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Article Summary: Karlis Ulmanis studied and then taught briefly at the University of Nebraska as a Latvian refugee. As president of Latvia years later, he shared his enthusiasm for Nebraska traditions with citizens of his country.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Karlis Augusts Ulmanis, Howard R Smith, Jerome Warner, Charles J Warner, Karl Kleege (originally Kliegis), Theodore Kleege, Herman Kleege, Val Kuska, Howard J Gramlich, Vere Culver, Harry B Coffee, J Gordon Roberts, A L Haecker, Hermanis Endzelins, Guntis Ulmanis

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Photographs / Images: President Karlis A Ulmanis, official photo taken in the late 1930s; graduation portrait of Ulmanis, University of Nebraska, February 15, 1909; University of Nebraska dairy judging team, December 1908: Ulmanis, Vere Culver, Howard J Gramlich; Gramlich and Lawrence Murphy viewing the preceding photo during a June 29, 1979, interview of Gramlich; Roberts Dairy office, early 1910; US Ambassador William Bullitt presenting a University of Nebraska pennant to Ulmanis at Riga Castle in 1936; Ulmanis in 1936 with members of the Latvian counterpart to 4-H clubs; last known photo of Ulmanis, taken July 23, 1940, in the Moscow rail yards with an unidentified agent of the USSR; unveiling of plaque honoring Ulmanis at the Dairy Industries Building on the University of Nebraska East Campus, May 22, 1954: Philip Kelly, W V Lambert, Olgerts Liepins, Charles J Warner, Ilmars Bergmanis

Karlis Ulmanis

from University of Nebraska Graduate to President of Latvia

By Lawrence E. Murphy, Aivars G. Ronis, and Arijs R. Liepins

One who passed through Riga in those days remembers seeing this man of heroic mold, in a great room of an old castle, with nothing upon its walls except the coat of arms of Latvia and a pennant of the University of Nebraska.¹

Of the nearly 280,000 persons who have graduated from the University of Nebraska between 1873 and 1999, Karlis Augusts Ulmanis, class of 1909, is the only one to become a president of a nation.² His historic shadow still lingers over Latvia, the country where he served both as prime minister and as president.

Who was this one-time Nebraska resident? Why did he make the long journey from Europe to Nebraska, and why were certain ideas of Nebraska origin implemented in a land six thousand miles to the east? These are worthwhile questions to ask about the brief Nebraska years of Karlis Ulmanis, who once walked the East Campus of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

For centuries, because of established amber trade routes, the ancient world had been aware of the area that today is known as Latvia. Among the first historians to leave a written record was Tacitus, who called the inhabitants of this area "Aestii" and reported, "They cultivate



An official photograph of President Karlis A. Ulmanis taken in the late 1930s. Republic of Latvia photograph

grains and other crops of the earth with greater perseverance than expected. . . . But they also search out the sea, and they are the only ones to gather amber."³

This ethnic group had lived free from colonization on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea for centuries, but by the latter part of the 1100s, the Germans had reached Latvia. Consequently, the first of many formal efforts of a foreign power to rule this region can be traced to the founding of Riga in 1201 by Bishop Albert and the Teutonic knights under his command. From this time until November 1918, Latvia was ruled by foreign powers.

When in the late eighteenth century, Russia consolidated its expansionist

gains, all of this area was annexed to the Russian empire. This aggressive move, however, did not disturb the practical control of the local German barons, under whom the ethnic Latvian farmers were treated as serfs.

This unique double system of control was still in force at the time of Ulmanis's birth on September 4, 1877, on a farm named Piksas, near the village of Dobeles, within Berzes County in the province of Zemgale. Under the existing conditions, it is remarkable that pursuant to a government act of June 12, 1886, the Ulmanis family was eventually able to obtain the title to Piksas from Russian Czarist officials.⁴

Karlis was the youngest of three Ulmanis brothers to reach adulthood. As a child, he attended a local grade school in Berzes County; as a teenager, he was a high school student in today's bustling provincial capital city of Jelgava. Oddly, in view of his many efforts to obtain a higher education, Ulmanis never received a diploma from a Latvian high school.

Ulmanis's interest in dairying surfaced early. In 1896 he made the first of many trips outside Latvia, traveling to the city of Tapiava (today known as Gvardejsk) in what was then German East Prussia, to attend an experimental school in dairying. Upon his return to Latvia in 1899, when he was just twenty-two, Ulmanis was already conducting lectures and demonstrations for the benefit of local dairy farmers in Berzes County.

In 1902 Ulmanis again traveled outside his homeland, first to Switzerland, where he enrolled in the Zurich Poli-

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Arijs R. Liepins, also a native of Latvia, is president of the Latvian St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, Inc., and the Latvian Relief Association of Nebraska-Daugavas Vanagi, Inc.

Karlis Ulmanis

technical Institute and specialized in agriculture. After a brief trip home, he broadened his education in Germany at the Agricultural Institute of the University of Leipzig in the province of Saxony. There he earned a certificate indicating that he was qualified to teach the subject of agriculture.⁵

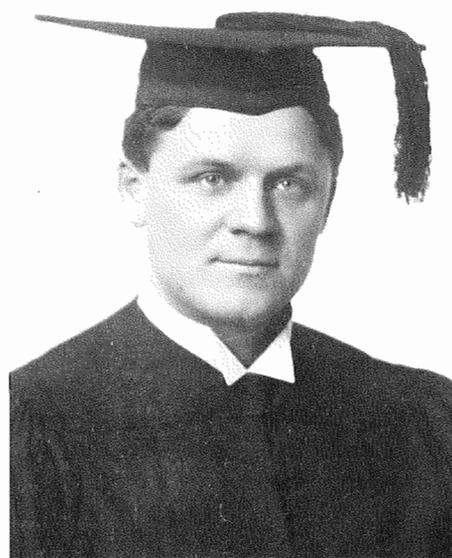
By 1905 Ulmanis had returned to Latvia. According to Hermanis Endzelins, a founder of the Baltic Agricultural Association, Ulmanis was first hired by that group as an instructor at a farmers' meeting held on July 10, 1905. His duties included not only lecturing at association meetings, but also writing articles for their publications.

