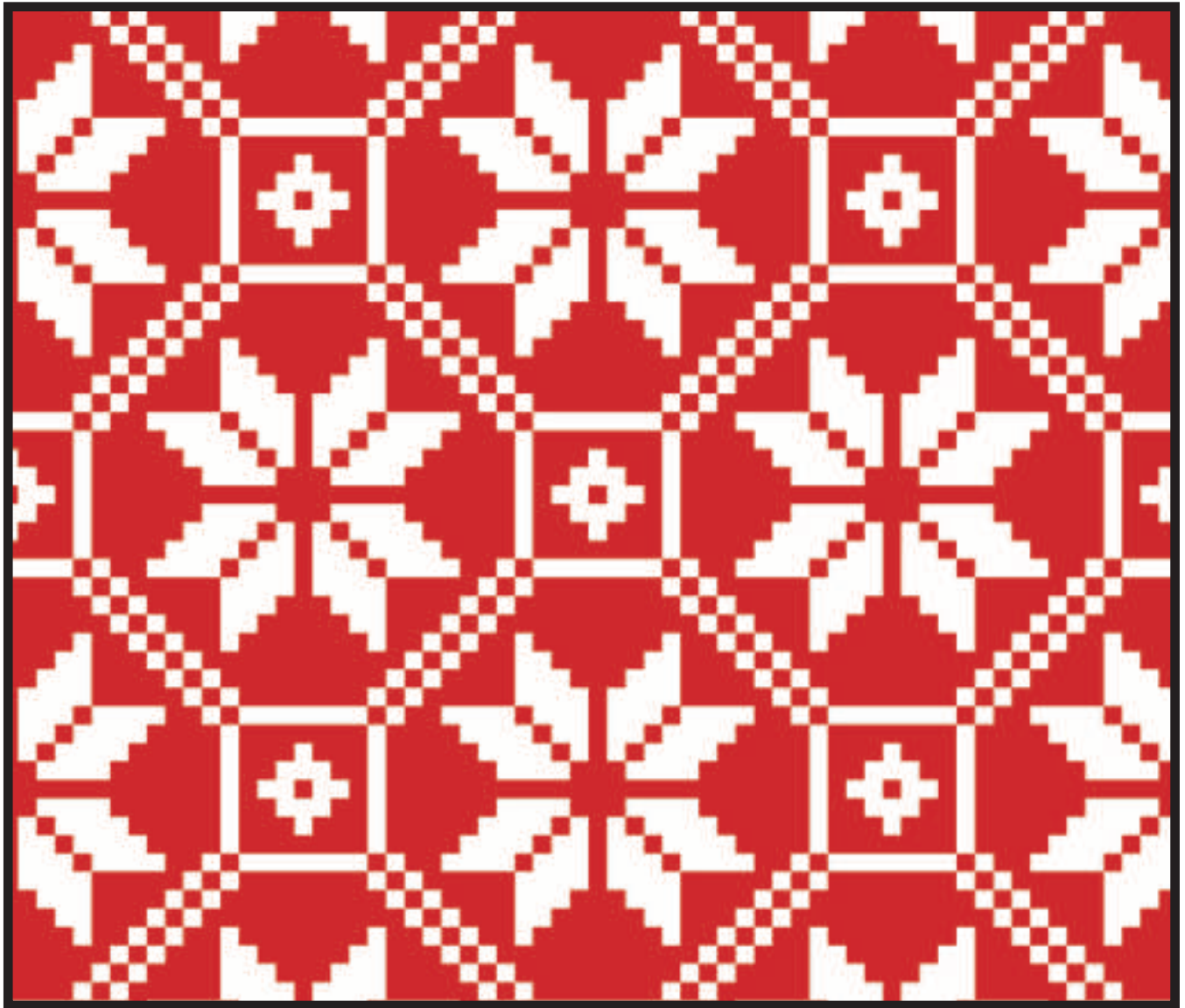


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Cover: Traditional Baltic textile design. Vintage mittens and wrist warmers (riešinės) with this design are found in museums in Šiauliai and Mažeikiai. The pattern still appears in contemporary knitting and weaving.

Back cover: Workers in Vilnius prepare for the tree lighting and opening of the Christmas village on Cathedral Square in Vilnius. Children are able to enter the fairytale tree to listen to their favorite stories. Photo: Marina J, Shutterstock.com

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from the editor

The Best Gifts

As we are now deep into what has become known, in common parlance, the season of thanks and giving, it seems only appropriate to acknowledge that for which we're grateful—and I for one have a lot of thanks to give!

But first, a little housekeeping ...

Those of you who have been subscribers for a while will notice that this double issue represents a little deviation from our normal publishing schedule. We normally have individual November and December issues and a combined January/February. This year, we're reversing that. This one-time adjustment will accomplish two things: you'll receive your holiday issue at the holidays and in January we'll be able to bring you some very special eyewitness accounts of that month's events 25 years ago in Lithuania's fight for independence.

