



BALTIC HERITAGE NETWORK

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Greetings to all friends of BaltHerNet on the arrival of summer!

Yes indeed, summer has arrived, and the 13th BaltHerNet Summer School is fast approaching. This year's theme is "Estonian Diaspora Cultural Heritage Abroad: Borderland."

On June 30, we will gather in Tallinn and visit the Estonian National Archives in its new home on Endla Street, where we will learn about the collections and research opportunities available there. The Summer School Book Club will also take place, featuring a discussion of Tõnu Õnnepalu's novel *Border State* (Piiiriik, 1993), and we will have the opportunity to meet the author.

From July 1-3, we will be in the border city of Narva. The theme and location of this year's Summer School were inspired by the 2025 ESTO Festival. Because those who work with Estonian diaspora heritage regularly encounter various kinds of borders and boundaries, this year we will explore topics such as: memory institutions at the crossroads of cultures—collecting practices, exhibition policies, and programs; historical boundaries in the work of memory institutions; generational boundaries in memory work; ethical boundaries in collecting and research; the challenges and rewards of cross-border research; and whether language itself creates boundaries.

Participants and speakers will be joining us from Estonia, Sweden, Canada, Australia, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and Kazakhstan. The association's annual general meeting will also take place during the Summer School on June 1.

We wish everyone a wonderful summer and look forward to seeing some of you at the Summer School!

Piret Noorhani

ENM Yearbook Vol. 67 "Migration and Diaspora Studies in Contemporary Estonia"

The Estonian National Museum has published its 67th yearbook, which provides a comprehensive overview of the current state and trends in migration and diaspora research in Estonia.

"Against the backdrop of active migration trends in the contemporary world, migration and diaspora research has also visibly revived. The number of topics related to migration is constantly growing. In addition to contemporary migration flows, researchers are increasingly examining historical migrations and the diaspora communities that emerged as a result," says the yearbook's compiler and ERM senior researcher Aivar Jürgenson.

The publication is thematically divided into three parts: The Eastern Diaspora, which examines the situation of Estonians in Estonian villages established in Russia and Kazakhstan, where households established during the Tsarist era were broken up during collectivization and the Estonian community was pressured on the basis of both ethnicity and religion; The Western Diaspora, which focuses on the escape to the West during World War II and the adaptation processes that took place there, as well as identity abroad; New Emigrants, which delves into the most recent and ongoing period of emigration that began with Estonia's regained independence and gained momentum after Estonia joined the European Union.

In addition, the yearbook includes an overview of the three largest waves of Estonian migration. According to Jürgenson, historical experiences should not be overlooked in discussions of migration, as they help us better understand contemporary migration processes and the attitudes associated with them. He emphasizes that the yearbook is intended not only for researchers but also for anyone interested in how Estonians have lived in different parts of the world and how these experiences have shaped our shared identity.

Contributors include Kaja Kumer-Haukanõmm, Keiu Telve, Mariya Oinas, Tiit Jaago, Tiina Ann Kirss, Piret Noorhani, Anu Kannike, Ester Bardone, Kristel Rattus, and Terje Toomistu.

The theme of the yearbook is particularly timely, not only in light of global migration pressures but also in the national context. For example, the Ministry of Education and Research has announced its decision to discontinue activity grants supporting initiatives related to the cultural heritage of Estonians abroad.



The Baltic Heritage Newsletter is distributed quarterly, on-line.

The next deadline for submissions is **August 15th, 2026.**

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- 03 VEMU Spring Visitors
- 04 Packing the Past, Preparing the Future:
A Transformative Spring at VEMU
- 05 A Bright Flame Continues to Burn
Brightly
- 06 A Busy Spring at VEMU: Culture,
Conversation, and Community
- 08 The Estonian Institute of Historical
Memory
- 09 An Anthology of North American
Lithuanian Diaspora Writers
- 11 A Variety of Topics at the Lithuania
Diaspora Researchers' Seminar
- 13 A Book about American Lithuanian
Hispanicist
- 14 Three Virtual Tours Through the
Lithuanian Tangible Heritage in
Chicago
- 14 The Lithuanian Youth Center
- 15 The Lithuanian Catholic Press Center
- 15 The Church of the Nativity of the
Blessed Virgin Mary

VEMU Spring Visitors

This spring brought a lively and diverse stream of visitors to VEMU, highlighting the institution's continued role as a cultural hub connecting Estonia and Canada.

