

National Memory without Borders – A Topic for the Estonian National Archives

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The National Archives is the Estonian state archival system established in 1998, including 13 archives: the Historical Archives, the State Archives, the Film Archives and 10 county archives.

The archives of the National Archives have all in all almost 8 million archival records the preservation and accessibility of which is the primary task of the archives. In addition, the collections have to be complemented by records of significance for the society, the state and the culture. Most of the collected documents are produced by state institutions. In recent years the National Archives has increased its interest in the appraisal and collection of the records of private institutions with the aim of guaranteeing the future users an adequate survey of the development of the Estonian society. Alongside with the documents of institutions and organizations, the collections of the National Archives obtain yearly also new personal archives.

The records are being collected by all the archives in the structure of the National Archives; the Estonian exile communities, however, have given so far their documents to our bigger archives only – the Historical, the State and the Film Archives.

Hitherto, the acquisition of new material from abroad has not been planned by the National Archives. To be honest, the collection of the Estonian exile documents has been rather a passive practice than a planned priority. Records of archival value have been received mostly on the request of the owners who have addressed the archives. It has been an intentional policy avoiding overlap and pointless competition in any field of archival service. Another reason has been the fact that both, the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian National Library as well as some other institutions of Estonian memory have been active in this field.

We have stored those exile archives that have been sent to us precisely. At the same time we have advised the owners in many cases to give their documents or publications to be preserved in other institutions – either museums or libraries. The National Archives is collecting first and foremost the archives as documents produced by an institution or an individual reflecting their function. Objects can be preserved only if the owner wants to keep them together with the archival records and we have the possibilities and the conditions to guarantee the preservation of a specific object. However, there have been donators who have decided themselves to divide their records between different cultural institutions.

In retrospect, the passive model of collection of the National Archives in the field under discussion has hitherto acquired archival records primarily from the Western Diaspora. The collections of the National Archives have received not a single full collection from the Estonian settlements in Russia. At the same time it is known that the deposition of the Estonian material of Russian origin here would be of great importance for us because of its public accessibility here.

To give a few examples of the Estonian exile archives preserved in the National Archives:

1) The records of the Estonian statehood are preserved in the State Archives. Since 1996 it has received the archives of the Estonian Consulate in New York, and of the Government of the Republic of Estonia in exile, the Baltic Archives gave us a collection of diplomatic documents of importance for the Estonian state, and a few personal fonds of statesmen (Karl Robert Pusta, Ernst Jaakson, Aleksander Warma, et al)

2) The documents of exile church are in the Historical Archives. Church records have been traditionally in the Historical Archives and it is reasonable to observe the principle of their common location. By today the Historical Archives have obtained the archives of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church in exile. The representatives of the National Archives have met with the leaders of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church for further co-operation.

3) In early 1990s the Film Archives received some personal film collections. The biggest is that of Elmo Luuk with its 26 films. Mention should be made of the film material donated by Kalju Lepik concerning the Estonians living in Sweden. There is video material on the Australian, Canadian and Swedish Estonians.

The Film Archives has about 3,000 photos of exile communities, 400 sound recordings, and 100 films and videos that are dispersed in the following collections: the Estonian Cultural Archives in Exile, the Estonian Consulate in New York, the Uppsala Estonian Democratic Club, the Stockholm newspaper "Eesti Päevaleht", Estonian Veterans in Bordeaux, the Elmo Luuk Film Collection (Canada), Viljar Nairis Collection of Sound Recordings, the sound recordings of the Radio Free Europe, the Collection of Estonian Exile Unions.

4) The archives of individuals and organizations have been collected by both the Historical and the State Archives depending mostly on the choice of the donator. So, the Estonian archives have got the documents of the Estonian National Foundation, the Borås Estonian Union, the Union of Estonian Physicians in Sweden, the US Corporation of the Estonian Students' Union, the archives of the Estonian Scouts in Sweden, the Union of Estonian Communal Help in Sweden, and other organizations.

The personal archives preserved now in the National Archives are dominated by those of cultural figures, researchers and diplomats – there are the archives of Armin Tuulse, Theodor Michael Künnapas, Joosep Nõu, Hjalmar Mäe, Johannes Kaiv, Ernst Jaakson, Artur Mägi, Nikolai Kaasik and others.

The above-mentioned documents have been arranged and can be studied in reading halls, the lists describing the archives on the unit-level can be read in the archival info-system (<http://ais.ra.ee/ais>). Still unarranged and waiting until they can be used by researchers are the archives of Andres Küng, the Union of Estonian Young Socialists, the Union of Estonian Organizations on the Western Coast, and that of the newspaper "Teataja".

The interest in the exile documents is great as evinced by their frequent use in reading halls. The exile collections have served as the basis for 4 exhibitions and have been used in publications compiled by the archives or researchers.

