

LITHUANIAN CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE

by
Dalius Zizys

Audiovisual documents are an important part of our state cultural and historical heritage.

As the result of a recent restructuring of archives, the Central State Archives of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Archive of Image and Sound have been joined into one archive, effective January 1, 2002, with the new name of Lithuania Central State Archive. For clarity, the two archives will be discussed separately, although they are now one unit in two adjacent buildings.

LITHUANIAN ARCHIVES OF IMAGE AND SOUND

Audiovisual documents as an important part of our state cultural and historical heritage have been collected and preserved in the Lithuanian Archive of Image and Sound since 1965. Although the name and the structure of the Archive has been changed, the main goal of its activity – safeguarding past images for future generations – remains the same. Many photos, films, sound and video recordings are kept in modern depositories and are waiting for researchers. The archives own about 516,000 photographs, 29,100 films and 16,600 sound and video recordings. There are 524 square meters of storage room in its depository where special microclimate is constantly maintained. The Archival collections continually increase with about 4,000 new documents each year. The greatest influx (about 200,000) of photo documents occurred last year, when the Archive acquired the entire photo collections from the reorganized Monuments' Restoration Institute and Lithuanian Film Studio. Various organizations, Lithuanians and foreigners donate valuable material to the Archive.

Seventy-six employees, including archivists and restorers, custodians and photographers, video cameramen, sound and video technicians take care of our collection. Various departments within the Archives include Restoration, Copying/Microfilming and Special Services. Skilled specialists check the physical condition of our collection. They are responsible for

accessibility of our documents and provide consultations for anyone who is interested in the history of our country. There are card catalogues and specially equipped rooms for our visitors as well. At present computer database is being created to accelerate, improve and facilitate access.

Film Documents

The entire history of our cinema is stored on 7.28 million meters of film within this Archive. The oldest film document dates back to 1895. Visitors can see copies of the first (in the world) film shots made by the brothers Lumiere. Our past state life revives after screening the pre-war newsreels. One



Dalius Zizys, director, Lithuania Central State Archive, 2001
(photo credit: Miriam Weiner)

can see views of towns, political events, Lithuanian Military Forces, priests, national communities, the mode of life and customs of the land. Both specialists and the general public are interested in the shots made by our famous past cameramen including K. Luksys, J. Milius, brothers Motuzai-Beleckai, S. Vainalavicius, S. Uzdonas as well as in those made by cameramen of today. Television stations, film producers and researchers constantly use our film fond. Any film of interest to you could be screened for you and a video copy of it could be made by us as well.

Photo Documents

The pride of our collection is the negatives and positives, albums and negatives based on glass. This collection grows every year with 3,000 new documents about the past and present of our country. The oldest documents (photos) date from 1860.

The photo documents of our days are preserved as well as the ones made by our famous professionals of the past including K. Smecechauskas, A. Sulcas, J. Miezlauskis, B. Buracas, D. Cibas and J. Karazija. Archival photos are published in albums, scientific monographs and textbooks as well as presented in exhibitions, while a greater number of them await researchers. We will help you find a photo you need or make a copy, as well as prepare exhibitions of famous people and important events or any other subject at your request.

Sound and Video Documents

It would take two years to listen and view all the sound and video documents preserved in our Archives. Our oldest sound recording (Lithuanian Songs) is from 1907, produced in Riga. We can hear again the voices of K. Petrauskas, A. Sabaniauskas, D. Dolskis, Lithuanian Republic President A.



Photographs of Jewish conscripts to the Russian army from a collection of 1,200 photographs (source: Lithuanian Central State Archive, Vilnius, Lithuania)

Smetona, K. Grinius and the ones of other famous Lithuanian people from the old records and magnetic tapes.

Recording studios and radio stations use many of our preserved music recordings. Since 1988, video documents are being collected. Copies of sound and video recordings could be made at the request of our visitors.

Jewish Collections

A considerable number of photographs depict Jewish communal life in Lithuania and its activities in different walks of life: culture, industry, trade, finance since the beginning of the 20th century up till now. Mostly these spheres are reflected rather fragmentary. Very few of the depicted persons are known as well as events, dates and time. But it is possible to form a conception about the period depicted, its mode of life and customs. Jewish soldiers in the Lithuanian Army, doctors, handicraftsmen, pupils and students with their teachers; shops, banks, sports clubs and workshops, all can be found in our Jewish photo collections.

Some tragic moments of Jewish nation's history are depicted in the photographs (scenes from Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos, destroyed houses).

