

**VIDEO TESTIMONY COLLECTION AT  
THE MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF  
LATVIA  
– CURATORIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND  
CHALLENGES**

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*The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1940-1991)*

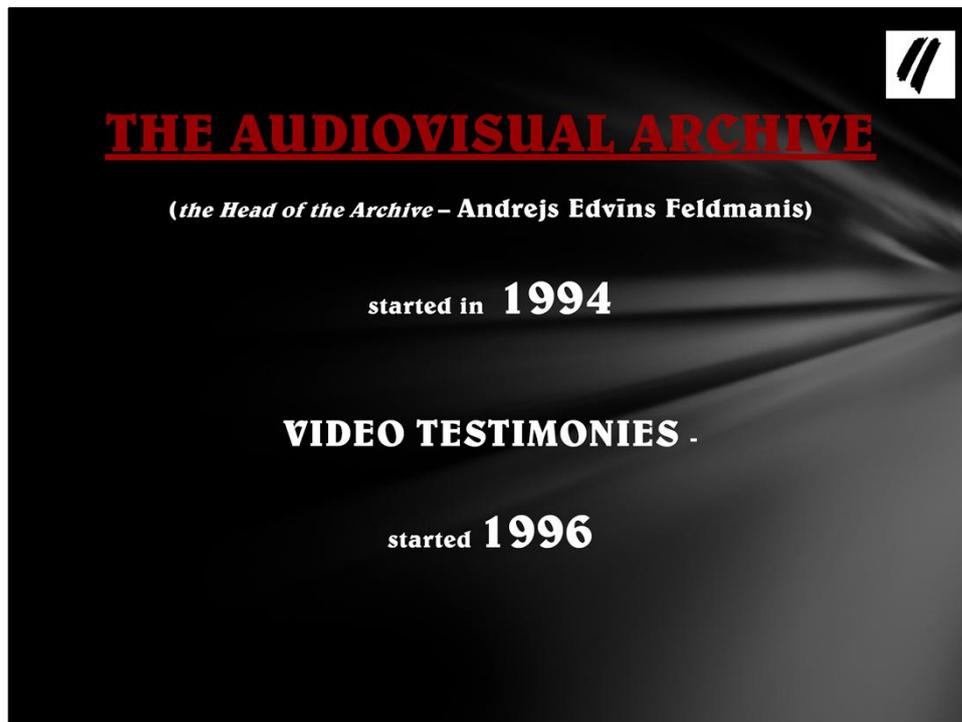




## **THE MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF LATVIA (1940–1991)**

- **Soviet occupation 1940–41**
- **Nazi German occupation 1941–  
1944/45**
- **Soviet occupation 1944/45–1991**

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1940–1991) was established in 1993. (*The Occupation Museum of Latvia is a private museum established and supported by a non-profit foundation that receives most of its funds as private donations from Latvians living abroad.*) Its purpose is to show and explain to Latvians and foreign visitors the real fate of Latvia under the occupation by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, wrongdoings committed by the occupation powers against Latvia and its people, and the consequences of the occupations.



The Audio-Visual Archive was started in 1994, when my colleague Andrejs Edvīns Feldmanis began to gather audio testimonies of people who suffered during the occupations. From 1996, we concentrated on gathering video testimonies.



## **VIDEO TESTIMONY**

**narrative of person whose life was  
dramatically influenced by the Soviet  
and/or Nazi occupation policies as a  
historical source**

***(e.g., deportees, refugees, or eyewitnesses of  
significant historical events)***



## **VIDEO TESTIMONY**

- **different nationalities** – *Latvians, Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, Germans etc.*
- **different languages** – *Latvian, Russian, German, English*
- **different countries** – *Latvia, Russia (Siberia), USA, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada etc.*

Video testimony is a modern method of documenting a narrative. Information in the form of a video recording, as compared to a written information sources makes it possible to preserve not only facts, but also the emotions of eyewitnesses. Moreover, video testimonies stand “as they are”, namely, they cannot be “polished” in the way that written testimonies may be. It thus helps to uncover the consequences of the narrated events — the moral and physical injuries to the interviewed persons. At present, the expeditions still take place. There are many people who could give testimonies, but our group is too small (only 3 persons) to interview all of them. Therefore, our priority is to record people who are over 80 years old and whose testimonies contain information for the Museum’s current research. The interviewees are from different nationalities. The most of the interviews are in Latvian, except some that are recorded in Russian, German and two interviews are in English. We record Latvians who are living not only in Latvia but also in Siberia (Krasnoyarsk district), Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Canada.