For practical purposes, January will be issue 10 of the current volume, and February will be issue 1 of the next. Any subscriber whose subscription would have ended with December 2015 will receive the January 2016 issue as well, so they will receive the full 10 issues to which they are entitled.

Now, on to the thank you's for the gifts we've enjoyed over the past year, and for those to come ...

I can't thank our editorial team enough for making each issue happen. To Daniel Craig, our designer; Rimas Gedeika, our administrator (and writer and photographer and so much more); and Jana Motivans, our food editor, thank you for being by my side unfailingly, issue to issue.

To all of our authors, thank you for the gift of amazing content. It's through you we span the globe and travel through time. In this issue, our thanks go to:

- Don Astras for sharing his mother's extraordinary straw folk-art creations (page 3).
- Sandra Baksys and Daiva Markelis for telling us about Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois—the book and the people (page 5).
- Vicky Norvaisa for allowing us to excerpt portions of her novel that give us a glimpse of life in Lithuania around World War I (page 10).
- Romualdas Kriauciūnas, who throughout this year has shared an intimate glimpse into the daily life of a displaced family through his mother's diary (page 14).
- Daiva Venckus for letting us have a seat at the table during the first Thanksgiving at the new U.S. Embassy in Lithuania in 1991 (page 20).

To all of our readers, thank you for choosing to take this journey with us into our shared Lithuanian ancestry. You give us the gift of your attention and we treasure it.

And in perhaps our biggest Bridges-related gift of the year (at least for me), we'll be welcoming Al Stankus to the team as our new contributing editor for the Current Events section. Al missed seeing the column and decided to do something about it—he is giving us the gift of his time to research and write the column beginning in January.

Wishing peace and joy to all,



Teresė Vekteris, Editor

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Lady of Wheat Transforming Folk Art Into Fine Art

By Don Astras



Straw-art manger scene by Ursula Astras. Photo courtesy Don Astras

Ursula Astras (Astrienė) designed art in straw more prolifically than any other artist in the U.S. or Lithuania. Although her works and motifs are in the Lithuanian tradition, her style is distinctly innovative and unique. She is renowned for her straw paintings and Christmas ornaments using the applique technique, as well as decorated Easter eggs.

Born Uršulė Lukosevičiūtė on a farm in Bartninkai, Lithuania, in 1912, the artist learned how to construct the traditional designs of straw braids and mobiles with strings running through them, as well as to etch eggs using natural dyes to share at Easter, from her mother. After graduating from agriculture school in 1932, Ursula worked as a cook and housekeeper. In 1944, she fled to Germany with her brother and sisters because of the returning Soviets, who began nationalizing all large farms. Already in 1941, the Soviet government sent thousands of Lithuanians to labor camps in Siberia, including Ursula's brother, Kazys.

While in the same refugee camp in the Bavarian town of Regensburg, Germany, Ursula married Stasys Astrauskas (Stanley Astras) in 1946. They emigrated to the United States in 1949 and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In the early 1950s, Ursula created new art forms of intricate snowflake or geometric design by pressing wheat or rye straw on to a masking tape backing and gluing these veneers together (straw applique). Ursula passed on her new and traditional methods to her children Mary, Tony, Don and Alberta, who have helped her in teaching those processes to others, including their children.

As a little girl in Lithuania, Ursula used to run about with other children in the wheat fields picking the stalks and weaving long plaits, which adults later sewed into straw hats. There, she learned how to cut and flatten wheat shafts and prepare inlay designs on boxes. After coming to America, she continued to make straw ornaments, especially the hanging mobiles

(sodai) that have become popular Christmas tree decorations among Lithuanians. Once she discovered masking tape, it revolutionized her flattened straw technique. Instead of simply inlaying on flat surfaces, she now could press the straw onto strips of tape and make long ribbons, which she cut into various forms. She also began making geometric snowflake designs to hang on Christmas trees. These “snowflake” (applique) cut-outs were never previously made in Lithuania, though the patterns were reminiscent of carved traditional ornamentation on large wayside crosses and traditional textile patterning. In addition to the ornaments, Ursula developed this unique, flat-straw technique into larger compositions mounted on velvet (paintings). She also continued to employ the traditional techniques to create birds, mobiles and braided balls.

Ursula began exhibiting her work beginning in 1955, when Grand Rapids Art Gallery recognized her talent from her braided Christmas manger. Her straw applique work has been featured in numerous museums and galleries throughout Michigan, Illinois and Ohio, and has garnered coverage in national and international press. Private and institutional collectors have acquired her art nationally and internationally.

