

# Recovering the Past while Documenting the Present: Approaches to the Baltic Diaspora in the Hoover Institution Archives

**David Jacobs**

Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University

As will undoubtedly be mentioned by other presenters at this conference, the word *diaspora* comes from the ancient Greek, where it means “dispersion” or “scattering.” In modern usage, it is a word that has come to be associated with the history of human migrations, especially involuntary ones. Today the word *diaspora* denotes a community living outside its historical homeland, and whose members are exiles, refugees, or migrants; it also includes their descendants. Initially, the term referred specifically to the Jewish communities living outside historic Palestine, but more recently, it has been broadened to encompass other exiled or émigré communities. At this conference, we are concerned with the Baltic diaspora, and given the particular history of the Baltic states, whose peoples have experienced displacement and deportation, or been forced to emigrate for political and economic reasons, it seems an appropriate concept by means of which to approach the history of the Baltic communities living outside of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Just as one can describe the history of the Baltic diaspora, one can also think of the dispersal (or diaspora) of Baltic history, whose records are in part scattered in various repositories throughout the world, including the one at which I work: the Hoover Institution Archives at Stanford University in California. As an archives with small, but important holdings on Baltic history, we approach the question of documenting the Baltic diaspora from several angles. In the first place, we want to make our resources better known to historians and to interested lay persons, thereby reuniting part of the historical record with the people whom it concerns the most, whether in the Baltic states or in the diaspora. Secondly, we want to increase our holdings to include documents relating to the diaspora experience, especially as it concerns Baltic communities in the United States.

The Hoover Institution Archives has materials that date from the very first years of the independent existence of the three Baltic states. Due to Herbert Hoover's connection to Stanford University (where he was a member of the first graduating class), the records of the relief activities Hoover directed after World War I were shipped to Stanford. The American Relief Administration headed by Hoover fed much of war-ravaged Europe after World War I, and was active in the Baltic region. In the ARA records can be found documents concerning not only relief activities but also political conditions in newly independent Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Although it was a humanitarian organization, the ARA was inevitably caught up in the political and military events taking place around it. In October 1919, for example, the ARA office in Riga was shelled by the Bermond-Avalov army, a force then marauding through parts of Latvia that was made up of German *freikorps* and White Russian elements. This dramatic incident is recorded in the diary of Thomas J. Orbison, head of the ARA mission in Latvia. The Orbison collection in the archives contains letters from Latvian officials, including Kârlis Ulmanis, in response to this and other events. The large ARA collection itself contains details on

shipments of relief supplies to all three Baltic states. In addition, the collection gives insights into the evolution of American policy toward the Baltic countries and the newly-emergent Soviet Union.

With the Hitler-Stalin pact and the brutal end of the first period of independence for the Baltic states, much of the effort to preserve the history of these three countries took place outside of the Baltic region itself. Records relating to the foreign policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were stranded abroad, along with diplomats from the Baltic countries that had ceased to exist as independent states. With the United States and the United Kingdom refusing to recognize the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic states, these diplomats continued to have official status as legal representatives, even as independent Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were erased from the political map of Europe.

Repositories abroad, including the Hoover Institution Archives, became natural havens for the papers of a number of these diplomats, thereby preserving documents of the first era of Baltic statehood that might otherwise have been repatriated had Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania retained their independence. As a result, part of the historical memory of the Baltic countries was preserved outside of the Baltic region itself, albeit sometimes in fragmentary form. Even now, these expatriate records remain important sources for information about key aspects of Baltic history.

The Hoover Institution Archives has a number of important collections relating to those officials who remained in their posts following 1940. In the case of Estonia, there is a sizeable collection relating to the career of the Estonian diplomat and foreign minister, Kaarel Pusta, who ended up as an exile in the United States. The collection contains an extensive correspondence series that extends from the 1920s through the 1960s, spanning the first period of Estonian independence, World War II and the loss of independence, and the Cold War.

The archives also contains analogous collections relating to Latvian and Lithuanian diplomatic history. For Latvia, there are the collections of Alfreds Bilmanis, the Latvian ambassador to Washington; Jules Feldmans, the Latvian minister to Switzerland and then Bilmanis's successor as head of the Latvian legation in Washington; Felikss Cielens, the Latvian ambassador to France before World War II; and Peters Olins, Latvian minister to Argentina and Brazil. Along with personal letters, these collections contain official correspondence conducted among the various Latvian Legations in Europe and the United States, along with reports prepared by the different missions. For Lithuania, there are the collections of Edvardas Turauskas, who had been Lithuanian ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, and Petrus Dauzvardis, who was the Lithuanian consul general in Chicago for many years.

