

# Archives of Estonian Organizations and Persons in Sweden

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In 1944 the Red Army was approaching the borders of Estonia and it was evident that the Germans had no longer any power to resist the Russian advance. The Estonians knew by experience what a Soviet occupation would involve and within a few weeks in September and October thousands of people fled westwards to Sweden in small boats and old cargo boats, in whatever floating vessel they might find. There arrived 6,000 of them at the island of Gotland (*Ojamaa*) and 15,000 at the East coast of Sweden, where they were collected into more than 200 refugee camps, most of them rather small units which facilitated the administration and permitted a more personal treatment. But the stay did not last long as these camps soon had to be evacuated to give room for the prisoners rescued by the Swedish Red Cross from the German concentration camps. In the month of March 1945 the Baltic refugee camps were emptied of refugees.

The government of the Soviet Union insisted on a demand that the Baltic refugees should be sent back to the Soviet Union; they were after all Soviet citizens. The answer by the Swedish government was that nobody should be sent back against his or her own free will. Nothing of all this was made public but none the less many of the refugees feared that they might be handed over to the Soviet Union, which resulted in a further migration to the west beginning in 1948 when the United States had opened their borders for "displaced persons". The number of those who wanted to go back to the Soviet Union by their free will was rather restricted, and already in 1950 the Russians had given up their demands on a general repatriation.

In Sweden at this time there was a demand for manpower and the newcomers were quickly integrated into the labour market. Many refugees were peasants and fishermen from the coastal regions of Estonia and with them there were no greater problems. More complicated was the integration of the many intellectual workers. There were, in fact, quite a lot of them as a result of a joint action by the US government and the Swedish government with the purpose to rescue from Estonia what was called "the intellectual elite". In order to respond to its commitment in this regard the Swedish government created 1,000 posts of "archival workers" (posts meant for intellectual workers), and 600 of these were given to Estonian refugees.

One often hears Estonians boasting about their capacity to organize themselves and this with full justice. This faculty was made use of by the Swedish authorities; in every refugee camp there was appointed an Estonian representative, a "*laagrivanem*", which made it easier for the Swedish camp leader to handle a rather complicated situation, especially with regard to the language difficulties. Soon let loose outside the camps, the refugees had to stand on their own feet. They got some help from an international organization, the Young Men's Christian Association (*Noorte Meeste Kristlik Ühing*), as its Swedish members granted Estonians free use of their premises. Estonians also created local branches of the Estonian Society (*Eesti Selts*), all by themselves. To these first organizations were attached a number of specified societies: boy scouts, girl guides, choral societies, gymnastic teams, athletic associations etc.

Even in the refugee camps Estonians organized schools for their children. The Swedish administration was reluctant and would not even permit such schools but after a while they were not only accepted but also supported with Swedish money.

In the new surroundings the Church was an important factor for the solidarity and good spirit. Many churches and communities were established all over the country. The

Evangelical Lutheran church had its own consistory in Sweden up to the 1970s when it was moved to Canada. Today Sweden is a deanery (*praostkond*) with 7 church congregations (*kogudused*).

Almost all political activity in Estonia had been prohibited first by the laws promulgated by the president Konstantin Päts and then by the two occupying powers. There existed among the Estonians in Sweden an irretrievable antagonism between the adherents of Päts and what we may call the parliamentarians, members of the former democratic parties in Estonia. This led to a split not only in the political establishment but also in many non-political unions and societies. The situation was at its worst on the central level with open quarrel and personal slander in the Estonian papers which all in all damaged the reputation of some Estonian leaders in the eyes of the Swedish administration. A survey of the Estonian political organizations in Sweden affords a bewildering impression which, I am afraid, is also presenting a true picture of the situation.

If the political establishment in the new surroundings was hardly a successful achievement, the cultural progress developed all the better. A register of Estonian authors active in Sweden bear witness to the fact that the volume of fiction and *belles lettres* among the expatriates for a while surpassed the literature in the homeland.

On the whole the Estonians in Sweden have displayed an impressive activity, so what will happen with the traces of all this activity? Many archives and collections have already been transmitted to Estonia and it will be the task of the civil servants in Estonian archives, libraries and museums to give an account of this, but I will here mention some important deliveries. As late as in May this year the archive of the Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsuse arhiiv*) was solemnly inaugurated at the National Archives (*Riigiarhiiv*) in Tallinn. The archive of the Estonian National Council is now to be found in the National Library (*Rahvusraamatukogu*) and the papers of the Estonian Committee (*Eesti Komitee*) are with Mart Orav for the journal "Akadeemia". They will later on be delivered to the National Archives (*Riigiarhiiv*) in Tallinn<sup>1</sup>. Several personal archives have been sent over including archives from authors such as Marie Under and Artur Adson, the linguist Johannes Aavik, the minister Aleksander Varma. Among persons responsible for the Estonian archives in Sweden I have heard reiterated requests that the archives under their custody may be transferred to Estonia, but also requests that these archives should stay in Sweden as a part of Swedish history.

