

DIRECT HEIR

KEEPER OF FIVE CENTURIES OF FUNDAMENTAL SCIENCE

The modern building in quiet downtown Riga in the heart of famous Jugend quarters is actually several centuries old. The Academic Library at the University of Latvia is the oldest public library in the Baltic region. It was officially launched in 1524 when Riga town-hall took over the collection of books of the monarchs of the Dome capitul. 430 years later it added the treasures collected by provincial librarian Janis Misins and since then the funds have been constantly expanding for over a 150 years.

At present the Academic Library keeps 1.5 million books, 1.7 million newspapers and magazines, 58 thousand manuscripts and 32 thousand rare publications. It is an invaluable collection, a true diamond! Its keeper Venta Kocere has been working in the library for 35 years. It would be better to say she has served the library all her life.

The energetic, lively and purposeful woman constantly initiates new projects and miraculously succeeds in implementing each of them. The Book House at 10, Rupniecibas Street opens exhibitions, publishes books, and holds conferences. It is always full of people. Who claimed a library is a quiet haven and calm work?

– Such crazy directors as me do not work everywhere. But we keep such treasures that it would be a sin not to display them, Venta Kocere said.

Due to its director the Academic Library is not a book storage. It is a junction of various cultures and a territory for their dialogue. Venta herself personifies the dialogue.

SIBERIAN WILLOWS

Venta's parents were Latvians whose predecessors left for Siberia in the middle of the XIX century. The mother and father were born in the town of Kalachinsk not far from Omsk. There was a big Latvian community and the settlement was named to commemorate the native land - Old Riga. The family spoke Latvian in Siberian taiga and often recollected the native land. Venta's mother Dina decided to go home. She returned after the war in 1946. The bridegroom was killed in the war, the mother died and she had to begin her life anew. The native land was the best place for it.

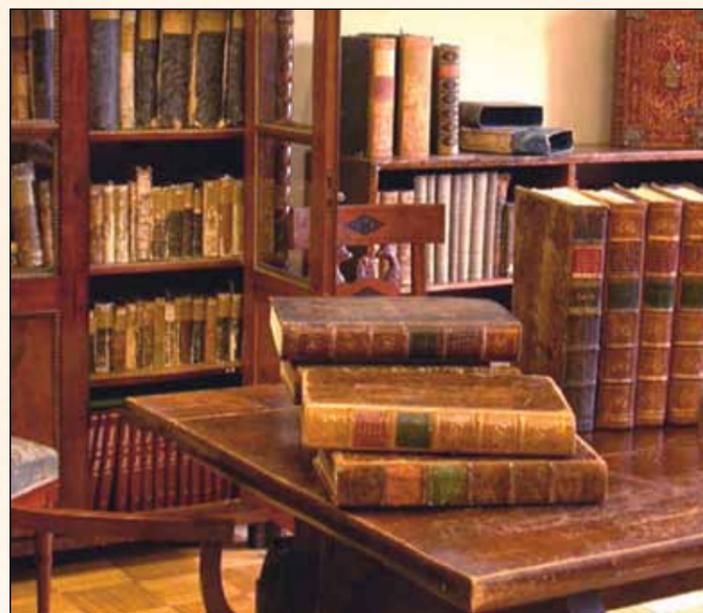
Life sometimes offers more action than movies. Janis Kocers returned to Latvia at the same time. He was also from Kalachinsk and grew together with Dina. They got married and soon a girl was born in Ventspils and named in honor of the city. It is surprising, but in the '50s Venta's parents chose a name that was easy to pronounce in various languages. They must have had second sight.

Venta finished school in the Latvian town of Limbaji, graduated from the University of Latvia in Riga and postgraduate courses of the Moscow State Institute of Culture.

– I practically have no relatives in Latvia while in Russia I have a lot, Venta said. – When I was a schoolgirl relatives often arrived from Moscow, Perm, and Omsk. I was surprised to hear them always talk with my mother about the past and recollect Siberia, the native settlement and willows on the bank of the river. Today I also want to know more about the place where my ancestors lived.

