The Lithuanian Encyclopedia Published in Boston as a Unique Cultural Phenomenon

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Abstract

The 37-volume *Lietuvių Enciklopedija* [Lithuanian Encyclopedia], which was published in South Boston, Massachusetts by the Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press from 1953 until 1985, is a unique cultural phenomenon. It is the only known example in the world of a general (universal) encyclopedia published by an ethnic community in their native language, while living in the diaspora. During that time, Lithuania was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union. There was no freedom of expression or freedom of the press there. Lithuania was no longer even a nation on the world map. This monumental intellectual and administrative project was made possible by a large group of refugee intellectuals who fled Lithuania, mostly in the summer of 1944, from fear of Communist persecution and possible deportation to Soviet gulags if the Soviet Union re-occupied and re-annexed Lithuania. In addition to providing universal knowledge about the world, they had to speak out and write the truth about their country, its history, its society, language, and culture because their brethren behind the Iron Curtain could not. One of the goals of the encyclopedia as stated by the editor-in-chief Vaclovas Biržiška in the introduction to the first volume was to be a weapon "to help smash the Iron Curtain" and, once that curtain had fallen and Lithuania had reestablished its independence, it would provide the rejuvenated nation with a source of information about how Lithuanians lived in the diaspora throughout the free world. It accomplished its mission in full. Other encyclopedias published in Lithuania today used the Boston Lithuanian Encyclopedia as their base.

Keywords

history of encyclopedias, Lithuanian Encyclopedias, Lithuanian displaced persons

Introduction

The 37-volume *Lietuvių Enciklopedija* [Lithuanian Encyclopedia], which was published in South Boston, Massachusetts by the Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press from 1953 until 1985, is a unique cultural phenomenon. It is the only known example in the world of a general (universal) encyclopedia published by an ethnic community while living in the diaspora, and in their native language. During that time, Lithuania was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union. There was no freedom of expression or freedom of the press there. Lithuania was no longer even a nation on the world map.

The first volume devoted to the letter 'A' was published in 1953 and the last volume, volume 35, devoted to the letter 'Z', was published in 1966. The special 15th volume devoted exclusively to Lithuania was published separately in 1969. There were two supplemental volumes: volume 36 published in 1969 and volume 37 published in 1985. The encyclopedia in Lithuanian spawned a 6-volume English version named *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, which was published by the same

publisher from 1970 until 1978. Both versions are well-illustrated. The number of pages in each of the volumes in Lithuanian is approximately 500 and in the English version approximately 550–600 pages. The total number of pages in the Lithuanian Encyclopedia was 19,796; and in the *Encyclopedia Lituanica* it was 3,446. Based on the number of subscriptions, it is estimated that about 5,500 copies of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia were published. Twenty copies of the encyclopedia were sent officially through Moscow to various Lithuanian institutions and organizations in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. They were held in very restricted, special fonds.

The Lithuanian Encyclopedia had five principal editors, 42 section editors, and seven hundred contributing authors, mostly in the United States and Canada, but also in Europe, Australia, and South America. The principal editors received a small salary. All the section editors and contributing authors worked for free. Almost all the people who worked on the encyclopedia were displaced persons or refugees from Soviet-occupied Lithuania who were well-educated and well-versed in their fields of specialization. Most of them had received their degrees and worked as professionals in interwar Lithuania. Some finished their degrees in post-war Germany and others in the United States. Most who specialized in the humanities, such as historians, lawyers and writers, could not find jobs according to their profession and had to do menial work in factories and other establishments. A good example is the renowned poet Bernardas Brazdžionis, who edited the world literature section of the encyclopedia, and worked as a typesetter at the Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press. He, like many others, had to write and edit their articles for the encyclopedia in the evenings and on weekends.