Among the guests was Kaisa Kuslapuu, widely recognized as the vocalist and songwriter of the band Lonitseera. During her time in Toronto, she was working on recording a solo album in the Võru dialect—an exciting project that has already sparked anticipation among her followers.

Tarmu Tammerk, journalism ethics advisor at Estonian Public Broadcasting, visited Toronto on work-related matters but took the opportunity to explore VEMU as well. When asked where he comes from, his answer proved to be more complex than expected—fitting for someone with such a multifaceted professional background.

A familiar face also returned to VEMU this spring. Eve Vahtra, head librarian of the Baltic Defence College, first became familiar with the VEMU book collection in 2012, when she helped organize it following earlier renovations. This time, her role was quite different: assisting with packing up the collection in preparation for a major redevelopment of the storage facilities.

VEMU, Tartu College, and Eesti Elu also welcomed young and talented Ukrainian pianist Havryil Sydoryk, who performed at the VEMU fundraising evening. Accompanied by his mother Marianna, Sydoryk made the most of his visit to Canada, giving additional concerts at Toronto's Agricola Church and in Ottawa. His Ottawa performance was organized with the support of the Estonian Embassy, to whom VEMU extends its thanks.



Tarmu Tammerk



At the end of May, colleagues from the Estonian Literary Museum arrived in Toronto—director Piret Voolaid and folklorist Liisa Nurme. Together with VEMU, they prepared to open a joint exhibition on June 3, focusing on Estonian children and youth in Canada. Their visit also included conducting interviews for a new collection campaign titled “The Later Years of a Diaspora Estonian: Thoughts on Aging and Old Age.”



Kaisa Kuslapuu

Finally, members of the Estonia–Canada Parliamentary Friendship group, who attended the VEMU fundraising evening, also had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the museum's collections and activities. Once again, VEMU extends its gratitude to the Estonian Embassy in Ottawa for helping facilitate these meaningful connections.

Taken together, these visits reflect a vibrant season at VEMU—one marked by artistic creation, scholarly collaboration, and the strengthening of ties across borders.

Kati Kiillaspea

Packing the Past, Preparing the Future: A Transformative Spring at VEMU



This spring marked a significant period of transition and quiet transformation at VEMU, as the museum's archives and library collections were carefully packed in preparation for a major redevelopment of its storage facilities.

What may seem at first like a purely logistical task is, in reality, a deeply meaningful process. VEMU's collections—spanning decades of Estonian-Canadian history—hold personal stories, cultural memory, and irreplaceable records of a community shaped across continents. Each box, folder, and photograph requires thoughtful handling, detailed organization, and a clear vision for its future accessibility.

The packing process has been meticulous. Materials must be sorted, documented, and secured according to archival standards to ensure their long-term preservation. For the VEMU team, this has meant balancing efficiency with care, as even the smallest item carries historical significance.

This work has also drawn on long-standing relationships. Among those contributing to the effort is Eve Vahtra, head librarian of the Baltic Defence College, who is no stranger to VEMU's collections. Having previously assisted in organizing the book collection after earlier renovations, her return highlights the collaborative nature of archival work and the shared responsibility of preserving cultural heritage. VEMU and Tartu College team members, Bibliography Club members as well as great volunteers and friends have also been hard at work packing and sorting.

While the temporary dismantling of shelves and storage spaces may feel like a pause, it is, in fact, a step forward. The planned redevelopment will create improved conditions for preservation and research—ensuring that VEMU's collections remain accessible and protected for generations to come. This \$4 million renovation is both very specific and urgent: an essential step to secure VEMU's collections and the history of the Estonian diaspora. Alar Kongats' design will modernize the facility by increasing ceiling height, installing environmental controls, and introducing compact mobile shelving to triple our storage capacity. These improvements will make the collections not only better preserved, but more accessible to researchers, to community members, and to future generations. This work will transform the archival repository from a vulnerable storage space into a state-of-the-art preservation facility. It is the first crucial step in solidifying VEMU's mark on the cultural heritage of the Estonian diaspora, Canada, and Estonia, and essential groundwork for the future VEMU Museum.

In many ways, the act of packing is both practical and symbolic. It fosters a moment of reflection and renewal: looking back at what has been preserved, while preparing the groundwork for what comes next. As boxes are sealed and spaces cleared, the stories within them remain very much alive—waiting to be rediscovered in a renewed and reimagined archive.