The Lithuanian Archive of Image and Sound possesses a unique "Collection of the Photographic Portraits of the Conscripts to the Russian Army, 1900 – 1914". The collection consists of 1,222 photographs with red seals of sealing-wax. Historical photographs are from different famous studies ("Rembrandt," "Brudner") and made by famous photographers (T.Chodzko, Tczyk brothers, A.Cinovec, S.Fleury, A.Strauss, Butkowsky brothers, J.Hermanovitch, I. Chonovitch) of that time. The quality of the photographs is outstanding and the reverse side of each photo contains some information, in Russian, about the person.

Paper documents for some conscripts exist in the Archives. The information about the conscripts on the photographs and in the paper documents is brief and variable. Some have date of birth; others supply only religion and social position. There is no any information about the army unit in which the conscript served.

This collection is accessible on the Internet at <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/VilnaConscriptsPhotos.htm>.

The negatives of old photographs are preserved on safety film. Copies on photo paper or CD are available for users. Readable or viewable information can be provided by e-mail in reply to requests.

Our Archive has only a few and very short fragments of a Jewish nature in film documents. Some members of the Jewish community in Lithuania taking part in the official meetings can be seen in them.

LITHUANIAN CENTRAL STATE ARCHIVE

The Lithuanian Central State Archive (formerly Central State Archives of Lithuania) contains 22 kilometers of shelves

and 3 million files for the period of 1918-1990. Documents are divided into the following time periods:

- **Documents from the Period of 1918–1940**

Pertaining to the Republic of Lithuania's central and local government institutions: the fonds (archival units) of the Cabinet of Ministers, President's office, various Ministries, diplomatic corps, municipal and regional area chiefs, scientific, cultural, educational, civil and religions organizations and societies.

- **Documents from the Polish Occupation of Southeastern Lithuania during 1919–1939**

Fonds of the Vilnius Magistrate's office, local government agencies, societies and private individuals.

- **Documents of the Occupying Nazi Authorities for 1941–1944**

The fonds of the Generalkommissar and Gebietskommissars, security and criminal police, Jewish ghetto, municipal and area chiefs, prisons, as well as others.

- **Documents from the Soviet occupation periods of 1940–1941 and 1944–1990**

The fonds of the Supreme Soviet, the Council of Ministers, various ministries, boards and committees, and collections of noted figures in the areas of science and culture.

Between the two World Wars, the Jewish population in Lithuania was about 154,000 representing 7.6 percent of the total population.

Over 90 percent of Jewish children of school age attended separate Jewish schools that were more or less subsidized by the Lithuanian government, but primarily maintained by private Jewish organizations. There were about 300 Jewish elementary schools, 20 high schools and a teacher's seminary. The language of instruction was Hebrew or Yiddish.

There were many Jews who were well educated. For instance, from 35-43 percent of the country's physicians and over 50 percent of Lithuania's lawyers were Jews. Jews owned 77 percent of Lithuania's commerce and more than 20 percent



■ Lithuanian Central State Archive, 2001 (photo credit: Miriam Weiner)

of its industry. A comparatively large number of various Jewish publications were published every year including six Jewish dailies, one of which was in the Russian language.

There were separate Jewish sport organizations (for example, Archive keeps more than 600 files of the Jewish sport organization "Makabi" for the period 1922–1939). The Jewish Historical and Ethnographical Society played a very important role in Jewish cultural life. In addition to that society, there were several other cultural and scientific organizations and groups. Perhaps the most well known is the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, founded in Vilnius in 1925, with its central headquarters now in New York.

In Kaunas (the capital of the Lithuanian Republic between the two World Wars), there were two Jewish theatres. In addition to those professional theatres, there were a number of amateur theatre groups in the provinces.

As for politics, Lithuanian Jews took part and were active in their own political organizations rather than joining Lithuanian political parties.

During the Nazi occupation, the fate of Jews in Lithuania was the same as in other European countries. After the second World War, the number of Jews decreased considerably. Many Jews emigrated to Israel. At the same time, some Jews moved to Lithuania from various parts of the Soviet Union. For many

of them, Lithuania became the stepping-stone to emigrate to the West easier and quicker.

The Lithuanian Central State Archive preserves more than 1,5 million files (storage units) dating from the fifteenth century–1918 (vital records up to 1940), about 16 kilometres of shelves.

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Editor's Note: Portions of the foregoing article were provided by Laima Tautvaisaite, Director of Lithuanian State Historical Archive and a former archivist in the Lithuanian Central State Archive.

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View of town square in Panevėžys, c. 1920 (Miriam Weiner Archives)