In comparison, the last printed edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition, 2010) was 32 volumes and 32,640 pages. It was prepared by about 100 paid full-time editors and more than 4,000 paid contributing authors from more than 100 countries. (Levy et al., 2024)

The publication of the two Lithuanian Encyclopedias in Boston was a great intellectual and administrative undertaking during very difficult times. There were no computers or the internet. Practically all the communication between editors and authors from around the world was by mail. Authors were constantly being reminded to meet publication deadlines. Articles were typewritten, corrected, and then re-typed for typesetting. Despite working in this laborious manner over 13 years, 20,000 pages of text were produced. There are many original articles about Lithuanian history and linguistics in this encyclopedia that are still being used as primary sources today.

How could such a huge intellectual and administrative project be accomplished? The answer lies in the aftermath of World War II.

Historical context

After World War II there were nearly 9 million displaced non-German persons in Germany, about 2 million were prisoners of war. About 200,000 were from the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Most eventually returned to their countries, but about 1 million remained

as "displaced persons". (Bartusevičius, 2012; "Displaced persons camps in post–World War II Europe", 2024)

Germany after the war was divided into four occupation zones: American, British, French, and Soviet. According to the 1946 statistics of the International Relief Organization (IRO), there were 30,543 Lithuanians in the American zone; 24,555 in the British zone; and 2,397 in the French zone: a total of 57,495 Lithuanians (Alseika, 1955). But IRO only accounted for those who lived in displaced persons' camps which were under its care. This statistic did not include Lithuanians who found shelter in private homes in German cities and towns and on farms, nor of the Lithuanian prisoners of war. The best estimate of the number of Lithuanians in Germany during that time is about 70,000. (Bartusevičius, 2012)

Most Lithuanians fled to Germany and other countries of Western Europe and South America during the summer of 1944 fearing the approaching Red Army, the re-occupation of Lithuania, and the terror and mass deportations that it would bring. Lithuania was first occupied and annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940. From June 14–19, 1941 approximately 18,000 Lithuanian residents were forcibly deported to Siberia. Lithuanians remembered well this tragic event and the sufferings that they had had to endure under the first Soviet occupation: key government positions were entrusted to communists; the Communist Party of Lithuania was legalized and other political parties dissolved; the parliament was dissolved and all non-communist organizations, newspapers, and magazines were closed; Moscow began implementing the USSR's management model in government offices, the police system and the courts; all Lithuanian land was nationalized; banks and large industrial enterprises were also nationalized. (Eidintas et al., 2016)

Lithuanians, especially government officials and political activists, business people and landowners, lawyers, and educators as well as the clergy knew what to expect if the Soviets re-occupied Lithuania. They chose to flee to the West thinking that it would only be for a short time until the Western armies would liberate their country. Statistics from the Displaced Person's (DP) camps show that distribution by profession of the refugees was the following: 277 clergy (25% of all Lithuanian clergy); 400 higher education teaching personnel (about two-thirds of the country's teaching personnel); 90 writers (70% of the members of the Lithuanian Writers Association); 400 engineers; 350 lawyers; 700 high school teachers; 100 special school teachers; 300 elementary school teachers; and 100 kindergarten teachers. That represented a significant part of Lithuania's pre-war intelligentsia. (Bartusevičius, 2012)

To maintain their cultural identity, Lithuanian refugees in the DP camps tried to recreate anew their own Lithuania. Political parties and organizations were re-established. Professional and public organizations were formed. Cultural life was particularly active: before 1950, as many as 775 books, of which 216 were fiction, were published; nearly every DP camp had their own news bulletins, newspapers, and magazines. Textbooks were printed in especially large numbers because during the peak years (1947–1948) there were 77 kindergartens, 88 primary schools, 15

progymnasiums, 25 gymnasiums and six vocational schools. (Mikuličienė, 2023)