Today the most often used exile collection in the State Archives is the collection of documents sheltered in 1940 abroad by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It includes records reflecting the birth and fate of the Estonian state, and also the Tartu Peace Treaty together with the map of the borderline between Estonia and the Soviet Russia from the year 1920, the Pact of Mutual Assistance drawn between Estonia and the Soviet Union in 1939, and many other foreign treaties together with their related diplomatic documents. These were preserved, in spite of all the political convolutions, by the leader of the exile government August Rei and later by the Baltic Archives established by the Baltic exile community in collaboration with the Swedish State Archives. In 2002 the Baltic Archives handed the documents over to the National Archives.

The other exile archives often used are the archives of the Estonian New York Consulate, and the personal collections of Karl Robert Pusta, Ernst Jaakson, Johannes Kaiv, Artur Mägi, Hjalmar Mäe, Voldemar Kures. The exile archives most frequently used in the Historical Archives is that of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church in exile.

Of the materials now in the Film Archives of special interest have been those of the German newsreel in the Elmo Luuk collection; the photos most often asked for are those taken in the Estonian settlements in the territory of the former Soviet Union. There would be even more users of these documents if the data on the photos and films preserved in the Film Archives were in the public data base.

According to the Archives Act, all the document acquisitions in the National Archives are registered by an instrument of transfer and receipt, and an agreement. The agreement formalizes the transfer of ownership to the state of Estonia; the document describes in detail the contents of the archives and fixes at the request of the donator the possible limitations on the access and copyright regulations of their use. Most often the documents have been a donation, they have not been arranged and their content is reflected in a list.

In general there are 3 reasons why exile communities want to give their archives to Estonian institutions:

- the interest groups and researchers are mostly in Estonia;
- local archives are interested more in the material related to the local area and its people;
- in the countries of their present location the Estonian-speaking community is decreasing and the language barrier makes it difficult for the local archives or libraries to arrange the material.

There is the fourth aspect as well – the belief in the stability and permanence of the state and the people of Estonia.

The biographies of Estonians having lived or living outside their homeland is also our history – a rich and versatile historical source growing in value year by year. The 20th century has meant a forced or violent leave from Estonia for so many Estonians that we can treat their produce, be it in West or East, only as a part of the Estonian culture and history. To get a complete picture of our history it is important to guarantee **the preservation and accessibility** of this heritage. This is of primary importance. This is more important than the issues of the place of preservation, or the owner of the collection, and can be guaranteed only in cooperation with the Estonian institutions and communities in their present location.

The National Archives, planning its future work with the exile archives, is proceeding from the following principles:

- the National Archives admits its responsibility for the preservation and accessibility of the worldwide Estonian heritage
- exile communities have had a significant role in preserving Estonian culture and their activities have to be reflected and recounted, for this is the only way to have a comprehensive picture of the Estonian history
- the National Archives is focused on archives – on the documents produced by the activities of institutions or individuals and on reflecting their activities.

The above-said explains the interest of the National Archives in the more organized activities in the preservation of the exile archives and in making them accessible. Within the framework of the Compatriot Program (a program supporting collaboration with the Estonians living outside the territory of the Republic of Estonia in 2004–2008) we are planning to compile manuals and collect church records. The interest of the National Archives in the heritage of Estonians in exile is stated also in the strategic development plan for the years 2006–2010. It contains the idea that in collaboration with different memory institutions we can guarantee access to the information on the Estonian communities, their activities and archives outside Estonia.

For this purpose there has to be compiled a compendium of the more important Estonian archives in different countries, their contents and conditions to give an idea about the Estonian cultural heritage of the 20th century. The compendium is important for the preservation of the archives but is meant for their wider use as well – there can be users only if the presence and location of the records is known.

To distribute information, the archives have to be arranged and described. Only then its contents, conditions and/or possibilities of use can be known. Piles of unarranged documents with no description are not accessible and are a dead material as far as the researchers are concerned. The more distant their original creation, the more difficult it is to put them into a sensible order or to describe them properly. Therefore, the National Archives supports the guided arrangement and description of exile archives using for the purpose both manuals as well as special projects. This way the memory institutions in Estonia can support the work of archives in their present locations.

So far there has not been much discussion on the physical state of the Estonian exile archives. There are no data whether the archives kept at the organizations are now in conditions that would guarantee their lasting use. The same is valid for the archives in personal possession. The archives contain mostly paper documents, photos and films. Different media ask for their permanent preservation also different environmental conditions.

The Estonian exile communities have collections of varied history and present state. There are archives already containing documents of many organizations and individuals. Their preservation cannot be doubted but researchers would be grateful if the collections related to Estonia were described and usable also electronically. In order to make archival information accessible also via the Internet one needs resources and again – collaboration between various institutions.

The public and better distribution of archival information concerns also those archives already in Estonia. Often researchers (and institutions themselves) have no overview of the material that can be found in Estonian archives, museums and libraries. The preservation of cultural heritage asks for better coordination between memory institutions and additional resources in Estonia as well as abroad.

The National Archives sees as the final aim of collaboration and document acquisition the guaranteed preservation of archives and their accessibility to as many interested persons as possible.