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The Lithuanian Research and Studies Center: Establishment of the Lithuanian Diaspora Research Institution in Chicago and its Activities from 1982 to 2022

Abstract

With origins that date back to the 1970s, the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center is the only Lithuanian diaspora research institution in the world. Its emergence was determined by the Lithuanian heritage accumulated in the Lithuanian diaspora and the need to disseminate it, as well as the developing scientific potential of Lithuanians abroad and the consequences of the Soviet occupation. Representatives of the Lithuanian American scientific and cultural elite founded this institution at the Youth Center in Chicago in early 1982, uniting 12 departments under the umbrella principle. The goal was to collect Lithuanian material, make it available to researchers, bring the latter together for scientific work, and promote research both within the Lithuanian diaspora and among non-Lithuanians. Up until 1990, the Center took shape by pooling the Lithuanian base and strengthening Lithuanian research. After 1990, in the second stage of the LRSC's activities, extensive and resilient relations were established with Lithuanian research institutions and scholars; Lithuanian libraries were supplied with Western

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literature and diaspora publications; books by Lithuanian and foreign scholars were prepared and published; articles and documents were scanned and microfilmed; and exhibitions were put together. The Center also became known to foreign scholars interested in Lithuanian studies.

Keywords

Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, Lithuanian studies, USA, Chicago, Lemont, Lithuanians abroad, Lithuanian diaspora, Youth Center, World Lithuanian Archive, Jonas Račkauskas, Robertas Vitas.

Introduction

There are few nations in the world that do not have a diasporic community. The Lithuanian nation is no exception. Its diasporic population has a history of more than 150 years. It is believed that together with their descendants (up to the 5th/6th generation), there may be four to five million Lithuanian emigrants worldwide. The largest number of Lithuanians abroad are concentrated in the United States, where there were nearly one million people of Lithuanian descent in 2017 (Skirius, 2018a). Chicago, which is the largest city in the state of Illinois, has long been called the Lithuanian capital of the United States. According to the U.S. Census, there were 112,410 Lithuanians and Americans of Lithuanian descent living in this state in 1980 (Adomėnas, 2023).

People appeared within the Lithuanian diaspora who realized that it was necessary to collect the legacy of the emigrants' activities – their cultural values, without which it would be impossible to remember the social, cultural and economic activities of Lithuanians abroad and write the history of Lithuanian emigration. In addition to private collectors, special institutions, such as the World Lithuanian Archive (WLA) in Chicago, the Lithuanian American Cultural Archives (ALKA) in Putnam, and the Museum of Lithuanian Culture founded

in Chicago by Stanley Balzekas, Jr.,¹ were founded and have long been collecting the cultural values of the Lithuanian diaspora. Among the emigrants and their descendants, there were enthusiasts who have published books, a Lithuanian encyclopedia, and jubilee publications, but complex studies of the heritage of the Lithuanian diaspora did not appear until the 1980s.

It took a long time for Lithuanian diaspora organizations to set the task of conducting research on Lithuanian material or at least discussing cultural values as a contribution of Lithuanian emigrants to the common culture of the Lithuanian nation and making them available to the public. However, the diaspora's representatives of culture and science discussed the matter of a potential research institution in the Lithuanian American press. The turning point was in the late 1970s/early 1980s, when the Lithuanian intellectuals in Chicago announced that the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center (LRSC; also referred to here as "the Center") was being founded. This may have been influenced by similar research institutes that had already been set up by Polish, Ukrainian, Czech and other diasporas in foreign countries (the United States, Canada, etc.).

This important event for the Lithuanian nation – the attempt to conduct comprehensive research in the diaspora – has not received broader attention from scholars to this day. The exceptions may be the one and only scientific article about the establishment of the LRSC and its first stage of activities (Skirius, 2018b), as well as the article written by the head of the LRSC, Robertas Vitas, Ph.D.,² which briefly summarizes the activities of the LRSC and sets apart three stages of the organization's activities (Vitas, 2022). In general, information about the LRSC and its activities is mainly found in the articles and reports published by the Center's employees in Lithuanian diaspora periodicals, as well as in one-off publications and leaflets published by the Center. There are a few pieces of information in encyclopedias.