That same year the first rumblings of Latvian nationalism terrified the ethnic German gentry, who had been in firm command of the land since the founding of Riga. These local barons promptly asked the Russian government for assistance in putting down the resistance of the protesting farmers.

The fall 1905 issue of *The Farmer*, a magazine edited by Ulmanis, reported the various countermeasures taken by the Czar against revolutionary movements spreading across Russia. Ulmanis ended this issue with a ringing declaration, "Long live the revolution!" Shortly thereafter, on December 21, 1905, he was arrested by Czarist police and sent as a political prisoner to the Russian jail within the city of Pskov.⁶

By May of 1906 he had been released from prison and was quietly working on his brother Indrikis's farm in the Zemgale province. However, by late summer, Russian officials were again investigating Ulmanis and his editorials. Through certain contacts in the Valmiera district of Latvia, Hermanis Endzelins, who had visited Ulmanis in prison, was able to alert his friend of possible rearrest.⁷ According to the neighboring Kliegis family, their father, Juris, sent his daughter on horseback with money and a warning for Ulmanis to leave immediately. By mistake the Czarist police had stopped at the wrong farm, thus providing crucial time for this warning.⁸

By the fall of 1906 Ulmanis was a full-fledged fugitive, on the run from his native land of Latvia in order to escape the Russians. He made his way to Riga, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm, and finally to Leipzig in Germany. While he was temporarily in Annaberg, site of an American consulate, Ulmanis noted in a letter to Endzelins that he had started studying English.⁹



Graduation portrait of Karlis A. Ulmanis, University of Nebraska, February 15, 1909.
© 1979, Townsend Studio, Lincoln

Not yet thirty in the spring of 1907, Ulmanis left Germany and sailed to New York. It is unclear why he traveled to America (and to Nebraska). At the time he left Germany, however, he was seeking employment, he was interested in learning more about modern improvements in agriculture, and he wished to help improve the lot of the Latvian people.¹⁰ Ulmanis somehow made his way to Omaha in the summer of 1907 and took a series of dairying jobs. Never afraid of hard work, he announced his availability in the Omaha newspapers. Eventually he found employment under the auspices of A. A. and Edward Martin.

While he was working at different locales within the Omaha and eastern

Nebraska area, including the Loveland Dairy and the Alamito Dairy in both Fort Calhoun and Lyons, Ulmanis was hospitalized with an unknown ailment at Immanuel Hospital in Omaha, where he met Dr. John Fossler. It is believed that it was Fossler who suggested that Ulmanis enroll in the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.¹¹

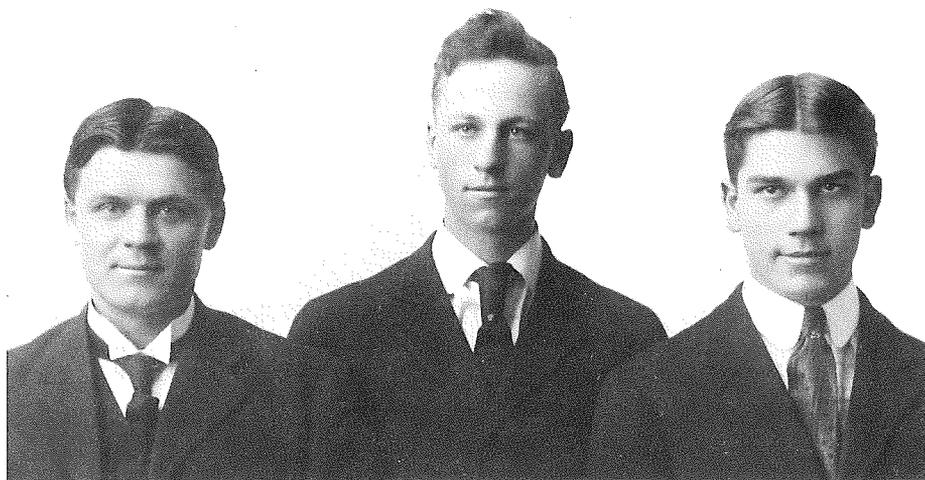
Karlis Ulmanis faced difficult problems when he arrived in Lincoln toward the end of 1907 or the beginning of 1908. Although he was already well versed in agriculture and dairying from his farm experiences in Latvia and his European education, his knowledge of English was limited. His age, now past thirty, made him a full decade older than most of his fellow students at the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture, then known as the Industrial College. He was reserved around people until after he had made their acquaintance. Fortunately for Ulmanis, soon after he arrived in Lincoln, he was befriended by Professor Howard R. Smith, then on the staff of the Industrial College. Professor Smith remembered:

I was head of the Department of Animal Husbandry at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. We had then a winter course for students lacking entrance requirements for the four year agricultural course. On the first day, a young man in my short course class spoke with a foreign accent, and I asked him to remain. . . .

When I learned that he had previous training sufficient to enter the four years college course, I took him to the city campus to talk with Dr. Bessey, Dean of the Industrial College, who permitted him to enter the four [year] course.¹²

The official University of Nebraska student record card for Karl August Ulmann, the German form of his Latvian name, reveals that on February 17, 1908, he was admitted to the Industrial College in the Technical Agricultural Group; was given senior standing upon presentation of credentials from the University of Leipzig; and on February 15, 1909, was duly issued a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture.¹³

Former State Senator Jerome Warner (now deceased) on numerous occasions



University of Nebraska dairy judging team, December 1908. (Left to right): Karlis A. Ulmanis, Vere Culver, Howard J. Gramlich. © 1979, Townsend Studio, Lincoln

recalled that his father, Charles J. Warner, welcomed new immigrants to Nebraska (including Ulmanis) during the early part of the century by offering employment at the large Warner family farm near Waverly in Lancaster County.¹⁴ Charles Warner also provided living quarters for the new farm hands, free room and board for as long as they remained on the farm, and regular wages during periods of work, such as the annual crop harvest.