Kati Kiilaspea

A Bright Flame Continues to Burn Brightly



Alar Kogats and Piret Noorhani

VEMU held its 14th fundraising dinner “Save Our Story – Why VEMU Matters Now,” on the evening of May 23 at Tartu College, above its soon-to-be-renovated archival spaces. The event raised funds for the renovation of the archives as well as for Ukraine. The springtime benefit evening brought together a lively crowd, delicious Ukrainian-inspired dishes, a meaningful keynote speech, and a moving performance by a talented Ukrainian Estonian pianist.

This year’s event was a clear success. More than 80 guests attended, enjoying sparkling wine and delicious dishes by local Ukrainian caterers Baby Point Lounge –including traditional knyshe filled with meat and sauerkraut and a sweet curd cheese filled crepe for dessert – very similar to our own Estonian cuisine.

There had been a buzz at Tartu College since the morning, as VEMU also participated in the Doors Open city festival. This year’s theme, “The World in the City,” was especially fitting, highlighting the friendship between Estonians and Ukrainians. Visitors could view an exhibition about Ukrainian students who lost their lives in the war and attend a stand-up performance where Estonian comedian Olga Loitsenko, Ukrainian Canadian comedian Alex Kotsyk and other local comedians explored how humor helps people cope with war trauma.

From each ticket of the fundraising event, \$25 was donated to Ukraine, while the remainder supported upgrades to VEMU’s archival storage. Sixteen years have passed since the last renovation, and in addition to space shortages, leaks and unstable temperature and humidity conditions now pose risks to the preservation of cultural heritage. “These are not minor inconveniences, but direct threats to the survival of our heritage,” VEMU emphasizes. A major renovation, designed by architect Alar Kogats, will begin this summer.

The evening opened with remarks by VEMU Board President Tiit Romet, followed by Chief Archivist Piret Noorhani. She acknowledged that major decisions can bring moments of doubt—

whether to move forward or take a different path—but stressed that progress requires both passion and commitment. Fortunately, VEMU, founded 17 years ago, continues to be supported by many dedicated individuals and organizations. The foundation of this largest Estonian archive and museum collection outside Estonia dates back 55 years to the establishment of the Tartu Institute.

The keynote speaker, Member of Parliament and security expert Peeter Tali, offered an overview of the current security landscape with his characteristic wit, emphasizing the importance of unity and cooperation while thanking the Estonian diaspora for their contributions. Along with Tali, the other members of the Canada–Estonia Parliamentary Friendship Group took part in the fundraising event. The group was visiting their Canadian partners.

Rob Zeidler, a big friend of Canadian Estonians and a passionate supporter of Ukraine also spoke, encouraging donations for medical supplies for Ukraine. The evening’s musical highlight was a performance by young pianist Havryil Sydoryk, which added a deeply emotional dimension to the event. Havryil is only 17 years old, yet he already amazes audiences with his extraordinary talent and abilities. Together with his artist mother, he fled war-torn Ukraine, first moving to Paris and then to Estonia in order to receive the best



VEMU Fundraiser Archives Renovations

possible musical education. Last winter he won the ETV competition series “Klassikatähed” by an overwhelming margin, and now his concert schedule is full. In just three years living in Estonia, he has also learned to speak fluent Estonian.

The evening concluded with thanks to all supporters by Tartu College General Manager Linda Karuks, reaffirming that VEMU’s role in preserving our history is more important today than ever.

Read the article in Estonian, written by Riina Kindlam, [here](#).

A Busy Spring at VEMU: Culture, Conversation, and

The spring of 2026 has been an active and engaging season for VEMU Estonian Museum Canada, as the organization continued its mission of connecting Canadian and Estonian communities through cultural programming, education, and dialogue. From lectures and language cafés to major public events, VEMU once again demonstrated its role as a vibrant gathering place for the Estonian diaspora and the broader Toronto community.

April began with a thought-provoking lecture by historian Kaarel Piirimäe on April 1. His presentation, “Can One Be Certain About the United States? Estonian–American Relations Through the Ages,” examined the historical relationship between Estonia and the United States and explored the implications of changing global politics. The lecture attracted audience members interested in both history and contemporary international affairs.



Jurgita Zvinklyte and Matti Palonen introducing their songs

Throughout April, VEMU's popular Language Café continued to bring together language learners and fluent speakers alike. These gatherings provided an informal environment for practicing Estonian while strengthening community connections across generations and geographic distances. The spring season also added the opportunity to participate in language cafes virtually, via Zoom. We look forward to continuing with the cafés in the fall, join us!