1 "The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture's mission is to preserve, perpetuate, showcase, and celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of the Lithuanian nation and people worldwide." Museum link: <https://balzekasmuseum.org/>

2 Robertas Vitas is the author of *Lithuanian Immigration History* (1982) and *The United States and Lithuania: The Stimson Doctrine of Nonrecognition* (1990).

The material is, one might say, relatively “scattered”, so it needs to be collected, summarized, and supplemented by yet unpublished documents. The LRSC also safeguards the World Lithuanian Archive, where there is a special LRSC Fund consisting of several boxes. These boxes contain material which has not yet been documented (documents, correspondence, photographs, press clippings, etc.), and which reflects the history of the LRSC. In addition, the Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago Fund (box No. 2A) contains File No. 21, where the documents collected show the establishment of the LRSC and the initial activities of the Center relatively well. These documents were collected by Lithuanian Honorary Consul General Josephine J. Dauzvardis (1904–1990),³ because she was also a member of the LRSC Board and participated in its meetings. It should be noted that the Center is not widely known in Lithuanian society, apart from researchers of the Lithuanian diaspora, library and archive employees, and some scholars at Lithuanian universities; it is also known among foreign scholars interested in Lithuanian history and culture. Information about the LRSC’s funds is useful for them.

The objective of the article is to reveal the importance of the LRSC’s activities to Lithuanian culture, highlighting the specificity of its stages. To achieve this objective, we shall draw attention to the necessity of such a center and the tasks set for it; discuss the conditions of its foundation and the motivation of the employees of this establishment; highlight the directions of activity and relations with Lithuanian research institutions as well as Lithuanian and foreign scholars; and consider the matter of the LRSC’s perspectives.

The Idea of the LRSC and its Materialization

In instilling young people in a foreign land with a sense of Lithuanian identity, the Lithuanian American clergy – the Jesuit Fathers – played a significant role. In 1957–1966, they used the donations of Lithuanian emigrants to build a large Youth Center (YC) complex near Marquette

3 1917–1928 – editor of the *Amerikos lietuvis* weekly; organizer of the first Lithuanian song festival in the United States; compiler of the book *Popular Lithuanian Recipes*. Since the USA did not recognize the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, diplomatic missions could continue to operate there.

Park in Chicago so that they could develop and better coordinate their activities. This well-equipped yc has housed many different public organizations. It was noted that at that time, 42 Lithuanian societies were using the premises of the yc, and “some 100,000 Lithuanians pass through the Youth Center every year” (*Čikagos jaunimo centras* 1957–1967, 1968). Later, most of the organizations that operated in the yc were merged into a common coordination structure – a large scientific and cultural unit – the LRSC, which was based in the yc, where the main Lithuanian events for Chicago and its surroundings took place, and Lithuanians and their American friends visited in large numbers.

The idea of establishing the LRSC came up in Chicago in November 1981, during the 4th Science and Culture Symposium held every four years by Lithuanians abroad. The main theme of the symposium was the contribution of Lithuanian emigrants to science. The speakers mentioned concerns regarding the cultural life of the Lithuanian diaspora. Chairman of the Lithuanian World Community (LWC)⁴ Vytautas Kamantas (1930–2012) spoke about a Lithuanian scientist in his community and reminded the participants about the aspirations of the Lithuanian diaspora: to preserve and develop Lithuanian identity, and to seek the restoration of Lithuania’s independence (*Draugas*, 1981, p. 6). This event clearly demonstrated the scientific potential of Lithuanian emigrants, which could be used for the affairs of the nation.