I now turn to the Estonian archives and collections still in Swedish custody, first of all in the public institutions. By far the most important is the Baltic Archives deposited in the Swedish National Archives. As another presenter will inform you about these archives, I leave it out here, only noting that the correspondence between the two ministers, August Rei and Heinrich Laretei in Stockholm and the resistance movement in Estonia today is published in a big book called "Töötan ustavaks jääda...".

In the Regional Archive in Lund we may find a collection of several Estonian churches in southern Sweden. The archive of the Estonian school in Stockholm is deposited at the Stockholm City Archives. Materials of Estonian local societies are also preserved, some in Alingsås, a small town in Western Sweden, and some in Uppsala, and are apparently in good order at the local archives for the popular movements. It might be a solution to keep the material here in Sweden, but are the Swedish archives prepared to take care of more Estonian material, even as a temporary solution? And how to provide the command of the Estonian language required for arranging and registration of the material?

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<sup>1</sup> The archive of the Estonian Committee (*Eesti Komitee*) is deposited at Estonian Cultural History Archives (Estonian Literary Museum). Comment by P. Noorhani

It was my intention to elucidate the situation of the Estonian archives in Sweden which are still in private custody. From the very beginning I realized that this was an intention which might be fulfilled only to some extent, to a very restricted extent, indeed. But even a very limited survey will be useful with regard to the imperative necessity to start a rescue action as soon as possible. There are for the moment five Estonian houses or “homes” in Sweden, in Stockholm, Uppsala, Eskilstuna, Norrköping, Göteborg and Lund. But they all are threatened to be closed down as the Swedish authorities have decided to cut down their financial support to that sort of club activities.

In Stockholm this would hit some of the most important Estonian associations. Speedy decisions and strong measures are urgently needed. The archives of the Estonian Committee (*Eesti Komitee*) have already been delivered to Estonia to a great extent, now it is of importance to decide what to do with the rest as the Committee is planning this year to end its activities and transform itself to a foundation. The remaining Estonian central organization Union of Estonians in Sweden, *Rootsi Eestlaste Liit (REL)*, have archives of great historical interest. As I have understood, the board of this union for the time being want to keep the archives in Sweden, but some help in settling up and making a list of the archives might be useful. In the custody of *REL* remain also the archives of a former political organization, Representative Committee of the Associations of Estonian Farmers (*Eesti Põllumeeste Kogude Esindus*), which ought to be taken care of.

In the Estonian House (*Eesti Maja*) in Stockholm there is also housed the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church which up to 1979 had its own bishop. When he moved to Canada he brought with him the archives of the consistory, but there remained the archives of the Swedish deanery (*praostkond*) and the dean Ingo Tiit Jaagu wants help to have this rich material put in order. This archive is of special interest because here you can find material corresponding to the Estonian parish register.

In *Eesti Maja* we also find the office of the weekly Estonian newspaper in Sweden, “*Eesti Päevaleht*” the further forthcoming of which may be a matter of time. All in all, an action in the *Eesti Maja* in Stockholm with the purpose of finding out which archives may still be available must be given a high priority. And there is not much time left for deliberation, what is needed here is immediate action.

I will give you a survey of the situation of archives as I find it at this very moment:

### **Stockholm**

Central Estonian organizations must probably leave their premises in *Eesti Maja* Wallingatan 34, *Eesti Komitee*, *REL*, *Rootsi praostkond*, “*Eesti Päevaleht*” (Several visits and phone-calls)

### **Gothenburg**

Aho Rebas [ [aho.rebas@bostream.nu](mailto:aho.rebas@bostream.nu) ] representative of *REL* in the city does not have much hope that one might find any archives except an archive of a relief organization for Estonian children (E-mail 9.6 2006)

### **Lund**

There is a keen interest to organize the archives probably by finding a room for them in a regional or local Swedish archive. (Phone contact 12.6 2006 with Pille Mai Laas [pille\\_mai@swipnet.se](mailto:pille_mai@swipnet.se))