Throughout the years, Ursula and her family have taught others how to make these ornaments in locations across the country, including Lithuanian summer camps, universities, the California Academy of Science and the Library of Congress. They also conducted Easter egg decorating workshops at the Balzekas Museum for 37 years, where Ursula held the position of director of folk art for many years. Ursula died in 2008 at the age of 95, but her children continue to teach her technique through their workshops.

To learn more about Ursula’s art, or to bring a straw or egg art workshop to your community, visit ladyofwheat.com.

Don (Donatas) Astras, Ursula’s son, followed in her footsteps, taking up art at a young age, often accompanying her at demonstrations and workshops, and participating as translator and instructor. He is the owner of marketing agency Tempest, Inc. in Grand Rapids, and still teaches folk art.



Ursula Astras and her husband on their 50th anniversary in 1996.



Lithuanian Christmas tree ornaments by Ursula Astras. Photos courtesy Don Astras



Every year, Ursula’s straw ornaments grace a tree at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids. Kathy Schaefer-Astras and Loretta Beukema helped decorate this year’s tree. Photo courtesy Don Astras

Connecting Loose Threads

Author Strives to Reignite Ethnic Interest

Daiva Markelis Interviews Sandra Baksys, author of *A Century of Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois*



Left: Sandra Baksys. Right: The Kaylor family from Riverton, Ill., whose immigrant grandfather John Joseph Straukas (who fought in World War I) is featured in the book. Photos: Donna Catlin

You grew up in Springfield, Illinois, as the daughter of a Lithuanian immigrant who came to the United States during the upheaval of the Second World War. Why did your father settle in Springfield? Were there many Lithuanians living there who were a part of that post-war immigrant wave?

My father's name was recognized by his paternal great aunt Mary Yamont (Jomantienė) on a list of DPs published in a Lithuanian paper after World War II. Mary Yamont had settled in Springfield with her coal-miner husband after the couple met and married in Scranton, Pa., sometime before World War I. She sponsored my dad to come live with her and her two sons and daughter in a three-room house in "Little Lithuania" near the Illinois State Fairgrounds, and also found him the pledge of a job. Due to the crowded living space, Dad did not stay at his aunt's house long, but he always remembered and honored her for helping him—maybe also because she was the only family member senior to him in the U.S. When we were young, Dad took us to visit Teta most Sundays, and she was like our grandmother even though she spoke very little English and we spoke no Lithuanian. I don't have an exact count, but my feeling is that Dad was among something less than two-dozen individuals/families from the second wave who settled in Springfield.

What was most "Lithuanian" about your upbringing in Springfield? What do you remember most vividly?

I think that visiting "Teta" (Mary Yamont) was our most Lithuanian experience growing up. We were almost exclusively without other Lithuanian connections because Dad's brothers and sisters who made it to America were all on the East Coast, and locally, he was a complete loner. Dad's strong accent, his wire-rim glasses when horn-rims were in fashion, the TV Westerns he hated because of the gunfire, the sauerkraut with pork and potatoes and something called "milk soup" that he made, and oh, cucumbers with honey—all being different, I associated with being Lithuanian. Oh, and being exhorted by Dad to "eat mėsutos" (meat) and "drink pienuky" (milk).

For me, being Lithuanian-American was mainly having an extremely socially standoffish and utterly non-conforming father, with whom I identified strongly from earliest childhood, defending him in my mind and heart from all the things and people he didn't seem able to deal with. Dad's difference made me different by default. But, of course, we were also made different by the rules Dad imposed, keeping us at home and out of the mainstream at school and church (no family vacations, no joining Brownies and Girl Scouts, etc.) I think I eventually wove those childhood deprivations into a badge of positive Lithua-



The Cara-Sel Lounge with owner Tony Yusčius serving beers. Tony was the son of Lithuanian immigrants and a decorated World War II veteran. Springfield, Illinois, circa 1955.



Immigrants Nancy (Benikas) and Adam Pazemetsky (Pazimskas) with daughter Helen, circa 1924. Adam was a coal miner and wedding musician who carried a pocket-sized 1863 Lithuanian Catholic prayer book everywhere he went. In 1927, the couple became famous for saving the life of their 1.5-lb. premature infant Ann, thereafter known as “the baby in the cigar box.”

nian identity, because who signs up for something negative at that age? Maybe my badge of ethnic distinction was also a way of taking the edge off so many things we weren't allowed to be or do. Now, of course, I think Dad was just saving money and trying to keep himself and us in his Lithuanian safe zone, even though he was usually the only one who was, or could be entirely within it. As you might guess, to a very large extent, that also meant standing off from his American-born children and the American cultural passions we carried with us.

There's so much interesting information here. How long have you been gathering material? Tell us a little bit about the process.

