



# **SAME COUNTRY, SAME BUILDING**

*The Latvian Embassy in Helsinki*

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## **Same Country, Same Building: The Latvian Embassy in Helsinki**

**By Una Bergmane**

### **Introduction**

Urban landmarks, such as houses, streets, markets, and parks, do more than provide visual orientation – they're emotional touchpoints linking us to the past.

Photos of the square at Riga Central Station come to mind when we think of the occupation of Latvia on June 17, 1940. The most iconic photo depicts Soviet military vehicles and an agitated crowd, but the surrounding buildings aren't visible, making it seem like any wartime city in 1940. We believe it's Riga because of the caption. Similar images reveal nearby architecture and identify Riga. Now, the armoured vehicles in a crowded square become frightening on a personal level.

Not all elements in urban environments impact us equally, and not all cities hold the same significance. What resonates most profoundly are items tied to our identity, such as streets, houses, and places from our childhood.

Locations with personal memories evoke emotions and speak to us as a society, community, and nation. Some landmarks, like Latvia's Freedom Monument, aim to strengthen our collective identity, while others, like Riga Castle, have evolved into symbols of shared identity.

Like other state symbols, including monuments, administrative structures, and the residences of heads of state, Embassy buildings hold unique stature. Although they rarely achieve widespread recognition, embassies represent a state's territorial presence abroad.

The 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States defines a state as having four criteria: population, territory, a functioning government, and the ability to engage with other states. Diplomatic representation in another state's territory signifies a state's fulfilment of the fourth criterion: embassy buildings serve as visual, material, and symbolic proof.

In the summer of 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Latvia and sought to claim Latvia's foreign assets, including embassy buildings.

During the interwar period, the Latvian state had acquired seven properties in European capitals critical to foreign policy. These included Weimar Republic-era Berlin, Paris, Tallinn, Helsinki, Warsaw, Geneva (the League of Nations Headquarters), and Kaunas (the then-capital of Lithuania).

Following the illegal annexation of Latvia on August 5, 1940, Moscow seized all these buildings except the Latvian Embassy in Warsaw, which had been destroyed during a 1939 German air raid. Overtaking embassies was considered part of dismantling Latvia's statehood and limiting opportunities for loyal diplomats to represent their country internationally.



Despite the illegal annexation, Latvia maintained representation in the embassy in London until 1970. The Soviet Union's ability to assert claims was limited by a 1925 contract designating that the long-term tenant was the Latvian Embassy's envoy.

The diplomatic mission in the United States had the most favourable situation. The U.S. recognized diplomats of independent Latvia as the sole legal representatives and paid annual dues to the Latvian Embassy from funds deposited in U.S. banks before 1940. The Latvian mission operated in these rented premises until 1951, when it purchased a building in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, symbols of independent Latvia vanished from European streetscapes, and red-white-red flags and Latvian coats of arms disappeared from facades.

More than 50 years later, a new generation of Latvian diplomats was able to return to two of the buildings that their predecessors were forced to leave in August 1940. One of these buildings is Villa Frenckell, located at Armfeltintie No. 10 in Helsinki.

## Return

"Conversations with Ambassador Tepfers led me to understand something fundamental," Anna Žīgure, the first Ambassador of restored Latvia to Helsinki, wrote in her memoir published in 2000. "It's easier to start now, after a 50-year break, than it was for him [Tepfers] to end the embassy's operation more than half a century ago."<sup>1</sup> Jānis Tepfers

<sup>1</sup> Anna Žīgure, *Es stāstu par Latviju*. Riga: 2000, p. 138

served as the Latvian Ambassador in Helsinki from 1939-1940.

The story of a building intertwines the destinies of states and individuals. It also highlights changes in fundamental principles of international relations, which enabled the Latvian diplomatic mission to reoccupy the embassy building on Armfeltintie.

In the 1920s, peace activists and diplomats in Europe and the United States, awakened by the tragic experiences of World War I, sought to alter inter-state relations. The Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed war as a solution to international conflict, was signed in Paris in 1928 by 63 countries and exemplifies these efforts.

Given the backdrop of the previous century's bloody conflicts, this document might seem like a tragic testament to 20th-century utopian illusions. However, scholars like Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro argue that the pact was pivotal<sup>2</sup> because it shifted international relations towards the principle that law should not arise from injustice.

The Stimson Doctrine, stemming from the Pact, came into use in 1932 when the United States refused to recognize Japan's claim to Manchuria<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the U.S. declined to acknowledge the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic

<sup>2</sup> Oona A. Hathaway; Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World*, New York, 2017

<sup>3</sup> The US State Secretary to the US ambassador to Japan on January 7, 1932. Available online: <http://courses.knox.edu/hist285schneid/stimsondoctrine.html>



countries in the summer of 1940 and challenged changes brought about through threats and force<sup>4</sup>.

Washington's stance played a critical role in shaping the future of Latvia and the Baltic states during the Cold War. Most Western countries followed the U.S. example, asserting that from an international law perspective, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania weren't legally part of the Soviet Union. This policy laid the foundation for Baltic continuity and asserted Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania's existence *de jure* despite Soviet invasion and occupation.

The fate of the Helsinki embassy building, and the doctrine of continuity are closely intertwined. After regaining independence in 1991, Latvia could reclaim specific buildings and property because the international community acknowledged that, legally, Latvia remained the same state founded in 1918.

This recognition was unprecedented. It was the first instance of a state having persisted exclusively *de jure* for an extended period, even though it had lost essential elements of statehood, including control over its territory and population and a functioning government.

The fact that most of the world's countries recognized the legal identity of the Baltic countries set a precedent in international law. The actions and decisions of individual countries regarding interwar properties and

contractual obligations significantly strengthened Latvia's continuity.

Finland's decision to return properties lost during the occupation affirmed that Finland regarded today's Baltic countries as legally the same entities with which they had established diplomatic relations in the early 1920s. Like any embassy building, the Latvian Embassy at Armfeltintie No. 10 symbolizes Latvia's statehood and represents continuity.

### Arrival

Latvia and Finland, while sharing paths to independence after World War I, had distinct journeys. Both were part of the Russian Empire until 1917, but Finland's territory, annexed as a Grand Duchy in 1809, enjoyed substantial autonomy. On the other hand, Latvia's territory was divided into three Russian governorates with limited self-governance under Baltic German rule.

Finland declared independence on December 6, 1917, following the February and October revolutions in Russia. Latvia remained occupied by German troops and could only declare independence after the capitulation of Germany in November 1918.

Hostilities in both countries did not end with the war. Finland underwent a bloody Civil War in early 1918. Latvia experienced the so-called War of Independence, a complex, three-year conflict involving "the interests of the Republic of Latvia, Soviet Russia, Latvian Bolsheviks, Baltic Germans, Germany that had lost the war, Russians fighting against Bolsheviks,

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<sup>4</sup> The US Deputy State Secretary Sumner Welles's report on July 23, 1940. Available online: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/144967.pdf>

and new and reborn neighbouring states and Western powers.”<sup>5</sup>

International recognition came swiftly for Finland in early 1918. Latvia had to wait until January 26, 1921, for the Council of Entente countries to recognize its independence. Finland reciprocated by acknowledging the sovereignty of Latvia and Estonia on the same day.

Latvia and Finland established relations in May 1919, when Jānis Ramans, a representative of the Provisional Government of Latvia living in Tallinn, authorized Emīls Dzinējs to temporarily represent the interests of Latvian citizens in Finland.