On April 20, VEMU hosted a Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) lecture at Tartu College featuring guest speaker Ergo Metsla, who explored the intersection of energy, artificial intelligence, and security in a rapidly changing world. The event also included a presentation by Elinor Toming, who introduced study opportunities at TalTech, particularly for members of the Estonian diaspora, underscoring Estonia's growing role in innovation and global technological development.

VEMU's commitment to highlighting women's achievements also continued through the EstoFem: Stories of Professional Women series. On April 29, the second event in the series featured a virtual conversation with Estonian-Canadian composers Elma Miller and Kristi Allik, two pioneering figures in Canada's contemporary music scene. The discussion explored their creative journeys, contributions to music and sound art, and the challenges and opportunities they encountered as women working in traditionally male-dominated fields. Building on the success of the inaugural EstoFem event earlier in the year, the program furthered VEMU's efforts to document and celebrate the accomplishments of professional Estonian women while preserving their stories for future generations.

May brought increased public engagement through cultural events and community programming. On May 6th, we hosted Learn the Kannel, a hands-on Baltic psaltery gathering that introduced participants to the kannel and its sister instruments from across the Baltic region. Organized in collaboration with the Canadian Estonian Youth Association (KENA), the event combined performances, demonstrations, and learning opportunities, helping both newcomers and experienced players explore the instrument's rich cultural heritage while fostering connections between Baltic communities in Canada.



Estonian-Canadian composers Elma Miller and Kristi Allik

VEMU also welcomed visitors to Tartu College as part of Toronto's annual Doors Open festival on May 23rd, introducing many first-time guests to the history of Estonians in Canada and the work of the museum. Visitors were invited to discover Estonian-Canadian history, explore the exhibition Unissued Diplomas, and participate in a unique program that combined humour, storytelling, and intercultural dialogue. On the same day, we also had our 14th annual fundraising evening, which was a great success. Read more about it in the dedicated article in this newsletter.

Music was also a highlight of VEMU's spring programming. On May 24, we presented a Toronto concert by 17-year-old Ukrainian-Estonian pianist Havryil Sydoryk, winner of the 2025 Estonian Classical Stars competition. Held at Agricola Finnish Lutheran Church in partnership with Toronto Vana-Andrese Congregation, the performance featured works by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Heino Eller, and Mykola Lysenko, showcasing both Estonian and Ukrainian musical

traditions while introducing Canadian audiences to one of Estonia's most promising young classical musicians. Havryil also performed in Ottawa the following day – we extend a big thank you to the Estonian Embassy in Ottawa for their support and collaboration.

To close out the month, on May 26, VEMU hosted a lecture by economic scholar Urmas Varblane on Estonia's place in a changing global economy. His talk explored how geopolitical shifts and evolving trade dynamics are shaping the country's economic outlook and future opportunities.

VEMU's spring season concluded with the June 3 opening of *Growing Up in Canada: Childhood and Youth in the Memories of Estonian Canadians*, a joint exhibition created with the Estonian Literary Museum. Drawing on personal recollections, photographs, and archival materials, the exhibition explores the experiences of Estonian-Canadian children and youth from the postwar refugee era to the present day, highlighting the community institutions, traditions, and cultural activities that helped preserve Estonian identity across generations in Canada. The same exhibition was on display from March to April at the Tartu City Library and from May at Tartu University's Lossi Street academic building.



Havryil Sydoryk. Photo by: Peeter Põldre

VEMU is already looking forward to starting the new, busy fall season after summer break. See you at our events!

Kati Kiilaspea

The Estonian Institute of Historical Memory invites early-career researchers to participate in the International Research Competition on Communism.

The competition is open to completed but unpublished Master's or Doctoral theses of scholars, aged 35 years or younger, examining communist ideology and regimes. Research topics need not be related to Estonian history; comparative studies and investigations of other national contexts are equally welcome. Eligible theses must have been defended in 2025 or 2026.

Theses may be submitted in Estonian, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian, Spanish, or Swedish.

Submitted theses will be evaluated in two categories: Master's and Doctoral. The winner in the Master's category will receive €1,500, while the winner in the Doctoral category will receive €3,000.

The deadline for submissions is 1 November 2026 (included).

Find all pertinent information and the application form [here](#).

For inquiries, please contact: info@mneamosyne.ee.

An Anthology of North American Lithuanian Diaspora Writers

Conversations with North American Lithuanian Diaspora Writers by Laima Vincė (Volume editor). Series: Exile Studies, Volume 26. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2026, 568 pages.