The necessity of the LRSC was further provoked by the information received that various old and even rare Lithuanian (and not only Lithuanian) publications were being eliminated from American universities and public libraries because they were either microfilmed or no longer being preserved due to a lack of funds. This unpleasant news stirred the cultural elite within the Lithuanian diaspora. Jonas Račkauskas (1942–2018), who was the rector of the Lithuanian Institute of Education (LIE) at the yc,

4 After World War II, the Lithuanians who had left Lithuania began to create a national organization in Germany – the Lithuanian World Community, which was meant to unite Lithuanians worldwide and preserve the language and traditions in emigration. The LWC has been in operation since 1949 and currently has 47 communities in different countries around the world.

a doctor of philosophy (pedagogy), and a professor at Chicago State University, formulated a principle that was constantly hammered into the heads of Lithuanians abroad: "If our cultural values are to be preserved, they will only be preserved by Lithuanians" (*Draugas*, 1985, p. 1). What he was implying was that apart from the Lithuanians themselves, no one else was going to ensure the preservation of Lithuanian cultural relics in emigration.

On January 6, 1982, *Draugas* (the Lithuanian American newspaper founded back in 1909) published an article about the need to preserve and expand Lithuanian culture, as it is necessary for the nation's freedom struggle, especially in the diaspora (Miškinis, 1982). This was probably the pretext for the intellectuals within the Lithuanian diaspora to take action. On January 9th, a group of initiators (Jonas Račkauskas, Dr. Vytenis B. Damušis, legal historian Jonas Dainauskas, WLA director Česlovas Grincevičius, Fr. Vaclovas Gutauskas, collector Bronius Kviklys and St. Joseph Calumet College professor Tomas Remeikis) gathered for the first meeting at the YC in Chicago to discuss the main organizational issues and outline guidelines for the status of the LRSC. It was announced in the press that a new institution had been founded – the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, which was legally registered in Springfield, the capital of the state of Illinois, as a public, non-profit organization. The objective of the new institution was also announced:

To collect various Lithuanian materials – books, magazines, newspapers, studies, documents, photographs from the life and activities of Lithuanians – and other items of Lithuanian studies that have historical significance; also, to take the gatherers of the said items – collectors – under its wing, make sure that valuable Lithuanian material does not perish, prepare it for scientific studies and create the necessary conditions for those who want to use it, and conduct various scientific research work ("Lituanistinis tyrimo ir studijų centras", *Draugas*, p. 6).

The LRSC was officially established on January 11, 1982, and a temporary board was formed, with Jonas Račkauskas appointed as chairman. At the board meeting on October 9th, it was decided to invite representatives of influential organizations (the Lithuanian World

Community, the Lithuanian American Community, the Lithuanian diplomatic services, the Lithuanian Institute of Education, the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science, the Jesuit Fathers) to be members of the board. The LRSC management structure was prepared and the Center's statutes were approved⁵. The operational goals were officially set for the Center:

1. Bring together all of the existing scientific organizations or institutions (the Lithuanian Institute of Education, the World Lithuanian Archive, the Žilevičius Musicology Archive, the Freedom Museum, the Center for Economic Studies, Association of Lithuanian Historians, the Association of Professors, etc.) into one central unit;
2. Preserve, organize and protect cultural values;
3. Involve young people in Lithuanian work;
4. Establish the main units: a) Country Studies and Research, b) Society Studies and Research, c) History Studies and Research, d) Cultural Studies and Research;
5. Hire at least one scholar for each unit⁶.

Hence, the plan was not only to collect information, but also to prepare scientific studies based on it and disseminate the research outcomes in society. Given, the Center still had a few urgent tasks ahead – it had to finish preparing the legal framework for the LRSC, find suitable premises for the new organization, start collecting Lithuanian materials, and find the funds needed to finance all of the work planned. It must be noted that money was the LRSC Board's main concern. Unfortunately, the lack thereof prevented the rapid implementation of their plans (Skirius, 2018b).

The issue to be addressed was that of the LRSC premises. Fr. Vaclovas Gutauskas (1913–2003), the chaplain of the Sisters of Jesus Crucified Convent in Elmhurst, Pennsylvania, negotiated with the Jesuit priests for the first six rooms at the Youth Center. By the end of 1983, the Center already had 13 rooms that housed the library, archive, and periodical collections; the LIE, WLA and Žilevičius Musicology archives were added, among others. The Center already had over

5 Chairman of the LRSC Board Dr. J. Račkauskas's 22 October 1982 letter to Consul J. Dauzvardis. LRSC/WLA, f. Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago, b. 2A, f. 21 (Lithuanian Research Center), l.n.