Venta was happy last summer when she visited Perm to attend a conference on intercultural dialogue. Her cousin-sisters were also happy to see her.

– They were surprised to see that people in Siberia know me, Venta smiled.



century is a zest of the treasury as it paints a complete picture of the cultural life of the time which was rich and intense. For example, in 1842 Franz Liszt performed

The Academic Library at the University of Latvia is the oldest public library in the Baltic region.

However there were no reasons for surprise. Venta Kocere, PhD Philology, is a well-known personality in Russia. She is acting member of the Peter's Academy of Science and Arts, member of the Council for book publishing at the International Association of Academies of Sciences, the author of numerous academic works. The Russian Imperial Heritage Foundation for the preservation and development of historic traditions has recently awarded her with the jubilee Kulmsky Cross in honor of the bicentennial of the victory in the 1812 war against Napoleon. The event was widely marked in Riga also due to Venta's efforts.

in Riga and the bills and programs of his concerts have been preserved.

Behind a thick metal-bar door there is a safe room with rows of bookshelves up to the ceiling. It is the sancta sanctorum where manuscripts beginning from the XIII century, the contemporaries of Bishop Albert and ancient Riga are being kept in microclimate conditions. There are signatures of Peter the Great, military commanders Kutuzov and Barclay de Tolli, an award list from which Napoleon personally deleted one of the three names next day after the Battle at Borodino. We can only guess

TREASURY IN RUPNIECIBAS STREET

Behind the glass of ancient bookcases in the reading room one can see ancient backbones. There are dozens of book relics - dictionaries, encyclopedias, collections of documents, pages of genuine history that keep the aroma of the epoch. A collection of theater play bills of the XIX

whether the emperor was in a bad mood or received some discrediting information about the candidate at the last moment. Another mystery is how the artifacts got to Riga, to the Academic Library?

- It is important that we have them! said Venta who enjoys the excitement of visitors. - The treasures reached us due to those who realized that everything created by humans obtains added value with time and becomes an evidence of the epoch.

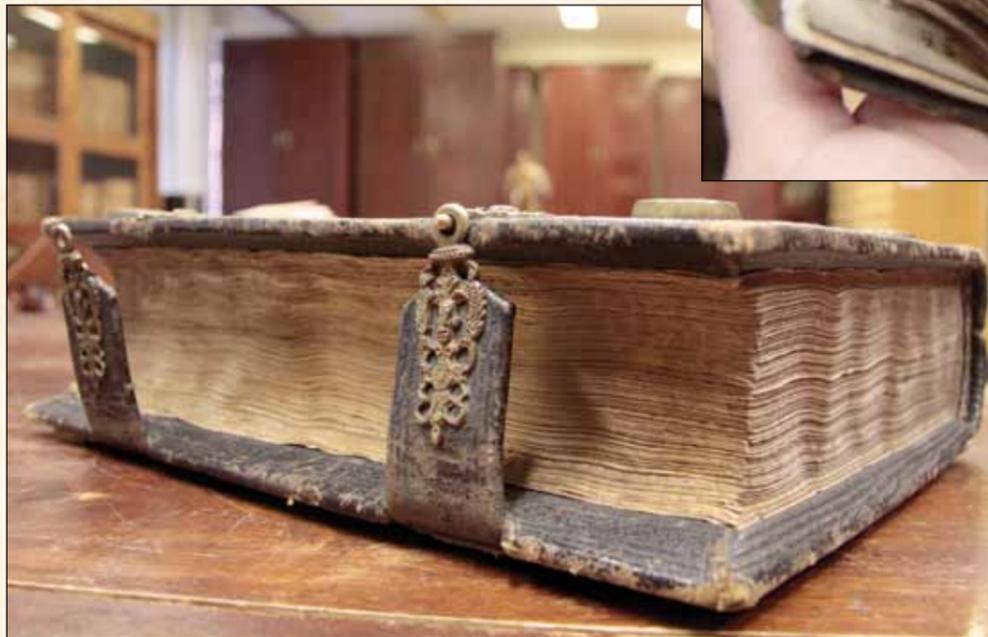
The library obtained hundreds of unique books thanks to bibliographer Janis Misins. He was born in a small town of Tirze and devoted all his life to books. He bought or acquired them, exchanged publications as if he foresaw their future value. He did it not for himself, but to share with others and with descendants. In 1925 Janis Misins handed over his valuable book collection to the city of Riga. Thus, the first Latvian public library appeared on the territory of modern Latvia. This year its successor - the Academic Library - marked 150th birth anniversary of the Latvian enlightener who laid the basis of academic bibliography.

