latvian refugees living in Germany, including raising the issue of storing exile documents and developing a program for the Latvian Refugee Life Archive. A few years later, in 1948, a decision was made to store archives and cultural property abroad, as it was clear that initial hopes of returning to Latvia would not be met, and an agreement was signed with Stanford University as the safest and most appropriate archive country outside Latvia and Europe - Hoover Institute for the custody of the "Latvian Refugee Life Archive".

Part of the Latvian exile (diaspora) archive in Münster was transferred to Latvia, and in 2002 it was transferred to the Latvian State Archives by Arturs Cipulis, Chairman of the Latvian People's Community in Germany. The transfer of the archive for safekeeping to the State Archives of Latvia caused a split in the Latvian society in exile (diaspora) and long discussions about the necessity and usefulness of this.

There is still a lot to say about why Münster became the Latvian center in Germany. There's an interesting story. There have also been exciting adventures during the Latvian Gymnasium in Münster in various periods. And, of course, an insight into what is happening now, because there was also a period when everything seemed to end, but it didn't happen.



Covid restrictions – history repeating itself

Ave Maria Blithe (Estonian Archives in the U.S., Inc.)

EAUS operated through-out shut downs of 2020 since our work force has always been dedicated volunteers. However, the impact of mandatory shut-downs has been devastating on small businesses and reminiscent of many government tyrannies in the past. Recent years of fake news remind us of the importance of memory institutions as keepers of original documents.



Starting a Social Media Program

Kristi Barrow (Estonian Archives in Australia)

During the pandemic, the Estonian Archives in Australia utilised the time to completely overhaul their very outdated website that hadn't really been updated since 2008. However, having a only website in 2021 is not enough as there are many other ways people engage digitally. We realised we had to also improve our Social Media presence.

I will be talking about the different types of Social Media Networks we have set up: Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn and discussing the results of our efforts, the good, the bad and the ugly!



Sharing our Archive with the world

Maie Barrow (Estonian Archives in Australia)

Australia has been in lock down for most of the last 18 months. Sydney has been especially affected and community centres have generally been closed. Estonian House has been closed, and only a handful of events have been held since the Pandemic begun. The Archive has been closed for most of the year.

How have we survived this time and what have we done to keep the archive open, if only virtually? We have worked from home where possible and used the downtime to develop a new website, Facebook and Instagram presence which have proved to be very popular and useful.

A surprise invitation to submit our oral history collection for consideration to be inscribed in the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register created a whirlwind of activity. Much to our delight our collection was accepted for the Register. A decision to digitise the collection resulted in a need to find funding which we tackled with enthusiasm. Having raised the funds, we are now in a process of digitising the collection and are open to advice on how best to catalogue the collection and

make it accessible, keeping in mind the Copyright Act and Privacy Act.

I will be discussing the above in greater detail and look forward to receiving any suggestions on how to keep improving our online accessibility.



Sharing Baltic research with the world by blog

Ann Tündern-Smith (Canberra & District Historical Society)

More than twenty years' research focussed on the first group of post-WWII Displaced Persons to be resettled by the Australian Government, all from the Baltic States and in 1947, has produced many stories. COVID-19 restrictions on community events have produced a work environment conducive to collating various sources in order to tell the stories. While paper, in the form of books or articles, still provides the enduring form of records, a Web log provides a quick form of publication. We can but hope that Web logs or blogs also will be semi-permanent. My blog, started in October last year, now houses 8 entries, one introduction and 7 biographies. Advantages of blogging will be discussed and some entries visited.

Supporters:

The Compatriots Programme

The Ministry of Education and Research

The Estonian National Archives

The Estonian Studies Centre/VEMU

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