6 LTS centras – organisation and objectives. Ibid.

100 historical maps and a large number of museum exhibits. The activities of the Center were supported by the Jesuit Fathers (who paid the rent); the Lithuanian Foundation also contributed and donations were collected.

One of the Center's employees, lawyer Augustinas Idzelis, Ph.D. (1942–2018), commented on the informational role of the new institution as well:

We also have to spread information about Lithuania to the free world... The facts that reflect the reality of occupied Lithuania become an important weapon not only in the work of liberating Lithuania, but also in the common ideological struggle between the West and the Soviet Union... Given the Soviets' efforts to hide and distort the reality of occupied Lithuania, scientific analysis becomes an important tool to reveal the true situation of Lithuania (Idzelis, 1983, p. 3).

In his opinion, disseminating research outcomes meant publishing scientific monographs in English, participating in scientific conferences, and printing journalistic articles in U.S. publications. And all of this was done, even though there were not many Lithuanian scholars.

After becoming acquainted with the newly launched LRSC, Josephine J. Dauzvardis, the Honorary Consul General in Chicago, wrote that the Center "left me with a good, serious impression. It is being headed by U.S.-educated professors/doctors who are familiar with the management and establishment of American science, research and technology institutions. They are committed to applying the latest methodology to the Research Center".

The First Stage of the LRSC's Activities (pre-1990)

During this period, the main focus was on developing and strengthening the LRSC. On October 12, 1984, LRSC Chairman Jonas

7 Transcript of J. Dauzvardis's 8 November 1983 pro memoria to the Lithuanian diplomatic service. LRSC/WLA, f. Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago, b. 2A, f. 21 (Lithuanian Research Center), l.n.

Račkauskas signed an agreement with musicologist and organist Juozas Kreivėnas (1912–1987), by which the latter donated his collection of musicology, which was named the Library of Lithuanian Music. In 1986, this collection was joined with the archive of the composer Juozas Žilevičius, and the Žilevičius-Kreivėnas Musicology Archive was born – the largest archive of Lithuanian musicology in the free world⁸. In 1988, the LC opened the Museum of Medicine as part of the Center – this is the only Lithuanian museum of its kind abroad and houses a large collection of rare medical books, documents, photographs, medical instruments, and samples of old medicines. The museum was patronized and supported by Dr. Milda Budrys (1916–2008), who was a clinical professor at the University of Illinois in Allergy and Immunology. The Lithuanian Museum opened at the Center on April 23, 1989. The exhibition, which is comprised of 26 stands, displays material that reflects Lithuania's past and the Lithuanian diaspora and its activities (a loom, flags of Lithuanian parishes, the Lithuanian army, religion in Lithuania, M. K. Čiurlionis, Lithuanian currency and coins, posters, Lithuanian national costumes, wrought iron sun crosses, etc.) (*Lituanistikos tyrimo ir studijų centras 1982–2008*, 2008, p.n.). This dissemination, which was also aimed at the U.S. public, was encouraged by the national liberation movement that was already taking place in Lithuania in 1988–1990.

In 1987–1988, the LRSC received a library of Lithuanian publications (approximately 15,000 books) from the Lithuanian Congregation of Marian Fathers in Marianapolis (Thompson, Connecticut) for safekeeping, and from there managed to bring back a unique and abundant archive of the activities of the Lithuanian American Catholic Council (Lithuanian National Council) from 1914 to 1920 (*Lituanistikos tyrimo ir studijų centras 1982–2008*, 2008, p.n.). To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the only surviving collection of documents that is so compact and so well reflects the political and informational activities of Lithuanian Americans. The LRSC staff can rightly be proud of it, as a unique collection on par with those of the German Lithuanian DP camps in 1944–1951, the Lithuanian

8 October 12, 1984, agreement between J. Kreivėnas and J. Račkauskas. *Ibid.*

Association in Great Britain since 1947, the Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago, the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America⁹, the personal archive of Leonardas Šimutis (1892–1975)¹⁰, and other abundant WLA documentary funds. One which is crucial for conducting research on the history of the Lithuanian diaspora.