BROTZE STOPPED THE TIME

Now we have come to the main thing - collection of works by Johann Christoph Brotze (1723-1842). Academics said the ethnographer contributed as much to the Latvian culture as Vladimir Dal did for Russia by compiling his Definition dictionary. A German by origin and pedagogue by education Brotze preserved Lifland of the second half of the XVIII - early XIX centuries for us.

Brotze's legacy comprises 30 thick volumes, 3000 drawings and descriptions which offer rich material for historians. Had the library kept only his works they would be enough to make it a cultural center of the Baltic region, a hub of Baltic civilization. During World War Two the Germans wanted to take Brotze's collection to the Third Reich but library staff succeeded to keep the treasure in Riga which the scholar adorned.

He made drawings of everything he saw - streets, people, and copied historical documents. He did it with photo-like precision and thoroughly recorded all details. His drawings are black-and-white and colored. Brotze collected them in a chronological manner and accompanied with statistical data, comments, explanations of his own and of well-known and unknown contemporaries. Having completed a volume the scholar sometimes re-analyzed the work he did and added text or draw-



Brotze's drawings show Riga densely populated. They depict street bread and fruit vendors, hussars and grenadiers, carpenters and milkmaids. Thanks to Brotze it is definitely known where Riga Balsam originated. The ethnographer made a drawing of the mansion of Russian merchant Lelyukhin on Kliveru Island where a recipe of chemist Abram Kunze was used in 1792 to produce the drink both for domestic consumption and for export.

- Riga dapples with various clothes and images and viewing them is a big pleasure. Therefore, I presented them in abundance and for the sake of variety offered various ages, strata, and sex like they appear in real life, Johann Brotze explained. His drawings feature people of 14 nationalities that inhabited Riga of his time - Latvians, Russians, Lithuanians, Germans, Bashkirs, and even one German.

- National variety is a wealth of Latvia rather than a problem. It appeared not in the '20-30s of the last century but at least two hundred years earlier, Venta Kocere told a meeting of the council for national minorities at the president of the Republic of Latvia. She cited Brotze's works as a proof. - He was constantly engaged in intercultural dialogue and threaded together various strata of the population, nationalities, and towns.

Distinguished Russian historians Karamzin and Razumovsky used the materials collected by Brotze. He made the first copy of the famous Smolensk Treaty which is very important for Russian history.

The thread has not been broken, but got stronger today.

In the past five years Venta Kocere took the exhibition Collection of drawings and descriptions of Lifland by Brotze to eleven countries of Europe. It is hard to imagine something better for the image of Latvia. The drawings of ethnographer caused specific interest in Estonia as everyone wanted to know how the native town or settlement looked like over two hundred years ago. Cooperation continues: distinguished Estonian historian Raimo Pullat prepared and published materials related to his country. The luxurious and expensive ency-

clopedia Johann Christoph Brotze/ Estonica sold out like hot cakes.

Quite recently the book Sea of Spirits came out in Riga in Latvian language. It is a modern and exciting narration by Estonian and Latvian historians of how people made fortunes between two world wars by smuggling alcohol from Estonia and Latvia to Finland where prohibition was in force. They smuggled spirits in torpedoes of warships and in thin flasks under the clothes. The Estonian embassy to Latvia helped to time an exhibition from the Rannarahva Museum of littoral culture to the presentation of the Sea of Spirits.

Had Brotze been alive he would have definitely made drawings of the exhibits.

UKRAINIAN WREATH AND AZERI MOTIVES

The Academic Library has been accommodating the Swiss and Austrian information centers for ten years.

