

# **Back from Afar: The Heritage of Estonians Abroad in the Estonian National Museum. Survey of the Collections of the ENM**

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Estonian National Museum

The Estonian National Museum established in 1909 to the memory of Jakob Hurt saw as its primary task the promotion of the Estonian folk research. This meant first and foremost providing the already existent Jakob Hurt collections of folk heritage with their safe home, but also the need to continue the collecting enterprise initiated by Hurt. By public calls and a network of collaborators Hurt had managed to assemble a large-scale collection of oral tradition within a few decades. The museum, however, treated as equally important the collection of material culture supplemented soon by photos and drawings.

Within almost a hundred years the collections of the museum have grown quite rich thanks to its staff, students, and also collaborators (in the first years of the museum these were scholars sent to field trips, at present – correspondents). By the end of 2006 the size of the collections was as follows:

Artifacts	132,880
Archival collections	
Ethnographic archives	853 descriptions (96,898 pp)
Topographic archives (diaries of field-work)	967 diaries (49,514 pp)
Sanitary-topographic archives	370 items
Archives of correspondents	1,228 volumes (487,798 pp)
Photographic collection	216,995 photos
Film archives	51 films
Video archives	910 films
Drawing collection	22,601 p
Library	32,604 publications

## **Collections of Eastern Estonians**

The collection of material from Estonian communities in various parts of the Soviet Union began in 1970s with the first expeditions to the Caucasus and the Siberian Estonians. Different trips have resulted in artifacts and photos (both old ones of the local people and the shots taken during the field trip) as well as information got while interviewing the local population. The material collected during these expeditions is being stored in various collections of the museum.

**The collection of artifacts** has about 660 items, the biggest are the collections of:

- the Caucasus  
the expeditions of Marika Mikkor in 1985–1987 (more than 250 items – A 757, 734, 715)

- Siberia  
the expedition of Edgar Saar in 1974 (25 items – A 647)
- the Setus of Siberia and Central Asia  
the expeditions of Mare Piho in 1987–1998 (almost 300 items – A 882, 827, 812, 788)

In addition to those, a few objects have been received from people who have returned to Estonia or from their descendants.

**Photographic collection** has about 4300 photos; the biggest are the collections of:

- the Caucasus
  - the collection of the native researcher Neriman (700 photos – Fk 2043)
  - the expeditions of Marika Mikkor (~2000 photos – Fk 2163, 2196, 2386, 2388, 2538, 2539, 2540, 2618, 2706)
- the Krasnodar territory
  - the expeditions of Marika Mikkor (~400 photos – Fk 2192)
- Siberia
  - Igor Tõnurist, Lembit Võime (459 photos – Fk 1785)
  - Edgar Saar (74 photos – Fk 1719)
  - Jüri Viikberg (241 photos – Fk 2195)
  - Aivar Jürgenson (81 photos – Fk 2569)
- the Crimea
  - Indrek Jääts (82 photos – Fk 2860)

**Archival collections** have relevant material primarily in the ethnographic archives (dominant subjects: settlement, sources of living, buildings, social life, family customs, national relations, language, identity, customs)

- Siberia (Omsk region)
  - collector Harivald Arst (1972) – 67 pp
  - collector Edgar Saar (1974) – 32 pp
  - collector Aivar Jürgenson (1996) – 65 pp
- the Caucasus
  - collector Marika Mikkor (1984-1997) – 775 pp
- the Setus of Siberia
  - collector Mare Piho (1988 -1991) – 121 pp

Unfortunately, most of the researchers visiting Eastern Estonians have not kept diaries that would have reached the topographic archives of the museum.

**The topographic archives** still have some diaries:

- Edgar Saar, Kalju Saaber (Omsk region, 1974) – TAp 650
- Mare Piho (the Setus of Siberia, 1987-1991) – TAp 840, 850, 872, 877

## Collections of Western Estonians

The material of Estonians living in West could not be collected in the Soviet era but in 1988 already the museum received the first delivery compiled by Ene Runge, the leader of the Estonian ethnographic circle in Toronto, Canada, and taken to the museum by its researcher Piret Õunapuu. Throughout 1990s the museum received numerous bigger collections and also isolated contributions.

**The collection of artifacts** has almost 2,000 objects from America, Canada, Australia and Sweden, the countries with the biggest Estonian communities:

- Handicraft, folk costumes, dolls in folk costumes, leather objects with national ornaments, badges, medals. The biggest are the collections of the Estonian ethnographic circle in Canada (A 829, A 848, A 878, A 885) and the Estonian Heritage in Seattle (A 826, D 136, A 856).
- Temporarily these are the objects that have been taken along while leaving Estonia, or made in the DP camps or in the so-called ethnographic circles, or sent later from Estonia.
- Exceptions: the uniform of the Baltic station stationmaster, that of the prosecutor of the Republic of Estonia, china dolls in folk costumes, an ESTO-flag, the collection of the consul Ernst Jaakson, the collection of the Swedish scouts.