Working on the farm with Ulmanis were several sons of Latvian Juris Kliegis who after immigrating to America, changed their last name to Kleege. Brothers Karl and Theodore arrived first. Later their younger brother Herman joined them. At one time or another, during the years 1907 to 1909, there were three or four Latvian-born farm hands working at the Warner farm.¹⁵

Nearly thirty years later, Ulmanis, then president of Latvia, invited Karl Kleege and his wife to return to Latvia. Eventually, he persuaded the Kleegees to come back in 1937, where a position within the Latvian government awaited Karl Kleege.¹⁶

Another university student, Val Kuska, was also working on the Warner farm in 1908. Kuska later became a well-known agricultural agent for the

Burlington Railroad and a loyal friend to the 4-H clubs of Nebraska. Within the archives of Love Library of the University of Nebraska are his written reflections about his classmate Ulmanis and about the days on the Warner farm.

We worked together, we ate at the same table and slept in the same bunk house. That gave us a good opportunity to discuss subjects and problems as they came up in our everyday lives. . . . I found Ulmanis was a thorough student, a close observer and well informed in all phases of human betterment. This made him an interesting conversationalist, particularly because he could compare life in America with life abroad.¹⁷

An extensive newspaper account published in Nebraska about Karlis Ulmanis describes him during his university days as a "penniless, friendless youth."¹⁸ Penniless he may have been, but he did have a great many helpful friends, professors, classmates, and employers during his short stay in Lincoln at the university.

One of his most long-lived classmates was Howard J. Gramlich, who later became head of the animal husbandry department. Professor Gramlich, when he was in his early nineties, described the 1908 selection of the first University of Nebraska dairy judging team by Professor A. L. Haecker, head of the dairy de-

partment. Ulmanis, Gramlich, and Vere S. Culver made up the three-man team. In a 1954 letter Gramlich described his friend and classmate:

Ulmanis was a very pleasant companion on such occasions as this. . . . He was a big, good-hearted guy who spoke with a very distinct accent and was probably ten years older than most undergraduates.¹⁹

Student teams representing nine colleges participated in the National Dairy Cattle Judging Contest in Chicago on December 3, 1908.²⁰ The University of Nebraska team of Ulmanis, Gramlich, and Culver won the separate Jersey trophy, but came in second overall. According to Gramlich, Ulmanis was a conscientious member who tried to do his best on every occasion.

My most vivid recollection of the contest and events pertaining thereto was one which occurred early on the morning after. I was awakened by Ulmanis, who was talking to himself as he sat up in bed, flaying the air with his arms. He was "damning" the class of Guernsey cows which he had in the contest and which had proved to be our downfall. While our team ranked second among the nine competing, we would have been an easy first had Ulmanis seen the Guernseys just a little better.²¹

During this period Ulmanis overcame occasional periods of loneliness. Ruth Guernsey, one of the early co-ed students at the old Industrial College, remembered Ulmanis living in a tool shed on the campus. She also recalled professors encouraging classmates to visit him there to cheer him up.²² Other students believed that Ulmanis could occasionally be morose.²³ Without question, the friendships of key University of Nebraska faculty members, and their help to Ulmanis in obtaining employment, affected his future. Apparently, through hard work, he was able to exorcise the dark moods.

Through the years, Filley Hall on the East Campus has been the site of many efforts of the Agricultural College faculty to improve the dairy industry of Nebraska. For a time that faculty included Karlis A. Ulmanis.

When Ulmanis was a senior, Profes-

Karlis Ulmanis

sor Howard R. Smith arranged for him to be appointed, on November 6, 1908, as a laboratory assistant at the salary of thirty dollars a month.²⁴ In a 1951 letter, a student of Ulmanis, John E. Erickson of Funk, Nebraska, described the situation that autumn of 1908.

It was in the fall of 1908 that I attended the School of Agriculture [high school] at Lincoln. I was only 16 years old at the time. Mr. Ulmanis was attending the College of Agriculture at the same time there and was teaching part time to help pay his expenses at school.²⁵

More than four decades later Erickson retained a vivid memory of his old instructor:

He was a rather large man, six feet or more tall, and weighed about 200 pounds; he was of the athletic type, active and alert. Mr. Ulmanis was a good instructor and the boys liked him in the class room. He was very keen and full of dry humor, and though his English was not too good, yet he was able to hold his own in any group he found himself. Cheese making

was Mr. Ulmanis' favorite work; as we worked with him in those classes we learned to appreciate his personality more than just from his lectures.²⁶

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents' records indicate that on February 15, 1909, the day Ulmanis received his B.S. degree in Agriculture, he was granted an interim appointment as an instructor and assistant in dairy husbandry at the experiment station. His salary had been increased to seventy-five dollars a month.²⁷ Several months later, on November 11, 1909, Karlis A. Ulmanis was awarded another promotion as "instructor in the department of dairy industry for the school year of six months at a salary of one hundred dollars per month."²⁸

Within the brief period of one year Ulmanis had gone from a part-time instructor in high school to a full-fledged instructor in the College of Agriculture with a significant increase in salary. He had achieved all this while he was ac-

quiring his degree, improving his English, and publishing articles on dairying.

