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Man of the Year 2011

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HISTORY REMEMBERED

PRESIDENT ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS AND HIS WIFE ONA -- DEPORTEES TO SIBERIA

By Ramune Rackauskas

During the time of the presidency of Aleksandras Stulginskis, Lithuania was a young country. Independence had been attained in 1918, and his presidency took place during 1921 – 1926. During these years, the foundation for a secure and prosperous nation was developed. Lithuania established diplomatic relations with the Western nations. The U.S., Great Britain, France and other countries acknowledged Lithuania as an independent and sovereign nation. The Lithuanian constitution was written. Land reform took place. A law was passed mandating that huge estates would be divided, and that this land be granted to the less wealthy people who owned no land. Although this was a very controversial move, since land was taken away from the rich, it brought good results. In the years of independence Lithuania became a strong agricultural country. Lithuania joined the League of nations. The city of Klaipeda, which had been occupied by the Germans, was returned to Lithuania. The financial system was organized. For the first time Lithuania had its own currency and it was based on the gold standard. Cultural and educational institutions were developed. A network of schools spread throughout Lithuania and for the first time, elementary education became mandatory for all children. The University of Kaunas was founded.

In 1926, there was a change in the government, whose policies Stulginskis strongly opposed. He left government life and bought a large estate in the country, which he oversaw. For 15 years, he lived peacefully, not involved in any government duties, occasionally writing articles for the press and giving lectures to student groups.

Why were Stulginskis and his wife Ona deported to Siberia? Like all the people, Stulginskis was very worried about the entry of the Red Army into Lithuania in 1939. There were rumors of deportations, but Stulginskis did not want to leave his country. He reasoned that although a large portion of his estate, almost 100 hectares had been taken away by the soviet government for collectiviza-

tion, he was still left with 30 hectares. If he was to be deported, why would the soviets leave the land for him? During his presidency, the relations between Russia and Lithuania had been good, and he had not acted against the soviet union. In 1939, the Lithuanian communist party had even offered him a position to represent the occupied Lithuanian nation in the U. S., a job which he adamantly refused. Thus, he certainly did have an opportunity to flee the oncoming danger,

but he chose to remain in Lithuania with the rest of his countrymen during this most difficult time.

Aleksandras Stulginskis and his wife Ona as well as many other Lithuanian citizens did not expect to be woken up on the morning of June 14, 1941 and told to pack a few belongings and to be sent to the waiting animal transport train for deportation. While the train was still in Lithuania, Ona wrote a letter to her daughter, which she threw out of the train window. Luckily, a good-hearted woman found the letter and brought it to their daughter, who was studying in Kaunas at the time. In the letter there were instructions on how she was to take care of herself, and a sense of hope that although they did not know their destination, they would be alright. At the end of the letter she urged her daughter not to forget that she was a Lithuanian and a catholic. Aleksandras added a small postscript to the letter, saying that he was always proud of her, and added wishes that the almighty God would look

after her. The original letter is on display at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. Ironically, the Germans occupied Lithuania one week after the deportations. The Germans had promised to catch up with the departed trains and free the prisoners, but as we know, that never happened.

At the time of the deportation, Ona Stulginskis was just about to turn 46, and Aleksandras was 61. They remained in Siberia from 1941 until 1956, for 15 years.



ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS
(1885—1969)

Ona was sent to Komi region, where she originally worked as a cook for a school for small children. Later, someone complained to the camp authorities that she had an easy life as the wife of a president, and now had an easy job at the labor camp. Ona was then reassigned to the job of cutting trees. This work was difficult, and she subsequently suffered two strokes, which left her partially paralyzed. But she survived, and after several years, she was able to establish a small meager household, with a few livestock and a garden.

Aleksandras Stulginskis had a more complicated experience: he was sent to various prisons, prison camps, and the criminal charges against him were not settled until 1952, 11 years after his deportation. Initially he was sent to Resiotu labor camp, known for its extremely harsh conditions. During the winter of 1941 – 1942, out of 2500 Lithuanians imprisoned there, only 400 survived. Thus a little more than one out of six survived. Stulginskis was later sent to the Kansk prison camp. He was not passive about his deportation, and wrote many petitions to various soviet officials vigorously denying the accusations and protesting his arrest. A record of his petitions was found by Alfonsas Eidintas, who while writing a book about Stulginskis, had accessed the KGB files in 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Among the many letters, there was one written in 1945 to Stalin, in which he wrote that he had two brothers living in the U.S. who were no doubt searching for his whereabouts. He also wrote that although he was already an old man, in poor health and had not much longer to live, but since his life was bound to the history of the Lithuanian nation, his death in the soviet prison camp will have consequences. His death among thieves and bandits would be a black mark against the Soviet Union to her enemies. He asked that Stalin would give him freedom and allow him to return with his family to Lithuania. Although there was no response to this letter, it was found in the KGB files, among the others he wrote. Finally in 1952, the court date to face the charges for his imprisonment was set. After 11 years of imprisonment in Siberia, he was charged with activities against the working class, working against the soviet revolutionary movement, and for anti-soviet agitation. He was sentenced for 25 years of prison. The same sentence was administered to many other high level ministers and religious leaders from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. They were all sent to the Vladimir prison for a 25 year sentence. In 1953 Stalin died, and there was a big change in the policies toward political prisoners. 1954, Stulginskis was freed from prison

and was allowed to join his wife in the Komi region.