These collections contain information on wartime conditions in the occupied Baltic states, on the recruitment of local populations by the German army, on resistance movements, and on news about what would later be known as the Holocaust. What emerges in the documents of these collections is the history of the common struggle waged by diplomats from all three countries as they sought to preserve the cause of Baltic independence and to influence public opinion in the West. This relatively unknown chapter of Baltic diplomacy has been studied in a recent monograph by two American historians, James T. McHugh and James S. Pacy "Diplomats Without A Country: Baltic Diplomacy, International Law, and the Cold War" (Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut: 2001).

McHugh and Pacy describe the unique position occupied by these diplomats, who continued to represent their countries even as they had no governments to report to. However symbolic or futile the actions of Baltic diplomats may have appeared at the time, the authors

conclude that they played an important role in “keeping the idea of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian sovereignty alive.” (McHugh and Pacy, p. 157) Ironically, although their work gives an excellent survey of Baltic diplomacy in this period, these historians did not consult the relevant collections in the Hoover Institution Archives. There is obviously more work to do in this field, and more to be done on the part of the archives to give its Baltic collections a higher profile.

As World War II drew to an end, thousands of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian refugees fled to Sweden or ended up in Displaced Person camps in Germany after the end of the war. The experience of these Baltic refugees is vividly described in the memoir written by Agate Nesaule “A Woman in Amber”, a book that was widely reviewed in the United States. Nesaule portrays the trauma and suffering endured by Latvian refugees; she also connects this experience to her life as part of the Latvian emigration in the United States. Nesaule emphasizes the hold that the past retains over the present, stating at the outset of her book: “Wars are never-ending, and so are their stories.” Her writing is a personal act of catharsis, releasing painful memories that had been repressed for many years. While others may not write about their experiences in as public or confessional a way as Nesaule, there is a general interest among those who passed through the DP camps in recovering their own past and telling the stories of their own lives.

The Hoover Institution Archives' documentation on the Baltic refugee experience consists of personal memoirs as well as records of life in the DP camps. These include albums of photographs, school records, camp publications, and minutes of meetings of organizations established in the camps. These materials show the efforts of Baltic refugees to preserve their culture, and to celebrate their traditions (including the summer solstice festival), even in the most trying of circumstances.

The DP camps were by their very nature temporary institutions, but they have become the focus of historical research as the starting points of the post-Second World War Baltic emigration. The resilience and determination displayed in the DP camps established a pattern for life in the Baltic diaspora, whose members saw themselves as the custodians of national cultural traditions following the loss of independence of the three Baltic states. In recent years, materials on the Latvian DP camps in the Hoover Institution Archives have been consulted by former camp residents interested in recovering their own life histories. In one case, a Latvian émigré in California (Ansis Pommers) has used these sources as part of his research in writing a comprehensive history of one DP camp, Fischbach. This history, which is being self-published later this year, will in turn become part of the collections on Baltic history in the archives, and is a good illustration of the role that the archives can play in helping historians of the Baltic diaspora.

A significant resource in the Hoover Institution Archives on Cold War politics is the very large Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty collection. As yet, this collection has been underutilized by historians from the Baltic states. Nonetheless, it contains important materials: not only are there copies of broadcasts made to the Baltic states, there are internal reports that evaluate the effectiveness of these broadcasts. There are also the corporate records of the RFE/RL administrations. In these files can be found evidence of the role played by organizations of the Baltic diaspora both as sources of information and as pressure groups influencing the evolution of American government policy during the Cold War. The history of this "Baltic lobby" is one that largely remains unwritten.

With the renewal of independence for the Baltic states, the Hoover Institution Archives has acquired new materials that document contemporary politics and social conditions in Estonia,

Latvia, and Lithuania. In an effort to better publicize our holdings on Baltic history, I was asked, along with a colleague who provided technical expertise, to create a web page that described our Latvian collections, while using images drawn from these collections as illustrations. (The web page can be accessed at: <http://www.hoover.org/hila/baltic.htm>.) The Latvian web page has resulted in a higher profile for Hoover's Baltic collections in general, and I hope that it will expand to include descriptions of our Estonian and Lithuanian collections.