Kārlis Reinholds Zariņš, a notable Latvian diplomat, became the next representative. Zariņš, later envoy in London, continued representing independent Latvia after the 1940 occupation and played a significant role in ensuring the country's continuity. Finland reciprocated with Reino Wilhelm Sylvander becoming the first Finnish diplomat in Latvia in the summer of 1920.

While relations between Latvia and Finland were generally positive during the interwar period, they didn't achieve the closeness envisioned by Latvia's first Foreign Minister, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, in the early 1920s. Meierovics's Baltic Entente project, which aimed to unite Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, was discussed but never implemented.

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<sup>5</sup> Ēriks Jēkabsons, “Latvijas Neatkarības karš”. Nacionālā enciklopēdija. Available online: <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/22216>

In May 1926, Latvia's first President, Jānis Čakste, embarked on the first of two foreign visits, travelling to Finland via the Latvian icebreaker “Krišjānis Valdemārs.” Finnish President Lauri Kristian Relander arrived in Riga a month later.

The idea of acquiring an embassy building in Helsinki surfaced in 1920 during the tenure of Latvia's first Ambassador, Kāris Zariņš. However, the young state had more pressing needs, and the Cabinet of Ministers rejected the proposal<sup>6</sup>. In subsequent years, the Latvian Embassy operated in rented premises. It wasn't until 1935 that the Cabinet's decision was favourable<sup>7</sup>, and Latvia made its first payment to acquire Villa Frenckell.

### **Villa Frenckell**

Nestled in Helsinki's Eira district, Villa Frenckell is a testament to the Art Nouveau style that defined the area's residential architecture at the turn of the 20th century. The district is named after Eira Hospital, which pays homage to Eira, the Norse goddess of healing. The building took shape in 1921-1922 during Helsinki's high point as the capital of independent Finland.

The city's roots trace back to the 16th century when King Gustav I of Sweden founded Helsingfors. The strategic location along the Gulf of Finland, facing Tallinn (Rävel), was chosen to establish a stronghold in Sweden's ongoing struggle against its economic and political adversary, the Hanseatic League. However,

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<sup>6</sup> The State History Archive of Latvia (LVVA) 1307. f., 1. apr., 281. l., p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 1458. l., p. 257.; 1434. l. 247., p. 248.

Helsingfors remained a relatively modest city until the 19th century and couldn't surpass the prominence of the old capital, Turku. After the Russo-Swedish war, Finland came under Russian rule, leading Tsar Alexander I to shift the Grand Duchy's capital from Turku to the closer proximity of Helsinki.

Finland's national awakening took root in the mid-19th century with the emergence of the *Fennomania* movement, which aimed to foster the development of the Finnish language and culture within Russia-controlled Finland. The Swedish-speaking minority, of which many were native speakers or Swedish by birth, comprised the elite of Finnish society and played a dual role in this narrative. Some felt threatened by the rise of the Finnish language and culture and mobilized to strengthen their rights<sup>8</sup>.

### **The first owners**

The first owner of *Villa Frenckell*, Arthur Reinhold Frenckell, was born in 1861 into a Swedish-speaking family of book publishers. The Frenckell printing house, a familial legacy since the mid-18th century, remained under family ownership until 2008<sup>9</sup>. Arthur's father was the first director of the Finnish Treasury and editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad*.

Arthur studied philosophy in his youth, wrote theatre reviews, and laid

the groundwork for his career as a journalist. In 1885, he purchased the Swedish-language newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* and assumed the role of editor-in-chief. Under his leadership, *Hufvudstadsbladet* became the largest daily newspaper in Finland, maintaining this status until 1920.

From his first marriage, Arthur's daughter Sigrid Fick achieved recognition as a tennis athlete, representing Sweden at the Stockholm Olympics in 1912 and winning silver in doubles. In 1918, Arthur married for the third time, and by 1922, the family had a new residence at Armfeltintie No. 10, designed by architect Walter Gabriel Jung. Jung's portfolio included the Art Nouveau-style Cinema Palace Kinopalatsi in Pohjoisesplanadi 39 (1911) and the classicist parish house on the corner of Annankatu and Bulevardi (1913).

Villa Frenckell's three-storey façade at Armfeltintie No. 10 reflects a harmonious blend of Nordic Classicism and Italian Renaissance. The interior, designed in National Romanticism by Finnish interior designer Nils Wasastjerna, is adorned with stained-glass windows and frescoes crafted by artist Bruno Tuukkanen. Tuukkanen's artistic contributions include various churches, murals in the Finnish Parliament building, and involvement in the design of the Finnish flag in 1918. Villa Frenckell's interior also features a Hanko granite fireplace, a mantelpiece adorned with tiles from Arabia, and German wood panels from St. Petersburg.

<sup>8</sup> Jason Lavery, *The History of Finland*. Westport CT, 2006, p. 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> Frenckell, Arthur Reinhold, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Biografiskt lexikon för Finland. Available online: <https://www.blf.fi/om-blf.htm>



By the late 1920s, Arthur Reinhold Frenckell was dealing with economic hardships exacerbated by his lavish lifestyle. Consequently, Frenckell relinquished ownership of Villa Frenckell to the company *Fastgbetsaktiebolag Armfeltintie 10*.

The Latvian Embassy entered the scene during this transitional period, renting the property in 1935 and finalizing ownership in 1936. The process culminated in 1938 when Villa Frenckell became a wholly owned asset of the Latvian state.

Vilis Šūmanis was the first Latvian Ambassador to work in the newly acquired building. Jānis Tepfers, an adjutant to former Foreign Minister Z.A. Meierovics and the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, assumed the role of Ambassador in 1938.

### **Absence**

The sales deed for Armfeltintie No. 10 is notably absent from the Latvian archives. Presumably, it was transferred to Moscow with the entire archive of the Latvian Embassy following the illicit annexation of Latvia by the Soviet Union. Amidst the tumultuous conditions of 1940, diplomats from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia found themselves grappling with challenging decisions on a personal and national level.

In May 1940, exactly one month before the Red Army invaded Latvia, the Latvian government empowered the Latvian Ambassador to London, Kārlis Reinholds Zariņš, to represent Latvia's interests abroad in the event of war.

The Lithuanian government dispatched a similar directive to its embassies on June 2. "We're very concerned that Moscow's accusations may be hiding something more serious and dangerous for Lithuania," it read. "If disaster were to befall us [...] we ask you to accept S. Lozoraitis [envoy in Rome] as the head of the Lithuanian diplomatic service."<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, when Soviet troops crossed the borders of the Baltic countries on June 15 and 17, Latvian and Lithuanian ambassadors did not receive official orders from their governments to exercise extraordinary powers. In Latvia's case, the last communication between the Embassy in London and the government in Riga was a telegram sent by the Foreign Minister in the early hours of June 17. "Soviet troops are invading the country and seizing all major institutions," it read.<sup>11</sup> Baltic representatives abroad were compelled to make autonomous decisions on how to navigate an unprecedented situation.