I started writing stories for my blog in the summer of 2012, after finishing my historical marker project, to try to see if I could use family histories to reignite Lithuanian ethnic interest and reconnect people both online and “on the ground” to re-grow Springfield's shrinking Lithuanian-American Club. Local Lithuanian-Americans just weren't reaching out anymore to the many hundreds of people who could join us, and next generations never came to our events or showed any interest in them. I came by my stories in so many different ways. Sometimes a fact or loose end in one would lead to another. Some stories were delivered up by my volunteer researchers, William Cellini Jr. and Tom Mann, in the form of archived newspaper features, and several I pieced together via newspaper research myself, like the chapter on our local Knights of Lithuania. My favorite thing about the book is how pieces fell into place like a puzzle being completed once I reached a critical mass. Most amazingly, while the train was literally leaving the station on this book and I was editing it chapter by chapter to send to design, I was contacted out of the blue by someone with the story of the local Lithuanian leftists I knew had existed, but which no previous source claimed to know anything about. My “Lithuanian Women in Marriage and Divorce” chapter emerged with the same serendipity near the very end of the process. And now I can't imagine the book without them.

Did writing the book surprise or change you in any way? What is the most important thing you learned?

One thing that occurred to me about the book only after I finished it was that everything I had discovered, and taught myself, over the space of three years was probably less than the sum of what our first-wave elders and their children knew just from living their daily lives here in Springfield. But that's why they never sat down and wrote it—they already knew it. My book truly was a voyage of discovery that was made necessary by all I didn't know. I used writing to teach myself and, hopefully, my readers. All along the way, writing the book gave me reflections I would not otherwise have had and sudden, intuitive insights into events in the lives of my father, my aunts and uncles, my grand-

parents, like the historical origins of my father's three years of formal education. By looking back interpretively, I came to new "facts," new realizations, such as the high possibility that the lethality of the pneumonia that killed my paternal grandfather in his 40s was due to miner's black lung disease. Learnings and meditations on other people's stories allowed me to connect the loose threads of my own. Of course the most important personal discovery for me was the second surviving branch of my paternal grandfather's family here in Springfield (the Orbacks) that had not been revealed to my sisters and me growing up. Ties between our branch and theirs had been totally lost.

Do you have a favorite story from the book?

I think I enjoyed writing about Joey (Jonaitis) Mack, the vaudeville comedy dance man, the most because he was a blind find suggested to me by a blog reader. I also had more fun playing with language and sentence structure in the Joey Mack story. And then to realize that he was behind the Mack School of Dance where my mother first took me to have dance lessons!

I also enjoyed the outlaw and outliers stories in the book, since none of us was ever raised to embrace any kind of Lithuanian-American social dysfunction or criminality. It was all such a surprise, including the criminal histories I discovered for two of Dad's first cousins born in America, which the family hid from us, along with those cousins. I now better understand the fierce and somewhat defensive pride Dad and Teta at times manifested about just making it in America, going to work and raising a family, which seemed pretty small potatoes to a girl like me who wanted to be a famous dancer, then writer, growing up.

One of the aspects of the book I like most is its tone. You include information about yourself here and there in a very natural, unobtrusive way. Would you consider this work part memoir?

Yes. From the beginning, the blog format allowed the stories I wrote obliquely or episodically to include elements of memoir. Blogs are first-person, after all. However, the inclusion of personal notes and reflections followed my deliberate standing of the blog format on its head by writing exclusively about other people's families. Elements of my family story that I did not want to put under a microscope or spotlight were easy to exclude. Yet it was simultaneously possible to use anecdotes and facts from my family history when necessary to illuminate or elaborate. I had the best of both worlds.



Sandra Baksys speaking to more than 70 people at her book opening September 23, 2015, at the historic Elijah Iles house in downtown Springfield, Ill. Photo: Donna Catlin

What's on the horizon in terms of a second book or project?

I'm resting now—resting and selling books and getting back to my day job in public relations consulting and writing, mainly in the legal and medical fields. I've got some serious lost income to make up. My lifelong dream has been to find my voice in fiction and poetry. However, I believe it was a writer from Lincoln, Ill., who once worked as an editor at *The New Yorker*, who said that even writing autobiographically, it is impossible not to fictionalize. Nothing one writes, in an autobiography, can be exactly as it happened, can escape creative enhancement. So, at this point, at this age, I will take whatever assignment the muse serves up. Although my "neglected" husband says next time I have to ask his permission.

