

## LITUANISTIC ACTIVITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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*In this survey Lituanistic activity at the University of Tasmania is presented and the accumulation of Lithuanian expatriates' manuscripts and printed heritage is discussed.*

*Key words: manuscripts and printed heritage, Lithuanians in Australia, Lithuanian Studies Society*

By their very nature, universities are important depositories of knowledge. However, it is sometimes incorrectly assumed that the universities should possess *all* available knowledge. Their original name, the Latin word *universitas*, had nothing to do with universality: it simply referred to a group of people organised for a common purpose.

Australia today has 38 state-funded and 4 private universities. They operate on 150+ campuses and teach well over 700,000 students. Most Australian universities are geared for large scale mass-production; consequently, they avoid offering low-demand subjects. This is one of the main reasons why no Australian university has a Chair of Lithuanian; and why no Lithuanian tertiary courses are offered anywhere on this continent.

As for the universities' library holdings, the librarians tend to concentrate on buying

and stocking the books needed for the courses taught on their campuses. Since Lithuanian is not on anyone's syllabus, few books on Lithuania are normally held in the universities' main library collections.

Ten thousand Lithuanians migrated to Australia after World War II, and they have made considerable positive contributions to this country. However, there is no purposeful institutional mechanism in Australia to record, in English, their contributions and heritage. As a result, many aspects of this unique cultural wealth are fast being forgotten.

In the meantime, a students' society named Lithuanian Studies Society (LSS) was established at the University of Tasmania in 1987; and it has been active ever since. The Society's principal aim has always been to initiate and to promote Lithuanian aca-

demographic research in Australian universities. Nevertheless, the LSS has covered a wide range of activities and, in doing so, it has made significant contributions in the areas of the Lithuanian heritage and Lithuanian identity.

1. Academic research. There are few Lithuanians living in Tasmania. So, more than a half of the Lithuanian research at the University of Tasmania is undertaken by non-Lithuanians. Interested Honours and postgraduate students are usually encouraged to conduct their research in the teaching department of their major subject, but specialise in Lithuanian topics. In this way, 15 Lithuanian dissertations and major research reports have been completed to date, in eight departments of the University of Tasmania (Commerce, Education, English, Journalism & European Languages, Geography/ Environmental Studies, History, Law, Political Science, Sociology).

Some of this original research investigated the recent past (Shuey, 2004; Vincas Taškūnas, 1998; Taylor, 1998; Waldren, 1993). Some students dealt with contemporary Lithuania (e.g., Banks, 1990, 1997; Simon Taškūnas, 1997, Rozentals, 2003). Several other dissertations, however, documented the Lithuanian migrants' identity and heritage in Australia (Boas, 1999; Kazokas, 1992; Boas, 1999; A.P. Taškūnas, 2002)

It is this latter group of material that provides a valuable source of heritage facts. Many of them are still untapped by other researchers, in Lithuania as well as elsewhere.

2. Lithuanian language courses. At the University of Tasmania, Lithuanian language courses are not run annually, but only as required. In 2006, the beginners' course attracted 12 students. Enrolments in the earlier years were usually smaller.

The University of Tasmania provides classrooms and other facilities, free of charge. However, the Lithuanian courses are not recognized for credit by the University, at this stage: that is, a student completing the course cannot count it toward his/her degree.

Language courses are an excellent bridge into another nation's culture. Perhaps the Lithuanians in Australia should consider this path to share their heritage more widely.

3. Publications. Notwithstanding its small size and limited resources, the Lithuanian Studies Society at the University of Tasmania has published a wealth of books and periodicals.

A booklet listing unnecessary foreign words in Lithuanian was printed in 1998. It proved popular, and was sold out quickly in Lithuania and abroad. Written in Tasmania by A. P. Taškūnas, this collection highlighted the impurities in contemporary Lithuanian language, as viewed from some 12,000 kms away.

This was the Society's only publication in Lithuanian. All other LSS books and periodicals were in English: 21 issues of a 72-page journal (*Lithuanian Papers*) and 7 books. These publications aimed at informing the reader about Lithuania, including its history and recent events. Altogether,

180 original articles appeared, written by 126 authors from 22 countries.

*Lithuanian Papers* are currently in use in seven high-schools in Lithuania. The journal is used by English language students for reading practice. At the same time, the Lithuanian youngsters discover additional facts about their own country, presented to them in a new language.