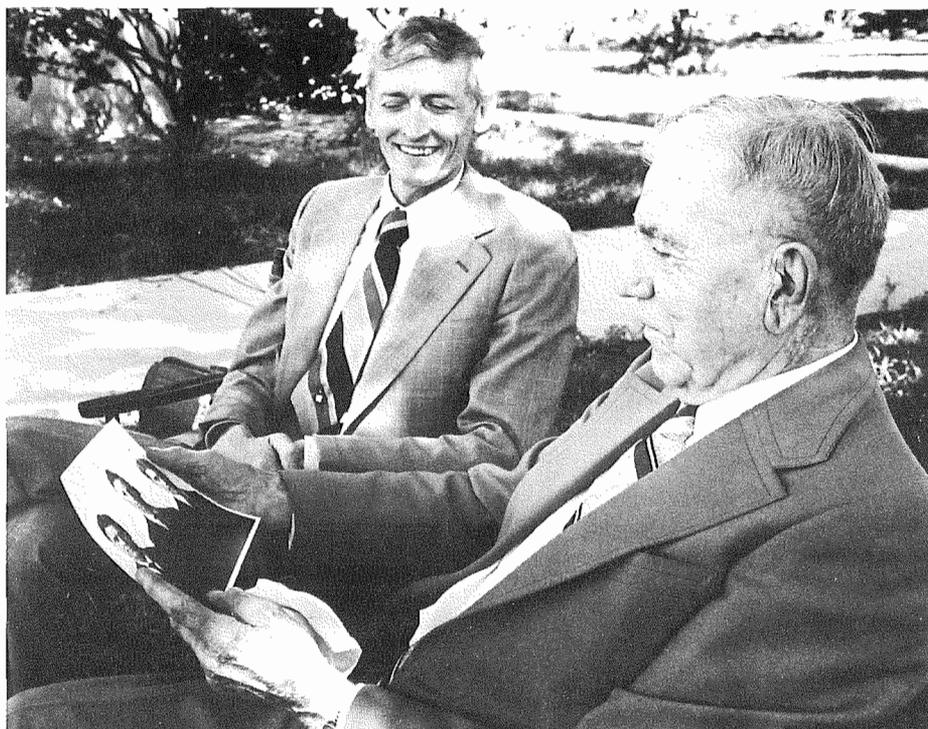
In Latvia, before coming to America, Ulmanis had published a best-selling text, *Profitable Dairying*. By 1908 he was sufficiently proficient in English to tackle composition in this country. The 1908 annual report of the Nebraska Dairymen's Association featured his article, "Profits of Farm Cheese Making." Shortly after graduation, in March of 1909, Ulmanis's article, "The Making of Cottage Cheese," was published in the *Nebraska Farmer*.

Contemporary accounts of this period describe Ulmanis as someone who "didn't drink, swear, or smoke; stocky, muscular and picking up a trace of an American prairie drawl."²⁹ A University of Nebraska Agricultural College periodical, appropriately called *Agriculture*, printed a favorable review of instructor Ulmanis in an early 1910 issue.

Few men of his age have had a wider experience or better training in the practical and scientific phases of Dairy Husbandry and as a student Mr. Ulmanis is thorough and progressive. His preparation and ambition to succeed insure for him a splendid future.³⁰

J. Gordon Roberts, who founded Roberts Sanitary Dairy Company, then located at the northeast corner of Sixteenth and M streets in Lincoln, hired Ulmanis as a superintendent for his Lincoln plant in early 1910. For the next two years Ulmanis worked for Roberts. In a letter written forty-five years later, Roberts tells a classic tale about his Lincoln superintendent. It concerns the physical and mental strength of the sturdy Karlis Ulmanis. According to Roberts, a couple of fellow employees enjoyed ridiculing this "foreigner" because of his accent, but one day two of the men made the mistake of doing so while standing too close to a large vat of milk. The slow-to-anger Ulmanis finally lost his patience:

Solemnly, the Latvian picked up the two men—one under each arm. Very deliberately, as though performing a necessary but painful duty, he took one man in each hand by the overall straps and deter-



Howard J. Gramlich (right) and Lawrence E. Murphy view a photograph of the 1908 University of Nebraska dairy judging team during a June 29, 1979, interview of Gramlich filmed by Nebraska Educational Television. Harald Driemanis photograph

minedly submerged the two. When the clowns finally surfaced gasping for air, the Latvian regarded them with no trace of expression upon his face, turned, and went about his business. Needless to say, Ulmanis was treated as a “man of distinction” from that time forward.³¹

At some point during the period of 1911–12, Karlis Ulmanis again decided to make a radical change—to pursue private enterprise. He had learned that a creamery was for sale in Houston, Texas. While others may have attempted to discourage him, Professors Howard R. Smith and A. L. Haecker co-signed a note for Ulmanis at the First National Bank in Lincoln so he could receive a thousand-dollar loan to close the purchase of the Texas creamery. It was ten years before the last of that loan was repaid to the co-signers.³² Stories within the Charles J. Warner family suggest the possibility of other loans and a trip to Houston by Warner to investigate the situation after the business experienced financial trouble.³³

Exactly why the fiscal stability of the Houston creamery was endangered remains unclear. According to some news accounts, written years afterward, Ulmanis made too many changes and installed expensive new machinery, which did not produce the hoped-for profits.³⁴

About this time the Russian government issued an amnesty for political prisoners arrested during the troubles of 1905. This manifesto was proclaimed on the 300th anniversary of the Russian House of Romanov in 1913.³⁵

The impending bankruptcy of his Texas creamery coincided with the amnesty, which made it safe for Ulmanis to return to his native Latvia. He left his failing business to his disappointed creditors and by way of the port of New Orleans, took a freighter back to Europe. Ulmanis’s American sojourn had lasted only half a dozen years, from 1907 to 1913. Nonetheless, his Nebraska experiences enabled him to combine, agriculturally and politically, the best of the old from Europe and the new from America.



Roberts Dairy office, northeast corner of Sixteenth and M streets in Lincoln, early 1910. (Left to right): Karlis A. Ulmanis, superintendent of the Lincoln plant; Vera Barger, secretary; J. Gordon Roberts, president; Clarence Laird; E. R. Harnly; and Grace I. Roberts. Roberts Diary photograph

On July 30, 1913, Ulmanis wrote his old friend Hermanis Endzelins from Bremen, Germany. Endzelins later reported that in spite of the amnesty, Ulmanis had been detained at the border by Russian authorities.³⁶ Once back home, he found the same old double system of German land barons who controlled Latvia under the titular government of the Russian Czar. However, it was a system that Ulmanis was determined to break. On August 20, 1913, he was again hired as an agronomist-editor for the Baltic Farmers Association in Valmiera in the province of Vidzeme.³⁷ He became active in the Latvian independence movement and head of the Agrarian Party. The Republic of Latvia’s Declaration of Independence was proclaimed in Riga on November 18, 1918.