The greatest achievements in education were the founding, together with the professors of Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRAA) University (1945–1948) in Munich, and the founding with Estonian and Latvian professors, of the Baltic University, which operated in Hamburg in 1946, and in Pinneberg in 1947–1949. Both universities had eight faculties. The UNRAA University had 179 teachers and enrolled 3,000 students, 602 of whom were Lithuanian. The Baltic University had about 170 teachers and 1,200 students. Artistic life was also very vibrant: theater plays, operas, and ballets were staged; song and dance ensembles as well as choirs were formed; exhibitions of painters, photographers, and folk artists were arranged. (Bartusevičius, 2012)

The transfer of refugees from DP camps in Germany to other countries, namely, Great Britain, Belgium, Australia, Canada, Columbia, Venezuela, and the United States, among others, began at the end of 1946. The transfer to the United States was greatly aided by the passage in 1948 of the Displaced Persons Act which, for a limited time, authorized the admission into the United States of 200,000 European displaced persons (DPs) for permanent residence. The number of Lithuanian DPs who entered the United States is estimated at 30,000–40,000 (Alseika, 1955; Bartusevičius, 2012). Almost all the refugee organizations that had been established in the DP camps in Germany were re-established in the United States. They provided the "brain trust" for the successful completion of such an ambitious project as the publication of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia.

The project

The Lithuanian Encyclopedia project was the brainchild of Juozas Kapočius (1907–1996) who came up with the idea to publish a Lithuanian encyclopedia in the diaspora in June of 1952. He had a very distinguished career as a printer and publisher. In 1927, he emigrated to South America and in 1930 graduated from a printing school in Montevideo, Uruguay. After he returned to Lithuania in 1933, he worked as a technical director and manager in printing plants in Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Kaunas. In 1937, he founded his own photo-engraving plant in Kaunas, and eventually expanded it into a combined modern engraving and printing plant. For the first time in Lithuania, he applied monotype and used zinc for relief printing. At the end of 1939 he moved his plant to Vilnius. The Soviet invasion in June, 1940 put an end to this work because all printing firms were immediately nationalized by the Soviets. (Kulbokas, 1973)

Kapočius fled to Germany in the great emigration wave of 1944 (sometimes called the Great Escape) and came to the United States in 1949. While working as the technical manager of the printing plant of the Lithuanian Franciscans in Brooklyn, New York, he came across the universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia (*Lietuviškoji Enciklopedija*) which had begun being published in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1933. Nine full volumes and parts of the tenth had been completed when the outbreak of World War II put an end to that project. Kapočius's dream was to complete that

project in the diaspora. An announcement that the Lithuanian Encyclopedia project was being revived and a call for collaborators appeared in the newspaper *Darbininkas* [Worker] on 27 June 1952.

In February 1953, Kapočius acquired a printing press with a starting capital of $15,000. This was supposed to pay for the machinery and materials as well as the salaries of the editors and workers. As he later remarked: "I mortgaged my whole family to the bank." (Santvaras, 1963) Both the press and the editorial offices were located on 366 West Broadway in South Boston. Eight months later, the first volume of the encyclopedia appeared. The first 22 volumes cost $7.75 per volume. The price went up to $8.75 per volume for the remaining volumes. The encyclopedia was financed primarily by subscriptions. Revenues after 33 volumes were $1,144,893.46, expenses were $1,141,893.46 and the deficit was $35,739.79. (Aistis, 1966) Almost every displaced person's family had the encyclopedia in their home.

The encyclopedia project was a labor of love and a gift to Lithuania, but it was also described as a weapon. In the introduction to the first volume entitled "A Word to Lithuania and Lithuanians", the editor-in-chief Prof. Vaclovas Biržiška stated that the goal of the encyclopedia was to be a weapon "… which will help us smash the Iron Curtain, which is now separating Lithuania from the cultured world, and once that curtain has fallen and Lithuania has re-established its independence, it will provide the rejuvenated nation with a source of information about how the scattered sons and daughters [of Lithuania] throughout the free world, and other free nations, lived while Lithuania was in chains and drowned in blood". (Biržiška, 1953)