The initial weeks following the Soviet invasion were particularly bewildering for Baltic diplomats. The extent of control maintained by governments of the independent Baltic countries remained unclear. By mid-July 1940, however, it became clear that the Soviet Union intended not only to install puppet governments in the Baltic countries but also to annex Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Parliaments, elected in

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<sup>10</sup> Albert N. Tarulis, *Soviet Policy toward the Baltic States, 1918-1940*. Notre Dame, 1959, p. 174

<sup>11</sup> Antonijs Zunda, "Zem politisko lielvaru rīteniem". *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 10.03.2005.

fraudulent elections, hastily petitioned for the annexation of these countries to the Soviet Union.

Diplomats abroad, loyal to the independent Baltic States, issued notes condemning the events in the Baltics to the governments of their host countries. The collaborationist government in power in Riga retaliated by stripping these diplomats of their citizenship and property in the homeland.

Kārlis Reinholds Zariņš continued to represent the interests of the independent Republic of Latvia and headed its diplomatic service for over 20 years. Following Zariņš's death in 1963, Jūlijs Feldmanis, Latvia's Ambassador to the United States, became head of the diplomatic mission.

During the tumultuous summer of 1940, the employees of the Latvian Embassy in Finland pursued diverse paths. Envoy Jānis Tepfers chose to retire from the Foreign Affairs service and resigned. On July 27, Tepfers passed on leadership of the Embassy to First Secretary Jānis Zirnis.

Tepfers and his family embarked on exile to Sweden. Initially working as an interpreter at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tepfers joined the Commercial Bank *Handelsbanken* in Stockholm in 1947. Actively involved in organizing assistance for compatriots who fled across the sea, Tepfers became a prominent figure in Sweden's Latvian community<sup>12</sup>. In

1954, Kārlis Zariņš appointed Jānis Tepfers to represent Latvia in Sweden.

On August 5, 1940, the Soviet Union annexed Latvia. Three days later, the Soviet Latvia government closed Latvian embassies, seizing all archives and assets.<sup>13</sup> Faced with this situation, Jānis Zirnis chose to collaborate with the occupying power in Riga and, on August 10, 1940, surrendered the Helsinki Embassy house, archives, and inventory to the Soviet Union's Embassy in Finland.

Armfeltintie no. 10 became the property of the Soviet Union, and Jānis Zirnis returned to Riga. Zirnis was relieved of his position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a few months later. In 1944, he fled to Germany but later returned to Latvia, where he worked as a warehouse manager.

Finland had experienced aggression from the Soviet Union even before the Baltic countries lost their independence in the summer of 1940. During the Winter War, it lost part of its territory in Karelia.

When hostilities erupted between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, Finland aligned itself with Germany. It launched an offensive against the Soviet Union to reclaim previously lost territories. Soviet Ambassador Pavel Orlov left Finland on June 21, 1941. At the behest of the Soviet Union, neutral Sweden, which had legally recognized the annexation of the Baltic States<sup>14</sup>, took

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<sup>12</sup> Rihards Treijs, "Latvijas pēdējais sūtnis Somijā". Latvijas Vēstnesis, 19.07.2002. Available online: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/64607>

<sup>13</sup> Latvian State Archive, 270. f., 1. apr., 2. l., p. 147.-148.

<sup>14</sup> Pekka Linnainen, "Viron lähetystötilon varastetut vuodet 1940–1994". Estofennia, 02.12.2018. Available

control of the USSR's properties in Finland, most likely also Armfeltintie no. 10.

The conflict persisted for three years until the signing of the Moscow Armistice in September 1944. Enforcement of the peace agreement was supervised by the Allied Control Commission, comprised of 15 British and over 200 Soviet representatives. Andrei Zhdanov, a prominent figure in Stalin's inner circle, led the Commission.

Because the Soviet Union had bombed its own Embassy building during the conflict, Ambassador Orlov established a residence in the former German Embassy. During his stays in Helsinki, Zhdanov utilized the residence at Armfeltintie no. 10.<sup>15</sup> Other Commission executives resided at Itäinen Puistotie no. 20A (now Itäinen Puistotie no. 10), which Estonia had initially constructed for use as a mission in the 1930s. The Control Commission situated its headquarters in the heart of the city, within the towering Hotel Torni, erected in 1931 and designed by Walter Jung, the architect of Villa Frenckell.

Villa Frenckell's new occupant swiftly became one of the most influential figures in the post-war Soviet Union. Until his demise in 1948, Zhdanov was even considered a potential successor to Stalin. However, the Helsinki period (1944-1945) marked a tumultuous phase in Zhdanov's career. Despite his active role in the repressions of the Stalinist Great

online: <https://estofennia.eu/viron-lahetystotalon-varastetut-vuodet/>

<sup>15</sup> Kirsti Toppari, "Ahon Lastujen syntysijoilla". *Helsingin Sanomat*, 02.02.1981.

Terror and the orchestration of Estonia's occupation, Zhdanov faced temporary isolation from Stalin's inner circle.

Stalin, who had previously trusted Hitler, condemned Zhdanov and his closest associates for failing to predict Germany's attack in 1941. Throughout the war, Zhdanov served as head of the regional party organization in Leningrad. Despite serious lapses in organizing the city's defence in 1941, he partially regained Stalin's favour after the end of the siege.

Finnish researchers refer to the period from 1944 to 1948, when Finland's sovereignty was threatened, as the "years of danger" (Vaaran vuodet).

Although Moscow did not believe in the full Sovietisation of Finland<sup>16</sup>, the Control Commission intervened in Finland's domestic and foreign policy. Finland ceded Karelia and several islands in the Gulf of Finland, paid war reparations to the Soviet Union and prosecuted Finnish politicians deemed responsible for Finland's 1941 attack on the Soviet Union.

The Allied Control Commission concluded its operations in 1948 after establishing the border between Finland and the Soviet Union under the auspices of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty. That same year, Finland and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance.

This treaty laid the foundation for relations that deviated significantly from the Soviet Union's dominance in Eastern Europe. Finland was not

<sup>16</sup> Kees Boterbloem, *Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 1896-1948*. Montreal, 2004, p. 250-251.



obligated to support either side in the Cold War superpower struggle and was not forced into a military cooperation agreement. However, Finland's neutrality was not absolute. Helsinki's foreign policy doctrine rested on the understanding that Finland's ability to exist as an independent, democratic, and capitalist state was directly related to maintaining positive relations with the Soviet Union.

In 1947, Villa Frenckell became the temporary residence for Grigori Savonenko, the former vice-chairman of the Allied Control Commission and the Soviet Ambassador to Finland. Subsequently, the Latvian Embassy building, much like its Estonian counterpart, briefly housed the Trade Representative Office of the USSR and a school for children of Soviet diplomats.

The mid-1960s marked a pivotal moment for Villa Frenckell. The Soviet Union initiated plans for a new building to house its trade mission, which altered the villa's destiny.

The Soviet Union sought to construct a commercial mission adjacent to its Embassy on Tehtaankatu Street on a plot of land owned by the Finnish state. In 1966, Finland and the USSR reached a bilateral agreement that the Soviet Union would acquire the desired plot of land in exchange for three properties—the Latvian Embassy, the Estonian Embassy, and a property in Töölö confiscated from Germany during the reparations process.