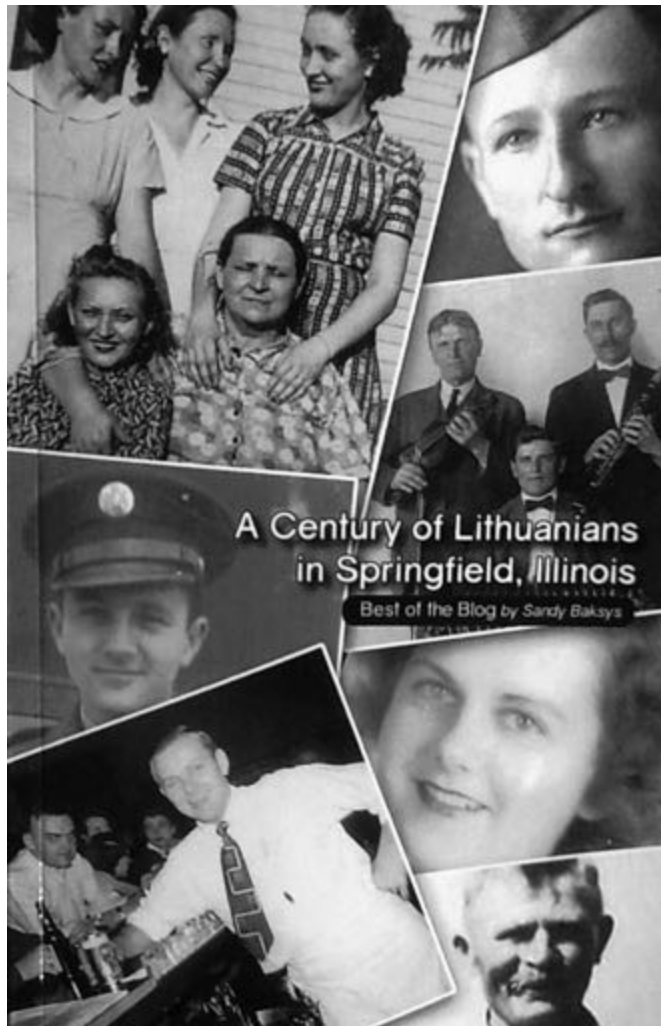


Sandra's long-lost cousin Sandy (Orback) Pecori, whom she discovered through her research. Photo: Donna Catlin

A Century of Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois

by Sandra Baksys

Reviewed by Daiva Markelis



A Century of Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois by Sandra Baksys is an important contribution to the history of Lithuanian life in the United States. While many of us are familiar with Boston, New York, Pittsburgh and Chicago as places where early Lithuanians settled, less is known about less-populated cities that played important roles in Lithuanian immigrant life. One such place is Springfield, the capital of Illinois and the residence of Abraham Lincoln when he was elected president of the United States.

A significant part of the book centers on the lives of early 20th-century immigrants who came to the U.S. to escape the often-brutal poverty of rural Lithuania. Several thousand Lithuanians

were living in Springfield by the mid-1910s, the men working in dozens of coal mines in and around the city. While living conditions were undoubtedly an improvement over those in the homeland, coal mining was erratic and physically dangerous and exhausting work. Baksys highlights some lesser-known facts about the early Lithuanian immigrants, such as their very low rates of literacy. Most Lithuanians who came to the United States during the so-called “first wave” didn’t know how to read and write.

In her book, Baksys attributes this to the remote poverty of the countryside and to Russian czarist campaigns against Lithuanian-language books and publishing that lasted approximately from 1865 to 1905. Many village schools operated by the Catholic Church—the sole sources of education in the countryside—were also closed at this time, which coincided with the formative years of the Lithuanians who arrived first to Pennsylvania and Chicago before making their way to smaller coal-belt cities like Springfield.

Baksys deftly moves on from these turn-of-the-century immigrants to chronicle successive generations. We get a strong sense of the prominence of the Catholic Church in the lives of many Lithuanian-Americans, as well as the importance of organizations such as the Knights of Lithuania in promoting ethnic self-help and maintaining patriotic connections to the homeland. There are several fascinating sections about local taverns; “Holding Up or Holding Back the Neighborhood?” is the title of one such chapter. We learn about establishments such as Tiskos Furniture Barn, the (Yusčius) Cara-Sel Lounge and “A-Go-Go,” and the “(Yacubasky) Blue Danube, a tavern/dinner club with a “magic bar.” (The bar was “electrically charged in such a way that when specially-treated glasses were placed on it, they were illuminated in many colors.”) We meet many, many underemployed coal miners and mine widows who turn to bootlegging during Prohibition to provide the means of sustenance that mine operators can’t, or won’t—including a wife who delivers her husband’s homemade “hooch” in a baby stroller.

The author does an excellent job of both contextualizing historical information and presenting a colorful, multi-faceted view of her subjects and their surroundings, including their church, businesses, sports heroes, veterans, taverns, weddings, moonshiners and other outlaws, and women in marriage and divorce—even listing Lithuanians killed in the mines. Another example of this 360-degree view of the Lithuanian community is when Baksys includes information about the political factions that were so common among first-wave Lithuanian immigrants. Many Lithuanian-Americans today aren’t aware that the unfair labor practices prevalent in coal mining, as well as in the factories, steel mills and stockyards of the time, led many immigrants not only to form unions, but also to join socialist and communist organizations.