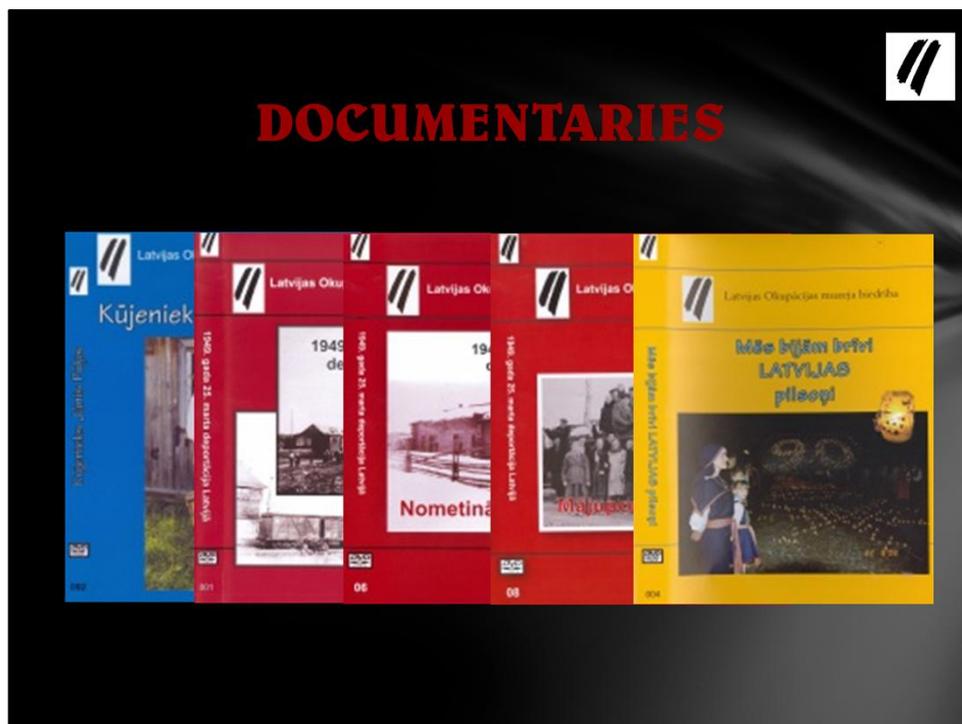
**UP TO NOW (1996 - 2013)**

**2170** video-testimonies  
total length approximately  
**3900** hours  
(0.5 – 11 hours each)

Up to now (September 2013) 2170 video testimonies have been recorded, totaling approximately 3900 hours (0.5–11 hours each). Almost every video testimony is so significant that we could make a documentary on its basis. This is the largest collection of video testimonies about Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes in Europe.



During the video expeditions we also collect significant artifacts, documents and photo materials as supplements to testimonies and as an independent source of information. We also scan family photos of the interviewees: how they and their relatives looked in childhood, youth, during events that he/she told us about, the places about which the interviewee spoke. We don't take the original photographs, because they are unique and belong to the memory of a family. Often there is important and sometimes unique information in these photos that should be seen and be accessible for researchers or the public.



We ourselves have also made some video films based on our collection to make our unique materials accessible to the broader public. Up to now we have prepared 9 documentaries, including 5 with English subtitles.

# WHAT TO DO NEXT?



**PRESERVATION**

**DIGITIZATION**

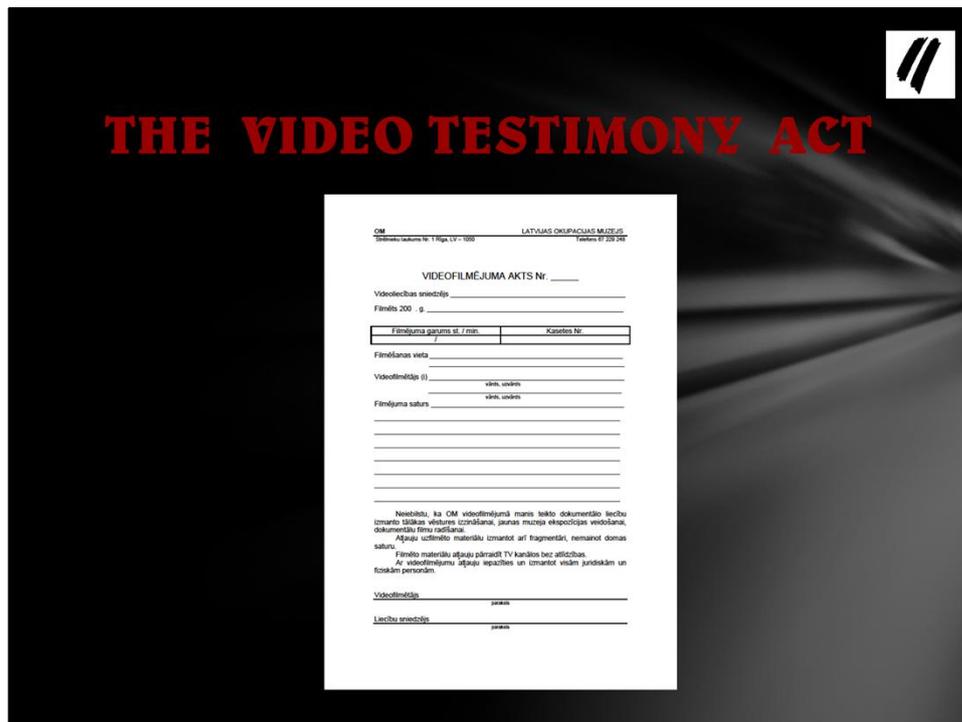
Today preservation means digitization. Together with the Museum's managers we are thinking already for some (7 or more) years about ways to solve this question. During this year we started talks about cooperation with Stanford University Libraries and Liisi Eglit as the Assistant Curator for Estonian and Baltic Studies. We are planning to digitize the video testimony collection and also store the copies in the Stanford University Libraries.

