

## ARCHIVISTS AT ALKA

Two archivists from the Lithuanian Central State Archives spent two weeks working on six archives at ALKA. They completed work on the archives of: Julius Botyrius, Petras Bliumas, the „Motinėlė“ society, Zigmas Raulinaitis, Vincas Tercijonas and father Mykolas Vaitkus.



Their work brought to light a wealth of information about the rich cultural and social activity of Lithuanians in the U.S.

**ALKA President Dr. Mirga Girniuvienė, archivists Inga Vizgirdienė and Sigita Baranauskienė.** (Jack McGowan photo)

Mr. Botyrius, a linguist who studied at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas before World War II, emigrated to the U.S. in 1950. Here he wrote articles about the history of Lithuanian writing and was a contributor to the Lithuanian Encyclopedia published in Boston. He died in 2001 in New Jersey at the age of 94. His archive comprises two boxes of manuscripts, both published and unpublished, as well as correspondence with the editors and publisher of the Lithuanian Encyclopedia in Boston.

Mr. Botyrius, a linguist who studied at

Mr. Bliumas, born in Lithuania in 1896, was an ethnographer who helped create a number of



ethnography museums and societies in Lithuania. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. He published three articles on ethnography. He died in 1988 in Detroit, Michigan. His archive comprises two boxes of mostly letters, photographs, news clippings and some manuscripts.

**Remarkable photos in Bliumas' archive.** (Vizgirdienė's photo.)

The „Motinėlė“ society was a U.S.-based organization whose purpose was to provide financial and moral support to Catholic Lithuanians wishing to

achieve a higher degree. It was active from 1900 to 1945. The archive comprises a folder containing correspondence about financial support.



Mr. Raulinaitis, born in Lithuania in 1913, was a war historian, journalist and editor who was an officer in the Lithuanian army from 1934 to 1940. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1949, where he published a number of books on the history of war in Lithuania and was editor-in-chief of the journal „Karys“. He died in New Jersey in 2009. His archive comprises ten boxes containing many photos and negatives, manuscripts of translations, contributors' manuscripts for „Karys“ and correspondence.

**Barauskienė reviewing every single letter in every single box – the work of an archivist.**  
(Vizgirdienė's photo).

Dr. Tercijonas was a pediatrician born in Lithuania in 1890 who emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. Here he helped organize the Lithuanian Physicians' Society New York chapter, published several books and articles on medicine and supported several Lithuanian health societies. He died in 2014 in Putnam, CT. His archive comprises two boxes of correspondence and manuscripts, both published and unpublished.

Father Vaitkus was a writer, priest, journalist and editor. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1951, where he was assigned to a parish in Pawtucket, RI. He wrote a number of books on morality, politics, and literature. His poetry was translated into Russian. He died in 1973 at the age of 89. His archive comprises three boxes of manuscripts, both published and unpublished, photos and correspondence.

This is the second time Ms. Vizgirdienė and the fourth time Ms. Barauskienė have worked at ALKA. What is their motivation – after all, they offer up two weeks away from work and family to help with archives in the U.S. Why?

**Here is Sigita's answer:** I've been working at the Lithuanian Central State Archives over 30 years. I have a broad experience in archival work and care about the preservation of our heritage in documents reflecting the history of Lithuania during various phases of her history, so that future generations of scholars, both historians and researchers, could use them and they could be accessible to the general public both in publications and on the internet. Because I am experienced in this field, I try to help people who are genuinely interested in preserving documents important

for Lithuania: I share my knowledge, I help organize archives kept at various Lithuanian institutions overseas.

My work with Ms. Mirga Girniuvenė began 5 years ago when I came to ALKA for the first time with my colleague in 2014. In 2014 and 2015 we organized the BALF archive. In 2017 four of us from the Central State Archive again helped at ALKA. Last year we could not accept Ms. Girniuvenė's invitation because we had to go to San Paulo, Brazil, to help Lithuanians organize their archives there. When we receive Mirga's invitation to spend 2 weeks working at ALKA this year, we did not hesitate. We understood perfectly that you can't move mountains in such a short period of time, but we tried our best to accomplish as much as possible.