The first volume was published in early November of 1953: seven months after Stalin's death and three months after the end of the Korean War. That same month, it was reviewed in the *Boston Post Magazine* by James J. Canavan. I would like to quote extensively from that review because it captures well the essence of that large undertaking from a non-Lithuanian perspective:

> Some of Lithuania's best brains are now assembled in South Boston. These new immigrants are engaged in the great task of recording the circle of arts and sciences in their native land and the world over. They have just finished the first volume… To these new immigrants, who've sought refuge here in America, it is their gift to their people still behind the Iron Curtain. While these renowned Lithuanian scholars have been striving to accomplish their difficult job of compiling the world's accumulated knowledge they have been stimulated by the thought that the work would eventually be an inspiration and a help to their own people now shackled by the communistic barbarians who have wrecked their beloved homeland. These gentlemen, gifted with culture, have been devoting every waking moment to this labor of love. The message that the entire staff wants to get across is that truth still does exist; that in the free world people ARE allowed to say and write what they wish… A humble group of dedicated scholars, these men are showing that in a free world truth still has a meaning. To generations yet unborn their message of hope and courage will keep the hope and spirit of Lithuania still strong. (Canavan, 1953)

The editors

The five principal editors were chosen for their experience and areas of expertise. The first and only editor-in-chief was the bibliographer Vaclovas Biržiška. He had been the editor of the 10-volume unfinished Lithuanian encyclopedia published in interwar Kaunas. From 1946–49 he was a professor at the Baltic University in Germany. In the United States during 1951–53 he was a consultant to the Library of Congress in Washington DC. (Sužiedėlis, 1970) He was joined on the editorial team by the geographer Antanas Bendorius, who wrote over 7,300 articles for the encyclopedia; the historian Pranas Čepėnas, who also taught at the Baltic University; and, the philosopher Juozas Girnius. A year later, the foremost archaeologist of interwar Lithuania Jonas Puzinas joined the team. Juozas Girnius edited the encyclopedia the longest – 16 years. The editor of the 15th volume devoted entirely to Lithuania was the historian of literature Vincas Maciūnas. Starting with volume 6 in 1955, Maciūnas is listed as one of the principal editors as well.

The expertise of the principal editors was slanted toward the humanities and the social sciences, but there were 42 section editors originally (others were added later as needed) whose expertise also covered the natural sciences, medicine, and technology. For example, the section on hydrology and hydrography was edited by Steponas Kolupaila, who had already distinguished himself in Lithuania when in 1928 he created a new method for winter runoff calculations, which became internationally known as the "Lithuanian method". After fleeing the Soviet invasion in 1944, he settled temporarily in the Bavarian town of Kempten where he worked for a German company manufacturing hydrometric instruments and helped to invent a meter component. He came to the United States in 1948 and began teaching at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. He taught advanced hydraulics and hydrology, subjects never taught before at Notre Dame. He contributed over 200 articles for the Lithuanian Encyclopedia (Gimbutas, 1973).

The editor of the chemical technology section was Adolfas Damušis, who in 1942 was elected dean of the Faculty of Technology at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and who had made his name through his research on silicates and organization of the cement industry in Lithuania. After arriving in the United States from Germany in 1947, he took up work in the field of paint and coating materials, and polymer research. He published articles in scientific journals and chapters in books which he helped edit, and held over 20 patents registered in his name in the United States, Canada, England, and France (Damušis, 1972).