Although the Finnish Parliament approved the transaction in 1968<sup>17</sup>, a protracted legal dispute ensued between the Finnish state and the city of Helsinki<sup>18</sup>. Finally, in 1973, Armfeltintie no. 10 and Itäinen Puistotie no. 10 officially became Finland's property.<sup>19</sup>

The subsequent trajectories of the Baltic Embassies diverged. The Estonian building was sold in 1978 to Bulgaria, which established its embassy there. Latvian building underwent a massive renovation, which incorporated tiles from the recently renovated residence of President Kekkonen in Tamminiemi.<sup>20</sup>

In 1975, the Finnish-Soviet Research Institute (Neuvostoliittoinstituutti-Sovjetinstitutet) started using the building. Established in 1947 and operating under the Ministry of Education, the Institute aimed to conduct USSR-related research and foster academic cooperation between the two countries. Reforms in 1967 strengthened the scientific function and minimized the influence of Finnish communists and the Finnish-Soviet Friendship Society. The

<sup>17</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Laki tonttialueiden vaihdosta Suomen valtion ja Neuvostoliiton välillä (Act on the exchange of plots of land between the State of Finland and the Soviet Union). Signed in Helsinki on December 27, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 6 O Neuvostoliitto m, Kättilöopiston tontti, a letter from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on November 11, 1971.

<sup>19</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 6 O Neuvostoliitto m, Kättilöopiston tontti, a letter from Building Authority to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland on July 24, 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Unto Hämäläinen, "Neuvosto-instituutti Eiran palatsissa". *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24.02.2002

institute moved to more prestigious premises, but in 1993, the director, Valdemar Melanko, admitted that the building had become like a “golden cage”<sup>21</sup> and was unsuitable for the Institute’s extensive library.

The transfer of Villa Frenczell to Finnish ownership didn’t escape the notice of Latvian diplomats in exile. Roberts Liepiņš (1890–1978), a long-serving member of the Latvian Foreign Service and the representative of Latvia in the Federal Republic of Germany, learned of the villa’s fate in 1974 through retired Finnish judge Johannes Jyrylä. Liepiņš reported the matter to Anatols Dinsbergs, head of the Latvian diplomatic mission, concluding his January 20, 1974 report with the optimistic prediction that “Once the situation in Eastern Europe changes, the restored Latvian state will negotiate issues related to the building with Finland, not Moscow.”<sup>22</sup>

Seventeen years later, Roberts Liepiņš’s prophecy materialized.

## Return

Western countries cautiously observed the rapidly burgeoning independence movements in the Baltic countries. In the summer of 1989, diplomats from Spain, presiding over the European Community, highlighted the Western world’s dilemma in dealing with the Baltic issue. “The Western world faces an obvious contradiction: either forfeit

the opportunity to support the Baltic States, thereby violating established principles of non-recognition of incorporation or openly endorse the Baltic countries’ quest for independence, diminishing Gorbachev’s manoeuvrability and introducing new challenges to perestroika.”<sup>23</sup>

The West feared potential repercussions of Baltic independence, such as the fall of Gorbachev, a military coup, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, civil wars, refugee influx, nuclear threats, and economic crises.

Finnish President Mauno Henrik Koivisto echoed these concerns in a letter to U.S. President George H.W. Bush on September 19, 1989: “The Baltic nations have managed to win many, even some surprising, concessions from Moscow. We’re afraid that at some point they may go too far and thus jeopardize not only the improvement of their situation but also the ongoing process in a wider context.”<sup>24</sup>

Although, from 1990 onward, most Western countries theoretically supported Baltic independence, they preferred negotiations be held between the Baltic States and Moscow. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1990, a group of smaller states—Denmark, Iceland, Poland, Sweden,

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<sup>21</sup> Ulla Janhonen, “Latvian suurlähetystö on saamassa entiset tilansa Armfeltintieltä”. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 23.09.1993.

<sup>22</sup> LVVA, 293. f. (Embassy in Washington), 1. apr., 5000. l., p.1

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<sup>23</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France, URSS (1986–1990) 6592; COREAU (European correspondence), Madrid, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France on May 16, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Juha-Matti Ritvanen, *The change in Finnish Baltic policy as a turning point in Finnish-Soviet relations. Finland, Baltic independence and the end of the Soviet Union 1988–1991*, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2020 4 (DOI: 10.1080/03468755.2020.1765861)

and Norway—demanded that Moscow respect the Baltic countries' right to independence.

Finland, in contrast, maintained a more conservative stance with a foreign policy distinct from that of its Scandinavian neighbours. Its policy of neutrality and unique relations with the USSR encouraged President Koivisto to exercise official caution regarding the Baltic states' demands, even claiming that Finland recognizes the de facto annexation of the Baltic states to the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, civil society began showing increasing interest in the events of neighbouring countries, especially those with linguistic and cultural ties, such as Estonia.

On January 10, 1991, just before Soviet forces attacked Vilnius, Koivisto announced Finland's de facto recognition of the annexation of the Baltic states to the Soviet Union. He also sympathized with the Baltic nations' aspirations for independence, emphasizing the need for negotiations and lamenting the absence of dialogue between the Baltic states and Moscow.

The Soviet forces' attacks in Vilnius and Riga, which resulted in the death of 20 people, shocked Finnish media and society.

On January 14, 1991, Finland's largest daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*, wrote that "The Vilna massacre is a heavy blow to everyone inside and outside the Soviet Union who hoped that the USSR would develop into a state striving for democracy and respectful of Europe's civilized norms. Humane states don't

drive tanks over unarmed civilians."<sup>26</sup> In Helsinki, several hundred people demonstrated in front of the Soviet Embassy and the Presidential Palace, demanding President Koivisto's resignation.<sup>27</sup>

Finland supported the involvement of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in resolving the conflict. It sought explanations from the Soviet Embassy regarding events in Latvia and Lithuania. Finnish historian Juha-Matti Ritvanen noted that this criticism of the Soviet Union was unprecedented in Finland's post-war history.<sup>28</sup>

Following the failed August coup, the Baltic countries finally received international recognition. Iceland, Denmark, and Hungary were the first to recognize Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Argentina, Finland, and Norway followed suit, recognizing Baltic independence before the European Community, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

On August 29, 1991, the foreign ministers of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania signed an agreement to restore diplomatic relations. The use of the word "restore," not "establish," is significant. Despite Koivisto's earlier statement, Finland did not consider the Baltic states new entities. Prime Minister Esko Aho clarified this by citing Finland's de jure recognition in the 1920s, which paved the way for the recovery of Baltic properties.

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<sup>26</sup> Olli Kivinen, "Kuka yrittää sammuttaa liekin?" *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14.01.1991, p. C1

<sup>27</sup> "Marssijat vaativat Koivisto eroa Helsingissä" *Helsinki Sanomat*, 14.01.1991, p. C3.

<sup>28</sup> Ritvanen, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ritvanen, 8.



The return of Latvian diplomats to Armfeltintie no. 10 was relatively straightforward.

On November 18, 1993, Latvia and Finland signed a Memorandum of Intent, facilitating the building's return to Latvia. In the summer of 1994, the Institute of Russian and Eastern European Studies vacated the building, and Finland carried out a renovation costing around 5 million Finnish marks (approximately 790,000 euros).<sup>29</sup> On August 28, 1995, a building transfer agreement assigned Armfeltintie no. 10 to Latvia without compensation and free from servitude.<sup>30</sup>

Restoring the Estonian Embassy proved more complex, given that the Bulgarian Embassy had operated there since the 1970s. Finland initially presented Estonia with several options until finally, in 1994, Finland purchased the house from Bulgaria for 15 million Finnish marks (about 3.5 million euros) before handing it over to Estonia.<sup>31</sup>

The return of Latvia and Estonia to their embassies in Helsinki marked a milestone in a broader process of

reclaiming Baltic properties worldwide.