By 1990, the Center had published 10 publications, including *Vengeance on the Run* (a collection of documents edited by Dr. Saulius Sužiedėlis); the Society of Lithuanian Historians finished printing issues of the newspaper *Varpas* (1889–1905; five volumes, over 3,200 pages)¹¹, and published *The Samogitian Crusade* by Prof. William L. Urban, *Bibliography of the Lithuanian People* compiled by Kazimieras V. Baltramaitis back in 1934, and so on. Together with the Center for Research Libraries Chicago, the LRSC completed a major project – microfilming sets of *Draugas*¹² and *Sandara* newspapers. In supporting Lithuanian dissidents, the Center included Dr. Kazys Ėringis, Dr. Vytautas Skuodis and Dr. Algirdas Stankevičius in the ranks of its research collaborators. Once the Lithuanian National Revival began, LRSC employees, particularly Prof. Jonas Račkauskas and Dr. Robertas Vitas, spoke about Lithuania on U.S. television and radio, and gave interviews to the U.S. press (Skirius, 2018b).

By 1990, the LRSC was already operating in as many as 25 rooms that they rented at the VC. The Center united 12 departments under the umbrella principle. At that time, the Center's library had accumulated more than 100,000 Lithuanian books and 1,500 periodical collections. Unlike other cultural centers of the Lithuanian diaspora

9 The United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America (ULRFA) was founded in 1944 as a unified aid organization of all patriotic Lithuanian American political organizations, with the aim of supporting Lithuanian refugees and exiles, and preparing for the reconstruction of the Lithuanian state. It operated from 1944 to 2008. During those years, it helped hundreds of thousands of unfortunate people, and distributed material goods, food products, medicines, and so on worth at least USD 100 million.

10 One of the most prominent Lithuanian American figures of the 20th century. One of the founders of the ULRFA, long-time chairman of the Lithuanian American Council, editor of the newspapers *Vytis*, *Garsas* and *Draugas*, head of the largest Catholic organizations.

11 A newspaper that was printed in Prussia and illegally distributed in Russian-occupied Lithuania and Congress Poland.

12 A Lithuanian daily in the United States that went into publication in 1909.

(which are either owned by private individuals, such as the Balzekas Museum in Chicago, or by an ideological group, such as ALKA in Putnam, under the patronage of Catholic organizations), the LRSC Center was patronized by the Lithuanian American community and supported by the Lithuanian Foundation. One might say that it is an institution of the entire Lithuanian diaspora, which contributes to the spread of Lithuanian identity among Lithuanians abroad and beyond (Paplauskienė, 2002). The LRSC had become the largest Lithuanian emigrant research organization and accumulation of archives in the West, which became an attractive subject for scholars and researchers not only from the United States, but also from more distant lands, including Lithuania once it became independent (Paplauskienė, 2002). This is when the second stage of the LRSC's activities began – the establishment of relations with Lithuanian research institutions and scholars.

Thus, the Center was still just taking shape in the first stage – it expanded its structure and increased its funds, pooled scientific and informational potential, and discussed the selection of scientific research topics.

The Second Stage of the LRSC's Activities (1990–2020)

In the second period, when Lithuania was declared a restored independent state, the Center got the opportunity to fully unfold and prove that the efforts Lithuanians abroad had made in creating this Lithuanian unit were not in vain. The research institution played an important role by making a significant contribution to strengthening the quality of science and education in Lithuania once its independence was restored – especially in the first decade.

The Center was one of the first Lithuanian organizations that immediately joined in helping the Fatherland, sending Western scientific literature as well as books and newspaper and magazine sets published by emigrants to Lithuanian libraries, replenishing their funds. As a reminder, these publications were scarce in Lithuania or were not freely available to the general public.