Quite frankly, until recently, the Hoover Institution Archives did not assign a high priority to Baltic history in terms of collection development. Only a very few American universities have any kind of program in Baltic studies, and Stanford University is not one of them. Nonetheless, we continue to acquire new materials relating to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and we have recently come to recognize the importance of documenting the history of the Baltic diaspora. Although it is of course small in absolute terms compared to other immigrant communities, there is a significant population of Baltic origin in California. There are schools, churches, and publications whose records are potentially materials that can be collected by the archives. Recently, I have endeavored to make contacts in the local Latvian-American community to see how we could increase our documentation of its activities. I hope to widen these contacts to include members of the Estonian and Lithuanian emigration.

Due to demographic realities, and the fact that the first generation of the Baltic diaspora is reaching the ending of its natural life span, there is some urgency to the task of documenting this generation's experiences. It is not only a question of mortality, but of the changing attitudes of the second and third generations of the diaspora, who in many cases no longer identify with a specific Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian identity. There is a danger of the institutional memory of the Baltic diaspora not being preserved. Already, significant gaps exist in the history of the Baltic emigration in California, which has not been continuous, but rather has occurred in waves. For example, very little trace remains of the generation of Latvians that came to the San Francisco Bay Area in the wake of the 1905 Revolution.

The Baltic diaspora created institutions of its own—churches, schools, camps, associations — and created a rich cultural life, expressed in song festivals and other celebrations. Many of these activities produced programs, yearbooks, and the like, or were commemorated in some way, and these kinds of materials are being collected by the archives.

Another more activist approach toward the documentation of the Baltic diaspora is the conducting of interviews with its members, thereby compiling oral histories of individual lives in the Baltic emigration. In terms of the Latvian diaspora, pioneering work in this field has been done by academics such as Maija Hinkle and Inta Carpenter, and there is an oral history program that has been established under the auspices of the American Latvian Association. I am sure that other presenters will refer to this program in more detail. In the Hoover Institution Archives, we have no systematic program in place to acquire such materials, but we have established contact with members of the Baltic diaspora in the California region with the aim of acquiring such materials, and to conduct oral histories of our own.

As an archives that is focused largely on political history, we naturally are interested in the political activities of the Baltic diaspora, both externally — as agents acting to influence American foreign policy — and internally, in terms of the spectrum of opinion within the Baltic emigration itself. Various researchers have documented splits within the diaspora during the Cold War, especially as regards travel by members of the diaspora to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania while these countries were under Soviet domination.

More recently, there has emerged the question of the so-called "returned diaspora," a

subject that has begun to attract the attention of historians and social scientists, especially in terms of the political role played by returned diaspora members in the Baltic states. There is no longer a rigid separation between the Baltic diaspora and the populations in the Baltic states themselves, but an interchange between the two spheres.

Ultimately, for our archives, the task of documenting the Baltic diaspora involves the cultivation of personal contacts within the various communities of the Baltic emigration, thereby gaining access to the social networks within these communities. Personal contacts can lead to the discovery of historians (both amateur and professional) within these communities, as in the case of the Latvian who is writing a history of one of the DP camps. They can also result in a better understanding of the institutions and publications of the diaspora. In developing these contacts, we are also trying to publicize the archives as a potential repository for documents from the diaspora. Our archives is open to the general public, and not just the scholarly community, which means that collections are accessible to a broad population. The fact that we have other collections relating to Baltic history is also an added attraction.

Along with expanding its holdings of materials on the Baltic diaspora in the United States, the Hoover Institution Archives is interested in forging ties with its counterparts in the Baltic states. Recently, we have entered into an agreement with the Latvian Ministry of Culture in order to facilitate the microfilming of certain of our Latvian collections. Previously, we assisted the Latvian State Archive of Audiovisual Documents in obtaining copies of films made by a Latvian-American photographer, Eduards Kraucs. These films include footage of Latvian refugees in Germany and the United States after World War II. Of course, we would like to see more research visits to our archives by historians from the Baltic states. At present, these happen all too infrequently, and travel costs, of course, are the main obstacle. However, it is also a question of making the collections of the Hoover Institution Archives better known in the Baltic states themselves.

I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to participate. The theme of this conference has drawn attention to the importance of holdings on Baltic history that are outside of the Baltic states themselves; it has also highlighted the question of documenting the Baltic diaspora. I know that I will have learned a great deal here that will help me in my own work in the future, and I am grateful for the opportunity provided by this conference to meet so many others working in the same field.

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