The author before the roundtable discussion of her latest book at the AABS conference. Photo credits: Laima Vincė

This year, Peter Lang International Academic Publishers published a companion volume, *Heritage, Connection, Writing: Conversations with North American Lithuanian Diaspora Writers* by the American Lithuanian author, Laima Vincė. The collection presents perspectives on what it means to hold onto Lithuanian and Litvak heritage while living in North America and writing in English. The writers and poets interviewed in this book discuss their integration of this unique heritage and cultural memory into their literary work. Containing conversations with 27 authors and including excerpts from their poetry and fiction, this book is a valuable resource for gaining insight into North American Lithuanian writing and heritage.

In a preface, “A Conversation Between Descendants and Ancestors,” the author notes that in her latest book, she tried to present different perspectives on what it means to retain a Lithuanian or Litvak heritage while living in North America and writing in English. The oldest participant in this book, as of this writing, is age 91, and the youngest 40. Within those 51 years lies a vast expanse of history and cultural identity, sometimes lost and later regained.

The experience of growing up within (and sometimes leaving) the North American Lithuanian diaspora community is one of the themes explored by some of the writers interviewed in *Heritage, Connection, Writing*. The writers and poets in this book integrate their Lithuanian and Litvak heritage, history, collective trauma, and cultural memory into their literary work. Many of these writers seek to build bridges into the future with contemporary Lithuania.



Laima Vincė's anthology was presented at the AABS 2026 conference in UIUC.

Over the years that Laima Vincė collected these interviews (2016–25), she spoke with American and Canadian writers with Lithuanian and Litvak heritage who have made their homes in Alaska, California, Chicago, Colorado, New York, Scotland, Vilnius, and many other places. For many of these writers, their Lithuanian or Litvak heritage is linked with the collective trauma of the bloodlands. At the same time, many of the writers included in this book reflected that identity and heritage provide them with a positive source of community, culture, belonging, and connection with Lithuania while living abroad. Some of the writers interviewed have lived in Lithuania as Fulbright scholars⁵ or first encountered Lithuania through service in the Peace Corps. With the exception of Lidia Yuknavitch and Maria Williams, all the writers interviewed for this book have traveled, lived, studied in Lithuania. Many stated in their interviews that the reason for their travel was to search for and reconnect with family estranged by the Soviet Russian occupation, to re-establish their roots, forge cultural connections, study, share their literary work in conferences and literary festivals, and to teach. There is a transnational aspect to these writers' lifestyles, with movement between Lithuania and the United States and Canada. A transnational sense of being in the world is reflected in their literary work.

Heritage, Connection, Writing is organized into three sections. Part I consists of conversations with writers whose ethnic Lithuanian ancestors immigrated to the United States and Canada during the first wave of migration from Lithuania that took place from 1868 to 1918. This migration was mostly economically motivated, although conscription into the Russian army was a major catalyst for emigration for both Litvak and Lithuanian men. Litvak emigration tended to be permanent, while Christian Lithuanian emigration tended to be cyclical, with family members returning with savings from their earnings to re-establish themselves in Lithuania.

When Lithuania gained its independence from Tsarist Russia in 1918 the nature of migration changed. Included within Part I are writers with ancestors from a second wave of emigration, which took place during the years of the

Republic of Lithuania, 1918–40. However, in some respects, this period of migration could be seen as an expression of transnationalism because during the years of independence Lithuanians traveled back and forth between the United States and Lithuania for economic and family reasons. WWII and the Soviet Russian occupation of Lithuania (1941/1944–91) isolated Lithuania from the West and rendered international travel nearly impossible.

The second section of the book consists of conversations with the descendants of political refugees who fled Lithuania during the first and second Soviet Russian occupations (1940–1 and 1944–91) and is divided into two subsections. The first section features interviews with writers who were displaced out of Lithuania as children and those born in the displaced persons camps in the Allied territories of Germany after WWII. The second subsection focuses on second and third generation American and Canadian born writers who grew up for the most part within the cultural, social, and educative space of the Lithuanian diaspora community created by the displaced persons (D.P.s) after emigrating to the United States and Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Part III is comprised of conversations with three generations of American writers of Litvak heritage, all of whom have chosen to maintain cultural and social ties with the contemporary Republic of Lithuania. Admittedly, this section is the slimmest with only four writers represented. For Litvaks, the relationship with Lithuania is more complex and is further explored in the introduction to Part III.

Laima Vincė Sruoginis earned a Ph.D. in Humanities from Vilnius University, an M.F.A. in Writing from Columbia University, an M.F.A. in Nonfiction from the University of New Hampshire, and a B.A. in English and German Literature from Rutgers University. Her academic monograph, *Vanished Lands: Memory and Postmemory in North American Lithuanian Diaspora Literature* (2023), was also published in the Exile Studies series from Peter Lang. Currently, she is a postdoctoral researcher at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania.

