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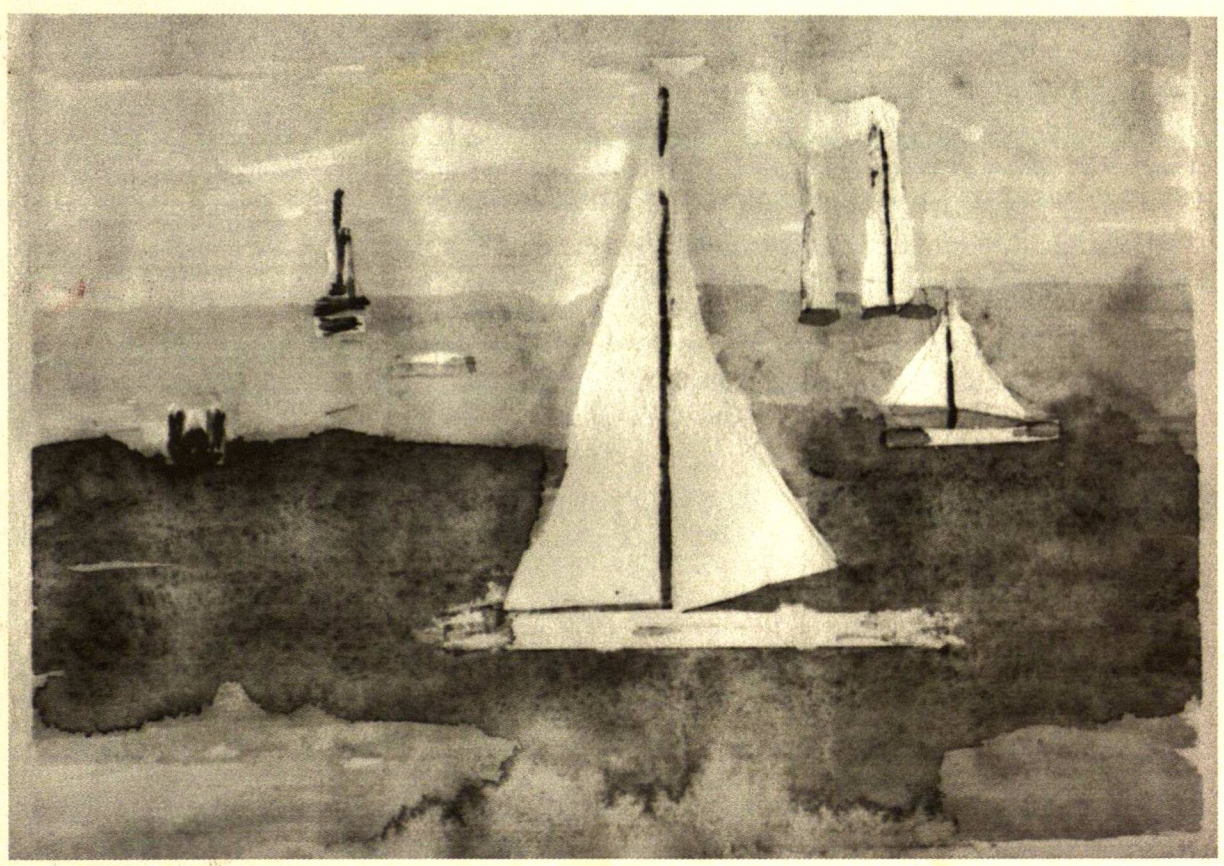
# BRIDGES

• LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL •

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Volume 24

Issue 6, July/August 2000



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*Lithuanian Folk Dancing...Music...A Parish Celebration...A Forgotten Hero Remembered*

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## P e r s p e c t i v e s

*I don't have any real memories regarding Lithuanian 1930s music except that it sounds so like the Fred Astaire-Zeigfield Follies-musical film tunes of America. I've always enjoyed the romance and easy style of these songs. When my husband's aunt, dediene Janina Bagdas, died, she left behind many, many albums. Among them were two Antano Šabaniausko albums recorded in Chicago by J. Karvelis, dates unknown, but I figure the late 30s.*

*After listening to our incessant beats of rock and roll when we were teenagers, my mother would tell us about how people in Lithuania would go to dances to tango or foxtrot or waltz to the most romantic voice of that period – Šabaniauskas. His name alone rolled off her tongue so deliciously.*

*During the Lithuanian picnics, we would climb out of our cars to Šabaniauskas over the speaker system. His voice would lead us to the picnic tables filled with friendly, talking faces. There was something so mystical when the grandmothers would pair up and start dancing under the branches of the trees, staring off into the distance. They would glide on an unseen dance floor with a mirrored light ball casting glimmering highlights on their aging faces.*

*Songs like "Paskutinis Sekmadienis" (The Last Sunday) or even the Lithuanian version of "Rose-Mary", sung with an Irish tenor-like voice evoke sentimentality for Lithuanian life as our national anthem evokes patriotism. The crackling quality of the albums reminds me that it is a life that I never experienced but ached for in an empathetic way. The songs brought such joy and smiles to my parents and their friends.*

*I put on one of the vinyl albums for my mother-in-law as she breakfasted this morning. She started humming and proceeded to spread the butter on her bread along with the soft tango beats in the background.*

*Rasa Ardys-Juška*

Editor

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## WHY DO LITHUANIANS FOLK DANCE?

"The versatility of the [folk] dance expresses a range of emotions; executes examples of farm work; imitates typical movements of birds, farm animals and even some flowers; and celebrates special occasions of the life cycle. In olden days, country folk observed funeral rites with appropriate somber dances."

"One theme absent from Lithuanian dances is that of war and battle despite the fact that Lithuania was always surrounded by powerful, hostile neighbors intent upon erasing Lithuania's existence from the map."

"Among Lithuanian exiles, folk dancing ignited enthusiasm...Not only were we able to express our pride and joy in our dancing among ourselves, but we were also able to demonstrate to diverse audiences our Lithuanian heritage and our love for it. We aim to pass it on to future generations as well."

Source: "The Significance of Folk Dancing in the Life of Lithuanians Abroad" by Genovaitė Breichmanienė in *The XI Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival 2000-Program Book* (Toronto, CA: Danaitis Associates, Inc.; 2000)

**On the cover:**  
Sailboats on Lake Michigan by Rev. Vytautas Bagdanavičius, MIC.



## The Land of My Ancestors

**T**he last thing one would expect teenagers to say when describing their summer vacation is, "I danced in a Lithuanian folk dance festival in Canada."

But that's precisely what over 1,000 children, teens, and college students will be saying this fall. Their parents and, even in some cases, grandparents will also have dancing memories of their year-long practices with their folk dance groups. This really was a family affair when the Eleventh Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival was presented at the Hershey Centre in Mississauga, Canada on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2000.

It would be wrong to say that the Festival began and ended on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. In reality, its theme, dance choices, and organization started after the last Festival in Chicago in 1996. Artistic directors Juozas and Rita Karasiejus together with the artistic coordinators, *The Lithuanian Folk Dance Institute*; the hosts, the Canadian and American Lithuanian Communities; and the many participating folk dance group teachers combined their talents to produce a spectacular event.

Each folk dance group sent out their teacher

to Camp Dainava in Michigan during the summer to learn the dances planned for the Festival. Upon return, it was time to take out the dancing shoes and begin memorizing and polishing each dance realization.

*Liepsna*, (*Flames*) a folk dance group in New Jersey, taught by Monika Murauskas met every Monday from 7:30 to 9:00 PM at Kearny's Lithuanian Community Center. Group members ranged from 14 to 40-something, which placed them in the young veterans' category of dance. Other categories of dance groups were children's, intermediate, students, and older veterans.

In the fall, the *Liepsna* group was geared up to learn the steps of their dances. Some dances for their category were well-known: the "Suktinis", a lively circle dance, and "Gyvataras", a quadrille-type dance. But the other dances were new, complicated, and captivating. These were "Protėvių Žemė" (Land of my Ancestors), "Dek, Ugnie!" (Burn, Fire!), and "Žolynėlis" (The Meadows). All three were pagan in flavor and tempo, bringing forth the ancient past through dance.

RASA ARDYS-JUŠKA is the editor of BRIDGES.