The digitization process consists not only of copying tape information to a computer but we also need to make a fundamental database with clear metadata and information for the future. Here comes the question about the information availability, how much of the collection's database and the video testimonies will open to the public, what are the borderlines, what information can we put on the internet for everybody's access and what falls in the restricted category? How can we share such sensitive information and to what degree?

## INTERVIEWEES



Here we need to remember that the video testimonies are life stories, narratives. They are subjective stories of how one individual person remembers events in his/her life. It is a very useful and important source of history but to get a clear picture - we need to look at different historical sources of certain period, to compare the testimonies of eyewitnesses with official or written documents.



After every interview the interviewer, video operator, interviewee, and if we have a witness (a person who sits and listens during the interview, it may be some relative or person who takes care of interviewee), sign the video testimony act. **This is a very important document because it determines the use and public access of this testimony.** We have 6 types of the document form with different provisions that we need to comply with — there might be some restriction on the access for some episodes, maybe some person’s names must be withheld or maybe information can be made accessible only after a number of years. This form determines the rules that we need to comply with.

## INTERVIEWEES



The video testimonies are life stories. They aren't testimonies only about one or two episodes in their lives, for example, deportation or supporting the National Partisans etc. These are life stories from the birth till present with real data, names, personal information. Can we put personal data for everybody to access?



## **AGREEMENT OF THE USE OF THE VIDEO MATERIALS OF THE OCCUPATION MUSEUM**

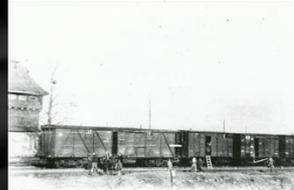
**The interviewee personal  
information has not be used against  
him/her or any person to cause  
moral harm.**

For research purposes or sometimes simply to understand a person's way of thinking, the way he/she acts and why, specialists are interested in a whole, complete interview. If there are not any restrictions, we can provide copies of a full interview, but they can only be used for the purpose that is written in a special "Agreement of the use of the video materials of the Occupation Museum". We need to be sure that the interviewee personal information will not be used against him/her or any person to cause moral harm.

- **Latvian soldiers in WW2** –  
*Latvians in the Red Army (USSR) and  
the Nazi Germany troops*



- **Soviet deportations 1941, 1949** –  
*collaborators, bystanders, deported  
people*



- **Holocaust** – *collaborators,  
bystanders, rescuers.*



Why are we so circumspect? That is because of sensitive information about themes that are still topical in today's politics.

The Museum's mission is for the video testimonies to be used for deeper understanding of history and today's society problems, to see what are the consequences of a totalitarian regime. We mustn't judge people in a history, there weren't bad or good ones – they all were people. These are also testimonies of the human nature in complicated social conditions.



## **THE VALUE OF A VIDEO TESTIMONY**

**Can we give the video testimonies  
for everyone and for free?**

**What is the value of a thing  
that come easily?**

There are people who support the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, there are specialists, who do this work as a special mission, there are many, many people who speak and tell their story not only for themselves but also for those who didn't survive repressions, who didn't live till the independence of Latvia, who can't speak today. There is a special archive and system how to find information. There is also so much to do still to make information easily accessible for researchers and people who are interested in it. Can we give the video testimonies for everyone and for free? What is the value of a book or clothes, or some other thing that come easily? Easy come, easy go? Is that what we want to happen with video testimonies?



**THANK YOU!**

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