Not long after the guns had fallen silent along the Western Front of Europe, Ulmanis had propelled himself to the prime ministership of a Latvian provisional government. Almost immediately, however, he found himself again a fugitive. He and his fellow ministers in the national cabinet were forced to find sanctuary aboard a British warship, an-

chored in Latvia’s harbor city of Liepaja, because a number of rival armies were clashing throughout the Latvian countryside. Latvia’s new, independent army, at one time or another, was forced to fight the Communist “Red” Army of the USSR, the pro-Czar “White” Army of old Imperial Russia, and a variety of swirling German troops who had refused to leave Latvia after World War I.

Almost miraculously the native citizens of Latvia, under Ulmanis’s guidance and grim determination, were finally able to escape Russian rule and the dominance of the German barons. By the early 1920s all foreign armies had been ousted, the independent Latvian army was firmly in control, and a peace treaty had been signed with former adversaries.

Like the United Kingdom, the Republic of Latvia adopted a parliamentary system of democratic government. During the two decades between World Wars I and II, Ulmanis served four terms as prime minister: November 18, 1918, to June 18, 1921; December 12, 1925, to May 6, 1926; March 27 to December 5, 1931; and March 17 to May 19, 1934.³⁸ The political parties of Latvia during this

Karlis Ulmanis

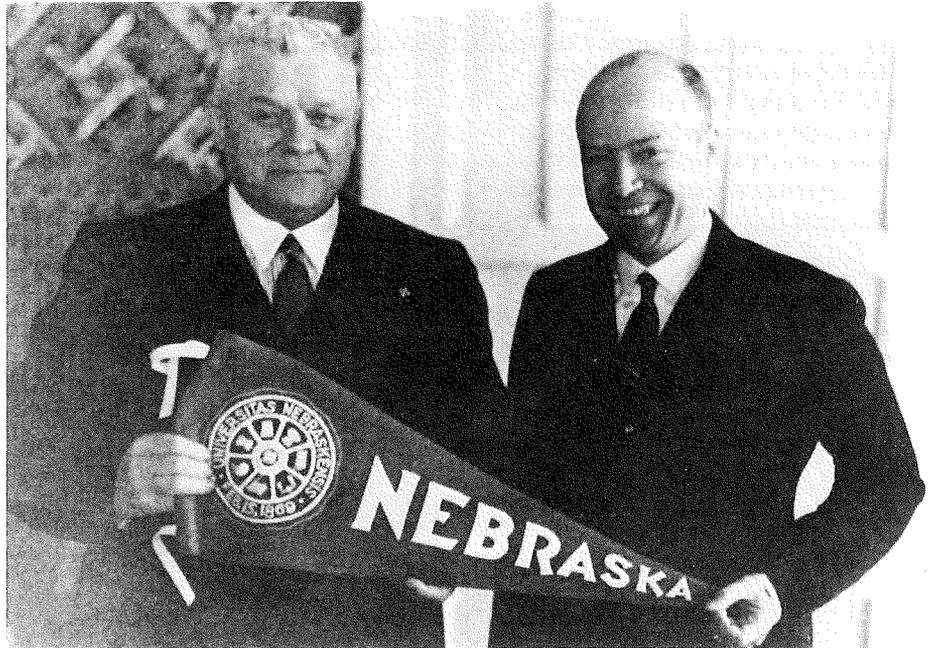
time were divided into dozens of different factions. With the rise of both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, the survival of Latvia against such outside fascist and communist influences seemed threatened, or at least so Ulmanis believed.

On the night of May 15, 1934, he, with the help of friends within the Latvian military establishment, staged a bloodless coup d'etat, without any shots being fired. Thus, Ulmanis became the unelected premier or "Vadonis" [leader] of Latvia. He also assumed the title of president when the sitting president's term of office expired in 1936. Ulmanis was to remain the president of Latvia until June 17, 1940, when the Soviet Union sent tanks across the border, forcibly occupied the country, arrested Ulmanis, and immediately replaced him with a Communist-installed government under the guns of the Red Army.

Whether or not Ulmanis was a dictator is an issue that Latvians still debate. Perhaps this old argument was best covered by the *Daily Nebraskan*, the student newspaper of the University of Nebraska, when Ulmanis was president of Latvia. On April 29, 1936, a news article with the banner headline, "Former Student Now Dictator," appeared in the *Daily Nebraskan*. The article stated that Ulmanis "joined the list of Europe's full-fledged dictators."³⁹

Just a little over a year later, on May 5, 1937, the *Daily Nebraskan* printed the other side of the debate. This time the headline read, "University of Latvia Graduate Peter Lejins Denies Existence of Dictatorship in Native Land." Pertaining to the controversy about the "dictatorship" of Ulmanis, the article stated:

Here to see the state and the university that Latvians have heard so much about, Peter Lejins, a graduate of the University of Latvia, who has been doing graduate work at Chicago, denied that his country was the type of dictatorship as exemplified by some of the other fascist states. As Lejins expresses it, Latvia, under the command of President Karlis Ulmanis, who graduated from the university in 1909, is merely enjoying the leadership of an able president and an important economic group of the population—the farming class.⁴⁰



U.S. Ambassador William Bullitt presented a new University of Nebraska pennant to President Ulmanis at Riga Castle in 1936. The pennant was sent by Nebraska Congressman Harry B. Coffee. Ulmanis Collection, University Archives/Special Collections Department, UNL Libraries

However, no one disputed Ulmanis's pride in his Nebraska connection. Many visitors to the living quarters in the presidential castle in Riga commented upon the sparsely covered walls that displayed the coat of arms of Latvia and the pennant of the University of Nebraska. Harry B. Coffee of Chadron, Nebraska's Fifth District representative to the U.S. House of Representatives and an Ulmanis contemporary from the old days at the Agricultural College in Lincoln, promised to send a new scarlet and cream pennant to replace the somewhat frayed one from the president's college days in Nebraska.⁴¹

Under Ulmanis's direction Arbor Day, first introduced in Nebraska by J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City, became an institution in Latvia. Ulmanis also founded an agricultural youth organization called "Mazpulki," patterned upon the American 4-H clubs he had observed in Nebraska. Furthermore, his work with the dairy industry in Nebraska is reflected in the emphasis Latvia put upon improved dairy methods. Latvia became



President Ulmanis in 1936 with "Mazpulki" members, the Latvian counterpart to Nebraska 4-H clubs. Ulmanis Collection, University Archives/Special Collections Department, UNL Libraries

one of the major European exporters of butter before World War II.