Practice after practice allowed *Liepsna* and the other participating dance groups to hone their movements as well as convey the essence each dance would bring to the Festival. *Liepsna* showed their talents during the New Jersey Lithuanian Independence Day celebration in Kearny and at Sts. Peter and Paul Lithuanian Catholic Church's annual summer picnic in Elizabeth.

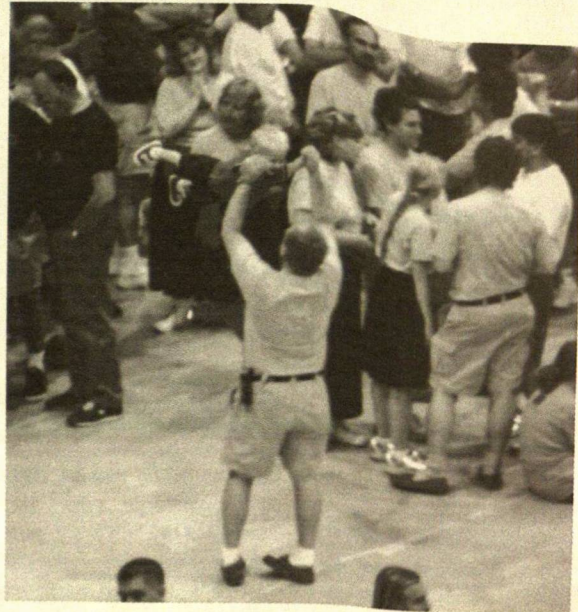
The first performance was in February and was nerve-racking for most because the newer dances were just that – new. Tried and true folk dances were part of the fare for every performance and usually expected. The audience was intrigued and enjoyed the show. Feeling confident, *Liepsna* continued to polish their movements and knowledge of the intricate steps.

The picnic performance further helped Monika see the weak points and also the strong points. The group felt ready and excited to see how an arena filled with over 40 groups would not only perform, but also exact an eye pleasing and very Lithuanian response.

The time had come, and by airplane or car, folk dancers from afar gathered at four different hotels situated near the Toronto International Airport in Missisauga, Canada.

The two-day practices started on Friday morning, June 30<sup>th</sup>, with the majority of the dancers congregated at the Regal Constellation Hotel lobby. Fifteen buses were used to transport this mass of dancers to and from the Hotel and the Hershey Centre.

The unique aspect of these two practice days is not necessarily the practicing, although



*Time to practice...*

*Daddy shows a different skip step.  
Below, groups polish up their moves.*





The Festival entrance...the youngest members enthrall the onlookers...the young veterans combine light, music, and movement.



vital. This time gives all the dancers a chance to bond with each other as they look across the arena and view the magnificent population determined to pass on a truly physical aspect of the Lithuanian culture. In the crowd, groups from not only the U.S. and Canada were present, but also from Lithuania, Buenos Aires, Pusk (Poland), and Sao Paulo.

All groups came dressed with practice uniforms. Some wore specifically designed t-shirts depicting their group's symbols – *Liepsna's* flames, *Spindulys's* rays of sunshine. A Chicago group, *Grandis*, used the pseudo-Mastercard logo as the background for their lettering. The New York City group, *Tryptinis*, used good ole' King Kong and a Lithuanian female dancer. All the groups showed their unity, creativity, and high spirits during the two-day practices.

When you have over 40 groups in an arena learning the sequence of the program and how each group will coordinate with the ones around it, you have to have intensely calm leadership. Rita Karasiejienė's soft, yet firm voice maintained its assertive demeanor throughout those long hours. And it paid off. For the last practice – start to finish – all stops were pulled and each group performed to peak ability.

That evening, A Folk Art Exhibition sponsored by the Toronto Branch of the Folk Art Institute (*Lietuvių Tautodailės Institutas Toronte*); and two live-band dances gave the dancers and their families time to relax, catch up

with old friends, and make new ones. It wasn't uncommon to hear, "The last time I saw you was... at the last Folk Dance Festival!" And so the three-day Festival was working up to the BIG day.

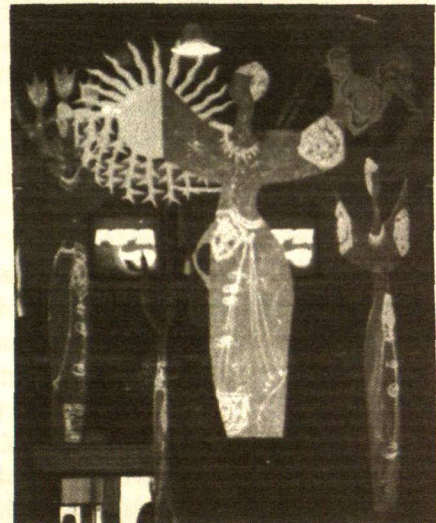
As each car rolled into the Centre's parking lot on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the distinct red and white Vytis and LT stickers decorating the cars, some with unique Lithuanian-language license plates, transported one dancer after the other or one Lithuanian family after another. One hour before the performance, people were still catching up with each other. They were still exchanging as much as they could to last until the next Festival where they would be bound to meet again. Dancers were sipping water (it's hot under those woolen "tauts"), fixing their skirts or ties, and re-viewing dance steps.

A little after 2:00 PM, Lithuanian starting time, the lights were dimmed. After the Artistic Directors, Rita and Juozas Karasiejus, were presented, Rasa Lukoševičiūtė-Kurienė announced each group as they walked into the arena. Cheers, clapping, and many cameras blitzes greeted the proud dancers.

After the singing of the Canadian, American and Lithuanian National Anthems, the opening remarks, and introduction of Guests of Honor, the **Prologue** began. Music accompanying each dance was varied: either a professional recording or live music performed by the "Žilvitis" ensemble orchestra of the Vytautas Magnus University of Lithua-



*...The older veterans and students share a dance producing patterns similar to their folk costumes  
...Folk decorations float above the dancers and the audience.  
..All the dancers wave their yellow, green and red handkerchiefs for the finale.*



nia.

Each set of dances followed a theme. The **Prologue** contained dances based on interpretations of pagan Lithuanian life. The youngest members, the children's and intermediate age groups, performed in the **When I was Young** set. Here, aspects of farm life and children's games delighted the audience.

What was so entirely unique about this Festival was the choreographers' abilities to depict the dances in different groupings. Each group was assigned its own square in which to dance. During earlier Festivals, each group danced the same dance the same way rarely connecting with each other until the finale. During this Festival groups floated around the arena dancing the same dances in different arrangements. Where one group danced in a circle, another danced in rows. At other times groups made large circles weaving in and out for a grand effect.

This type of cohesiveness was clear during **Wedding Dances**. Pre-wedding celebratory dances (one in which the dancers weave the bride and groom together with long "juostas") to the day after the wedding were performed with vigor and enthusiasm. The groups combined to show different aspects of the dances by arranging themselves to highlight solo entrances of the bride, groom, and the wedding entourage. The **Žilvitis** professional dance group from Lithuania performed, solo, a lively wedding dance called "Vestuvinis Šokis". Each dance successfully kept the audience's eyes darting from one end of the arena to the other to capture fluid movements accentuated by the colorfully woven Lithuanian folk costumes.

Within the **Family Dances** sequence the audience continued to be entranced by the blending of movements. The first dance, "Motinėle obelėle" combined all four generations of dancers: grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren. With "Išėjo tėvelis į mišką", children and their parents performed an amusing and heartwarming dance about a family setting out on an owl (fowl was what they

probably were after) hunt. Choreographed movements allowed the non-Lithuanian speaking audience to understand exactly how the hunt was proceeding.

Dances associated with family life and the home were exuberantly performed for **The Homestead** segment, before the finale. Again a unique blending of movements were clearly witnessed during the "Rusnietis", a quadrille, performed by the students along with the older veterans. The slower weaving movements of the veterans accentuated the jumping students. The unity of these two groups underlined the importance of all the generations in the Lithuanian family unit.

The **Finale** filled the entire arena with the music and movements to the dance "Suktinis". Yellow, green, and red handkerchiefs were held high, and the dancers waved them to the beat of the music and the audience's delighted clapping.

Once the last people drifted away to their cars, in the distance several dance teachers were deep in conversation. One can only suppose that the next Festival's plans were already in the making. ♦



"See you all at the XII Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival in the year 2004!", says Skaidra Pliura, a Grandis dancer.