Life for citizens returning from Siberian deportation was difficult for everyone, including my grandparents. Everyone had difficulty getting housing and employment, since the communist government considered them enemies of the state. Other people, including former relatives and friends feared repercussions if they helped the returning deportees. The government allowed Stulginskis a 7 ruble per month pension. At the time of their return in 1956, Stulginskis was 71 and Ona was 62, and in very poor health. An old acquaintance was brave enough to give Stulginskis a job at a greenhouse, although with long hours and little pay. The KGB surveillance reports from this time state that had it not been for his daughter's frequent parcels from the U.S., they both would have starved under these living conditions. Stulginskis was well aware that the KGB surveillance was still following him. The KGB reported that he was a loner, kept to himself, and did not enter into conversations. Stulginskis himself wrote that he did not want to incriminate anyone by becoming friends with them, or in engaging in long conversations, and thus kept to himself, during the last years of his life. The KGB surveillance reports indicate that Stulginskis was very happy and his spirits uplifted in 1965, when his daughter Aldona and I, his granddaughter were allowed to come to Lithuania to visit him. It was a joyful time for all of us. A second visit by my mother and sister took place in 1967. A third visit, during which my brother would have come was denied by the soviet authorities. Stulginskis was offered a job by the communist government of writing his memoirs regarding the Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona. He refused, saying that anything he wrote would be altered by the soviets to discredit the both, president Antanas Smetona and the previous independent Lithuanian government.

Ona died in 1962 and Aleksandras Stulginskis died in 1969. Aleksandras Stulginskis was the only Lithuanian president to share the suffering of the Siberian deportation and prison along with many of his countrymen. Towards the end of his life he showed no bitterness towards his enemies, but held fast to his Catholic faith and his optimism. He refused to give up his principles and his love for his country to serve the soviet government when it would have been very profitable for him. He accepted his fate with dignity and hope and spirit, as did the thousands of men, women, and children whose destiny he shared.

From left: President Aleksandras Stulginskis's granddaughters Jūratė Juozevičiūtė-Norvilienė and Ramunė Juozevičiūtė-Račkauskienė, grandson Jonas Linas Juozevičius, daughter Aldona Stulginskaitė-Juozevičienė, and great-grandson Aras Norvilas standing by the exhibit "President Stulginskis Deported to Siberia" at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. Exhibit was arranged by Ramunė Juozevičiūtė-Račkauskienė and Aldona Stulginskaitė-Juozevičienė as part of "Hope and Spirit" exhibit, curated by Audrius Plioplys.



MUSEUM EVENTS



From left: Audrius Plioplys, MD, the curator of the *Hope and Spirit* exhibit, Monsignor Edmond Putrimas, Arydas Daunoravičius, Director of the Department of Lithuanians Abroad, and Museum President Stanley Balzekas, Jr.



At the Jonas Kazlauskas photography exhibit, "Lithuania in Exile, 1988-1989"



At the exhibit, "Lithuanian President Aleksandras Stulginskis Deported to Siberia"

On September 10, a photo exhibit by Juozas Kazlauskas "Lithuania in Exile, 1988-1989" was opened at the Museum.

A photo exhibition *Lithuania in Exile, 1988-1989* by the late photographer, film director, cameraman and traveller Juozas Kazlauskas completed the exhibition offerings. Kazlauskas has been featured in several dozen one-man and group exhibitions in Lithuania, Bulgaria, France, Mexico, USA, Germany, Yugoslavia, Georgia, and Russia. On a historic and geographic level, this cycle of photographs is archivaly significant as it documents the remains of Siberian barracks that have now vanished from the contemporary landscape. On an aesthetic level, the photographs consider the relationship between man, history and nature through the subtle play of light and dark in the images, asking the viewer to consider what cannot be seen as much as what can.

The Kazlauskas photographs were purchased, professionally mounted and framed, and loaned to the *Hope & Spirit* exhibit by Dr. Audrius Plioplys, the "Lithuania in Exile" exhibit and *Hope & Spirit* series curator, organizer and sponsor. The photographer's widow, Dalia Kazlauskiene, retains the copyright for these images. The Balzekas Museum gratefully acknowledges these individuals for their generosity.

At the same time, another exhibit "Lithuanian President Aleksandras Stulginskis Deported to Siberia" was opened.

Aleksandras Stulginskis was the second President of Lithuania (1920–1926). In 1941 Stulginskis and his wife were arrested by the Soviet "NKVD" (Secret Police) and deported to the Gulag. President Stulginskis was separated from his wife and sent to the Krasnoyarsk region, whereas his wife Ona was deported to the Komi area. In 1952, after World War II had ended, he was officially sentenced by the Soviet authorities to 25 years in prison for his anti-socialist and clerical policies in pre-war Lithuania.