Since its inception, the LRSC collected books and periodicals published by the Lithuanian diaspora, and even had “duplicate

rooms”, because Lithuanians were constantly giving the Center their books, magazines and newspapers. On the initiative of Jonas Račkauskas, the LRSC began sending books to Lithuanian research institutions in postal bags in 1988. In the summer of 1990, Račkauskas agreed with the National Library of Lithuania in Vilnius on sending even more books, and the library undertook distribution of the books received to other Lithuanian libraries; the Lithuanians in Chicago organized a book drive called “Books for Lithuania” for this purpose. In the autumn of 1990, a total of three containers were sent to Lithuania, loaded not only with books and periodicals, but also with works of emigrant artists that were donated to the Lithuanian Art Museum. The cost of sending these containers was covered by the Lithuanian American Community and Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid¹³. At that time, Lithuanian libraries received some 200,000 books, with an estimated value of USD 800,000 (Juodelis, 1990). There were subsequent book drives as well. LRSC employees are justifiably proud that through their initiative (collecting, packing and loading containers), nine containers with almost 1.5 million books donated by Lithuanian Americans and American academic institutions were dispatched to Lithuania. This made it possible not only to rapidly replenish library funds and put together a more comprehensive Lithuanian collection, but also to provide Lithuanian scholars and students with the literature they needed (Skirius, 2018a). The Center is still responding to inquiries and requests to this day.

One of the most important activities of the LRSC is close cooperation with scholars, mainly from Lithuania. The management of the Center, understanding the difficult material and financial situation of Lithuanian scholars – especially in the first decade of independence – created excellent working and living conditions for them (room and board, copying of documents, and sending books and copies by post were all paid for). All this facilitated the efforts of scholars when working with archival material, literature and

13 Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid was founded in 1959 by Lithuanian American priests and Catholic organizations, with the core goal being to support the church and believers in Soviet-occupied Lithuania.

exhibits. If these conditions had not existed, some of the scholars who came would not have been able to comprehensively carry out the work they had planned. Over the past 30 years, Lithuanian scholars researching the history of the Lithuanian diaspora have already done extensive research work, publishing articles and monographs, defending theses, and participating in conferences. The output provided by them more or less reflects the material used from the LRSC archive funds as well.

From the very beginning, the LRSC management had a liberal attitude towards newcomers. The Center was and is open to Lithuanian Americans and Americans, as well as to guests from abroad. According to Jonas Račkauskas, “the LRSC is not a political organization. We welcome everyone: Christians [and] atheists [alike]... We welcome those who want to contribute to the activities of the Research Center.” (*Draugas*, 2020, p. 4). Exact statistics on how many researchers have already visited the LRSC are not yet available. Based on data provided by Chairman of the LRSC Board Robertas Vitas in 2022, over 900 different employees from Lithuania have worked at the LRSC since the restoration of Lithuania’s independence in 1990, cataloging, managing archives, doing internships, or assisting in other ways (Vitas, 2022). This refers to people who have helped the Center. Since the management of the LRSC has agreements concluded with the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, Lithuanian archives, and other research institutions, there is ongoing cooperation between them, with librarians and archivists coming from Lithuania to help manage the library and archive funds and digitize documents.

Visiting scholars also contribute by organizing the funds they research – this is one of the Center’s unspoken rules and a sort of compensation to the Center for the excellent living conditions provided to the scholars. Though not yet precisely counted, it is thought that more than 100 scholars have collected material for scientific work – dissertations, articles and monographs. Scholars – and not only from Lithuania – are particularly interested in the abundance of documents in the World Lithuanian Archive, which was founded in 1946. This is the largest Lithuanian archive outside Lithuania: it contains over a million documents, not including the

abundant Žilevičius-Kreivėnas Musicology Archive, which researchers of Lithuanian diaspora culture cannot do without it. According to Robertas Vitas (2020, p. 4): “If we didn’t have those primary and secondary sources, those studies would not have come out, and our place, the Lithuanian diaspora, in the world of Western science, our role, would be much smaller.” The studies and articles on emigrants would not have been documented as abundantly as they are now – using materials in the WLA and other archives. One can only agree with Vitas’s statement that if it wasn’t for the LRSC, the historical material collected not only in Chicago, but also from various parts of the United States, would have been irretrievably lost and destroyed for the Lithuanian nation (as the diasporas of some other nations have experienced).