*Leona Gustaff*

## A New Heifetz?

### *The Embassy Showcases Brilliant Lithuanian Talent*

**T**hey were only 23 and 25 years of age. Vilhelmas Čepinskis, the violinist, was the younger. But they performed with the aplomb, graciousness, and generosity of much more seasoned musicians. The performance was in the beautiful rooms of the Lithuanian Embassy at 2616 -16th. St., Washington, D.C., whereupon entering, we viewed unique creative paintings of the eminent Lithuanian musician, composer, and artist, Mykolas K. Čiurlionis (1875-1911). The art was borrowed from the Lithuanian museum in Chicago, Illinois.

Vilhelmas Čepinskis and Gouda Gedvilaitė, his accompanist on the piano, were invited to appear to an appreciative and mostly Lithuanian audience by Stasys Sakalauskas, Ambassador to the U.S.A. Heralded as a romantic evening, it was much more. Noteworthy selections by Saint-Saens, Rachmaninoff, Prokofieff, Mendelssohn, and Debussy were well prepared and beautifully presented.

I must confess that as I attended the concert I did not expect to hear music played with such talent and finesse. The first offering, "Sonata" by Saint-Saens, opened with a dramatic explosion of large grand sweeps of the bow on the instrument's strings. I was captivated. True polished technique filtered through and continued to grow until the last encore.

The dramatic interpretation of the concert rhapsody, "Tzigane" by Ravel, was most in-

triguing. We heard a stirring acappella beginning with piano accompaniment joining in just as one felt the composition would continue for violin only. Neo-classic music with strange harmonies, flowing notes, and rapid trills were played with dynamic intensity. A gypsy dance and tune subtly intruded, and one envisioned gypsies twirling about in heavy laboring steps to rhythmic melodies of folk tunes. The audience rewarded this rendition with a standing ovation and unison clapping.

My favorite was the melodious "Auf Flügeln des Gesanges" composed by Felix Mendelssohn. Meticulous phrasing and lovely tunes played with full marvelous sound entranced me until the last note slowly descended into nothingness.

The interpretation of the immensely popular "Clair de Lune" by Debussy rekindled memories of the beloved master violinist, Jascha Heifetz, who was born in Vilnius in 1901 and presented his first concert in Kaunas when he was six years old. Vilhelmas informed me that the arrangement was by Isidor Achron, accompanist for Jascha Heifetz.

Vilhelmas Čepinskis is the only son of musical parents. His father was a violinist and orchestra conductor in Lithuania, his mother, an opera singer. He began to study the violin at age four and at seven years of age performed with the Kaunas Philharmonic. He played the Wieniausky Second Violin Concerto with the

---

*LEONA GUSTAFF, now retired, is a former teacher of music and director of choirs in the U.S.*



Guoda Gedvilaitė and Vilhelmas Čepinskis

Photo: L. Gustaff

National Symphony Orchestra when he was ten. Vilhelmas was also the recipient of a scholarship to study with the renowned Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard Music School from which he graduated in 1997. In June of that year he made his symphonic debut at Carnegie Hall in New York City, N.Y.

Guoda Gedvilaitė, the accompanist, graduated from the M. K. Čiurlionis College of Arts and entered the Vilnius Music Academy,

where she studied with Prof. Veronica Vitaitė. She has performed with major European orchestras and has won international piano competitions. Notably, she received the First Prize at the Nicolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Paris. She also captured both the First Prize and the Public Prize at the Chopin International Competition in Hanover, Germany.

What a delight it is to hear such excellent music flow through the rooms of the elegant building of the Lithuanian Embassy again. My mother and my grandparents, who had arrived in Baltimore from Lithuania in 1900, would have approved.

Young and old talent emanating from Lithuania is amazing. These are professional performers who have been welcomed in many countries of Europe and in the U.S.A. They are presenting stellar performances that are exciting and well prepared. We should be proud of this talent from our homeland. Let us invite them back. We must bring our sons, daughters, and friends to hear them. ♦

## Conductor Rostropovich Presented Honorary Citizenship

**T**he Vilnius City Council has presented viola cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich with the title of honorary citizen of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius on July 27th, 2000.

During the Second World War Rostropovich began his musical career in Moscow. He has been one of the brightest stars on the world music scene for a number of years. He received a number of honors and recordings of his music have won prizes, including the Grammy award and the Grand Pris du Disque.

Rostropovich accepted more than 30 honorary degrees and was honored ceremoniously over 60 times in over 30 different countries for his contributions to art and adherence to humanist principles.

In 1995 Rostropovich was decorated by the president of Lithuania with the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas. Rostropovich's asso-

ciation with Lithuania became much more active after Lithuanian independence. Rostropovich has performed concerts with the Lithuanian National Symphony and National Chamber Orchestras, and the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theater.

In 1991, Rostropovich staged a concert with the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra in Spain. He donated his proceeds from the event to charity, for the purchase of medicines for victims of [the 1991 Soviet attack of the Lithuanian freedom demonstrators.]

Only three people have received an honorable Vilnius citizenship up till now: former U.S. pres. Ronald Reagan, Icelandic foreign minister Jon Baldwin Hanibalson, and Monsignor Kazimieras Vasiliauskas of the Vilnius Arch-Cathedral.

(Baltic News Service) ♦

Jeanne Dorr

# The Many Faces...

**O**n behalf of the Lithuanian Orphan Care Committee I would like to wish all the BRIDGES readers a happy and a safe summer.

I will be spending the summer in Lithuania, and God willing, will return in the fall with many new stories to share with you. You will be meeting new people and hearing about new programs. But I will also return from visiting some "old" favorites, such as the orphans and ladies of Rumbonys, the two Jurgitas, as well as the city and country grandmothers.

We have had two success stories this year. One of our former orphans just completed his first year in the seminary; while Jurgita, our gifted writer whose work I published in *BRIDGES*, is taking her exams to enter the School of Journalism at Vilnius University. I am sure she will be successful.

As I was leaving the house for school this morning I received an email from Countryside Children in Vilnius. I think when I asked them to prepare a schedule for me in Lithuania they simply threw their hands up in the air. Where did I want to go? To see the families who are living in hay wagons? To visit the fifth grader who has leukemia and his widowed mother



can't find a job or pay for the necessary medicine? Maybe I wanted to see the people who are living near the garbage dumps and are living off them because they can't afford to live anywhere else. Of course, there are the elderly who are living from hand to mouth.

I went to school, and it bothered me all day as I watched my students throw out half their lunches and waste paper like there was no tomorrow. When I came home I sent my answer to Lithuania. I want to see ALL of it because I know the *BRIDGES* readers will respond. You are among the most generous people in the world.

*JEANNE DORR*, is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. She is also a social studies teacher in New Jersey.

I tend to get carried away, and I promised myself to be brief. I'm sure the people who read this column are saying, "That will be the day!" Since a picture is worth a thousand words, this time around I will give you more pictures and fewer words. I would like to share with you the photographs that portray the many faces of our Lithuanian people.

Take pleasure from the beautiful summer. Whether you are taking a cruise around the world or simply enjoying your back yard, please don't forget Lithuania's forgotten children. Poverty doesn't take a vacation; it doesn't even take a short holiday. The cost to sponsor a child is \$150 a year, but ANY donation is gratefully appreciated. Please send your tax deductible checks to:

Lithuanian Orphan Care  
2711 W. 71<sup>st</sup> St.  
Chicago, IL. 60629 ◆



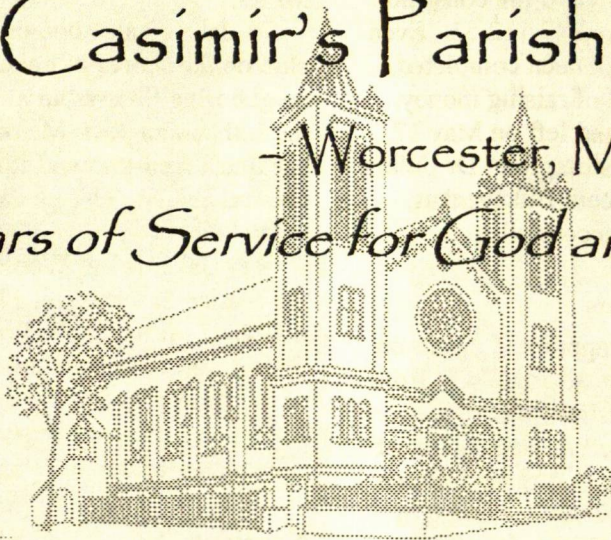
All photos: Jeanne Dorr

*Bernadeta Miliauskaitė-Harris*

# Saint Casimir's Parish

— Worcester, Massachusetts

*105 Years of Service for God and Country*



The skyline of Worcester, Massachusetts is dotted with many Catholic churches. Driving through on the highway, one's eyes are drawn to a tall, stately brick church. Its two copper steeples, with gold crosses atop them, identify it as St. Casimir's Lithuanian Church, which has been proudly serving God and country for 105 years. St. Casimir's Parish has made great contributions to the spiritual and cultural life of Lithuanian Americans. Following are some highlights of its rich history.