The principal theme of the book is “an immigrant dream deferred” in the face of a coal-mining collapse that began almost

as soon as Lithuanian immigrants arrived, leading to the sustained outbreak of violence known as the Central Illinois “Mine Wars.” Prohibition, the Great Depression and two world wars further challenge and impede immigrant families’ economic progress. After World War II, a smaller number of immigrants from Lithuania arrive and add their stories to the chronicle.

Despite decades of hardship and struggle, with the passage of time and especially the post-World War II economic boom, we begin to see some success stories—the Lithuanian-American bankers, entrepreneurs and politicians who make it big but also give back to their community.

Baksys writes like an historian but without the jargon one sometimes finds in academic books. She includes references to her own life as the daughter of a Lithuanian father who was a World War II “displaced person.” The chronicle of a “Century of Lithuanians” closes on a somewhat melancholy note; assimilation over the generations and a dearth of fresh immigrants has resulted in the decline of a once-thriving Lithuanian community and the disappearance of its prime physical landmarks, including businesses, taverns and the beloved Roman Catholic Church of St. Vincent de Paul.

A Century of Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois is full of fascinating stories accompanied by photographs of the time, most from family archives. What else makes this book such a valuable resource, as well an enjoyable read, is the inclusion of first-person stories told by immigrants and their children. There are also personal letters, genealogical documents and photos, and an alphabetized list of hundreds of Springfield Lithuanian surnames. The book has been a labor of love for Baksys, as is her popular blog, lithspringfield.com, from which much of the material for the book has been adapted.

A Century of Lithuanians in Springfield, Illinois will undoubtedly foster renewed interest in this fascinating group and, one hopes, in Lithuania in general. Efforts like these to revive eth-



Lithuanian immigrants and tavern owners Sam and Mary Lapinski (Lapinskas) tending bar, 1935. Sam and Mary also owned apartments in the neighborhood where they housed Lithuanian DPs after World War II.

nic identity and interest among next-generations of early 20th-century Lithuanians is especially important at a time when the Baltics are again threatened by their old enemy to the East. Given its precarious political situation, Lithuania will always need as many friends as it can get in the U.S.

You can buy this professionally designed softcover book of 282 pages and 300 images for \$15.95 at Amazon’s Create Space: www.createspace.com/5493567.