Nevertheless, the strongest sections were those devoted to Lithuanian, East European and Russian history, geography, linguistics, folklore, literature, music, art, ethnography, and archaeology. The editor of the sections on Russian and Polish history was Konstantinas Avižonis, who began teaching Russian history at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and continued at the Baltic University in Germany. After emigrating to the United States in 1949, he taught European and Russian history at Elon College in North Carolina. (Sužiedėlis, 1970)

The editor of the section on Lithuanian history up to 1600 was Zenonas Ivinskis, who began his teaching career at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and was chair of the history department. He was one of the most distinguished Lithuanian historians of interwar Lithuania. He was exceptionally well acquainted with the historical literature of Lithuania and its neighbors, with the printed collections of sources, and with unpublished documents, especially in the archives of Germany and Italy. He wrote many extensive studies in the field of Lithuanian history from the 13th to the 16th centuries. He fled to Germany in 1944 but never emigrated to the United States. He stayed and worked in Germany and Italy. Besides his many contributions to the Lithuanian Encyclopedia, many of which are still being read as primary sources, he also contributed to the Italian *Enciclopedia Catholica* (1951) and the German *Herder Lexikon* (1956) (Sužiedėlis, 1972).

Although not a section editor, Adolfas Šapoka was an important contributor of historical articles first to the Lithuanian Encyclopedia published in interwar Kaunas and then to the encyclopedia published in South Boston. He, together with Avižonis and Ivinskis, were the leading historians of interwar Lithuania. One of his most important works was the editing of the first scholarly, synthetic textbook *Lietuvos istorija* [History of Lithuania] in 1936. This textbook was probably the book most often smuggled into Soviet-occupied Lithuania because only a Sovietized version of Lithuanian history was taught in Soviet Lithuania. He taught history at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, fled to Germany in 1944, taught at the Lithuanian refugee high school in Augsburg, and in 1948 emigrated to Canada (Sužiedėlis, 1976).

The Lithuanian language section editors were the linguists Antanas Salys and Pranas Skardžius. Salys began his teaching career in 1930 at the Vytautas Magnus University, fled to Germany in 1944 and taught at the Greifswald and Tübingen universities (1944–46). In 1947 he became a professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where he taught Russian and Polish, Old Church Slavonic, comparative grammar of Slavic languages, and early Lithuanian literature. He contributed many articles to the Lithuanian Encyclopedia, including those on ancient Baltic tribes (Jonikas, 1976a).

Pranas Skardžius taught Lithuanian and Baltic linguistics at the Vytautas Magnus University from 1940–44. He withdrew to Germany in the summer of 1944 and became a guest lecturer at the Baltic section of the University of Tübingen. In 1949   he emigrated to the United States but was unable to find a position in his field. At first, he worked in a factory, then joined the Library of Congress in Washington, DC after obtaining a master's degree in library science. His specialty was the development and normalization of Standard Lithuanian (Jonikas, 1976b).

Another major contributor on Baltic, Slavic and German linguistics was Antanas Klimas. He studied at the Vytautas Magnus University and the Baltic University and completed his studies at the University of Pennsylvania with a Ph.D. in Germanic linguistics. He first taught at the University of Pennsylvania (1950–57) and then at the University of Rochester in Rochester, NY. One of his major publications (with Leonardas Dambriūnas and William R. Schmalsteig) was a

textbook on the Lithuanian language *Introduction to Modern Lithuanian* (1966). He contributed many articles to both the Lithuanian Encyclopedia and the *Encyclopedia Lituanica* (Klimas, 1973).

The folklore section editor and major contributor was the ethnologist and folklorist Jonas Balys. He received his doctorate in Vienna, taught as an assistant instructor of folklore at the Vytautas Magnus University, and then in 1935 became the director of the newly founded Lithuanian Folklore Archive. He withdrew to Germany in the summer of 1944, worked at the Archive of German Folk Songs (*Deutsches Volksliederarchiv*) in Freiburg im Breisgau (1944–45) and taught at the Baltic University (1946–47). He emigrated to the United States in 1948 and from 1956–1981 he was head of the Baltic section of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC (Balys, 1970).

The editor of the world literature section was the poet and literary critic Bernardas Brazdžionis. From 1940–44 he was director of the Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature in Kaunas, and from 1944–49 lived in Ravensburg, Germany, where he participated actively in the cultural life of the Lithuanian refugees. In 1949 he emigrated to the United States and worked as a linotypist at the Lithuanian Encyclopedia Press in Boston (Aistis, 1970).