A Variety of Topics at the Lithuania Diaspora Researchers' Seminar

This May, the community of Lithuanian diaspora researchers gathered at the National Library of Lithuania for the eleventh time. The event featured a wide variety of topics.

The first half of the seminar focused on a recently launched eKultura.lt platform, the Lithuania's largest digital cultural space. Dr. Giedrė Milerytė-Japertienė, Deputy Director General for Science and Outreach at the National Museum of Lithuania and a specialist at the Dizi company, presented the collections of audio and video recordings related to the Lithuanian diaspora and showed a few of curated content narratives, which will be gradually appear on the new platform.

The main geographical areas covered by the collected recordings include the United States, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Poland. Radio programs created and produced by Lithuanian-American Giedrė Kumpikas for Lithuanian radio in New York, brought to Lithuania, transcribed, and cataloged, as well as recordings from the Lithuanian Archives Project, supplemented with metadata, will become part of the eKultura. The archival material from film director Arvydas Reneckis, who emigrated from Lithuania to the U.S. nearly four decades ago, will also be available soon.

Dr. Asta Petraitytė-Briedienė, a researcher at the Lithuanian Emigration Institute at Vytautas



Dr. Asta Petraitytė-Briedienė spoke about the concept, implementation process, and future prospects of the curated content “Snow in Rome,” available on the eKultura. Photo by Vygaudas Juozaitis / National Library of Lithuania



The community of Lithuanian diaspora researchers gathered at the National Library of Lithuania for the eleventh time. Photo by Vygaudas Juozaitis / National Library of Lithuania

Magnus University, spoke about the concept, implementation process, and future prospects of the curated content “Snow in Rome,” available on the eKultura. The rare snowfall in Rome became an unexpected thread leading Dr. Petraitytė-Briedienė to the history of Lithuanian diplomats, the Lozoraitis family. According to the researcher, sometimes it is precisely such a fleeting event that provides an opportunity to revisit the archives and discover how personal family memory intertwines with the broader narrative of twentieth-century history. Surviving family photographs and film footage bear witness to this rare phenomenon.

As part of the National Library's of Lithuania ongoing program, A Year with Denmark, dedicated to commemorating Lithuanian-Danish friendship, cultural exchange, and diplomatic relations, attention was also given to the theme of Denmark. Reda Mieldažytė, chair of the Lithuanian community in Denmark, gave a presentation titled “The Lithuanian Community in Denmark: Through the Crosswinds of Time, History, and Generations.” Another presenter, Dixie Simonsen, who joined the event on-line from Denmark, presented a study on the lives of Lithuanian lawyer and historian Martynas Brakas (1907–2000) and his Danish wife Gunhild Høgh Bryø (1909–2005) as they moved between Denmark and Lithuania.

Deimantė Žukauskienė, chief researcher at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Unit of the National Library of Lithuania discussed the archive of Vincas Bartusevičius (1939–2000), an active figure in the German-Lithuanian community,

which reached the library last year in seventy-seven boxes and a suitcase. The archive consists of approximately 2,000 publications in Lithuanian, German, English, Russian, Polish, and Danish, periodicals, and manuscripts: correspondence from the board of the Lithuanian community in Germany, documents from the Lithuanian February 16 Gymnasium, as well as documents on Lithuanian organizations active in Germany and other materials.

Dr. Žydronė Kolevinskienė, a researcher at Vytautas Magnus University and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, talked about the activities of female members in the Lithuanian Rifleman's Union in exile. According to the researcher, several main areas can be identified: fostering national identity, educating youth and community, being active in social work, and supporting the cause of Lithuanian freedom.



The participants of the seminar had a rare opportunity to become acquainted with music for the player piano. Photo by Vygaudas Juozaitis / National Library of Lithuania

Dr. Regina Laukaitytė, a researcher at the Lithuanian Institute of History, presented a paper based on her extensive research titled "Journeys to the West from the Lithuanian SSR: Tourist Routes and Long-Term Visas."

Musical themes received significant attention at this year's seminar as well. Dr. Aušra Strazdaitė-Ziberkienė, a curator at the Kaunas City Museum Mikas and Kipras Petrauskas House, introduced the history of Lithuanian émigré music as told through the exhibits. Audio recordings and exhibits (photographs, records, sheet music, and collections of musical works) were presented, revealing the music activities of Lithuanians in Europe, Argentina, Brazil, the U.S., and China.