**The photographic collection** is unfortunately quite poor as to the material of Western Estonians and so this is the field the museum is dedicated to focus on in near future.

- Photos taken by the museum's researcher Edgar Saar in Sweden, America, Germany, England, Holland and Belgium 1,138 photos (Fk 2759, 2760, 2801, 2802, 2820, 2832, 2838)
- The collection of consul Ernst Jaakson (1,693 photos – Fk 2647, 2721, 2731, 2732, 2742)
- The Estonian Ethnographic Circle in Canada (63 photos – Fk 2723)
- Smaller series (522 photos – Fk 2482, 2845, 2514, 2645, 2649, 2650, 2788, 2822)
- Negotiations on obtaining the photo collection of Eric Soovere living in the US have been going on for years and the results are not clear yet. The museum has more than 200 photos on paper from the collection but these have not been registered in the museum.

To supplement its **archival collections** the museum has issued two questionnaires and conducted field research.

## Archives of correspondents

The first questionnaire, entitled “Escaping homeland. The first decade in exile” (questionnaire No 203) was compiled in 1998. It was answered by 150 people. The introductory text said: “The Estonian National Museum collects data on the history, life and culture of Estonians in exile. The questionnaire includes questions on the flight from homeland and the first decade in exile. Much time has passed and many things may have been forgotten. Please write what you remember. As the history of Estonians in exile is a part of the history of the Estonian people, the museum asks to answer the questions by as many Estonians living in exile as possible. The museum will be grateful for any contribution, however small it is. Your personal memories and assessments are of great value. Anything related to these topics, even if not directly asked is welcome.”

The second questionnaire was compiled in 2001 and centred on the life of Estonians in their new countries of residence. The title was “Estonians in exile 1955–2000” (questionnaire No 213). The introduction to this questionnaire said: “The questionnaire includes the years 1955–2000 and is a sequel to questionnaire No 203 “Escaping homeland. The first decade in exile” gathering data on Estonians who had escaped to the West. The present questionnaire can be answered also by the Estonians born outside Estonia”. The museum expected to get more responses than to the previous questionnaire but actually it turned out to be the opposite case and we received only 50 answers.

## Topographic archives

- Field diaries of Edgar Saar:
  - in Sweden 1999, 2000, 2001 – TAp 920, 926, 930
  - in England 1999 – TAp 921
  - in America 2000 – TAp 925
  - in Sweden, Germany, Denmark 2001 – TAp 931
  - in Germany, Belgium, Holland 2002 – TAp 935
  
- Diaries of field trips together with *korp! Filiae* (the material will come in 2007)
  - Riina Reinvelt in America 2006 (16 pp)
  - Merike Ivask in Canada 2006 (17 pp)
  - Maris Rosenthal in Sweden 2006 (10 pp)
  - Virge Laaneste in Sweden 2006 (19 pp)

The sound archives preserves both the interviews of Edgar Saar (110 cassettes) and those financed in 2006 by *korp! Filiae Patriae* (78 interviews). At present these are being copied from tapes and in the years to come they will hopefully be accessible in the ethnographic archives. A more rare material is the interviews conducted in 1992 by Marianne Mikko with the Estonians living in the Republic of South Africa (22 cassettes).

Besides the materials mentioned, the museum possesses copies of the 2004/2005 interviews (on 6 discs) conducted within the framework of the Uppsala University project “The Estonian language in Sweden”. For their use permission has to be asked from Uppsala University.

**The video collection** has the copies of videos about the life of Swedish Estonians shot for the same 2004/2005 Uppsala University project “The Estonian language in Sweden” (on 6 discs), but these, too, can be used only with the permission of the Uppsala University.

### **To sum up**

The statute of the museum constitutes that the Estonian National Museum, independently and in collaboration with other institutions, organizations and individuals, collects material (objects, photos, films, video-material, drawings, information, etc) characterizing the development of culture of Estonians and other Finno-Ugric peoples, of other national groups living in Estonia, and also of the neighboring peoples. No difference is made between Estonians living in Estonia or outside its geographical borders. In general, it can be said that material on Estonians living abroad is quite accidental, obtained due to the initiative from outside the museum or that of its few researchers and out of their personal interest.

In 2006 the collection policy of the Estonian National Museum for the period 2007–2012 was worked out. It lists eight fields treated as priorities for the years to come. From all these both material and non-material culture will be collected with emphasis on the material illustrating the everyday activities. One of the research fields concerns Estonian communities outside Estonia and mentions as separate subjects the following:

- the establishment of Estonian communities in the East and West
- the preservation of ethnical identity, national activities, national symbols
- the present situation

Departing from this policy the museum hopes to be more systematic and efficient in the field in the nearest future supplementing its collections but also researching them and informing the public about its results.

We are most interested in photos (especially the negatives), memoirs written as life-stories, and diaries.

*Translated by Anne Lange*