For example, in 1991, the Bank of France transferred gold reserves held since the 1930s back to Latvia and Lithuania. It also compensated the Baltic States for properties obtained by the Soviet Union in the 1940s.

In the late 1960s, Great Britain sold off gold held in the Bank of England that belonged to the Baltic countries but compensated the rightful owners in the 1990s.

These stories of the retrieval of Baltic property abroad bear witness to a time when the Baltic states, which declared independence in 1918, existed only as legal constructs and ideas. The fact that after a 50-year hiatus, this concept became a tangible reality is a remarkable development of 20th-century history.

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<sup>29</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 1991/21679 07.50 *Latvian edustusto Helsinki*, Arhitektis Erkki Savolainen, *Armfeltintie 10* ipašuma remonta un pārbūves darbi, Rīga, 1994. gada 18. augustā. (Architect Erkki Savolainen, Repair and alteration works on property of Armfeltintie no 10, Riga, August 18, 1994)

<sup>30</sup> Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 1991/21679 07.50 *Latvian edustusto Helsinki*, Somijas un Latvijas vienošanās par ēkas pārņemšanu, Rīga, 1995. gada 28. augustā. (Agreement between Finland and Latvia on property restitution, Riga on August 28, 1995)

<sup>31</sup> Pekka Linnainen, "Viron lähetystötalon varastetut vuodet 1940–1994" *Estofennia*, 02.12.2018. Available online: <https://estofennia.eu/viron-lahetystotalon-varastetut-vuodet/>



Una Bergmane in the building of the Embassy of Latvia in Finland on November 24th 2023. Photo: Janis Kirpitis.

### **Una Bergmane**

A historian and researcher at the University of Helsinki, Bergmane obtained a doctorate from the Institute of Political Studies in Paris (Sciences Po Paris). Bergmane has been a lecturer at the London School of Economics (LSE) and a researcher at Yale and Cornell. Since 2012, she regularly publishes in international academic journals. Bergmane's first book, *Politics of Uncertainty: the US, the Baltic Question and the Collapse of the USSR*, was published in 2023.

## **Bruno Tuukkanen – versatile decorative artist**

Bruno Tuukkanen, born in 1891 and passed away in 1979, was a highly active and sought-after artist specializing in decorative and glass painting, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. His artistic creations were primarily associated with architecture, and he paid great attention to harmonizing his works with the style of the buildings. The specific location and purpose of each piece played a crucial role in determining the creative process behind it.

Some of Tuukkanen's most renowned works include the magnificent ceiling and wall paintings found in the House of Parliament, the beautifully crafted stained glass of the Kordelini chapel located in Rauma, the exquisite floor mosaics adorning Kotka City Hall, and the decorative and stained-glass artworks displayed in numerous churches. Additionally, his accomplishments extend to his involvement in the design and completion of the Finnish flag.

Towards the end of the 1940s, Tuukkanen shifted his focus towards education and the advancement of artistic knowledge in his field. He served as the rector of the School of Applied Arts for over a decade, dedicating his efforts to teaching and inspiring future generations of artists.

Originally hailing from Viborg, Tuukkanen pursued his painting degree and studied at a drawing school in his hometown. He further honed his skills as a decorative painter at the Stockholm School of Applied Arts from 1908 to 1912. Afterward, he relocated to Helsinki, where he co-founded an advertising agency and drawing studio alongside Topi Vikstedt and Harry Rönholm. This agency, known as "3" or "Three" in English, specialized in

creating custom advertisements, billboards, and posters. The trio collaborated for three years before each member decided to focus on their respective areas of expertise: Vikstedt in functional graphics, Rönholm in interior design, and Tuukkanen in decorative painting.

In 1918, Tuukkanen served as an aide to Akseli Gallen-Kallela in the general staff, where his primary duty was to assist in the creation of military uniforms designed by Gallen-Kallela. Additionally, Tuukkanen himself took on the task of designing several flags, including those for the Civil Guards, *suojeluskunnat*. Unexpectedly, he was also given the responsibility of designing the flag for Finland. In May 1918, shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, the constitutional committee urgently sought to finalize the flag for the newly independent nation just before Pentecost. Gallen-Kallela was recognized as an expert, yet the subject frustrated him, so he left to celebrate Pentecost and entrusted his assistant with this important task. Tuukkanen meticulously determined the proportions and carefully selected the colours for the Finnish flag, as well as its various iterations. Collaborating with Eero Snellman, he dedicated the Pentecost weekend to creating the drawings. Subsequently, the Parliament officially adopted the blue cross flag as Finland's national flag.

Tuukkanen undertook the task of creating exquisite decorative paintings for approximately twenty churches across Finland. One notable project was the extensive restoration of Lammi's medieval church, which had suffered from a fire in 1920. Additionally, he adorned the side aisles of the Mikael Agricola's church in Helsinki in 1934 with his splendid decorative paintings.

The embellishments in these churches were often characterized by



ornamental, mythological, or classical styles. However, Tuukkanen also crafted figurative religious paintings specifically for these sacred spaces. In 1924, he showcased his talent by creating stained glass windows for the Jyväskylä City church. Furthermore, he contributed to the beautification of the Mariehamn church in both 1927 and 1961. His final major work was seen in the Oulu Cathedral in 1977, where he designed exquisite stained-glass windows.

As his career progressed, Tuukkanen expanded his artistic repertoire by venturing into mosaic work for churches and various other buildings. In addition to his contributions to ecclesiastical structures, he also embellished secular buildings. In Vyborg, Tuukkanen engaged in decorative paintings during the renovation of the Round Tower in 1922. Notably, he also created captivating painting decorations for the Vyborg Theatre in 1922 and the Vyborg Savings Bank in 1926.

In Helsinki, Tuukkanen created decorative paintings, such as those commissioned for the Department of Anatomy at the University of Helsinki (now known as the Athena building) on Siltavuorenpenkere in 1928. Additionally, he adorned numerous residential stairwells with wall and ceiling paintings. Notably, Tuukkanen's magnificent stained-glass artworks can be found in the SKS building in Helsinki. However, his most significant contributions came in 1931 when he undertook the task of producing decorative paintings for the Parliament House. The esteemed architect J.S. Siren exclusively enlisted Tuukkanen's talents, assigning him the responsibility of embellishing ceilings and walls in pivotal spaces. Tuukkanen also played a vital role in the colour scheme of the premises, thereby influencing the overall appearance of

the building's interior.

Bruno Tuukkanen was an influential figure in the realm of Finnish decorative arts. He possessed an extensive network of acquaintances within the cultural sphere, which notably encompassed numerous architects. Through these connections, he received various job offers. Holding positions of trust in diverse associations, as well as working as a teacher and principal, provided him with additional opportunities to establish connections and exert influence in the field of art.

In the domain of stained glass, Tuukkanen can be regarded as one of the pioneering Finnish artists who not only mastered the technique but also successfully implemented it. His artistic imprint is distinctive, showcasing both creativity and a keen eye for colour. The wall, ceiling, and stained-glass paintings exhibit a convergence with the prevalent styles of the era.