Perhaps better than anyone else, former President Herbert Hoover captured the impact of Ulmanis's stay in America. After his visit to Riga in 1938, he reflected upon certain words of the Latvian president:

"America may need expert advice later on and I will come home—I mean come back—and help." This slip into the word "home" echoed in my mind for days, for that is the grip that America takes on men's souls.⁴²

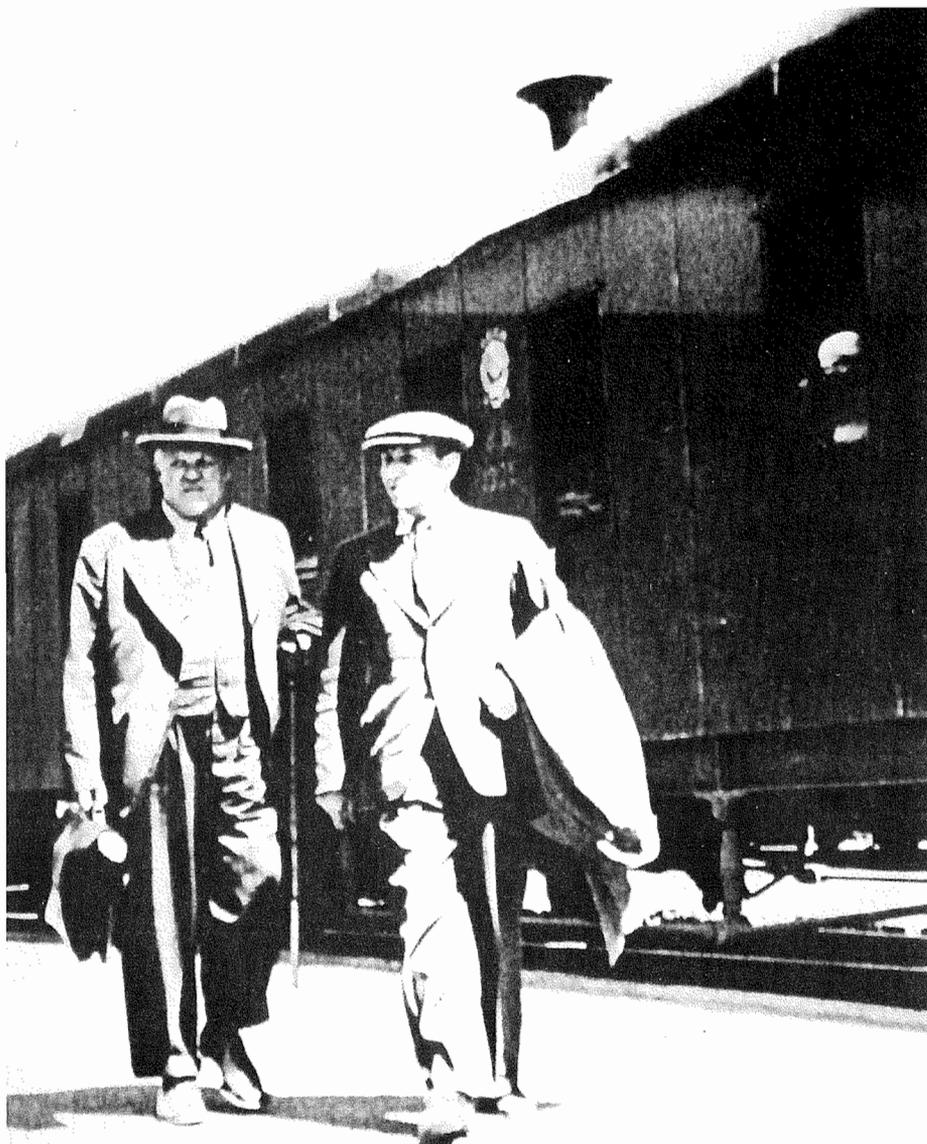
After fewer than twenty-two years of independence free from foreign intervention, Latvia again was squeezed between two giants, Germany and the Soviet Union. Hitler and Stalin had made a deal in 1939, dividing Poland and assigning the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the Soviet "sphere of influence."⁴³

With a free hand promised under the Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union invaded Latvia on June 17, 1940. As the Red Army was marching in, President Karlis Ulmanis addressed his fellow citizens for the last time in a nationwide radio broadcast late that day. Urging calm, he asserted, "Es paliksu sava vieta, jus palieciet savas" ("I shall remain in my place; you remain in yours").⁴⁴ The last Westerner to speak with Ulmanis on a transatlantic telephone (in June of 1940) appears to have been newspaper reporter Edward Morrow of the *Omaha World-Herald*. Morrow later wrote:

I asked him if Soviet troops were marching in and he said he thought so but . . . my impression was that the Russians were nearby and possibly had tapped his line. Then he hung up.⁴⁵

President Ulmanis and many other Latvians were arrested at the time of the initial invasion. A more massive deportation, by train, of thousands occurred a year later on June 14, 1941, just before the arrival of the invading German army, which had launched an attack upon the Soviet Union.