One of the most prominent and best-known contributing authors to both the Lithuanian Encyclopedia and the *Encyclopedia Lituanica* was the archaeologist and anthropologist Marija Gimbutas whose Kurgan hypothesis located the proto-Indo-European homeland in the Pontic Steppe. (Gimbutas, 1963) She also proposed the Goddess hypothesis that the European prehistoric culture was female-centered and worshipped a Mother Goddess. (Gimbutas, 1991) She began her studies at Vytautas Magnus University and Vilnius University under the tutelage of Jonas Puzinas, who later became one of the principal editors of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia. She received a doctorate in archaeology from the University of Tübingen in 1946, and came to the United States in 1949 with her husband Jurgis Gimbutas, who was a civil engineer and the building section editor for the Lithuanian encyclopedia. Marija Gimbutas spent her teaching career at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as professor of European Archaeology and Indo-European Studies. She is the author of many scholarly books and articles including those for the Lithuanian encyclopedias.

The expertise level of those working on the encyclopedias was high but working under abnormal conditions the over-all quality level of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia was uneven. For higher quality articles in some fields (outside of Lithuanian studies) there were no experts. There was a lack of sources for some articles, especially since there was no normal communication with Soviet-occupied Lithuania. Nevertheless, the editorial team was able in 13 years to publish all but one of the 35 volumes of the encyclopedia.

The 15th volume (807 p.) was devoted totally to Lithuania. It was edited by the historian of literature Vincas Maciūnas, and took longer to compile. It was published in 1968 (two years

after volume 35 and one year before the first supplement in 1969). Its structure was different. It was divided into four major subject areas or topics: geography, society, history, and culture. There were many sub-sections under each topic, each written by a well-known scholar. For example, the section on Lithuanian pre-history was written by the archaeologist, anthropologist, and UCLA professor Marija Gimbutas. This volume especially was popular and was secretly smuggled into Lithuania.

The results

When Lithuanian scholars came to the United States after World War II they were appalled by the lack of information and the amount of misinformation about Lithuania in various reference works in the West, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and history books. They wanted to do something about it, and writing for the Lithuanian Encyclopedia was one way of providing valuable information and correcting mistakes. The English language *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, which was an offshoot of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia, focused strictly on Lithuanian history and culture, and did just that for the English-speaking world. The historian Simas Sužiedelis was the editor and there were 200 contributing authors. Translations were done by the children of DPs who completed their higher education in the United States and knew the English language well.

The *Encyclopedia Lituanica* provides essential information about Lithuania and Lithuanians from the earliest times until the end of the 20th century – land, nation and state, major historical events, social and economic structure, religion, language, culture, customs as well as many biographical articles of important individuals. Since this encyclopedia was published while Lithuania was occupied by the Soviets, particular emphasis was placed on describing the interwar (1918–1940), independent Lithuania, which was no longer on any world map, to counter Soviet propaganda and misinformation about that period. Much attention was also given to life of the Lithuanian community in the diaspora (Klimas, 1979).

As a "cultural sword" to pierce the Iron Curtain, it provided important information to a limited number of scholars in Soviet-occupied Lithuania who gained access to the special collections (specfonds) where the encyclopedia was kept. Smuggled copies of the 15th volume devoted totally to Lithuania were read secretly in the underground. The Lithuanian Encyclopedia also provoked a Soviet response. It is generally assumed that the three-volume *Mažoji lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija* (Concise Soviet Lithuanian Encyclopedia) was published between 1966 and 1971 as a counter-measure against the Lithuanian Encyclopedia.

As a gift to the restored Republic of Lithuania (1990), the Lithuanian Encyclopedia formed the basis for the 25-volume *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija* (Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia), which was published in Vilnius from 2001 until 2015.

