

Jaan Purga's paper "30 Years of the Estonian Society of Cologne" (The paper was written for the concert-theatre evening of the Estonian Society of Cologne on Oct 31, 1981.)

As life started to normalize in Germany after World War II, apartments for refugees, especially for those with jobs, were being built in the district of Westhoven of the then independent city of Porz. Soon Westhoven turned into a district where mainly refugees, including a handful of Estonians, were living.

Soon the Estonians got an idea to found their own organization and on their gathering on Aug 22, 1951, the idea became a reality: the Estonian Society of Westhoven was founded. On Jan 1, 1975, Porz lost its 'independence' as it was joined together with Cologne. As the name of Cologne was more known than that of Westhoven the general meeting of the Estonian Society decided to change the name. On June 1, 1975, the name of the organization became the Estonian Society of Cologne. However, as the structure and the membership of the organization remained unchanged, August 22, 1951, can still be considered its birthday.

Osvald Tammeveski was elected the first chairman of the Estonian Society. He was later succeeded by Endel Kalda who is now one of the church representatives. Both gentlemen are still members of the society. Besides these two there are others who have been members from the beginning.

Heino Kallas succeeded Endel Kalda as the chairman. The society promoted social intercourse of Estonians and organized big gatherings, the most important of which were Christmas and Martinmas celebrations. After Heino Kallas left Cologne, the activities of the society came to a standstill. People still came together but the organization itself hardly functioned.

Some members initiated a general meeting on May 26, 1960, that adopted a bylaw and elected a new board (chairman - Evald Fuks, members - Jakob Veinimäe and Lembit Kalda) and an auditing committee. After the general meeting the activities of the society brisked up considerably. The society organized big gatherings which even attracted Estonians from the neighbouring countries and from more distant places. Christmas parties with children, which continue to take place on the Sunday before Christmas, were mostly frequented by members although some participants came from outside Cologne as well. One of the main tasks of the society was to arrange holidays in Walböl for its members, for which some members received discounts. Evald Fuks, a chairman of thirteen years, was a very energetic man. For many years

he single-handedly organized the activities of the society. Besides, he was the head of the continuation school and the leader of the folk-dance group, *Tungal*. He also wrote several Christmas plays that were performed at Christmas parties. In 1961 the Estonian Society of Cologne had 30 members, 17 of them are still in the society.

Due to degrading health Fuks was unable to fulfil the duties of the chairman although he still continued as the leader of the folk dance group until his death in August, 1976. The Estonian Society of Cologne is much obliged to Evald Fuks.

After Evald Fuks resigned in 1974 Jaan Purga became the next chairman, still holding the position. The other members of the board are Johannes Küngas and Lembit Kalda. In 1974-1981 also Maret Kalda, Raoul Laev and Helmut Kibowitz, in addition to the above-mentioned, have been on the board.

Beside large-scale reunions the society has organized smaller gatherings of Estonians with about 200 participants. The most important of these have been the celebrations of the anniversaries of the Estonian Republic, a kin gathering with Finns and Hungarians, theatre performances, Christmas and Martinmas parties, church services in Estonian etc. On bigger events Estonians from the neighbouring countries and from farther places have been present as well. The Estonian Society of Cologne has an especially tight cooperation with the Estonian Society of Belgium. The society has a new drama club that has an independent economy although it is subjected to the society's auditing committee. The leader and art director of the drama club is Raoul Laev. So far the club has produced 5 plays, of which Eduard Vilde's *Pisuhänd* (*Goblin*) is the most popular one. In addition to Cologne all plays have been performed in Belgium as well.

In Cologne's district of Porz (Demo-Treff) the society has one room (Senioren Treff) at its disposal every Friday from 6 p.m. Earlier the room was in more active use; now it is mostly used by the drama club for their rehearsals and the 'bridge team' to play bridge.

The Estonian Society of Cologne has now 52 members, 8 (15,7%) of which are younger than the society. Since 1960 15 members have passed away; unfortunately information about earlier years is missing. Several members have lost contact with the society because they have moved elsewhere or for other reasons.

As said, there are 8 members less than 30 years old. There are unfortunately only 2 members between 30-40, 5 members between 40-50, 22 members between 50-60, 9 members between 60-70 and 5 members over 70. As seen, the average age of the

members is quite high as there are only 7 members between 30-50. However, there is some hope as the number of the young is quite high.

It is to be hoped that the members who are now younger than the Estonian Society will carry on the work in uniting Estonians and preserving Estonian spirit abroad when the older generation is not able to do it any more.