The early Lithuanian immigrants came from small agricultural towns or villages. Finding themselves in a strange land where the customs, language, work, and people were different, they turned to their religion, whose traditions they had grown up with, for consolation. Bishop Beaven of Springfield granted the early Lithuanian immigrants in Worcester permission to establish a parish, which would be named St. Casimir. They would now have a church around which to organize and thus maintain their culture in a foreign land. A

small group of Polish immigrants joined them.

Reverend Joseph Jakštys

Rev. Joseph Jakštys was the first pastor. The first services were held in the basement of Sacred Heart Church on Oct. 31, 1894. In January 1895, a plot of land on Waverly St. was purchased for \$1,004.65, and a small wooden church was built on it at a cost of \$1,699.77. A rectory was built behind the church in 1899 at a cost of \$2,133.62. In those days, a woman earned \$2.50 to \$5.00 a week; while, a man's weekly wage ranged from \$7.00 to \$10.00. Determination and enthusiasm enabled the parishioners to raise the required amount.

In 1900, as more Lithuanians began to arrive, the church became too small. Land was bought on the next block and construction of a brick church began in 1903. The Polish members separated in order to form their own parish. The cornerstone was blessed on May 31, 1903. Construction stopped upon completion of the basement, where services were held

*BERNADETA MILIAUSKAITĖ-HARRIS is a member of the Council of Religious Affairs in the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.*

starting on Nov. 8. The old wooden church was converted into a hall.

The total cost of the land and the construction of the new church were \$47,112.53. Even though construction had not been completed, the parishioners were tired of raising money. Fr. Jakštys was tired also and left on May 17, 1908. Two succeeding pastors, Rev. Dr. Julius Radzevičius and Rev. Vincent Bukaveckas, faced many problems unsuccessfully.

### Reverend John J. Jakaitis

Rev. John Jakaitis was appointed pastor on Feb. 27, 1913. He was like an angel sent from heaven to revitalize St. Casimir's Parish. Construction was completed in the summer of 1916 at a cost of \$76,000. In August, thirteen lots were purchased by Lithuanians living in south Worcester for the construction of a second Lithuanian church. Our Lady of Vilnius (*Aušros Vartai*) Parish was founded in 1925 and still functions today with Rev. Alphonse Volungis as pastor.

After 12 years of praying in the basement, St. Casimir's Church was finally completed. What a magnificent sight to behold! There were three marble altars. The main altar, in honor of St. Casimir, had a huge painting of him praying by a church door. The altar to the right was in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the altar to the left honored St. Joseph. The beautiful paintings, statues, and Stations of the Cross were admired by all and reflected the deep love for God held by the Lithuanian people. Jesus' words: "Come to me all who are burdened and I will refresh you", painted across the center arch, were a source of comfort to all.

During his pastorship, Fr. Jakaitis directed efforts to assist Lithuania during World War I by sending donations of money and clothing. He was a member of the delegation to see President Woodrow Wilson, spoke in the U.S. Senate on behalf of Lithuania, and twice visited President Warren Harding seeking the legal recognition of Lithuania. The U.S. recog-

nized Lithuania de jure after the second visit, which was led by Worcester attorney Anthony Miller.

Fr. Jakaitis also bought an old run down club on the shores of Lake Quinsigamond in neighboring Shrewsbury. It was named after the Lithuanian poet, Maironis. Maironis Park became a well-known Lithuanian American cultural center. This elegant hall still operates today.

Rev. Jakaitis left Worcester in 1930 to join the Marian Fathers. As a Marian, he was headmaster of Marianapolis Preparatory School in Thompson, Connecticut (still open), Provincial of the American Province, and built two Lithuanian churches in Argentina. He died in Chicago on March 4, 1965.

### Reverend Augustine Petraitis

Rev. Augustine Petraitis succeeded Rev. Jakaitis and served until his death in 1957. A thrifty administrator, he was assisted by Rev. Michael Tamulevičius and Rev. Alphonse Volungis.

In 1944, as the Soviet army occupied Lithuania a second time, many Lithuanians did not wish to suffer under the Communist regime again and fled. This wave of immigrants brought new life to the parish and its organizations. A number of new organizations were formed to maintain the Lithuanian culture in the immigrants' new land and to work for Lithuania's independence. At one time there were as many as 35 organizations in the parish. Some were purely religious, others religious and beneficial, social, and cultural. Eleven are active today. Among them are Chapter 5 of the Lithuanian American Roman Catholic Women's Alliance and Council 26 of the Knights of Lithuania.

Rev. John Bakanas was appointed administrator after Fr. Petraitis' death.

### Changes at St. Casimir's

Bishop Flanagan appointed Rev. John C. Jutkevičius (Jutt) pastor on June 3, 1965. At



At left is the original painting of St. Casimir, which hung above the main altar before renovations. It is now in the church hall. At right is St. Casimir as he is now portrayed in the church today.

Photos: B. Miliauskaitė-Harris

this time, the changes recommended by Vatican II were being put into effect. Fr. Jutkevičius faced many problems: the church was in need of renovation and a new rectory was needed. He began with the church.

The exterior of the church was sandblasted and remortared. The interior required complete renovation. Even though there was no decree in Vatican Council II, which directly ordered altars to be destroyed, they were. The beautiful interior of St. Casimir's Church was completely stripped of everything – altars, statues, Stations of the Cross, paintings, pews, and flooring. Under the direction of Prof. Vytautas K. Jonynas, artist and sculptor, and Mr. Apolinaras Treinys, architect, the church was given a contemporary appearance.

A great number of people objected to the removal of the three altars. Despite the explanations given, they could not understand how the Church would order the destruction of al-

tars — doing the same thing the Communists did in their native Lithuania, which they were forced to leave. The last service was held on Jan. 29, 1969. From then on, until the last Sunday in July, Masses were held in the church hall.

St. Casimir's Parish celebrated its diamond jubilee on Oct. 19, 1969. Bishops Timothy Harrington and Vincent Brizgys, together with eight priests, concelebrated Mass in a newly designed all white church with the Resurrected Christ as the centerpiece. The diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Free Press*, carried photos and an article about the renovation

Reverend John C. Jutkevičius (Jutt)

Fr. Jutkevičius was an American and Lithuanian patriot. Even though he had never been to Lithuania, he understood how much the Lithuanian people had suffered under Communism. He was very active in the Knights of



The monument to those who died for Lithuania's freedom.

Photo: B. Miliauskaitė-Harris

Lithuanian and founder of their Lithuanian Affairs Committee.

He enjoyed traveling with his two brothers, also priests. While vacationing in Africa in June 1971, Father fell ill. He was hospitalized in London, where he died on June 27, 1971.

Rev. Justin Steponaitis was curate under Fr. Jutkevičius. Rev. Albin Yankauskas was appointed pastor after Fr. Jutkevičius's death. Due to poor health, he resigned after a few months.

### The Marian Fathers Arrive

Bishop Flanagan was faced with the problem of finding Lithuanian speaking priests for St. Casimir's. After attending a parish council meeting to discuss the future of the parish, it was voted to enter into a contract with the Marian Fathers, who would provide two priests to staff St. Casimir's. The administration of the parish would not change, and the responsibilities of the priests involved would be the same as those of diocesan priests. The new pastor was Rev. Anthony Miciūnas, MIC, an experienced administrator. His assistant was Rev. Joseph Budzeika, MIC. After his departure, Rev. Benjamin Uždavinis, MIC, (a parishioner) assisted.

