

# The Archives and Library of Tartu Institute

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Dr Endel Aruja Archives and Library of Tartu Institute

## **Introduction: Tartu College, Tartu Institute and its Archives and Library in Toronto**

Tartu College, an 18-story student residence near the University of Toronto, was officially opened in September, 1970. Its charter required that the College also support cultural and educational activities. The College set up Tartu Institute in 1972 as an autonomous body to carry out the cultural and educational components of its charter. The Institute's mandate, drawn up in broad terms, includes the establishment of an archive and library in support of its activities, which include the study and promotion of the culture, such as literature, music and art, of minority nationalities in Canada, especially that of Estonians, and the analysis and study of the political, cultural and economic activities of the Estonians in Canada.

Dr Endel Aruja, the first secretary of the Tartu Institute was the driving force behind the creation and enlargement of the archives and library. He was born in Estonia in 1911, and graduated from mathematics and natural sciences faculty of Tartu University in 1935 and obtained his Masters in mathematics in 1938. Cambridge University, England awarded him a scholarship in 1939, and granted him a doctorate in 1943. He worked first in England, emigrating to Canada in 1962. Before his retirement in 1976, he was employed at the Ontario Research Foundation and as a professor of physics at Ryerson Polytechnic University and also as a visiting professor at the American University in Beirut and at the University of Nairobi in Kenya.

He has always been active in Estonian associations, as a founder and administrator. He was the chairman of the London Estonian Society for six years and worked with the Baltic Council, the Estonian House as well as with the Estonian Society in England. Besides his scientific work, he distributed pamphlets and other printed material on Estonia and Estonians through "Northern Publications" and wrote articles for newspapers. He helped to found the newspaper "Eesti Hääl" and served as the London editor of the "Baltic Review". He wrote the article on Estonia and biographies of Estonian statesmen for the 1963 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In Canada, he worked on ESTO'84 festival and was on the boards of many organizations - Tartu College, Estonian Central Council in Canada and so on. The Estonians in Canada and especially in Ontario are greatly indebted to Dr Aruja for his leadership in promoting Estonian education and culture in England and in Canada.

His work has been recognized publicly - an Honorary Doctor of Tartu University (1990), the Republic of Estonia's *Valgetähe orden*, class V (1998) and, in 2002, the service recognition medal of the Tartu University Library.

By 1978, the archives occupied two rooms in Tartu College filled with - archives and books, newspapers and so on. Even then, the two main threats for the future emerged - work, such as cataloguing, had to be done by volunteers, as funds were lacking to pay workers, and the rooms in Tartu College, for which rent was not charged, were insufficient to hold all available material and physically not best suited for an archive. The Ontario government, through its youth employment program, occasionally facilitated the hiring of students to help in the library during the summer. Funds for shelves and other supplies were obtained from donations or paid for by

Tartu College.

In 1985, Dr Aruja formed the Bibliography Club of retired volunteers willing to help the archival and library work. The “New Horizons” program of the Canadian Government, created to support volunteer organisations of retired persons, granted about \$30 000, which sum allowed the purchase of equipment, such as copiers and microfilm readers. The Club is independent of Tartu Institute. Dr Aruja served as its head until his retirement in September 2004 from the Club and all of his positions with the Institute. Today, his role requires three persons - the Secretary of the Institute, the Manager of the Archives and Library and the head of the Bibliography Club. In recognition of Dr Aruja’s 25 years of service to the Tartu Institute (1997), the archives and library were named in his honour as the *Dr Endel Aruja Archives and Library*.

The Bibliography Club has also put on some 26 public events to mark anniversaries and other noteworthy happenings. The very first one was celebrated in March of 1986, the 15th anniversary of the Tartu Institute. The latest was in April of 2006 in connection with the visit of the men’s ensemble from Nõo Church in Estonia. Other noteworthy events depicted the lives of DPs - Displaced Persons (1992) and a memorial for those sent to Siberia in June, 1941 (2001). The biggest such event was held in November 1994 and titled “Kaugel kodumaast - 50 aastat” (“Far from our homeland - 50 years”). This week-long event, organised together with *Eesti Kultuuripärandi Klubi* and *Toronto Eesti Raamatukoguhoidjate Koondis*, occupied most of the ground floor rooms of Tartu College with exhibits reflecting the escape and the life in exile of Estonians and featured in addition numerous presentations. The Club also holds private luncheons to celebrate events like Christmas or the start and end of the work year.

The first large-scale shipment to Estonia of books, newspapers and technical and scientific journals in both Estonian and English as well as publications like “National Geographic” and “Readers Digest” - in all, 160 boxes weighing about 5000 kg occurred in May, 1989. The Institute had previously mailed to Estonia some 150 packages of 5 kg each. The recipients were the Archival Library of Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu University, Estonian National Library in Tallinn, Academy of Sciences and 7 provincial libraries. The costs were covered by donations from individuals and by Tartu Institute. Equally weighty shipments went in January and December, 1990. Yearly shipment have continued - by 2003, some 7 000 boxes had been sent to numerous libraries, among them Estonian Literary Museum, O. Luts Public Library in Tartu, Estonian Art Museum, National Library and others. The Institute has become a collection and forwarding point for persons and institutions wishing to ship publications to Estonia. For example, books have been collected from Canadian university libraries and sent to Pärnu College after its library was partially inundated.