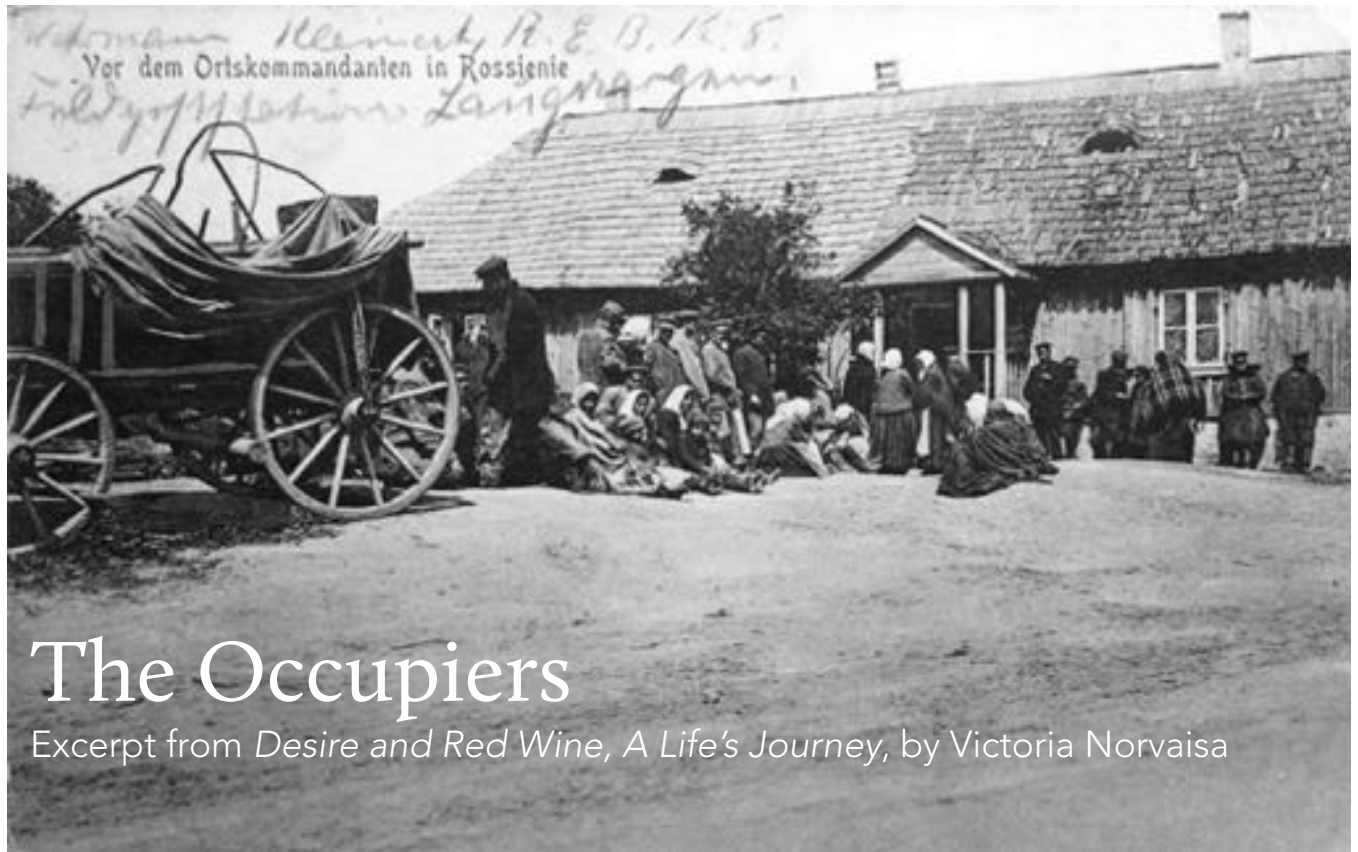


Sandra Baksys has been a newspaper reporter, medical trade journalist and, for the last 19 years, a public relations consultant and writer. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northwestern University, as well as a B.A. in Italian and an M.A. in English literature from the University of Kentucky.

From 1989 through 1991, Sandy participated, state-side, in the Lithuanian "Singing Revolution" as Kentucky coordinator for the Lithuanian Information Center. In 2012, she spearheaded the erection of a historical marker titled "Lithuanians in Springfield" and launched a blog that can be found at lithspringfield.com.

A Springfield, Ill., native, Sandy has lived in four states and traveled widely, including trips to Lithuania in 1995 and 2005. For the past 15 years, she has lived in Springfield with her husband Ted and their beloved Maltese dogs Poco and Ricky-Bobby. This is her first book.

Daiva Markelis is a professor of English at Eastern Illinois University, where she teaches classes in creative nonfiction, rhetoric and women's memoir. Her personal essays and short stories have appeared in the American Literary Review, New Ohio Review, Other Voices, Crab Orchard Review, Oyez, Pank, Cream City Review and many others. Her memoir, White Field, Black Sheep: A Lithuanian-American Life, was published in 2010 by the University of Chicago Press.



The Occupiers

Excerpt from *Desire and Red Wine, A Life's Journey*, by Victoria Norvaisa

German military field postcard sent in 1915 from Lithuania showing the local German military commander's headquarters in a Lithuanian town.

The war in Europe raged on. The Russian army was trying hard to hold the Germans in East Prussia. Superior German artillery, machine guns and better communication systems gave them a distinct advantage on the battlefield. Although the Russian armies fought bravely, they lost thousands of men and huge amounts of military supplies and by the fall of 1915, the German army had occupied Lithuania. The occupying forces enforced a merciless system of food requisition. All the animals, chickens, and staples like flour, sugar, smoked meats and lard had to be registered with the town administrator. The food was confiscated with no consideration for the people's needs.

It was a beautiful, sunny Sunday afternoon. Joseph's father had left for a meeting at a neighbor's farm. Martin and Joseph were sitting on the porch when they first noticed the trail of dust coming through the trees. Four soldiers rode into the yard and dismounted. A wagon driven by a middle-aged man rolled to a stop in front of the house. There was something very familiar about the man in the wagon and looking more closely at his face the boys recognized him as the grocery shop owner in town.

A young corporal told his interpreter to get the family together.

The corporal's bearing impressed Joseph. He was small in stature, but held his head high and his chest out. The uniform was impeccable.

Shiny brass buttons, black leather boots and several stripes on his collar and sleeves indicated that he was in charge of the group. Joseph looked at the man's black, piercing eyes and the small, square mustache. His face was cold, expressionless and hard.

"It was reported to me that there were some inaccuracies in the counting of your animals and food supplies. You understand that is a crime against the German occupation forces."

"The children and I don't know what was reported. My husband is not home." Joseph's mother tried to keep her voice low and calm, trying not to show how frightened she was. Her eyes darted from the soldiers to the man in the wagon, then back to the soldiers. Joseph glanced at Martin and noticed that his brother was looking at their old rifle, leaning against the side of the porch. It wasn't loaded.

Shouting orders to his men, the corporal strode around the yard, snapping the riding crop against his leather boots to emphasize his words.

"Go to the barn and bring out all the horses. We'll get the cows and pigs later. Load the wagon with supplies from the house. Make sure you get all the meat, flour and sugar."

"Please, winter is coming and my family will need all the food we have," the woman pleaded.