During my earlier stays at ALKA I had noticed unique and important documents reflecting the work of Lithuanians in the U.S. Among them are documents belonging to famous Lithuanian cultural, art, education and public figures, reflecting the life of Lithuanians in DP camps and various aspects of their emigration to the U.S. To date only a portion of the documents stored in the ALKA archives have been reviewed, organized, and described. The greater part of these documents is held in boxes and cabinets, they are not organized, it is not known what important documents are being preserved and whether all the documents being held have enduring value. As long as the documents are not organized and their descriptions are not made accessible, it is not possible to use them – they can't be exhibited in shows, published in the media, etc. Only by reviewing every single item in every single box can you find unique „pearls“, unknown and unpublished manuscripts, letters, articles, photographs.

The majority of the documents stored at ALKA are written in Lithuanian. I think that creates a challenge in finding volunteers who would undertake this important and time-consuming project requiring archiving experience. We, who live in Lithuania, can peruse and understand these documents much more rapidly and capture their essence relatively simply.

Every time specialists from the Lithuanian State Archives work at ALKA, they prepare descriptions of the archives they have reviewed and these descriptions are later posted in the ALKA website at [www.lkma.org/alka\\_archyvai.htm](http://www.lkma.org/alka_archyvai.htm) Anyone interested in the history of Lithuania and its diaspora can access these descriptions at their own discretion.

Because most researchers and students of Lithuanian history cannot afford to travel across the Atlantic and spend enormous amounts of time reviewing undocumented archives, I think that every newly documented archive will motivate them to consider a new and rarely discussed topic.

I believe that our help and advice are useful and meaningful to Lithuanians managing archives in the diaspora. And those two weeks spent working on the archives at ALKA were useful to me as well. Every time I work on archives with varying sizes and diverse content, I gain new historical information and expand my professional experience.



**Here is Inga's answer:** I came to ALKA for the first time in 2017, right after the flood that did such irreplaceable damage to the archive. Our main assignment then – for all four of us from the Central State Archive – was to return everything to where it belonged.

**Vizgirdienė admiring the photos stored at ALKA.** (Baranauskienė's photo)

As professional archivists, we could not simply put everything back without checking out the content. We realized that the ALKA archives contain a tremendous number of impressive photographs illustrating Lithuania before and during World War II, also DP camps and the work of Lithuanian organizations in the diaspora over the years.

I've been working at the Lithuanian Central State Archive since 1988, most of that time with photographs. I am a specialist in this field and a fan as well. I come to ALKA and will come in the future just for the photographs being kept there. It's impossible not to admire the people who fled the approaching Soviet army to the West and brought with them not just the essentials for living, but also a camera. The photographs reveal unexpected scenes: children who have brought with them a beloved toy, women in high heels, men with their bicycle tossed in a wagon. Photographs from DP camps illustrate life of Lithuanians in Germany, the help of UNRA, their journey in ships to the U.S. Photos from later periods constitute a separate, broad-based review of the life of Lithuanians in the U.S., one that cannot be described in one or two sentences. The history of families, weddings, christenings, funerals –whole lives preserved in the ALKA archive, together with written documents, present the researcher with a comprehensive view of Lithuanian emigration to the U.S. and the living they created in this land.

It would be great if these photos were accessible not only to researchers visiting ALKA, but also to the general public, both in the U.S. and in Lithuania. Having seen the diversity of photographs, their value and significance for Lithuanian culture, I can firmly state that internet access not only to descriptions of archives, but also to photo images, is a must. Digitized, professionally described

images can be made accessible on the ALKA website as well as on the Lithuanian Central State Archive website. The ALKA archives have a great content, the Lithuanian Central State Archives have the newest digitizing equipment, modern storage places and professional workers. We just need the desire, mutual understanding and agreement and the desired result – digitized photo archives on the web – are at our fingertips. Photographs fit for use in monographs, textbooks, academic publications, journals, and even documentary and artistic films would be made available for use.

And it does not matter how many more expeditions need to be organized – it's worth going to ALKA for this one reason.