Under Fr. Miciūnas, a new rectory was built. He also had the idea to build a monument to those who died for Lithuania's freedom. After discussing it with the Worcester chapter of the Lithuanian National Guard in Exile (*Šauliai*), the *Šauliai* agreed and began to raise money for the project. The monument was erected next to the church in 1978.

On March 4, 1984, the parish commemorated the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir with a dinner. This commemoration of the feast of St. Casimir continues to be an annual tradition observed on the first Sunday of March.

### Reverend Vincent Parulis, MIC

After serving as pastor for 15 years, Fr. Miciūnas, MIC was transferred in the fall of 1987. He died on Sept. 22, 1998. Rev. Vincent Parulis, MIC returned to the parish of his birth to serve as pastor. Rev. John Petrauskas, MIC former headmaster of Marianapolis Preparatory School, was appointed assistant. A second assistant, Rev. Anthony Nockūnas, MIC arrived on Feb. 1, 1994.

Under Fr. Parulis's, MIC skillful administration, church hall renovations were begun. Father celebrated his 50th anniversary in the priesthood on Aug. 28, 1994.

St. Casimir's Parish celebrated its centennial on Nov. 20, 1994. The liturgical celebration and banquet were befitting of this grand occasion. Rev. Parulis, MIC did not live to see the completion of the church hall's renovation. He died on March 23, 1996.

Rev. Anthony Nockūnas, MIC currently serves as administrator. Rev. John Petrauskas, MIC assists him.

Organizations take monthly turns hosting coffee hours after Sunday Masses in the newly renovated hall.



The summer of 1999 saw repairs done to the steeples, which were damaged during a violent storm. Copper shingles have replaced the traditional light green color, which stood out of the hilly Worcester landscape for so many years.

### The Sisters of St. Casimir at St. Casimir's School

The history of St. Casimir's Parish would not be complete without mentioning the parish school and its teachers – the dedicated Sisters of St. Casimir who served for 62 years.

Under Fr. Jakaitis, a three-story brick school with a basement was built in 1924 on the site of the old church hall on Waverly St.. The old rectory behind the school was turned into a convent for the Sisters. Enrollment in 1927-28 was the highest ever – 505 students. After that, it began a slow decline. The school was closed on Jan. 29, 1986. It is still owned by the parish, which rents it to the Worcester Public Schools. It is known as St. Casimir's Alternative School and is used to educate students who are unable to function in a regular school setting.

The Sisters of St. Casimir did an outstanding job providing the youth with a solid religious and educational foundation. Their expertise was especially appreciated in the children's sacramental preparation and the imparting of the Lithuanian language. Most importantly, the Sisters inspired many students to enter religious life. Fifty-one girls entered the Sisters of St. Casimir. Eight chose other orders. Nine boys entered the Marian Fathers, one as a brother.

St. Casimir's Parish is forever grateful to the Sisters of St. Casimir for their outstanding service.

### With Hope Toward the Future

Today, St. Casimir's Church is experiencing a decline. As parishioners pass away, there are no new ones to take their place. The church choir, under the direction of Anna Walinsky, continues to sing at the 10:00 a.m. Lithuanian Sunday Mass, which is attended mostly by the older generation. The choir also sings at funerals, of which there are quite a few. There are no families with young children; therefore no religious education classes, nor First Communion or Confirmation classes. Many new Lithuanian immigrants have come to Worcester and would revitalize our parish if only they would join and attend services. Only a handful has done so.

Jesus said: "...if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in heaven." [Matthew 18; 19] The independence of Lithuania from years of Soviet bondage demonstrates that God indeed does answer our prayers.

Our Father has been gracious and bestowed many blessings on St. Casimir's Lithuanian Parish through its 105 years. As we thank Him, we continue to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life and for new parishioners, so that the dream of St. Casimir's Parish, which became a reality through the persistence and dedication of its founders, will not die. May God hear our prayers so that Lithuanian hymns continue to ring out joyously in St. Casimir's Lithuanian Church for yet another 100 years. ♦

Edward W. Baranauskas

# The Second Transatlantic Flight

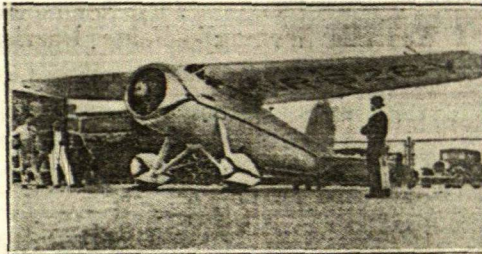
## Felix Waitkus: Forgotten Hero

I am sure most of us have heard of Darius and Girėnas, the two Lithuanian-born pilots, who attempted to fly non-stop from New York to Kaunas in July of 1933. The flight ended tragically, when their airplane, named *Lituanica*, crashed in a forest in Germany, killing both only four hundred miles short of their goal.

How many of us remember that there was another attempted non-stop flight from New York to Kaunas two years later? Who was the pilot, and did the flight come to a successful conclusion?

His name was Felix Waitkus, and he was known in Lithuanian circles as Feliksas Vaitkus. His parents came from Lithuania in 1904, and settled in the Bridgeport part of Chicago, where he was born three years later. He enlisted in the army in 1928, and after graduating from advanced pilot's training school, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Corps. In 1931, he was placed in the reserves with the rank of first lieutenant and returned to civilian life to work with his father-in-law who operated a flying school in Kohler, Wisconsin.

A few months after the *Lituanica* tragedy, some prominent members of the Chicago Lithuanian community discussed the possibil-



Unless unexpected trouble has developed, this plane is now winging its way over the Atlantic Ocean at 170 miles an hour, bound from Floyd Bennett Airport to Kaunas, Lithuania. Lieut. Felix Waitkus is at the controls.

ity of financing another transatlantic flight. This idea was greeted with much enthusiasm, and enough funds were raised during this difficult period, which was called the "Great Depression". A much faster and more modern airplane (compared to the *Lituanica*) was purchased

from the Lockheed Aircraft Corp., called the Lockheed Vega, the same model used by Wiley Post in his round-the-world flight, and by Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

The airplane was christened *Lituanica II* on Sunday, April 22, 1934. When the pilot originally chosen for the flight unexpectedly resigned in the spring, the Lithuanian organizers turned to Felix Waitkus, and he accepted the challenge to fly to Lithuania.

The original flight date had to be changed to 1935 because modifications were needed to strengthen the aircraft's structure due to the installation of extra fuel tanks and a more powerful engine. New equipment was added, which Darius and Girėnas did not have, such as a variable pitch propeller to improve engine performance and a radio compass. *Lituanica II* was flown extensively to insure its success.

Waitkus arrived at Floyd Bennett Field in New York in May of 1935. Up until then, no

*EDWARD W. BARANAUSKAS* is a regular contributing writer to *BRIDGES*. He is also a fan of many Lithuanian-American heroes, including Darius and Girėnas. The newspaper clippings come from Mr. Baranauskas's scrap book.

pilots were able to fly over the Atlantic due to poor weather conditions, and so he had to wait until the chief meteorologist gave him a favorable weather report. It was not until four months later, on the evening of September 20, he was informed that the weather along his route had improved where conditions were average with no major changes expected in the next 24 hours. Encouraged with this news, Waitkus decided to fly.

The next day, September 21, at 6:45 in the morning, *Lituanica II* was headed for Europe. Unfortunately, Waitkus had to fight the worst possible weather conditions, flying through rain, fog, and icing conditions, so that most of his navigation had to be by his new radio compass. More than once he noticed ice forming on the wings and had to descend to a lower altitude until it all thawed off. Waitkus was helped considerably by hourly broadcasts from an Irish radio station. He learned that Dublin was fogged in, as well as all areas heading east as far as the Baltic Sea. He knew that he could not make it to Kaunas due to his low fuel supply, and being exhausted after a 23-hour struggle fighting the elements, he felt it was best to come down somewhere in Ireland.

He spotted an open field and came down, with the airplane suffering extensive damage. He was lucky to be alive without suffering any injuries. *Lituanica II* was crated for shipment to Lithuania, where it would be restored. By ship and by train he made his way to Kaunas where he was given a hero's welcome.

The only one to fly across the North Atlantic in 1935 was Felix Waitkus, and even though he came down in Ireland and not in Kaunas, he was entered in aviation's history books for being the sixth pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic.