## **Uppsala**

The question concerning the Estonian archives has come up and something will happen the forthcoming year. The Estonian Society in Uppsala (*Eesti Selts Uppsalas*), Estonian Democratic Club (*Eesti Demokraatlik Klubi*), Estonian choir in Uppsala (*Eesti Segakoor Uppsalas*) are in the *Folkrörelsearkivet* in Uppsala (Archive of the Popular Movements in Uppsala)

## **Eskilstuna**

The Estonian Society (*Eesti Selts*) was visited in June by three very high Estonian politicians, among them the Parliament (*Riigikogu*) chairman. The local chairman took up the question of the local Estonian archives and got an answer that they might send them to Estonia or keep them in Eskilstuna whatever would suit them best. (Phone call 13.6 2006 with Lembit Palla [phone 46-152-109 58 or 45-157-441 38], chairman *Eesti Selts Eskilstunas*)

## **Norrköping**

I have been in contact with the congregation (*Norrköpings kogudus*) and they will take up the archive-question at their meeting this week.

## **Västerås**

The archive of the congregation (*Västeråsi kogudus*) is taken care of by Viivi Baladi, daughter of the dean (*praost*) Richard Koolmeister [[viivi.baladi@telia.com](mailto:viivi.baladi@telia.com)]

## **Alingsås**

A lot of Estonian organizations were active in Alingsås. The archives of the Estonian Society (*Eesti Selts*), Association of Estonians (*Eestlaste Koondis*), Estonian Volleyball Club (*Eesti Võrkpalliklubi*), Estonian Aid (*Eesti Abi*) are today to be found in Alingsås' Archive of Popular Movements, *Folkrörelsernas arkiv i Alingsås*.

## **Borås**

The Estonian Society (*Eesti Selts Boråsis*) was founded on December 17, 1944 and in 2000 it discontinued its activities. A detailed account of history, in Swedish, is available in [www.immi.se/ir/ir2000/estfor.htm](http://www.immi.se/ir/ir2000/estfor.htm) .

## **Halmstad**

The Estonian Society (*Halmstadi Eesti Selts*) was founded in 1945 and liquidated in 2004. Edgar Saar recommended the archive to be transferred to the Literary Museum (*Kirjandusmuuseum*) in Tartu.

## **Milvi Seim**

Is keeping in her custody the archive of the Estonian summer university in Sweden, the so-called METROO [*METSaülikool ROOtsis*] active 1976-2004.

In opposition to the elder generation the members of METROO were working to save the Estonian culture in exile in a living contact with the culture in Estonia.

## **Leelu Andrén**

Oskar Loorits's daughter, has in her custody an archive, 6-8 shelf metres, of Johanneshov's Soroptimist Club, [www.soroptimist.se](http://www.soroptimist.se) . Maybe someone in Estonia is interested?

In Stockholm we have the main problems gathered in *Eesti Maja*. The situation in Gothenburg is alarming, whereas there is still hope for Lund and Uppsala. What about the

rest? What will happen to all the other records? Will they be preserved or will they disappear? Here we have to balance between fear and hope. But there are also pleasant surprises as the two to me hitherto unknown archives presented by Leelu Andrén and Milvi Seim.

The purpose of this conference is to elucidate the problems concerning the Estonian archives abroad. This of course is a very good idea. But I recall the story of the old lady attending a meeting at the Salvation Army, where she had learned: "It isn't just enough to say 'Hallelujah'; you also have to do it." I repeat, it is a good thing to elucidate problems, but we have not much time to dispose. The number of active Estonian organizations in Sweden is rapidly diminishing, and their members are growing old.

My task here was to sketch in a first rough outline the present position of the Estonian archives in Sweden. But I find that it is also my task – a foreigner though I might be – to touch upon some problems involved and propose some measures to be taken into consideration.

The first step must be to establish a connecting link between the Estonian authorities and the Estonians abroad. The best way to do this might be **to create an Internet site**, for instance named [www.valiseestlastearhiivid.ee](http://www.valiseestlastearhiivid.ee) .

There you should find information about

- all the archives which have been transferred to Estonia from abroad, where to find them and, hopefully, information on their contents,
- contact persons who may give you advice about where to send your archive and who may help you with the practical arrangements,
- Estonian archive standards which will help you to file your collections,
- links to Estonian archives, libraries and museums inside and outside Estonia.

Next step must be **to inspire Estonians abroad with confidence in the archival authorities in Estonia**, for example by

- accounting for a realistic estimate of the possibilities, in personnel and storage room, to handle properly the items delivered,
- sending over students who may give advice and help, students with knowledge in English,
- establishing easy routines for the transportation to Estonia,
- concluding a formal agreement of co-operation with the Swedish archives, libraries and museums.