The LSS books and the 21 volumes of the Society's journal contain the largest amount of Lithuanian heritage materials, published in English by one Australian publisher. It is a pity that the Lithuanian educational authorities have made no effort, to date, to reprint these valuable texts and make them available more widely.

4. **Book Collection.** In 2005, an English-language Collection of Lithuanian Books and Journals was established in the School of Government, at the University of Tasmania. (The University of Tasmania is the fourth oldest university in Australia).

This Lithuanian Collection now has 1,000 books and journals about Lithuania and its people, mostly in English. More books are needed, and the organisers have made a worldwide appeal for donations.

The Lithuanian Collection at the University of Tasmania has excellent study facilities. Arrangements can be made for non-students to use it. A large heated reading room has all comforts. The books are on display, and are kept behind locked glass doors. Copies of all Lithuanian dissertations written in Tasmania are also preserved here.

It is significant that no other university

in Australia, or anywhere in the Southern Hemisphere, has a separate Lithuanian Collection of this size.

5. **Lithuanian Scholarship.** In the whole of Australia, there is only one university scholarship designed to promote the study of Lithuania and its heritage. It is the AU\$5,000 per annum (US\$4,400) Lithuanian Honours Scholarship at the University of Tasmania. Introduced in 1997, the cash award has been offered annually to the best Honours (usually fourth year) student writing a dissertation on an approved Lithuanian topic. There is little doubt that nominated scholarships can assist in achieving the sponsors' aims. The winners of the Lithuanian Honours Scholarships have certainly accumulated a variety of Lithuanian heritage documentation, over the past decade.

6. **Conferences and Exchanges.** LSS members' participation in interstate and overseas conferences has extended the "Lithuanian message" into the wider English-speaking circles. Positive publicity for Lithuania accrued from staff exchanges, such as Fulbright scholarships and a visit to Japan. Major studies prepared for larger audiences (e.g., *Dissidence in Lithuania*, by A. P. Taškūnas, for APSA 1984 Conference at the University of Melbourne) should not be lost to posterity.

A few Lithuanian migrants and their children have been in the forefront of all these achievements. At the same time, the University of Tasmania has encouraged and assisted them in many respects. The Univer-

sity has provided the premises, office facilities and the administrative backing for the Lithuanian scholarship.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a brief overview of the ongoing accumulation of the Lithuanian expatriates' printed heritage at the University of Tasmania. The full range of these rich

Lithuanian heritage sources is readily available to all: students, staff, researchers and townspeople. However, little interest has been shown so far.

Manuscripts, on the other hand, are non-existent. Books, dissertations and journals have reached the Tasmanian collection points in their finished form; consequently, there has been no call for manuscripts.

## LITUANISTINĖ VEIKLA TASMANIJOS UNIVERSITETE

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Santrauka

Universitetai yra svarbios tautos paveldo saugyklos. Jie kaupia dokumentus ne tik apie savo, bet ir apie daugelį kitų tautų istoriją. Trisdešimt aštuoni Australijos valstybiniai universitetai veikia 150 vietovių, juose mokosi 700 000 studentų. Deja, nė viena iš šių akademinų institucijų neturi Lietuvių kalbos katedros ir nė viena iš jų nedėsto lietuvių kalbos kursų. Dėl to šių universitetų bibliotekos nesaugo reikšmingesnio skaičiaus lietuviškų knygų ar lietuviškos kultūrinės medžiagos.

1987 m. Tasmanijos universitete buvo įkurta Lietuvos studijų draugija, kad užpildytų žinių apie Lietuvą spragą. Per dvidešimt pastarųjų metų draugija išplėtojo veiklą šiomis kryptimis: akademiniai lietuviškų temų tyrimai garbės ba-

kalauro ar magistro laipsniams gauti; lietuvių kalbos kursai; leidyba: knygos anglų ir lietuvių kalbomis ir recenzuojamas mokslo žurnalas anglų kalba; 1000 lietuviškų knygų ir žurnalų kolekcija (daugiausia anglų kalba), kuri vis papildoma; kasmetės stipendijos nagrinėjantiems lietuviškas temas (po 5000 dolerių); konferencijos ir mainai su Lietuvos mokslininkais.

Draugija, padedama universiteto, dirba visomis šiomis kryptimis: stipendijas teikia universiteto Stipendijų komitetas, knygų kolekcija laikoma Valdymo mokyklos stiklinėse spintose. Draugija kreipėsi į Australijos ir viso pasaulio lietuvius, kad šie dovanotų daugiau knygų, rankraščių ir kitos kultūrinės medžiagos.

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