He was recalled to active duty in the Army Air Corps in 1940, serving as the chief test pilot at the Boeing Aircraft Co. in Seattle, testing hundreds of B-17 and B-29 bombers. He was recalled again to serve in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

He died of a heart attack while stationed at

Weisbaden, Germany on July 25, 1956 at the age of 49. His body was shipped home and interred in his wife's family plot in the Kohler Cemetery at Sheboygan, Wisconsin. At the time of his passing he held the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Not many Lithuanian-Americans remember Felix Waitkus, who he was, and what he tried to do. This year will mark the 65th anniversary of his attempted non-stop flight to the land where his parents first saw the light of day, and I hope this story will bring him the honors that he so justly deserves. ♦

## OCEAN FLIER RACING INTO DIRTY WEATHER

Roaring across the North Atlantic, headed into weather which meteorologists said "could scarcely be worse," Lieut. Felix Waitkus, former Army flier, last night was presumably more than half way to his goal on a projected 5,000-mile non-stop solo flight to Kaunas, Lithuania.

At 5:15 P. M. a plane believed to be Waitkus' was heard passing over fogbound Belle Isle, twelve miles out of St. John's, N. F.

If he wins through the storms ahead, and completes his flight in 28 hours, as he planned, the Wisconsin flier will break the non-stop solo distance flight record between the United States and Europe, still held by Col. Charles A. Lindbergh. Lindbergh flew non-stop to Paris, 3,610 miles, in 33 hours, 29 minutes.

Favorable conditions prevailed when Lieut. Waitkus took off in

### BULLETIN.

Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, Sept. 21 (UP)—The white, orange-trimmed Lockheed monoplane of Lieut. Felix Waitkus was reported sighted over here tonight at 6:10 P. M. (7:10 New York time).

his monoplane, *Lituanica II*, from Floyd Bennett Field at 6:45 A. M., New York time, yesterday, but later reports indicated dirty weather ahead.

The Harbor Grace Airport reported cold, rain and fog. Waitkus, however, planned to avoid bad weather by flying as much as possible in the sub-stratosphere.

Swinging out over the Great Circle route, the flier was expected to pick up land again at Athlone, Ireland, if he holds his course.

Lieut. Waitkus tuned up his 550-horsepower supercharged motor for a full half hour before he lifted his plane. With a load of 8,000 pounds, chiefly gasoline, the flier was taking no chances of a crash at the takeoff.

When he was satisfied by the steady fire of the motor's cylinders, Waitkus smiled at his bride of eighteen months, ordered the checks removed, waved his hand, and in a few moments was in the air with a perfect takeoff.

Carries 1,900 Letters.

The little brown-eyed wife of the pilot watched the plane until it was a speck on the horizon, and then, turning to a mechanic, said with a sigh of relief:

"Well, he's off and on his way." The plane, a Lockheed-Vega of the same type as the late Wiley Post's famous *Winnie Mae*, was



Mrs. Martha Waitkus, wife of the flier, checks his route at her home in West Orange, N. J., last night.

provided by the American-Lithuanian Transatlantic Flight Association. The flight cost of \$52,000 was backed by the Chicago Lithuanian newspaper *Naujienos*.

The flight was arranged primarily in commemoration of Stephen Darius and Stanley Girgens, who crossed the Atlantic two years ago only to crash 275 miles short of Kaunas. In the plane were a thousand letters to be delivered in Lithuania, and ribbons contributed by Chicago Lithuanian-Americans to be dropped on the graves of Darius and Girgens.

Waitkus is of Lithuanian descent. A reserve Army officer at Selfridge Field, Detroit, he has been flying for six years and has 1,200 hours in the air to his credit.

Confident and untruffed, Mrs. Waitkus sat up last night listening for radio bulletins at the home of friends, Mr. and Mrs. S. F. Goodie, 18 Ridgeway Ave., West Orange, N. J.

Reticent about the flight, she would only say: "I am not making the flight; my husband is. But I have no doubt about its certain success. With such a good plane and such a good pilot, it cannot fail."

So positive was the bride, that she arranged yesterday for passage aboard the *Normandie*, which sails from New York on Wednesday.

## C u r r e n t   E v e n t s

### Investing with Rimas M. Milaitis...

**W**hen Strong Capital Management of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin decided to choose a spokesperson for their company, they chose Rimas Milaitis. Already Strong internet advertising and full page ads in the New York Times (4/30/2000) have featured Milaitis.

The ads sound out Milaitis's reasoning for his determination in business and successes. "My grandparents lost absolutely everything overnight when the Russian Red Army took over Lithuanian" in World War II, said Milaitis, who is 37. "My mother's family buried the silver in the field. When they came here, they started from scratch. They had nothing."

In the New York Times ad, Dick Strong's words are, "Rimas's roots have profoundly affected his perception of the world. He appreciates things in this country that most of us will always take for granted. He is very serious, very proud, and very competitive."

Look for Milaitis in the financial section of the newspaper. He's bound to be there also. ♦

### 50 Year Anniversary Celebrations!

**D**etroit's Lithuanian-American community celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their Baltijos and Gabijos Boys and Girls Scout Troops. Their ability to keep their youth connected to "God, Country, and Fellow Person" over these 50 years is a great example of Lithuanian dedication to its youth. The *illustration* to the right was included among many in their Anniversary publication.

*Tėviškės Žiburiai* (The Lights of Homeland), a Lithuanian-Canadian weekly newspaper also marked its 50 years of service to the Lithuanian community in Canada. The first editor was Dr. Adolfas Šapoka (passed away in 1961), and his assistant was Rev. Dr. Pranas Gaida. Presently, Rev. Dr. Gaida is managing editor assisted by J. Andrusis, Č. Senkevičius, R. Sakalaitė-Jonaitienė. ♦

### Racine Parish Opens New Doors in Lithuania

**T**he *Catholic Herald* December 9, 1999 edition ran a news story, written by Bill Kurtz, describing the closure of Racine Wisconsin's Lithuanian Parish, St. Casimir Parish.

According to the article, "the former St. Casimir parish, just south of downtown, closed in 1998, but many of its furnishings will find new use. Appropriately, items are being sent to Lithuania, the homeland of those who founded St. Casimir in 1913."

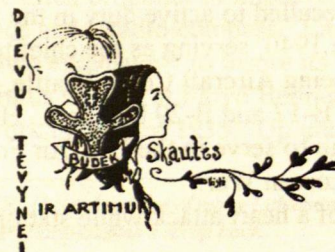
"St. Casimir was one of five south side parishes that merged to form St. Richard Parish. Patrick Diem, co-chairman of the St. Richard parish council, said that St. Casimir's last parish council and its last pastor, Fr. Russell G. Roetzer, proposed sending items to Lithuania."

"Parishioners contacted a bishop in Lithuania, and donations were steered to the city of Marijampolė, where four new parishes are served by the Marian Fathers, who served St. Casimir for much of its existence."

"The Lithuanian parishes will receive altar linens, vestments, candlesticks, baptismal fonts, seven statues and 14 stations of the cross with inscriptions in Lithuanian."

"St. Richard received a grateful letter from a Marian priest in Marijampolė. 'This is my fourth year struggling to refurbish a very destroyed and neglected church left by the Communists,' the priest wrote. 'Whatever articles you could send from your church, we would truly be grateful and fortunate to accept. With huge gratitude we welcome everything you send. Whatever is not needed in our church, we will share with others.' ♦

- Ramutis Pliara



## An Apology From Lithuania's Catholic Church

**T**he *Evangelist*, May 4, 2000, printed an article concerning "Lithuania's Catholic bishops apologizing for the Church's failure to defend persecuted Jews during World War II, as well as for past instances of 'nationalist egoism.' "

The article, from CNS, highlighted the contents of a letter, signed by Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius of Kaunas, president of the Lithuanian bishops' conference, and the conference secretary-general, Auxiliary Bishop Jonas Boruta of Vilnius. The letter said, "It pains us that a part of the Church's children lacked love for persecuted Jews during World War II and did not use all possible means to defend them."

"In their letter, the bishops said they regretted that Catholic priests and laity "through human weakness and fear or for personal gain, not only submitted to criminal occupation regimes, abandoning their religious, moral and civic duties, but also helped the oppressors." They added that "not all Christians connived in the Holocaust or with the Soviet KGB. But some did, and this must be admitted as a lesson for the future."