Various emigrant archives continue to fill the Center. At the meetings of the LRSC Board, the necessity of preserving archives was and is constantly emphasized and the importance of supporting archives is raised; this is also in the interest of the Lithuanian American Community (LAC). For example, at a meeting of the board that was held on September 11, 2010, President of the Lithuanian American Community National Executive Committee Vytas Maciūnas said that “the preservation of archives is one of the most important undertakings of the activity of the LAC” (Lapienytė, 2010, p. 6). This suggested that the Lithuanian American Community would continue to contribute and look for opportunities to help the archives.

Another important part of the Center’s activities is the publication of scholarly books not only in Lithuanian, but also in English, as a way to disseminate information about Lithuania and the Lithuanian diaspora. According to the latest data, the LRSC has published 54 books over the course of its operations, primarily by authors from Lithuania. A third of the books were published in English, and according to the Center’s managers, these books are in demand. Prominent American authors are also published. As an example, there is the aforementioned William Urban, Ph.D., a professor at Monmouth College who is a global historian, a medieval studies researcher, and the former editor of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*. Urban’s *Tannenberg and After* (Urban, 1999) was published in 2001 and was recognized as one of the 30 best historical research works in

the world that year (Vitas, 2022). It was later translated into Lithuanian in Lithuania. Books not only bring attention to Lithuania and Lithuanians – they also provide the Center with a bit of income.

Furthermore, in order to provide a more detailed presentation of the available archives and exhibits to the American public, the LRSC holds various exhibitions that also have certain political significance. For example, in early 1990, the LRSC held an exhibition about President of the Republic of Lithuania Aleksandras Stulginskis (1885–1969). At the time, the press wrote:

When Lithuania is currently in the midst of a national revival, when the nation is fighting with all of its might for the freedom and independence of Lithuania, it is very useful to draw strength from the past, as our national anthem says... The aim of the exhibition is to learn about the history of Lithuania's statehood and for our youth, who grew up in occupation, exile and emigration, and all older people, to develop their ethnic and national consciousness (Juodelis, 1990, p. 6).

Jonas Račkauskas brought a copy of the exhibition to Vilnius and handed it over to the National Museum of Lithuania; the exhibition was shown in larger Lithuanian communities in the United States and Canada. To mark special occasions, the Center holds exhibitions in the premises of the Čiurlionis Gallery – for example, “Lithuanian American Folk Dance Festivals”, “Lithuanian DP Camps in Germany”, “The 90th Anniversary of the Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago”, “North American Lithuanian Sports Activities”, and so on. They are also published on the website. Rarer exhibits that are stored in the LRSC archive and museum funds are also displayed at the exhibitions.

For several years now, the Center has been carrying out an extensive project in cooperation with *Draugas*, the Lithuanian American daily – scanning and photographing the press of the Lithuanian diaspora so as to preserve the periodicals of Lithuanians abroad and to make them more accessible to researchers. The management of the Center is serious about scanning and digitizing all available documentary, audio and video material, so that researchers and hobbyists can access the historical documents and research that they need from anywhere in the world (Vitas, 2020). Work has already

begun. The managers of the Center admit that this is and will be the most important prospective activity of the LRSC (Timukienė, 2017). From the beginning of this process, one could talk about the third stage of the Center's activities. Chairman of the LRSC Board Robertas Vitas says that the third period began in 2018, when the Center's archives began to be moved from Chicago to Lemont,¹⁴ to the newly acquired premises that were adapted for the archives and the library, and space was created for future new collections. The Center opened there on October 24, 2021. One of the reasons given for the relocation was that there were a lot of Lithuanians living in Lemont, including volunteers who wanted to help manage the archives (Vitas, 2022). The Center's management plans to expand its work even further. The extensive scanning work that was already mentioned coincides with the Center's move to Lemont.