The seminar discussed recently published or still



Dixie Simonsen presented a study on the lives of the Brakas family between Denmark and Lithuania. Photo by Vygaudas Juozaitis / National Library of Lithuania

forthcoming publications. Dr. Kristina Jakaitė-Bulbukienė presented a book written with her co-authors, based on research about the Lithuanian language abroad. In the book, the authors discuss language learning and the transmission of the Lithuanian language to children, changes in the Lithuanian language, fostering bilingualism in Lithuanian or mixed families, and Lithuanian-language education.

Dr. Darius Kučinskas, Chief Bibliographer of the Music and Visual Arts Unit at the National Library of Lithuania, shared the research behind his forthcoming monograph *Lithuanian Pianola Rolls for the Player Piano*, and introduced lesser-known yet significant figures in music history, about whom music history textbooks and encyclopedias often provide scant information: Jonas Žemaitis, Ksaveras Strumskis, Vincas Nickus, and others. The work presents a comprehensive study of Lithuanian pianola rolls in both print and digital formats and provides accurate information about the origins of this unique phenomenon of Lithuanian musical heritage, the rolls themselves, and the music recorded on them.

At the end of the seminar, the participants had a rare opportunity to become acquainted with music for the player piano, recently acquired by the National Library of Lithuania.

The day culminated in a screening of Ramunė Rakauskaitė's documentary *Toks kaimas Amerikoje* [Such a Village in America, 2025], nominated for the Silver Crane Award in the feature-length documentary category, about the Lithuanian-American camp Dainava in Michigan, followed by a conversation with the film director.

A Book about American Lithuanian Hispanicist

On May 20, a launch of Akvilė Šimėnienė's monograph, *Birutės Ciplijauskaitės fenomenas* [Birutė Ciplijauskaitė's Phenomena, 2025], took place at the National Library of Lithuania.

Lithuanian émigré critic, Birutė Ciplijauskaitė (1929–2017), is the most important scholar of Hispanic studies in the Lithuanian diaspora during WWII, who worked at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, from 1962 to 2010. The book analyzes in detail and presents for the first time a systematized collection of all of the scholar's critical works dedicated to Hispanic studies, reviews her literary paradigms and importance in the context of Lithuanian diaspora, Hispanic studies, and Western literary studies.

The author of the monograph shows the weight of Ciplijauskaitė's figure and her equal place next to the great Lithuanian diaspora scholars, such as Algirdas Julius Greimas, Vytautas Kavolis, and Marija Gimbutienė. Scholar's cultural phenomenon revealed hitherto undiscovered networks of Lithuanian and Spanish diaspora. Lithuanian and Spanish exiles, brought together by tragic historical and existential experiences, created not only fundamental theoretical and historical schools of cultural criticism, but also influenced the development of some U.S. academic research centers (Wisconsin–Madison, Ohio, Columbia, Harvard, etc.). Ciplijauskaitė's hybrid concepts: feminine writing style, internal and external structures of women's creativity, women's language, the specificity of female perception, lateral identity, existential universality, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, types of reality, the inhabited body and its modalities, are considered one of the main pillars of today's feminist phenomenology.



In her latest book, Akvilė Šimėnienė analyzes Birutė Ciplijauskaitė's critical works dedicated to Hispanic studies. Vygaudas Juozaitis / National Library of Lithuania

Akvilė Šimėnienė, a lecturer in Spanish language and intermediality, researcher, and translator, has been researching the cultural and historical processes and interactions of the Lithuanian and Spanish diaspora since 2011. In 2019, she compiled and translated from Spanish a collection of Ciplijauskaitė's critical texts, *Tarp lituanistikos ir ispanistikos. Moterys XIX–XX a. Europos literatūrose* [Between Lithuanian Studies and Spanish Studies. Women in 19th–20th Century European Literatures, 2019].

Three Virtual Tours Through the Lithuanian Tangible Heritage in Chicago

A new Lithuanian culture platform eKultura.lt provides access to the country's digital and digitized cultural resources. The platform, which has been under development for three years, began its life cycle in May. It will be constantly updated.

This is the largest project of its kind in Lithuania to date, implemented by the National Library of Lithuania together with more than twenty other cultural institutions. The creators of the platform emphasize that eKultura is a joint project in which every partner is important.