Tuukkanen's decorative art works can be found in buildings representing the functionalism and, more notably, the classicism prevalent during the 1920s. These creations embody the enduring influence of antiquity, showcasing elements like symmetry, harmony, and motifs. Drawing from stylistic foundations, Tuukkanen has developed a consistent and intact style that is entirely his own. The defining features of his art encompass the versatile skills of a decorative artist, an overarching classical aesthetic, and a conscious effort to complement architecture rather than overpower it. This principle also holds true at Villa Frenckell.

Sirkka-Liisa Korkeila, Master of Social Sciences, master's degree student in Art History



Hotel Fennia at the Helsinki Station square, Mikonkatu 17, in the first half of the 19th century. The Latvian envoy worked in the hotel premises between 1919 and 1921.



The delegation of Latvian diplomats in Paris after receiving the de jure recognition of the Allied Supreme Council in 1921. Miķelis Valters, Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics, Olģerds Grosvalds, Georgs Bisenieks, Jānis Tepfers, Jānis Lazdiņš. Photo: Latvian National Archive.



A poster displaying the names of the nations that officially recognized Latvia's sovereignty, Finland being among them, attached to the car on Nikolaja Street (now Ķr. Valdemāra Street 10/12) in Riga. Photo: 1921, Mārtiņš Lapiņš, National Archives of Latvia.





The grand entrance doors of the embassy building in 1934. These very doors continue to serve dutifully all the users. Photograph: Otso Pietinen, Museovirasto archive.



President of Latvia Jānis Čakste visiting Helsinki in 1926. Photo: Museovirasto archive.



The famous square Engelin aukio and park Juhani Ahon puisto near the embassy. The picture shows the courtyard terrace of the embassy building. 1936. Photo: Helsinki City Museum.



# ATPŪTA

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Redakcija un ekspedīcija: Rīgā, Kalēju ielā 20.

Atb. red.: Jūlija Lācis.



LATVIJAS ARKĀRTEJĀIS SŪTNIS UN PILNVAROTĀIS MINISTRS SOMIJĀ  
**JĀNIS TEPFERS**  
AR KUNDZI MAIJU UN MEITU ILEANU

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Latvia to Finland Jānis Tepfers with his wife, Maija, and daughter, Ileana, in the Atpūta magazine no. 748 (3.3.1939).



The earliest aerial photo showing the embassy building, 1924. Photo: Arvo Nisunen.



Villa Frenckell is situated in the Eira district of Helsinki, renowned for its Art Nouveau residential development during the period of 1907 to 1915. This district derived its name from the nearby Eira Hospital, which itself was named after the Norse healing deity. Eira Hospital, designed by architect Lars Sonck, was among the earliest structures constructed in Eira, dating back to 1905. Photograph: 1925, Rauhamaa, Helsinki City Museum archive.

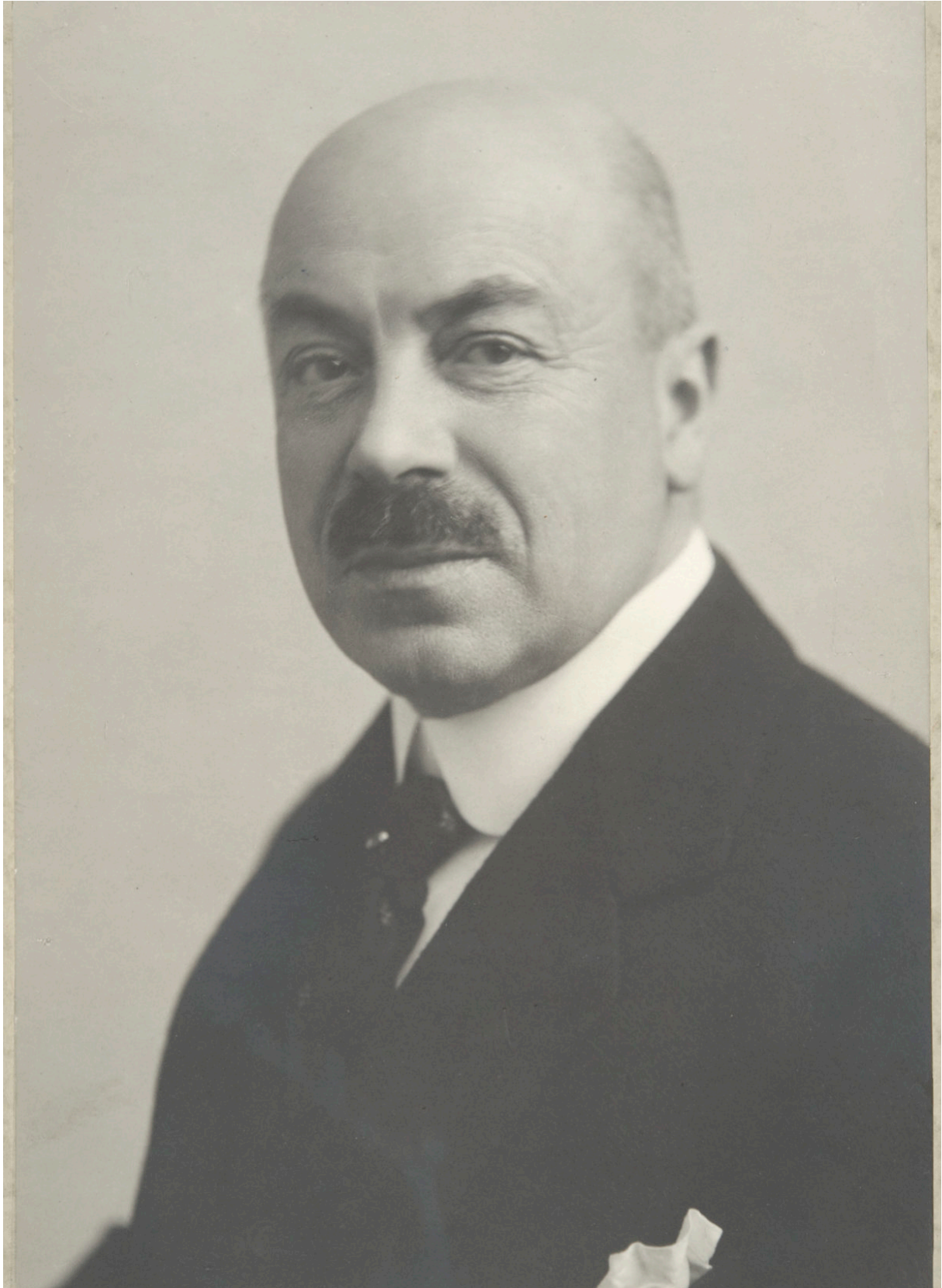




A service bus at the junction of Armfeltintie 8 and 10. 1927. Photograph: Eric Sundström. Helsinki City Museum.