In the new premises, the Center began going by a shortened version of its name – the Lithuanian Research Center. However, most researchers (and Lithuanian American newspapers) still refer to the Center as the LRSC. Robertas Vitas claims that the name of the organization was too long. Plus, as Vitas says, “someone who researches also studies... We think that ‘research’ is a word that encompasses all scientific activity.”¹⁵ This is hard to dispute. Moreover, the word “studies” in the name had meaning while the Lithuanian Institute of Education was operating, which trained teachers from the Lithuanian diaspora for Saturday schools. For their classes, students from the institute carried out certain studies and used the literature and museum exhibits that had been accumulated. Once the Lithuanian Institute of Education was closed down, the studies disappeared.

Broader awareness of the Center and dissemination of information about it occurred when the LRSC website was created in Lithuanian and English in 2003¹⁶. All of the LRSC's departments and their activities are presented on the website. A catalog of 2,300 periodical

14 Lemont, Illinois (USA) is home to the Lithuanian World Center, which was established in 1987 as a scientific, cultural and educational institution for the Lithuanian diaspora.

15 Robertas Vitas's March 9, 2023, Messenger message to the author.

16 <http://www.lithuanianresearch-arch.org/>

collections can already be found in the WLA section, and lists of stored books, archive personnel and organizations are gradually being added. The website now has a "What's New" section that is updated monthly (*Amerikos lietuviai*, 2003, p. 15). This is also important for scholars, who can now find out remotely what this research institution has in its funds.

In evaluating the second stage of the LRSC's activities, it is the Center's clear and direct connection with Lithuania and its research and cultural institutions. Although the Center tries to balance the significance between Lithuania, the Lithuanian diaspora and foreign stakeholders, the Lithuanian factor is still the more significant. To put it simply: The Center is important for Lithuania, but at the moment, Lithuania is more significant for the Center's activities.

In carrying out its cultural and Lithuanian identity dissemination mission, the LRSC is faced with some shortcomings, including the funds necessary for essential activities, competent employees, and premises for work. Some of the problems are solved not only with the help of Lithuanian diaspora organizations and individual enthusiasts, but also through assistance from Lithuania.

Conclusions

1. The emergence of a research institution like the Lithuanian Research and Studies Center in Chicago to coordinate significant Lithuanian studies was inevitable in the Lithuanian diaspora. The Lithuanian scientific elite abroad was encouraged to create the LRSC by the political processes in the United States in the 1970s that were unfavorable to Lithuanians as well as the vanishing cultural heritage of the diaspora.

2. There was a need not only to collect, register and preserve, but also to study the cultural heritage of the Lithuanian diaspora – the guarantor of Lithuanian identity. Once it was founded in the Youth Center in 1982, the LRSC, in its first stage of operation under the umbrella principle, united the library, the archive, museums, societies, and so on (12 institutions in all), and accumulated scientific information; it planned to include scientific intellectual potential, and secured guaranteed and regular, albeit insufficient, funding.

The vast majority of the Center's employees worked and are still working on a voluntary basis.

3. By 1990, the Center expanded its structure and premises, pooled information potential, and discussed the selection of scientific topics and the inclusion of young people in history studies. It managed to create a base that was visited by scholars around the world conducting Lithuanian research; this base formed the axis of research into Lithuanian traditions and history among members of the diaspora. In the first stage of its activities, the Center prepared and released 10 publications (some of them in English) on Lithuanian studies.

4. The second stage of the Center's activities involved close and extensive relations with Lithuanian research institutions, libraries, archives and scholars, with literature and periodicals published in the West being collected and sent to Lithuanian universities, research institutions and libraries. Over 900 librarians, archivists and scholars came to the LRSC from Lithuania as assistants and researchers.

5. Attention is given to the preparation and release of publications by Lithuanian and foreign scholars. The Center has published a total of 54 books (one-third of which were in English). To mark special occasions, the Center holds exhibitions featuring exhibits in its holdings. A project involving the scanning and microfilming of Lithuanian diaspora press and preserved historical documents has been launched and marks a new stage of the LRSC's activities. The collection and preservation of Lithuanian diaspora heritage continues; contacts are maintained with foreign scholars, and cultural values are disseminated among Lithuanian researchers and researchers of other nationalities. The relocation of the Center to Lemont in 2021 will help solve problems with premises and helpers, and in part – the lack of funding.

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