"Bishop Boruta said the letter had been "calmly and positively received" by all but "a few small radical groups" and would contribute to calming tensions in the run-up to October elections to Lithuania's parliament." ♦

— Edward Baranauskas

## Remembering Danutė

**M**arch 14, 2000 was the first anniversary of the passing of Danutė Lembertienė (Dana Daukantas-Lembertas). She is survived by her husband Vitalis Lembertas and two daughters, Audra and Brigitta, and four beloved grandchildren. Her writings have appeared in *BRIDGES*.

June 11, 2000, Holy Mass was offered at St. Casimir's Church, Los Angeles, California, for her soul. After Mass, a monument for her was blessed at Forest Lawn Cemetery, and everybody was invited back to St. Casimir's parish hall for a Lithuanian traditional "gedulingi pietūs" (dinner) with a program — "Remembering Danutė".

Family asks all friends to remember Danutė in their prayers. ♦

— ATe Ruta

## Lithuanian Mercy Lift – 2000

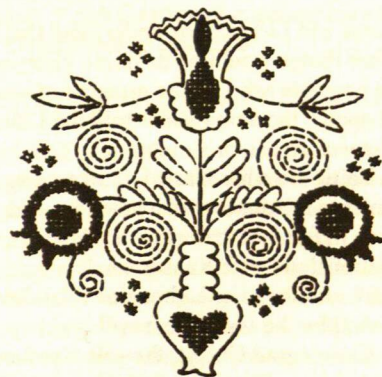
**L**ithuanian Mercy Lift (LML) is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! In April 1990, a small group of individuals came together from various backgrounds and were determined to ship one container of medical aid to medically deprived Lithuania. Bonded by a common need to help those less fortunate, Lithuanian Mercy Lift members prodded forward with hope and determination to change the medical system that had been depleted by 50 years of Soviet occupation.

With open hearts, LML members are continuously seeking effective ways of helping hospitals, homes for the elderly, and children's orphanages in Lithuania. Priorities include the purchase of much needed medicines and the establishment of various health-oriented programs throughout the country. All the LML projects are only possible through the generosity of the LML donors and supporters.

This year, October 1<sup>st</sup>, Lithuanian Mercy Lift will host its annual fundraiser at the Montefiori Gardens and Pavilions, in Lemont, IL. The yearly Grand Raffle is held in conjunction with the fundraiser. This year we have two grand prizes: each a pair of round-trip airline tickets to Lithuania, generously donated by American Travel Service, Evergreen Park, IL. and Scandinavian Airline System (SAS), Chicago, IL. Other prizes include: \$1000 cash; \$500 cash and two prizes of \$250 cash.

To contact LML, write to P.O. Box 88, Palos Heights, Ill, 60463 or phone 708-448-6173. ♦

— Lithuanian Mercy Lift  
Fundraising Committee



## Sen. Durbin Opens US Senate's Eyes to Putin's Russia

Lithuanian ally at the U.S. Senate, Senator Richard Durbin, cautioned his colleagues not to shut their eyes to the "disturbing statements by Russia" concerning the Baltic states, adding that the countries should be invited to NATO.

Durbin read a statement in response to Russian President Vladimir Putin's remarks against Baltic membership in NATO at the U.S. Senate in late June.

The senator severely criticized Putin's statement that the admission of the three Baltic States to NATO would be a rash gesture, which would destabilize the situation in Europe.

In Durbin's words, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia do not have "anything like a missile arsenal, yet they look across the borders to their neighbors in Russia and Belarus and see very highly armed situations – and in many cases very threatening."

Commenting on the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement about a voluntary entry by Lithuania into the Soviet Union in 1940, Durbin said that "this is an outrageous rewrite of history."

"We thought that the end of the Russian empire would be the end of revisionist history. Unfortunately, Mr. Putin and his leadership in Moscow are starting to turn back to the same old ways," said the member of the Baltic Caucus at the U.S. Senate.

"It is unbelievable that the Russian Foreign Ministry could forget the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact," Durbin said. ♦

## Russia Suggests Lithuanians Forgive, Forget

Russia's ambassador to Vilnius, Yuri Zubakov, set Lithuania apart from the two other Baltic states, and proposed Lithuanians forget the past and its wrongs.

"Russians and Lithuanians understand that without one another things would be difficult. Everyone wants to have a neighbor who, in the moment of need, can be relied upon," the ambassador told the Lithuanian daily, *Lietuvos Rytas*, in an interview on July 24<sup>th</sup>.

"Each Baltic state has started to take on its own image in the eyes of Moscow recently," he said. "Each has its own individual features, and there are nuances to the relationships with Russia, too."

Zubakov said Russian-Lithuanian relations are also distinguished by the visa-free travel regime to and from the Kaliningrad Oblast, the sole Russian territory (divided from Russia by Lithuania and Belarus, conquered from Nazi Germany after World War II)

where Lithuanians don't need a visa.

The ambassador said he believes Russia should conclude treaties with Lithuania on the demarcation of state borders, investment protection, and the avoidance of double taxation immediately.

The Treaty on the Delimitation of Borders, the Continental Shelf, and Economic Zones in the Baltic Sea between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Lithuania was signed by Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas and Russian president Boris Yeltsin in 1997. It was ratified by the Lithuanian parliament in autumn of 1999.

The ambassador said efforts are needed so that "two equally sovereign states can expand normal neighborly relations."

The diplomat repeated Russia's hard line on Lithuanian NATO membership. "Our position on Lithuanian NATO membership is strictly negative. We know there are other national defense methods that could guarantee security," Zubakov said.

He said Russia wasn't against Lithuania joining the EU, commenting "that's normal economic relations." ♦

## Lithuanian-U.S. Business Council Created

The first meeting of the Lithuanian-U.S. Business Council was held in Washington, D.C.. The meeting took place July 25th at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry reported.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is one of the largest business organizations.

Deputy speaker of the Lithuanian parliament Rimantas Dagys and Lithuania's ambassador to the U.S. Stasys Sakalauskas attended the council's first meeting.

Lithuanian representatives briefed the group on Lithuanian economic and political current events and fielded questions on economic reform plans, progress in joining the EU, restructuring in the energy market, the prospects for integration of energy supply in the Baltic region, the expansion at the Port of Klaipėda and expected membership in the World Trade Organization.

What concrete actions the council should take to stimulate business ties between the two countries was also discussed.

The Business Council will regularly distribute information about Lithuania in the U.S.. Its first bulletin was presented at its first meeting, which will be made available to all members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ♦

## U.S. Supports Lithuania's Euroatlantic Integration

U.S. President Bill Clinton assured Lithuania and the other Baltic states of his country's support in their aspirations to become members of European and transatlantic institutions.

The above was stated in President Clinton's letter addressed to Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, the President's Office reported on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

In his letter, Pres. Clinton welcomed the reaffirmation at the recent sitting of the US Baltic Partnership Commission in Tallinn of common efforts to jointly create conditions to complete the integration of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into European and transatlantic institutions.

Clinton also expressed his conviction in the letter that "Russian President Putin understands clearly the importance the United States attaches to ensuring stable and cooperative relations between Russia and its neighbors, including the Baltic region."

President Clinton said that "this issue, along with respect for democratic principles and the success of economic reforms will have a direct impact on Russia's international integration." The letter also says the United States would continue to facilitate commercial contacts between the Lithuanian oil industry and the Russian government. Williams International, an American oil company, is currently managing the Lithuanian concern Mažeikių Nafta [Mažeikiai Oil], the uninterrupted operation of which depends largely on Russian oil supplies.

In turn, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus sent a letter to President Clinton to congratulate him with Independence Day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. President Adamkus said in his letter that "common values and similar experience in the history of both countries has drawn our countries closer through the transatlantic partnership." ♦

## Lithuania's Torahs to be Given to Religious Communities

The Lithuanian parliament has been coming up with proposals to return Jewish holy writings, Torah, to Jewish religious communities.

In legislation, sponsored by members of the parliament's Education, Science and Cultural Committee and the Human Rights Committee, the Torah held by the Lithuanian National Library would be given over to Jewish communities and associations without remuneration, although those Torah holding special significance for the Lithuanian cultural inheritance

## Lithuanian President Bestows Honorary Order on US Ambassador

U.S. Ambassador Keith Smith, who completed his term in office, was decorated with the Order of Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas.