Recognition

In 1992 UNESCO initiated an international programme for the preservation of documentary heritage with the symbolic title *Memory of the World*. The programme seeks to facilitate the preservation of documentary heritage, to assist universal access to that documentary heritage and to increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of that documentary heritage. An *International Memory of the World Register* was established in 1995 to assist in that purpose.

Lithuania became part of the *Memory of the World* programme in 1996 by establishing its own National Memory of the World Committee. The *Lithuanian National Memory of the World Register* was created in 2003 to note the most important documents for Lithuanian and regional history and culture, and as a necessary step for inclusion in the international register. The first documents and their collections were entered in 2006. (Mašanauskienė, 2023) To date, Lithuania and partner countries have inscribed three entries in the international register and there are 88 entries in the national register. The criteria for evaluating documents for the national register are the same six as for the international register with the addition of one more: importance for the study of the Lithuanian language, literature, and culture.

In 2023 the archive (21 boxes) of the Universal *Lithuanian Encyclopedia* published in Boston, housed in the American Lithuanian Cultural Archives (ALKA) in Putnam, Connecticut, was inscribed in the Lithuanian national register as entry number 83. The major criteria for inclusion were its authenticity; its significance for Lithuanian and world culture; the insight it provides into the history, culture and knowledge of a specific time and a group of people; and its importance for Lithuanian studies.

Conclusion

The journalist James J. Canavan called the publication of the universal *Lithuanian Encyclopedia* in Boston "an historic literary event," and it was. The publication of the two Lithuanian encyclopedias was a monumental intellectual and administrative undertaking during very difficult times and under difficult conditions. No other ethnic community in the diaspora has been able to match that achievement. It was made possible by a large group of intellectuals, refugees who were displaced from their homes by a hostile foreign power, the Soviet Union, that occupied and annexed their country and made a safe return to their homes impossible. They were scattered throughout the globe but maintained a strong world community. The greatest concentration of Lithuanian refugees (Displaced Persons), who were a majority of Lithuania's interwar intelligentsia, was in the United States. Their major goals were to maintain their national and cultural identities and to do everything in their power to see that Lithuania reestablished its independence. These goals were shared by all the displaced persons.

Living in a free and democratic country they realized that the free press and the truth were very powerful weapons in the quest for freedom. They had to speak out and write the truth

about their country, its history, its society, language, and culture because their brethren behind the Iron Curtain could not. Lithuania was being Russified by the Soviet communists, its history as a once great medieval state and empire, as well as its very successful rejuvenation as an independent state after World War I, was being erased.

Prof. Steponas Kolupaila reviewing the first volume of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia for the *Draugas* newspaper wrote: "Maybe the historian of the future, writing about the tragedy of our nation in the 20th century, will appreciate the publication of the huge Lithuanian Encyclopedia as a sign of our high moral level and unbreakable resilience. An old and cultured nation, though small, but able to carry out such works, will not drown in a foreign sea, it will preserve its sign of hope…". (Kolupaila, 1953).

One of the goals of the encyclopedia as stated by Vaclovas Biržiška in the introduction was to be a weapon "to help smash the Iron Curtain" and, once that curtain had fallen and Lithuania had reestablished its independence, it would provide the rejuvenated nation with a source of information about how Lithuanians lived in the diaspora throughout the free world. It accomplished its mission in full. Truth won out. The hope and spirit of Lithuania was kept strong. Lithuania is once again free and playing an important role on the world stage.

Author

Ramūnas Kondratas is a retired museum worker and historian of science specializing in the history of medicine. He received his Ph.D. in the history of science from Harvard University (1977). For 32 years he worked as curator of the medical collections and in many administrative positions at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, and for 10 years as founding director of the Vilnius University Museum. Currently, he is President of the Lithuanian Association of the History and Philosophy of Science and of the Lithuanian Society for the History of Pharmacy as well as board member of UNESCO Lithuania's *Memory of the World Programme*. He has curated many exhibitions, prepared videohistories documenting Science in American Life, and published widely in the field of the history of the biomedical sciences.

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