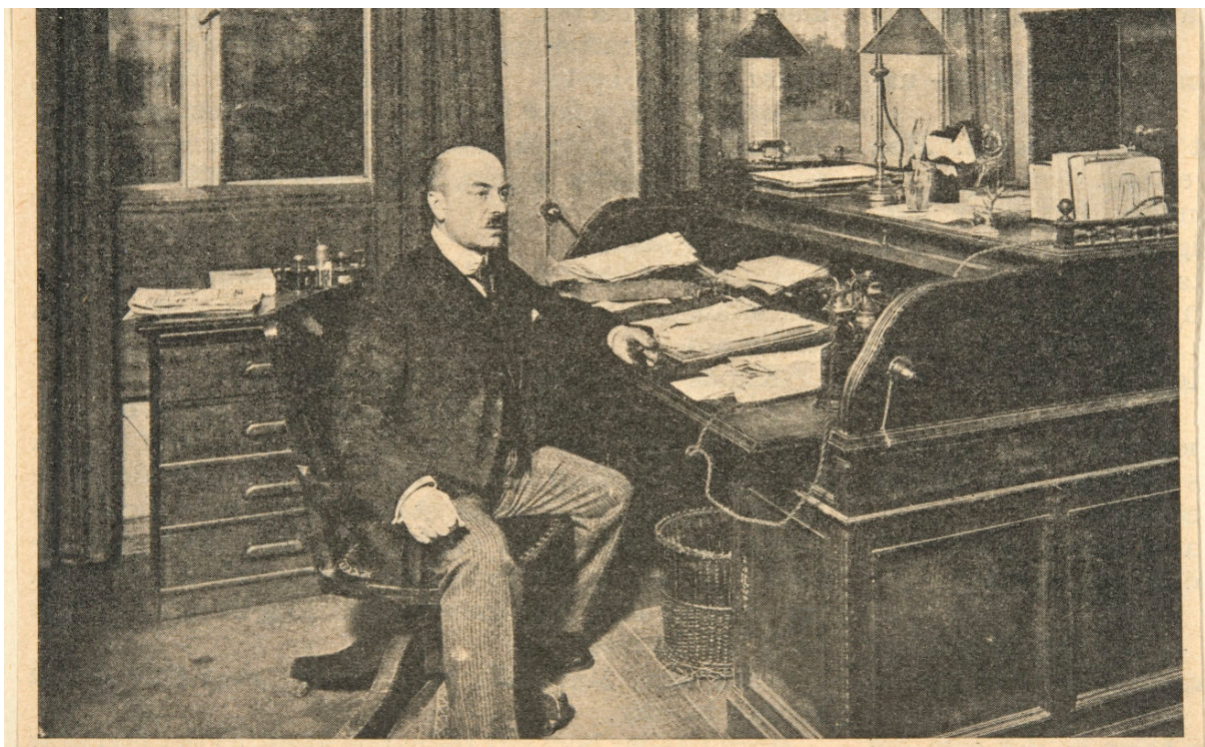


Eira, aerial photo 1930. Photo: Foto Roos. Helsinki City Museum.



The first owner of Villa Frenckell, Arthur Reinhold Frenckell. During his early years, he studied philosophy, wrote theater critiques and laid a solid foundation for his as a journalist. In 1885, Frenckell acquired a renowned Swedish newspaper, Hufvudstadsbladet, assuming the role of its editor-in-chief. Under his guidance, Hufvudstadsbladet became the preeminent newspaper in Finland until the year 1920. Photograph: 1921, Museovirasto archive.





In 1918, Artur Frenkel entered into his third marriage, and by 1922, a brand-new residence located at Armfeltintie no. 10 was constructed. The renowned architect Walter Gabriel Jung was selected to design the building. His portfolio already included the Art Nouveau-inspired Cinema Palace at Pohjoisesplanadi No. 39 (1911) and the Church House situated at the intersection of Annankatu and Bulevardi (1913), characterized by its classicist style. Photograph: 1910, Museovirasto archive.



Frenckell's 70th birthday celebration. Due to his lavish way of living, Frenckell had to relinquish not only his ownership of the Hufvudstadsbladet newspaper but also Villa Frenckell. That was a hard blow to Frenckell, who passed away two years after the grand celebration depicted in the photograph of 1931 by Otso Pietinen, Museovirasto archive.





This photo of the stairs from 1924 shows a window with a painting on glass Gutenberg by Bruno Tuukkanen. 1924. Photo: Eric Sundström. Helsinki City Museum.



The dining room interior of Villa Frenckell was inspired by the national romanticism style and was created by Nils Wasastjerna, a renowned Finnish interior designer, art critic, and former director of the Helsinki City Museum (1913-1920). Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.





Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.





Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1924, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.



Villa Frenckell. Photograph: 1929, Eric Sundström, Helsinki City Museum.





Gutenberg, painted glass by Bruno Tuukkanen.



The signing of a reparation agreement December 17, 1944: Juho Kusti Pasikivi, the Finnish Prime Minister, Grigoriy Savonenkov, the Deputy Head of the Allied Control Commission, Andrei Zhdanov, the Head of the Control Commission, and Pavel Orlov, a Russian Envoy and Political Advisor of the Control Commission.

Zhdanov, the new resident of Villa Frenckell, became remarkably influential in the post-war Soviet Union. He was even considered a potential successor to Stalin's power until his untimely demise in 1948. However, the Helsinki period from 1944 to 1945, was a time of uncertainty in Zhdanov's career.

Photograph: Olavi Aavikko, Museovirasto.

From the blog of Finnish composer Kari Rydman.

The beautiful Latvian Embassy building, drawn by Jung, was located in our neighborhood, on the opposite side of the street. You could see everything from the kitchen window(..)

The building became the residence of Andrei Zhdanov, a notorious Soviet looter.

(..) When Zhdanov or his men went somewhere, the streets of the Eira neighborhood were closed. One such day was in the spring of 1945, when I came home from school. I had a cardboard backpack on my back in which I was carrying some books. The corner of Röbinder and Armfeltintie was closed. I guess my facial expression was so unhappy that a friendly policeman looked at the others and said: Let the boy go home.

(..)

In the name of truth, we must say that the Russians who crowded our neighborhood were unusually kind to the children and often offered candies, which we always took when the parents were not looking. If the parents saw something like that, they immediately drove us to the other side of the street or back home, and strictly explained that "nothing may be taken from them".





The embassy building in February 1946. Photograph: Otso Pietinen. Museovirasto archive.



In 1946, a ZIS 103 series vehicle, displaying a license plate from the USSR (specifically Leningrad), parked in front of the embassy building. These particular cars enjoyed popularity among esteemed KGB officials. Notably, the windows of the building are obscured. The person standing by the gate is probably a Chekist. Additionally, the spire of the Agricola church is drawn in, reducing the risk of recognition from the air.



## СОГЛАШЕНИЕ

Союз Советских Социалистических Республик и Финляндская Республика сегодня на основании пунктов (2) и (6) Акта об обмене участками, подписанного обеими договаривающимися сторонами 5-го мая 1969 года, относительно перехода владения участком № 8 (адрес Армфелтинтие 10) в квартале № 226 VI-го района города Хельсинки и находящимся на этом участке строением от Союза Советских Социалистических Республик Финляндской Республике, договорились о нижеследующем:

- (1) Упомянутый в настоящем Соглашении участок и находящееся на этом участке строение переходят во владение Финляндского государства со дня подписания настоящего Соглашения.
- (2) Финляндское государство, представители которого проверили упомянутый в настоящем контракте участок и находящееся на этом участке строение, принимает их в том состоянии, в каком они находятся в день перехода во владение.
- (3) Финляндское государство отвечает с этого дня за все расходы, связанные с упомянутым в настоящем Соглашении участком и находящимся на нем строением.

Настоящее Соглашение составлено на финском языке в двух тождественных экземплярах, при чем обе договаривающиеся стороны получают по одному экземпляру. К настоящему Соглашению прилагается перевод на русском языке.

Хельсинки,

1973 года.

