

Finding Lithuanians

in the National Archives of Australia

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The National Archives of Australia (NAA) are a rich source for anyone wishing to trace the entry of Lithuanian's into Australian life. Over the last couple of years I have "trolled" the national archives, somewhat more diligently than the casual archives user. In the process my knowledge of the archives has grown. It is knowledge I am happy to share.

The NAA holds Commonwealth Government records on behalf of Commonwealth Government departments and other entities. The Departments of Immigration and Labour and National Service created most records relevant to Lithuanians entering Australia, as displaced persons (DP's) between 1947 and 1953. Many people access these records to satisfy proof of identity requirements of the modern bureaucracy. Others do it to satisfy their curiosity, trace relatives, construct a genealogy or for serious research.

NAA holds literally millions of records across repositories in most Australian capital cities. An extensive database of the records, called *RecordSearch*, is accessible through the Internet. Begin at <http://www.naa.gov.au> and follow the links to *RecordSearch*, to begin exploring, or go to Facts sheets to learn more about the archives. Due to the popularity of immigration records, NAA has created a *NameSearch* function, and is progressively adding hundreds of thousands more immigration records to the database.

NAA charges fees to digitize and copy records. For anyone looking at just a few records about any individual the fees are not unreasonable. This service allows records to be viewed from your home computer, instead of perhaps having to travel across the country. Records are never transferred from one archive repository to another, so if you want to see a record yourself you must order the record and visit the reading room where the record is stored. Through experience I have learned that a *RecordSearch* or *NameSearch* enquiry will not necessarily disclose all records about an individual. Documents most likely to be found are selection and naturalization files.

Selection files typically contain a card, interview notes, medical reports including chest x-ray negatives and passport style photographs. Between 1947 and 1953, the style of documentation changed considerably. UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) and IRO (International Refugee Organisation) papers sometimes exist within these files. Naturalization files contain forms such as a Declaration of Intention and Application for Naturalization, which show where a person lived and worked in their early years in Australia.

Selection and naturalization files are generally found at the NAA Canberra. Completion of the naturalization process triggered the creation of another file, identifiable by its series name, B78. These files usually contained a person's immigration card and photograph. An applicant for naturalization had to surrender their Certificate of Registration of Alien, which was a booklet each DP was obliged to carry. The booklet contained a photograph and documented the alien's changes of address. B78 files are kept by NAA at Melbourne and can be found in *RecordSearch* or *NameSearch*.

Now I will explain where to find files that a *RecordSearch* or *NameSearch* enquiry will not presently disclose by a name search. A card set, known as the 'Bonegilla Cards' exists at NAA Canberra. As far as I can tell, a card exists for nearly every displaced person, man, woman or child, who passed through the Bonegilla and Bathurst Reception and Training Centres. During the 1949 coal strike some DPs bypassed the established reception centre, due to 'emergency measures', but cards exist for these people, too.

A card has a photograph and basic details of a person's arrival and departure. For some children, particularly babies, there are no photographs. The series name is A2571 and can be found by entering A2571 in the *RecordSearch* 'reference numbers' enquiry box. Some 828 items exist within the series. The 317 boxes of Bonegilla cards for DPs are listed alphabetically. NAA will find and copy a card from this series if you send a request by email, to ref@naa.gov.au.

NAA began recording these cards individually, and have done Aa to Adamko, but the enormity of the task seems to have stalled the process. Series MP1492/2 exists at NAA Melbourne and holds boxes of alien registration documents of migrants to Australia, by nationality and in alphabetical order. There is one box, 313, of Lithuanians documents, but this has been split into bundles, alphabetically. Some of the files are for Lithuanians who were deported, died, or otherwise "Left the Commonwealth". I like to think of these records as the 'orphans', which did not otherwise find a home in the bureaucracy. Nominal Rolls recorded the names, and other particulars, of all passengers aboard IRO transports, which carried DP's to Australia. They can be found, usually, by use of the search term 'nominal roll', followed by the name of the transport.

All the aforementioned records were maintained by the Department of Immigration. I have found Department of Labour and National Service records difficult to trace. There are some card sets in the NAA Brisbane and NAA Adelaide, which may have belonged to this department.

Searching the archives, from your home computer, or at an NAA reading room, is an adventure. Staff at NAA reading rooms are very helpful. Professional archive research agents will conduct a search, for a fee. Good luck with your search!

Josef Sestokas is a Victorian police officer and an active Baltic researcher. His book [Welcome to Little Europe: DPs and the North Camp](#) will be published late in 2009. E-mail address: jsestokas@bigpond.com.