Different forms of culture are combined in one place—audiovisual works, performing arts, cinema, 3D objects and other materials. Currently, more than one million cultural objects have been accumulated, which will be opened to the public in stages. Among them, for the first time, virtual 3D buildings of exceptional value are presented; three of them are located in Chicago, U.S.

The Lithuanian Youth Center

The Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago was built through the efforts of Lithuanian refugees of WWII (1939–1945). After the war, thousands of Lithuanians, the so-called displaced persons, fled to Western Europe. Some war refugees, after temporary residence in displaced persons camps in Germany and other European countries, later moved to the United States. Chicago became the main center of Lithuanian diaspora life.

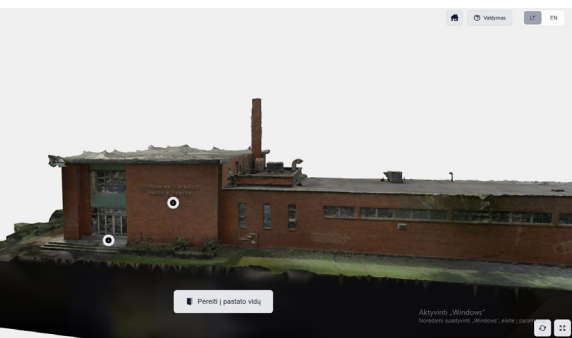
Here, the DPs developed community and cultural life, fostered Lithuanian identity and artistic traditions, and established schools, cultural centers, and religious institutions. Buildings constructed for the Lithuanian community and designed by Lithuanian architects not only served practical purposes but also became symbols of Lithuanian identity.

The cultural center and monastery complex, referred to as the Jesuit castle, was one of the largest and most ambitious Lithuanian architectural initiatives in the U.S. It consists of three buildings constructed at different times and united into a single architectural ensemble: the Youth Center (1956–1957) and the Jesuit chapel with monastery (1957–1959), designed by architect Jonas Kovalskis-Kova together with engineer Juozas Augustinavičius, and the central connecting wing (1968–1973), designed by architect Jonas Mulokas.

The principal founders of the Lithuanian Youth Center were Lithuanian Jesuit fathers. In 1948, they settled in Chicago and, with the approval of the order's leadership, established the Lithuanian Vice-Province in Exile. From the outset, the Jesuits were actively involved in youth education: they founded a Lithuanian-language school, organized summer camps, Fr. Juozas Vaišnys supervised the scouts, and Fr. Jonas Borevičius worked with the Catholic youth organization, Ateitininkai.

The tour of the Lithuanian Youth Center is available [here](#).

The Lithuanian Catholic Press Center



A screenshot of an exterior of the Lithuanian Catholic Press Center in Chicago.

The Lithuanian Catholic Press Center, together with a new monastery building, was built on the initiative of the Marian religious order. The monastery included a library, meeting rooms, and a chapel, which is one of the most decorative sacred spaces built by Lithuanians in the U.S. Next to the monastery, a separate modern building for the Catholic Press Center was envisioned. The complex, completed in 1957, was designed by architects Jonas and Bronė Kovalskis, while the construction work was carried out by the Neris company, led by engineer Juozas Augustinavičius.

The Press Center housed a modern printing house and editorial office, which published *Draugas*, the longest continuously running Lithuanian newspaper in the world, as well as other publications. After the construction, *Draugas* wrote that the new complex was “one of the most modern and hygienic buildings for printing purposes in Chicago.” The construction of the Press Center embodied the Lithuanian community’s belief that a free word, reaching Lithuanians worldwide, plays a crucial role in preserving national identity.

The tour of the Lithuanian Catholic Press Center is available [here](#).

The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary



A screenshot of a 3-D model of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Chicago, one of the most prominent examples of Lithuanian sacred architecture in the U.S.

The Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1953–1957) is one of the most prominent examples of Lithuanian sacred architecture in the U.S. Its architecture combines modern structural solutions with folk motifs, particularly forms inspired by traditional Lithuanian wayside shrines.

The project was designed by architect and engineer Jonas Mulokas. The interior was created by Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, while individual pieces of artwork decorating the church were produced by Kazimieras Žoromskis, Vytautas Kašuba, Ramojus Mozoliauskas, Sister Mercedes (Marija Mickevičiūtė), and Adolfas Valeška. Engineer Antanas Rudis was the contractor.

In this virtual model of the building, visitors can explore the interior, learn about the history of the church’s construction, listen to interviews with members of the Lithuanian community in Chicago presenting the history and contemporary life of the church and its surroundings.

The tour of the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is available [here](#).

All three virtual tours are also available in English.