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От имени  
Союза Советских Социалистических Республик

---

От имени  
Финляндской Республики

1973 agreement between Finland and the USSR on a real estate exchange, whereby the Finnish state takes over the Armfeltintie 10 property with a building.



Aerial photograph of Eira in 1970 by Simo Rista.



Armfeltintie street as seen from the observation deck of the Micael Agricola church tower. The image reveals the attic windows on the top floor of the building. Photograph: 1972, Kari Hackley, Helsinki City Museum Archive.



Presentation of the letter of accreditation of Anna Žīgure, the first ambassador of the newly restored state of Latvia to Finland, to the President of Finland, Mauno Koivisto, on December 4, 1991. Health Minister Toimi Kankaanniemi is standing next to him. Photograph: Anna Žīgure's personal archive.



In 1992, Anna Žīgure, the first ambassador of the newly restored Latvia in Finland, had her office located at Bulevardi 5th Street in Helsinki. This office space was temporarily rented from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, an organization situated in the same building. Generous contributions from several Finnish companies allowed for the provision of furniture and other necessary equipment. Interestingly, the table depicted in the accompanying photograph is still being utilized by Latvian envoys stationed in Finland. Photograph: Anna Žīgure's personal archive.





The winter of 1994 was harsh, the Gulf of Riga froze over, and Latvia purchased the icebreaker Varma from Finland. The ship, built in Finland in 1968, served for a long time in the Riga Freeport fleet, and its port of registration was Riga. Photo: Anna Žīgure's personal archive.



## N O D O Š A N A S   A K T S

**Nodotājs** Somijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija

**Saņēmējs**

Latvijas Republikas Ārlietu ministrija

**Nodošanas objekts**

Helsinki pilsētas 6. pilsētas rajona kvartālā  
Nr. 226 esošais zemes gabals Nr. 8 ar ēku.

Nodošana neskar kustamo īpašumu.

**Kompensācija**

Nekustamais īpašums tiek nodots bez  
kompensācijas un brīvs no servitūta.

**Īpašuma un lietošanas  
tiesības**

Īpašuma tiesības pāriet saņēmējam 29.8.1995.  
Lietošanas tiesības ir pārņemtas 26.6.1995.

**Nodokļi un samaksas**

Saņēmējs atbild par nodokļiem un citām samaksām,  
kas skar nekustamo īpašumu un pēc savas būtības  
attiecas uz saņēmēja pārvaldīšanas laiku.

Šis nodošanas akts ir sagatavots trijos  
eksemplāros kā somu, tā arī latviešu valodā, un  
tekstiem ir vienāds pierādošais spēks. Viens  
eksemplārs paliek nodotājam, viens - saņēmējam,  
un viens - notāram, kas apstiprina nodošanu.

Rīga, 1995. gada 28 augustā

Somijas Republikas  
Ārlietu ministrija

Latvijas Republikas  
Ārlietu ministrija

*Tarja Halonen*

Tarja Halonen  
Ārlietu ministre

*Valdis Birkavs*

Valdis Birkavs  
Ārlietu ministrs

The agreement signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, later President Tarja Halonen, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Valdis Birkavs on the transfer of ownership of the land and building of the embassy to Latvia in 1995.



The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, later President Tarja Halonen, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Valdis Birkavs sign the agreement on the transfer of the ownership of the land and building to Latvia in 1995.



Opening of the embassy building in 1995: ambassador Anna Žigūre and Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari.





In the summer of 1995, the embassy team relocated to the newly refurbished Armfēltintie no. 10 building, which had been restored and modified to suit the embassy's requirements before being returned to Latvia. In the photograph, Counselor Jānis Kārklīšs, along with Ambassador Anna Žīgure and Embassy Secretary Hilkka Koskela, are affixing the national coat of arms above the entrance door. Photo: Anna Žīgure's personal archive.





The embassy team in the reclaimed building at the end of the service of ambassador Anna Žīgure in 1998. In the back from the left: Ilze Matisone, Dita Putnaērgle, Jānis Kārklīšs, Anna Žīgure, Klāvs Rāts, Kaspars Hese. Front: Hilka Koskela, Idir Chereff, Gunta Kazmina, Ance Gobiņa, Ruta Hese.



The Finnish Latvian Choir under the direction of conductor Ilmārs Millers sings at a reception in honor of Latvia's Independence Day in 2022. Also choir rehearsals take place in the embassy premises. Photo: Jānis Ķirpītis.



In 2022, in honor of Alexander Čaks's 120th birthday, the poets Heli Lāksönen and Guntars Godiņš present the audience with Heli Lāksönen's poetic dialogue in the poem *Paņēmi manu sirdi no plaukta/ Poimit sydāmeni kirjahyllystä*. (You took my heart from the shelf). Photo: Jānis Ķirpītis.





The traditional Christmas celebration for diaspora children at the embassy in 2022. Photo: Jānis Ķirpītis.



European Language Day at the embassy of Latvia in Finland, Helsinki in September 2021. The library bus has brought the entire collection of modern Latvian literature that is expanded every year. Photograph: Jānis Ķirpītis





Embassy building in June 2022. In the background, Mikael Agricola Church. The Soviet Union, during the mid-1960s, embarked on a mission to construct a new trade mission headquarters in Helsinki, marking a pivotal moment in the story of Villa Frenczell. The Soviet Union had a vision of erecting this new building in the heart of the city, right next to their embassy, on a plot of land owned by Finland on Tehtaankatu Street. Photo: Henrik Duncker.



Eventually, in 1966, an agreement was reached: Finland would grant the coveted land to the USSR in exchange for three properties - the Latvian embassy building, the Estonian embassy building, and a house in the Töölö district acquired from Germany as part of the reparations process. Photo: Henrik Duncker.





Representation premises of the embassy. Photo: Jānis Ķirpītis.



Representation premises of the embassy. In the background, a fireplace made of Hanko granite. Photo: Jānis Ķirpītis.



In the stairwell on the third floor of the building, al secco ceiling paintings by Bruno Tuukkanen can be admired. Tuukkanen also crafted stained glass windows and painted murals in various churches and the Parliament building of Finland. He also contributed to the design of the Finnish flag in 1918. Photo: Henrik Duncker, 2022.





Bruno Tuukkanen's al secco fresco artworks adorn the staircase leading to the third floor of the building. Regrettably, Tuukkanen's stained glass pieces at Armfeltintie no. 10 have not survived. Photo: Henrik Duncker, 2022.





The embassy building's interior with the staircase leading up to the third floor. During Frenckell's era in the 1930s, the third floor of the building was occupied by bedrooms and rooms designated for children. Several historians speculate that the residence of Zhdanov, the head of the Allied Control Commission, during the Helsinki period (1944-1945), included a bedroom situated on the third floor of this very building. Photograph: Henrik Duncker, 2022.





Al secco fresco paintings by Bruno Tuukkanen in the stairwell on the second floor of the building.  
Photo: Henrik Duncker, 2022.





Al secco fresco paintings (paintings on dry plaster) by Bruno Tuukkanen in the stairwell on the second floor of the embassy building. Bruno Tuukkanen is one of the two Finnish artists who designed the blue and white flag of Finland. Photo: Henrik Duncker, 2022.





Hotel Torni building in Helsinki, summer of 2022. The iconic hotel was opened in 1931. The architect, Walter Gabriel Jung, also designed Villa Frenckell. Photo: Henrik Duncker.