- It is an honor for us that the embassies of the two countries chose our library for their strongholds, Venta said.



The library offers the richest choice of German-language books in Latvia. The collection began with a present from the embassy of Austria worth 50 thousand lats and continues to expand. The Swiss and Austrians who live in Latvia like to gather in the small rooms with an extreme density of cultural values per square meter. Distinguished

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personalities of the countries meet compatriots there during visits to Latvia.

The Austrian Center has recently welcomed distinguished Swiss writer Paul Nizon (his father was born in Riga and library staff helped the son to find the house), exhibited facsimile of the works of noted artist Gustav Klimt, held conferences devoted to outstanding analytical psychologists Alfred Adler and Sigmund Freud.

– It turned out that in post-war Latvia a society of individual psychoanalysis was set up under the influence of Adler, said Venta who keeps admiring the variety and diversity of cultural ties.

In 2004 the Ukrainian information center opened in the library. 60 thousand Ukrainians living in Latvia consider it to be their headquarters. Book-

shelves are full of Ukrainian-language publications while several years ago when Chairman of the Union of Ukrainians Vladimir Lugovsky purchased furniture for the center it looked like there will be enough free room for a long time.

Then Ukrainian Supreme Rada speaker, Vladimir Lukin, visited the center during a trip to Latvia and said it was full of cordiality and love and if Ukrainians meet such

an understanding everywhere economic cooperation will be successful.

– We call Venta Kocere a Ukrainian. She definitely looks like a Ukrainian - dark eyed and very lively, said Viktor Stefanovich, co-chair of the Union of Ukrainians in Latvia.

However Venta's interest in Ukraine has nothing to do with her origin. It emerged in 1996 when she suggested holding an exhibition of Ukrainian-Latvian historic and cultural ties. Vladimir Cherny, who was the Ukrainian ambassador to Latvia at the time asked Venta: "Has Taras

Shevchenko ever been in Latvia?"

– I immediately said "Yes"! Only then I realized I did not know it for sure. But I wanted it to be. I got down to research of the library funds to find a confirmation to my claim, Venta recalled.

And she did it. It turned out Taras Shevchenko travelled to Petersburg via Dinaburg as a 16-year old boy. He came to Latvia for the second time as a famous poet. He sailed from Stockholm to Petersburg via Riga and Liepaja. His brief stay was so impressive that the Gamalia poem appeared after it.

Friendly relations with colleagues from the Karazin National University in Kharkov resulted in a new project in which she immersed completely - Latvians in Kharkov Region book. (Dur-

ing the First World War the Latvian community in Kharkov numbered 20 thousand people). It is a unique collection of documents about the life of the Latvians in the Ukrainian city. There are a lot of them for analysis. Numerous telephone calls and e-mails are going between Riga and Kharkov. The book will definitely be continued as Venta is writing a monograph.



Venta Kocere and Metropolitan of Riga and all Latvia Alexander

Last year Venta visited Baku where she also discovered a Latvian trace. There was a Latvian community in the capital city of Azerbaijan. During the First World War writer and artist Janis Junsudrabins lived and worked there.

Although Mikhail Lomonosov, who is often called Russian Leonardo,

has never been in Latvia the future genius went to study in Germany due to the President of the Academy of Sciences and Kurland Baron Johann Korf. Latvian enlightener Fricis Brivsemnieks wrote a book about Lomonosov which is considered to be his first academic biography in Latvian language and a bestseller of its time. The fate of the Russian academician resembled to Latvians their own life in which one has to work hard to career.



Now Venta exactly knows that historic ties between people, fates and countries always exist. You only have to look for them.

In 2011 Venta Kocere was unanimously elected chairperson of the Consultative council of Amber Bridge Baltics funds and the Baltic Civilization Institute



Venta Kocere meeting with the President of Latvia A. Bērziņš

which aim at improving partnership between Baltic Sea neighbors. She has been engaged in the mission all her life and has been spanning bridges between people and countries across historic and geographic borders on the solid foundation of human values. Intercultural dialogue is both her work and vocation which is an ideal coincidence.

Olga Larina,
for Amber Bridge