After his seizure by the Soviets in June of 1940, Ulmanis was taken by



The last known photograph of Karlis A. Ulmanis, taken July 23, 1940, when he arrived at the Moscow rail yards in custody of an unidentified agent of the USSR. Photograph courtesy of Guntis Ulmanis

train to Moscow and then to a permanent internment camp for political prisoners in Stavropol, in the Caucasian region of southern Russia.⁴⁶ Through February of 1941 Ulmanis corresponded with his Latvian contacts, especially his agricultural friends.⁴⁷ From Voroshilovsk [Stavropol], on December 19, 1940, for example, he sent a poignant Christmas card, one of his last messages, to

Endzelins in Valmiera. At the conclusion of the card is an eerie postscript, It is almost again like 35 years ago in Pleskau [Pskov].⁴⁸

During the German army's last offensive through the Caucasian region, Ulmanis was removed from the Stavropol camp and taken across the Caspian Sea to the city of Krasnovodsk.⁴⁹ It was fifty years before any credible facts about his

Karlis Ulmanis

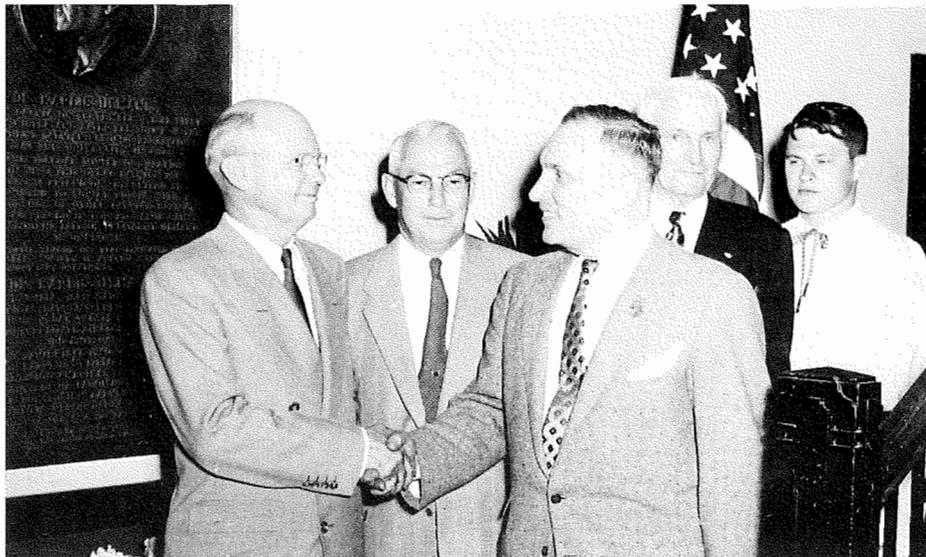
final days were determined. In an interview, eyewitness Nikolay Melnikov, a Soviet prison official, confirmed that Karlis Ulmanis had died in the prison infirmary on September 20, 1942, and that he had been buried in the Krasnovodsk cemetery in Turkmenistan.⁵⁰ He was sixty-five years old.

Following World War I, the Baltic nations were free and independent. The loss of that freedom to the occupying Soviet army during 1940–41 had been such a traumatic event that when the Red Army again approached their homelands during the second invasion in late 1944, an estimated one half million residents of the Baltic States left their possessions, relatives, and native soil behind and fled west, ahead of the retreating German armed forces.

As of April 30, 1951, 59,426 Baltic nationals, including 29,599 Latvians, had immigrated to America under the new Displaced Persons Act.⁵¹ More than one thousand Latvian families came to Nebraska during the early 1950s with the help of farmer sponsors or Lutheran Church authorities. Most of them eventually settled either in Omaha or Lincoln.

During the postwar years, it became increasingly apparent to the Nebraskans from Latvia that restoration of independence for their native land would be a long, bitter struggle. Their efforts to keep their ethnic heritage intact in the meantime included preserving the cherished memory of Karlis Ulmanis. On May 22, 1954, a plaque in his honor was placed within the Dairy Industries Building on the East Campus of the University of Nebraska. On hand to give the dedication address was Lieutenant Governor Charles J. Warner, Ulmanis's friend and former employer.⁵²

In 1981 when Helene Ulmanis, widow of a nephew of Karlis, offered to donate her priceless collection of the Latvian president's papers to his alma mater, Gerald Rudolph, then dean of University of Nebraska Libraries, established the Ulmanis Collection. Associate Professor Elsie Thomas, librarian in archives and special collections, cared for



A plaque honoring Karlis A. Ulmanis was dedicated at the Dairy Industries Building on the University of Nebraska East Campus, May 22, 1954. (Left to right): Dr. Philip Kelly, chairman of the dairy department; W. V. Lambert, dean of the College of Agriculture; Olgerts Liepins, president of the North American Latvian Press Association; Lt. Gov. Charles J. Warner; and Ilmars Bergmanis, Latvian Youth representative.
Ilmars Didrichsons photograph

the collection and was instrumental in obtaining support for the commissioning of sculptor Mikelis Geistauts's bronze bust of Ulmanis. The bust was dedicated on November 18, 1982. Today it can be seen on the second floor of Love Memorial Library.⁵³

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, U. S. President George Bush was finally able to welcome the diplomatic representatives of all three newly freed Baltic nations to the White House on September 11, 1991. A short two years later the Ulmanis name reappeared on the list of world statesmen when Guntis Ulmanis, a grandnephew of Karlis, was elected president of Latvia.

In 1924 Ulmanis had described the difficult task of nation-building in a letter that also contained a contribution toward the construction cost of the new Memorial Stadium in Lincoln.

Professor Haecker, my dear professor, the foundation and the formation of a new state by a little nation like ours is no small matter after all, believe me. The longer I live the more I begin liking and admiring the history and the great statesmen of America.⁵⁴

Karlis Ulmanis shared with every Nebraskan a high regard for the pursuit of excellence, whether on the campus or in the creamery, whether in the city or on the farm. His Nebraska experiences and education remained an influence throughout his life. Nor did Nebraska forget the quiet dairyman from Latvia, the University of Nebraska graduate of 1909 who became his country's leading statesman.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

¹ "A Premier from Nebraska," *New York Times*, Mar. 26, 1931, 11.

² L. Dennis Smith, president of the University of Nebraska, to Lawrence E. Murphy, July 16, 1998.

³ Cornelius Tacitus, *Tacitus' Agricola, Germany and Dialogue on Orators*, trans. Herbert W. Bernario (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 86.