### **Present status of Archives and Library of Tartu Institute**

With the retirement of Dr Aruja from his positions as archivist and as the head of the Bibliography Club, the organization finds itself in a state of flux. It has become necessary for both the physical arrangements of the collection and the policy and procedural structures to become more formal, even bureaucratic.

Physically, the location of eight rooms on three floors - total area of 236 m<sup>2</sup> - is awkward. The second and third floors are below street level and the third is a former garage. Tartu College is slowly refurbishing this floor with new lights, shelving and interior walls to allow for more secure storage. The new shelving will lead to a more rational arrangement for books with rooms

and cabinets for special collections, such as the books from around 1900 that once belonged to the Medicine Valley Estonian Society and from the Estonian Embassy in England.

All the archive boxes will be stored in one location for ease of access, as will the collections of photographs and audio and video recordings. There are still archives to be sorted and organized, such as the 50 years of the Estonian weekly newspaper “Meie Elu” and the papers of Dr Tõnu Parming. The archives have received close to 300 boxes from some 100 larger donors, both persons and organizations, plus numerous smaller files and single documents. Of the sorted archives, Dr Karl Aun’s is the largest - 20 boxes - followed by that of E.V. Saks - 12 boxes.

A new cataloguing software - INMAGIC - and new computers have been bought and all the old book listings as well as new incoming publications and previously uncatalogued books will be transferred to an electronic database. There are about 6 300 entries for books but an estimated 2 000 still need to be processed. The classification system is one devised by Dr Aruja, but modified by librarians in the Bibliography Club. Use is also made during the cataloguing of entries available through the Internet from Estonian libraries. The three categories with the largest numbers of entries are *Estonian literature* (52 % of catalogue entries); *History of Estonia* (11 %) and *Estonian culture* (8 %). The hope is to make the catalogue available over the Internet eventually, but in the interim, the plans are to provide interested libraries CDs with the catalogue as well as an abbreviated INMAGIC search routine on CDs.

At the same time, phonograph records – some 700 entries - of Estonian music or by Estonian artists, conductors and orchestras are being catalogued using INMAGIC. Selected photographs are being scanned and stored together with brief descriptions to make the entries searchable. The chief difficulty is the lack of identifiers for large numbers of the photographs, which means that most are not stored electronically.

The cataloguing of newspapers, magazines and audio and video tapes has not been tackled as yet. Many of the tapes date back 15 - 20 years and their present quality is not known. Whether and how to transfer the tapes to a more permanent medium still has to be worked on.

Although there are written lists of the contents of the archives, it is planned to transfer these also to an electronic filing system, together with a fuller description of the contents than exists at present.

The broad categories for the library collections are:

- publications, both fiction and non-fiction, from before the end of World War II (arguably the most numerous of its kind in North America)
- those published after the War, mainly by exiles
- those published in Estonia under the two Russian and the German occupations (Estonian originals and translations)
- items published anywhere after the end of the second Soviet occupation (1991)
- non-print media, such as photographs, films, videos, sound recordings etc

In principle, all material prior to 1950 will be kept and catalogued. This would include all literature in Estonian or by Estonian authors in translations and all branches of history and knowledge that refer to Estonia and its peoples. The library has, for example, a complete set of the proceedings of the Estonian assemblies and parliaments and decrees (“Riigi Teataja” – the equivalent of the “Canada Gazette”) as well as a selection of other government publications; some of the proceedings of Tartu University; some material from the displaced persons camps in

Germany; many books published in Estonia during the second Soviet occupation (1944 – 1991). In literature, there are complete sets of editions, including the early ones printed in Sweden and Germany just after the war, of the Estonian publishing houses Orto and EKK. There are, unsystematically collected, newssheets, theatre and festival programs and so on from Estonian organizations in Canada and duplicate sets of the newspapers “Meie Elu” and “Vaba Eestlane”, both published in Toronto, as well as incomplete sets of many other newspapers.

Finally, there is the question of access by researchers and the general public to the collection. The library is a reference, not a lending, library. The problem of interlibrary loans has to be solved. The safest would be to send only copies. The same applies to photographs and sound recordings. At the present, the library does not have the equipment to convert original recordings into another format. The archives are, at present, closed and can only be used for specific research projects with the approval of the manager of the archive.

In connection with the above policy questions, there are many practical matters to be dealt with. Very little paperwork exists at present that documents the donations, whether to the archives or to the library. There is no written policy regarding what material the library should collect and how to deal with it. There is no definite year-to-year funding.

Finally, there is the question of sending books to Estonian libraries. Is it still worthwhile, for example, to send ORTO and EKK publications and material in English, such as “National Geographic” and encyclopedias? On this question, a lead from Estonia is badly needed. Since the library and archives belong to Tartu Institute, its directors have to make serious and fundamental decisions soon about the matters mentioned above.