On July 25<sup>th</sup>, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus conferred the Order on the U.S. ambassador for his personal contribution to the development of Lithuanian-U.S. interstate relations and his assistance to Lithuania in its integration with the community of the world states.

The Lithuanian president expressed his gratitude for his diplomatic service in Vilnius and for his personal attention to Lithuania.

In his turn, Ambassador Smith said that bilateral relations between Lithuania and the United States "have always been and always will be very good." In an earlier news conference, Smith had stated that "he sees many unexplored possibilities for Lithuanian exports to the United States." He told reporters there are many Lithuanian products which could fit into a very good market in the U.S., including timber, furniture, textiles and linen, handicraft glass objects, small manufactured items, food, dairy products and others. But Lithuanian producers perceive the U.S. market as distant and inaccessible, and don't attempt marketing their products there."

Among his accomplishments, Smith recalled Lithuanian and American cooperation and presiding over a period that saw Lithuania moving ahead in its preparations for NATO membership.

"Lithuania's image in America regarding NATO is very positive. I think there are more people in the United States who know about Lithuania today. We've had more American senators and congressmen in the last three years in Lithuania than in any other Central European country," the ambassador said.

A career diplomat, John F. Tefft, will replace the ambassador. Keith Smith will continue his career at the U.S. Department of State. ♦

would be retained.

The legislation calls on the Lithuanian government to confirm the manner of Torah transfer and a list of receivers by September 1, 2000.

The Lithuanian National Mažvydas Library has custody of and is restoring approximately 270 Torah, in varying states of preservation. Most of the Torah were found several years ago, strewn among other books in a Vilnius warehouse. ♦

## Germany to Give Reparations for WWII Occupation

The Lithuanian Research Centre of Population Genocide and Resistance has decided to set up a task group to collect applications from persons who had suffered from Nazi occupation and to create a database.

A June 30<sup>th</sup> report released by the Centre said that a German foundation "Memory, Responsibility and Future" will pay out compensations to those persons who had been put on the Centre's list as having suffered from Nazi occupation.

Early in June, the Lithuanian Seimas [parliament] adopted a decision on the procedure of receiving compensation from Germany by Lithuanian citizens, which provides that the Centre of Population Genocide would be in charge of gathering applications and carrying out other functions in a compensation payout procedure until a Lithuanian-German organization has been set up to carry out these functions.

Since the restoration of independence, Lithuanian citizens had to appeal to the Russian embassy with regard to receiving compensations for the damage resulting from the Nazi occupation.

It is thought that compensation for damage may reach several hundred millions or even billions of U. S. dollars.

Speaking at a meeting in Vilnius with the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, early in June, Lithuanian Seimas Speaker, Vytautas Landsbergis, said that a two-way organization should be set up to solve the issue of compensations, similar to those in effect between Germany and Poland and the Czech Republic.

Recently, various Lithuanian public organizations have sent letters addressed to the president of the German Bundestag and to one of the initiators of the German foundation "Memory, Responsibility and Future" asking them to exert pressure on the German government to see that payment of compensations were not made through a third party from the former Soviet Union. ♦

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## Eurocentras 2000 Festivities

A week-long hot-air balloon event, Eurocentras 2000, began July 21<sup>st</sup> in Vilnius. The program for the event included ten competitions and a parade of balloons by moonlight, the organizers announced.

Morning and evening flights over the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, and over what is considered to be the geographical center of Europe, slightly to the north of the city, were also seen.

## Lithuanian Women Admitted to Military Academy

Women have been admitted to the Lithuanian Military Academy for full-time studies this year for the first time.

On July 21<sup>st</sup>, the Mandate Commission of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy decided to accept 145 new candidates of the 540 seeking to become military officers.

Women competed alongside men in the selection process; although they were given a handicap for physical requirements.

This year, 62 women submitted applications to study at the academy. Nine fulfilled the requirements of the selection process. All nine were admitted as candidates.

The Office of Comptroller for Equal Gender Opportunity requested an explanation as to why the number of women admitted for studies at the academy was limited.

Based on a directive from the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defense and on the needs of female officers, a quota of six women had been set for this year. But the equal opportunity comptroller said educational institutions must provide uniform conditions for men and women applying to become students.

Last October, 1999, the Lithuanian defense minister ordered women be given opportunities for full-time studies at the academy, in line with findings by the comptroller's office.

The defense ministry reported that all candidates will have to undergo a further ten-week military preparation course beginning August 1, during which their physical and mental abilities in extreme situations, and leadership abilities and other military qualities will be assessed.

If they pass the assessment tests and finish the course successfully, the candidates will become cadets.

The Lithuanian Military Academy was established in 1994. It prepares future officers and raises the level of professional qualification of current officers. ♦

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Three formal competitions took place during the festivities – Eurocentras 2000, the fourth international hot air balloon contest, the eighth Lithuanian hot air balloon contest, and the World Cities Cup 2000.

Hot air balloons with the names of cities festooned on their cupolas participated in the World Cities Cup 2000, for the first time this year. .

This project is to continue until the year 2009. ♦



## R e f l e c t i o n s

**Sr. Margarita Bareikaitė**

# The Role of Lithuanian Parishes in the United States

**L**ithuanians began to immigrate to the United States in the 17th century. The reasons are not hard to understand: they left to escape the oppression of Russian rule and especially to avoid conscription into the Russian army, which meant service for 25 years. They came to the U.S. hoping to secure religious and political freedom.

During World War II many Lithuanians abandoned their homes and their native land when the Communists occupied Lithuania. They did not want to live under Soviet domination. Many spent four or five years as refugees in various countries of Western Europe, then immigrated to Canada, South America and the U.S.

The history of each Lithuanian parish in America is the reflection of a great undertaking – something achieved with great sacrifice and love. Far from their native land, they wanted to keep their faith and their heritage alive. They remembered the churches in their native villages and towns; they remembered the prayers and songs they sang. After long hours of back breaking labor, they wanted their Sunday to be like the Sundays in their parishes at home.

From notes and minutes of meetings we can determine the circumstances that dictated the establishment of each new parish: how the first steps were coordinated, and how they decided

on the name for the parish church.

The Lithuanian parishes brought the people together so that they could worship and communicate in their own language preserving the traditions so dear to them. They saw themselves as a family of believers, who took their faith seriously. Their belief in Jesus Christ was at the center of their lives, and they wanted to express what was in their hearts in the way most natural to them.

These people, strangers in a new land and barely surviving at the bottom of the economic ladder, nevertheless moved mountains to establish their own parishes where they could feel at home. Here they were able to preserve and nourish the roots of their Lithuanian heritage and culture. The words of the great American statesman, Adlai Stevenson would have been music to their ears: "On this shrunken globe men can no longer live as strangers... Our prayer is that people everywhere will learn finally to live as brothers, to respect each other's wounds, to promote each other's progress, and to benefit from each other's knowledge."

The very first Lithuanian parish, according to historical records, was founded in Hazelton, Pennsylvania in 1887. A close second is St. Mary of the Angels parish in Brooklyn, which dates its founding as 1888. There were 124 Lithuanian parishes throughout the U.S. in 1941. When the new wave of postwar immigrants arrived between 1949 and 1954, the

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number of parishes shrank to 98, but many increased in size as the newcomers began to attend.

The Lithuanian parish was the focal point of many kinds of activities. It not only kept the people alive spiritually, but also provided for their social and cultural needs. Most of the parishes had parochial schools, and for a time these taught the children the Lithuanian language. Later this function was taken over by the new immigrants' Saturday schools. The parishes had their church choirs, many different organizations and societies, and many had libraries and kiosks with Lithuanian books, magazines, and newspapers.

One of the oldest Lithuanian parishes in New England, St. Joseph's of Waterbury, Connecticut, boasted 42 different organizations between 1885 and 1955. These were very diverse: from the St. Casimir Grocery Cooperative, Third Order Franciscans, and Holy Name Society to sports and theater groups, and even political organizations. The cultural, political, and social activity of the parishioners expressed itself in organizing concerts, art exhibits, rallies, and demonstrations. And this was quite typical of most Lithuanian parishes. The parishes were shrines to which people flocked – for here "the heart beats in Lithuanian." (*Širdis lietuviškai plaka.*) ♦

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