An addition to the *Hope & Spirit* series, the exhibit features original material from the Stulginskis family archives and was curated by the late president's granddaughter, Ramune Rackauskas.

MUSEUM EVENTS

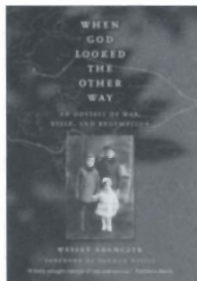
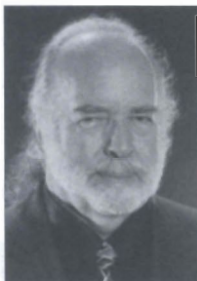


Timothy Snyder presenting his book, "Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin".

On September 25th at 5 p.m., as part of the Hope & Spirit series, Yale University professor Timothy Snyder presented his acclaimed book, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*.

Americans call the Second World War "The Good War". But before it even began, America's wartime ally Josef Stalin had killed millions of his own citizens — and kept killing them during and after the war. Before Hitler was finally defeated, he had murdered six million Jews and nearly as many other Europeans. At war's end, both the German and the Soviet killing sites fell behind the iron curtain, leaving the history of mass killing in darkness.

Bloodlands is a new kind of European history, presenting the mass murders committed by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes as two aspects of a single history, in the time and place where they occurred: between Germany and Russia, when Hitler and Stalin both held power. Assiduously researched, deeply humane, and utterly definitive, *Bloodlands* will be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the central tragedy of modern history.



Author Wesley Adamczyk and his book "When God Looked the Other Way"

On October 16 at 2 p.m. Wesley Adamczyk, author of *When God Looked the Other Way* and deportation survivor gave a first-hand account of deportation as experienced by his family during WWII. Adamczyk discussed his remarkable life story and presented a slideshow of drawings from Siberia created by deportees, including children, who were forcibly exiled there.

Adamczyk was born in Warsaw in 1933 and deported to Siberia in 1940, from where he escaped in 1942. His mother died in Iran shortly after the family's escape from the Soviet Union. Adamczyk's Father was murdered in the Katyn massacre. After completing a ten year odyssey through twelve countries and four continents, alone at age sixteen young Wesley came to the USA and eventually graduated from DePaul University with a degree in chemistry and philosophy as well as a commission in the United States Army Signal Corps. He retired as a senior chemist in 1995.

Adamczyk has devoted his entire retirement to the dissemination of information about the tragedy incurred by Polish people at the hands of the Soviets, namely that of deportation to Siberia, the Katyn Massacre, and the suffering and plight of Polish children in exile--events and experiences which defined and ravaged Adamczyk's own childhood. His memoir, *When God Looked the Other Way*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2004, and was subsequently translated into Danish and Polish. The Polish edition *Kiedy Bog odwrócił wzrok* was chosen in Poland as Book of the Year in 2010.



"Slave Labor in Wintertime" - A drawing by Irena Ejsymont-Ogrodowicz for her baby daughter Iwona and for posterity. Kazakhstan, Soviet Union, 1942. This illustration and others were included in a slideshow of deportee art brought back from Siberia.

OUR VISITORS



Musician David Tamulevich was performing in Lithuania in October at the festival "Bardai" in which singer and songwriters from all over Europe performed. David's father's side of the family immigrated from Lithuania in the early 1900s, and Lithuania was a real presence in his upbringing. It has been a lifetime desire of David's to visit there. From left: Museum President Stanley Balzekas, Jr., singer and songwriter David Tamulevich, Museum staff members Daiva Alborovienė and Luka Šaparnytė.



From left, Žygmantas Pavilionis, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania in Washington, DC, Emanuelis Zingeris, Member of Seimas (1990–2000 and since 2004), chairman of its foreign affairs committee (since 2010), Skaistė Aniuilienė, Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in Chicago, Irena Degutienė, Speaker of Seimas, Stanley Balzekas, Museum President. While in Chicago, the delegation from Lithuania met with the Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, and visited the Balzekas Museum.



From left, Ovidijus Léveris, Director of Lithuanian Special Archive; Irena Pumputienė, Museum librarian, Dalius Žižys, Director of Lithuanian Central Archive, and Ramojus Kraujalis, Director of Lithuanian State Archive. The archivists visited the Museum at the time of Library and Archives Conference held in Chicago.



From left, Augustinas Idzelis, Director of Lithuanian Research and Studies Center; Viktoras Stankus, Kent University; Stanley Balzekas, Museum President; Irena Pumputienė, Museum librarian, Rolandas Kačinskas, Lithuanian Embassy in Washington, DC.



A DOCUMENTARY FOR DARIUS AND GIRENAS 80TH ANNIVERSARY IS BEING FILMED

Lithuanian filmmaker Gražina Sviderskytė visited the Balzekas Museum in search of material pertaining to Darius and Girėnas. Her new film about these two Lithuanians flyers should be released in the summer of 2013 for the 80th Anniversary of their flight across the Atlantic.

The Balzekas Museum would appreciate donations of any material pertaining to Darius and Girenas (copies or originals) which could be used for the upcoming film. For more information, please contact Museum President Stanley Balzekas at 773-582-6500.