Librarian Elsie Thomas and Guntis Ulmanis (Karlis's grandnephew) with Mikelis Geistauts's bust of Karlis A. Ulmanis in Love Library, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1992. Guntis Ulmanis became president of Latvia in 1993, serving until 1999. Peteris Zobs photograph

⁴ "Vykupņol akt," folder 3, Ulmanis Collection, University Archives/Special Collections Department, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries (hereafter cited as Ulmanis Collection).

⁵ Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Life of Karlis Ulmanis* (Tumba: Daugava Forlag, 1978), 599.

⁶ Affidavit of Hermanis Endzelins, folder 1, Ulmanis Collection, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸ Val Kuska to Theodore Kleege, Dec. 21, 1959, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

⁹ Dunsdorfs, *Life of Ulmanis*, 600.

¹⁰ Alfreds Berzins, *Karlis Ulmanis Cilveks un Valstsvars* (New York: Gramatu Draugs, 1974), 34–37; Dunsdorfs, *Life of Ulmanis*, 600. Alfons Francis, "Dr. Karla Ulmana Dzive un Darbi," ed. Atis Zalitis, *Tev Muzam Dzivot Latvija* (Riga: Rota, 1938), 62–63.

¹¹ Juris Silenieks, *Nebraskans From Latvia: A Sociohistorical Study* (Lincoln: Biruta Zommers Trust Fund, 1979), 16.

¹² Howard R. Smith to Osvalds Akmentins, cited in Osvalds Akmentins, *Nebraska Student, Statesman, Leader* (Lincoln: Vaidava, 1954), 7.

¹³ Official student record card, University Archives/Special Collections Department, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

¹⁴ Statement, Jerome Warner to Lawrence E. Murphy, Nov. 1982; Silenieks, *Nebraskans From Latvia*, 35.

¹⁵ Silenieks, *Nebraskans From Latvia*, 35.

¹⁶ Theodore Kleege to Val Kuska, Jan. 9, 1960, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

¹⁷ Statement, Val Kuska, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

¹⁸ Marr M'Gaffin, "Premier Making Latvia Like Nebraska," *Omaha Sunday World-Herald*, Apr. 19, 1931: 9C.

¹⁹ Howard Gramlich to John Mierkalns, June 6, 1954, reproduced by Val Kuska in a letter to Osvalds Akmentins, Dec. 22, 1954, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

²⁰ "Results of Students' National Contest in Judging Dairy Cattle, National Dairy Show, Dec. 3, 1908," *Agriculture* (December 16, 1908).

²¹ Gramlich to Mierkalns, June 6, 1954.

²² Silenieks, *Nebraskans from Latvia*, 19.

²³ M'Gaffin, "Premier," 9C.

²⁴ Silenieks, *Nebraskans from Latvia*, 21.

²⁵ John Erickson to Alexander Liepnieks, Jan. 16, 1951, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Silenieks, *Nebraskans from Latvia*, 21.

²⁸ Minutes of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents meeting, Nov. 11, 1909, University Archives/Special Collections Department, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

²⁹ Lemuel F. Parton, "From Milkman to President; Ulmanis May Reverse Route," *Omaha World-Herald*, June 20, 1940.

³⁰ "Karl Ulmann," *Agriculture* (March 1910): 7.

³¹ J. Gordon Roberts to John Mierkalns, May 20, 1954, folder 14, Ulmanis Collection.

³² M'Gaffin, "Premier," 9C.

³³ Edward Morrow, "Former Husker Student's Dairy Goes Bankrupt: Tiny Latvia Gains Dictator," *Omaha World-Herald*, Apr. 12, 1936: 12A.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Endzelins affidavit, 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ J. Rutkis, ed., *Latvia: Country and People* (Stockholm: Latvian National Foundation, 1967), 241.

³⁹ "Former Student Now Dictator," *Daily Nebraskan*, Apr. 29, 1936, 11.

⁴⁰ "University of Latvia Graduate, Peter Lejins, Denies Existence of Dictatorship in Native Land," *Daily Nebraskan*, May 5, 1937.

⁴¹ "Latvia Dictator to Get New Nebraska Penants," *Omaha World-Herald*, Metro Ed., Apr. 15, 1936, 8.

⁴² Herbert Hoover, reprinted from *Collier's* in "What Nebraskan Learned as Dictator," *Omaha World-Herald*, Apr. 1, 1951, 10.

⁴³ Rutkis, *Country and People*, 244.

⁴⁴ Radio Broadcast, Karlis Ulmanis, June 17, 1940, folder 2, Ulmanis Collection.

⁴⁵ Edward Morrow to Lawrence E. Murphy, Feb. 12, 1980.

⁴⁶ Dunsdorfs, *Life of Ulmanis*, 613.

⁴⁷ Karlis Ulmanis to Latvian Agricultural Literary Publishing House, Feb. 7, 1941, folder 1, Ulmanis Collection.

⁴⁸ Postcard, Karlis Ulmanis to Hermanis Endzelins, Dec. 19, 1940, folder 1, Ulmanis Collection.

⁴⁹ Dunsdorfs, *Life of Ulmanis*, 613.

⁵⁰ *Zemes Saimnieks*, producer and director, Arvids Krievs, Kaupo Studio, 1993, videocassette; Andris Stavro, "Karla Ulmana Apraksanas Pedejais Liecinieks," *Liesma* No. 1/2 (1991): 10–11.

⁵¹ Senator Herbert H. Lehman of New York, "Freedom for Baltic Peoples," 82nd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* (June 19, 1951), 4.

⁵² "U of N to Honor Graduate Missing Behind Iron Curtain," *Omaha World-Herald*, May 20, 1954, 12.

⁵³ See Elsie Thomas, "The Karlis Ulmanis Collection at the University of Nebraska Lincoln," type-script, June 1982.

⁵⁴ Letter, Karlis Ulmanis, cited in "Ulmanis—Builder of a Republic," *Nebraska Alumnus* (September 1924): 253.