### **Examples of other Estonian archives and libraries in Canada**

Postwar Estonian immigrants could be found in all parts of Canada, although the majority eventually settled in the bigger cities. The numerous organizations that they founded are now frequently in decline as this generation is disappearing and volunteers become scarcer. There is a danger that the history of individuals and organizations will also disappear unless efforts are made to collect, catalogue and preserve it. The examples below are not exhaustive, but do indicate the type of material that exists as well as the difficulties in preservation.

Toronto itself has at least four significant archives and libraries, all run by volunteers: the Estonian Central Archives in Canada (*Eesti Keskarhiiv Kanadas*) in Estonian House and the one at Tartu Institute - both of these have collected a wide range of materials - and those of two Estonian Lutheran churches. The one in St. Andrew’s is now dormant as volunteers are lacking. Besides books, mainly fiction, it contains newspaper clippings and photographs dealing with church activities as well as church bulletins, hymn sheets and so on. There is no correspondence or other documents dealing with the affairs of the congregation. The archive at St. Peter’s is still very active. It contains, in addition to photographs, church bulletins, hymn sheets, materials for confirmation and so on, account books, documents connected with the building of the church and some of the correspondence of its first minister.

The Calgary Estonian Society, founded some 60 years ago, is likely to be wound up because of lack of interest by descendants of the founders in the work of the Society. The archives have been sorted and a history is planned. Documents and books of the Estonian school exist. The problem of what to do with the material has arisen. One possibility is the Alberta archives, which evidently does have materials from the early pioneers who settled in Alberta

around 1900. The founding of the Alberta Estonian Heritage Society in 2005 by the descendants of such pioneers has produced several volumes of memoirs and family histories - in English, of course. The Heritage Society could undertake further research into this early period and locate the relevant material.

Finally, there is the Library and Archives of Canada in Ottawa. It contains at least three archival collections of material related to Estonians. Their future preservation seems guaranteed. These are:

- Medicine Valley Estonian Society (1910-1984). The collection has correspondence, minutes of meetings, financial files and the like. (The Tartu Institute Library has the books from its library)
- Orto Estonian Publishing House, founded by Andres Laur, contains correspondence, manuscripts, galley and page proofs and business, financial and other records from 1950 to 1973 - in all 21,5 m of textual records
- Alfred Kurlents collection contains his personal correspondence, articles on Estonian folklore, correspondence with various Estonian organisations and sound recordings of interviews with Estonians in Canada

### **What is the future of Estonian archives and libraries in Canada?**

There are at least three questions that should be asked about Estonian archives in Canada:

- how much historical material exists out there;
- what material is worth keeping;
- where should such material be kept?

With respect to the first question, it is clear that, despite the circumstance that the Estonian archives in Canada have depended mainly on volunteer workers and on donations, a respectable amount of historical material has been collected and can be made available, with varying degrees of ease, to researchers interested in the history of the Estonian refugees who came to Canada as well as of earlier settlers.

In answer to the second question, it should be noted that these collections represent parts of the collective memory of those persons, who, departing from Estonia, came to Canada to make a new life. Since the Government of Canada pursues a “multicultural” policy that encourages and supports various ethnic groups in preserving their linguistic and cultural identities, it is important that the Estonians in Canada maintain their part of the multicultural mosaic. Therefore, this Estonian heritage needs to be added to by taking active steps to encourage the postwar immigrants and their descendants to donate their personal and organizational histories to archives, so that they can be preserved, catalogued and made available to researchers. A major difficulty is that there probably are many unknown collections. A first step should be to find out the location and quality of such collections through public appeals. The Archives of Tartu Institute would welcome all donations of historical material. It would also be a great step forward if the existing small collections could be concentrated in a few archives. It can be argued that all material donated to the archives should be kept, as the direction that future research will take cannot be predicted. Nevertheless, looking at what Tartu Institute has collected to date, it is difficult to believe that all is worth preserving. The policy decisions on what to keep and what to

discard still have to be made.

Finally, the last question deals with problem as to who will utilize the Estonian archives and libraries and where the material should be kept. Since this material is a fundamental part of the history of Estonians in Canada, it belongs in Canada as a memorial to those who came to make a new life here. And today, travel for researchers from Estonia to Canada is not difficult. Also, as long there exists a Chair of Estonian Studies at the University of Toronto, source material in Estonian for research will be necessary. An encouraging sign is that the Board of Tartu College decided in 2006 to start the construction of an addition to the College. This addition will include additional space for the archives and library, an art gallery and a lecture room.

Nevertheless, it is an inescapable fact that the number of persons in Canada conversant with the Estonian language is small. Some Estonian societies are now closing because in some cases the descendants of the original immigrants are no longer interested in carrying on the work. Logic, if not emotional attachment, would then dictate that the professionally operated archives in Estonia could be the best and unified repositories. Of course, from over here, there is a certain, if small, fear of the future security of a country living next to Russia. It is also difficult to gauge the interest of researchers from Estonia in the history of Estonian Canadians. Where the overseas Estonian archives are finally stored will require considerable future discussion. So will the source of funding to finance the workings of the archives.