"Our armies cannot starve and we are more important than your family." The corporal looked at the woman closely, taking

in her shiny hair, slender figure and clean clothes.

“Tie the boys up and take the woman behind the barn,” he ordered.

As the soldiers approached, Martin dove for the rifle. One shot rang out in the Sunday afternoon. Joseph saw Martin falling to the ground. The corporal was putting his revolver back into the holster. Two of the soldiers grabbed Joseph and tied him to the porch railing. He saw blood seeping from Martin’s mouth and chest. His mother was being dragged away by the third soldier and the driver of the wagon. The corporal turned around to the other two soldiers.

“Come, let’s have some fun with the damned bitch.”

The group disappeared behind the barn. He heard the men laughing and swearing, and then his mother began to scream. Joseph had never heard a woman scream like that. The sound was piercing, anguished, animal-like. It seemed to Joseph that it went on forever. He looked at Martin and instinctively knew his brother was dying.

“Oh God...please...somebody help...please!”

His mother started screaming again. Blackness engulfed the young man and with it came relief from the pain tearing at his heart.

The first thing he saw when he regained consciousness was his father and mother kneeling in the yard, cradling Martin’s body. There were black and blue marks on his mother’s face. Her dress was torn and bloody from a gash on her shoulder and her shiny hair was matted with dirt. His father’s face resembled a piece of marble as he untied Joseph.

He watched his mother’s tears roll down her cheeks, fall and mingle with his brother’s blood, and blend into the dark earth next to his feet.

Falling to his knees, he picked up a handful of dirt and squeezed it in his hand. He never forgot his father’s words.



Town of Kupiškis, Lithuania, in 1915, during the time of German occupation.



Residents of the town of Šakiai, Lithuania, in 1914, shortly before the German occupation began at the start of World War II.

“Remember that freedom is one of the most precious things in this world. Love God, Joseph, but love your country more.”

After the funeral, Joseph knew he had to get away. Life at home had become unbearable. His mother walked around the house quietly doing her chores, but he never heard her sing or laugh again. Her eyes were empty and lifeless. His father was away for several days at a time and when Joseph asked where he had been, the answer was always the same.

“It’s better you don’t know where I go or what I do.”

One Sunday after mass, he went to see the Monsignor.

“So, you’ve made up your mind to go to the seminary. You won’t regret it. I’ll write the Bishop today, submitting your name.”

In October of 1915, while thousands of men were dying in the trenches, bogs and forests of Europe, sixteen-year-old Joseph said goodbye to his parents and left for the Seminary.

Desire and Red Wine, A Life’s Journey, by Victoria Norvaisa, is available at Amazon, Barnes&Noble, Books 123 and as a Kindle or Nook eBook.



Lithuanian women in Dūkštas, Lithuania, pressed into labor duty to construct a wooden sidewalk by the occupying German army in 1916.

this month in history

November and December Anniversaries



645 years ago

November 25, 1370

Self-proclaimed “grand prince” Algirdas conducted the second of three marches against Moscow in his campaign to extend the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’s sphere of influence into northern Russia. Algirdas devoted the years of his rule over the Lithuanians and

Ruthenians (1345 until his death in 1377) to creating an empire that extended from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.



495 years ago

December 6, 1520

Birth of Lithuanian noblewoman Barbora Radvilaitė (Barbara Radziwiłł), of the powerful Radvila family, who became the second wife of Lithuanian Grand Duke and Polish King Žygimantas Augustas (Zygmunt II August). Radvilaitė was born and raised in Vilnius,

and was considered one of the most beautiful women in Europe at the time.

In 1537, she entered into an arranged marriage with Stanislovas Goštautas, voivode of Trakai, but became widowed by 1542. Her husband’s death marked the end of the Goštautas dynasty. Shortly thereafter, she met Augustas and it is believed they began a romance while he was still married to Elizabeth of Austria.

After Elizabeth’s death in 1544, the couple met more frequently, and Augustas had a secret entrance made to the Radvila palace. Because of Polish hostility toward the scandalous relationship, the couple married in secret in 1547. After Augustas took the throne in 1548 following his father’s death, he made the marriage public. His wish to crown Barbora as queen was opposed by his mother, Bona Sforza, as it foiled her dynastic intentions, and by the Polish nobles, who feared the growing influence of the Radvila family.

Negative sentiment was so great that the king even considered abdicating, but the opposition finally acquiesced, and Barbora was crowned on December 7, 1550. Shortly thereafter she became seriously ill and died in May 1551. Although it was rumored she was poisoned by Bona Sforza, based on her symptoms modern historians believe it more likely that she had some type of gynecologic cancer. As she was so despised in Poland, she requested to be buried in Vilnius Cathedral. Her deeply bereaved husband walked behind the hearse for much of the month-long funeral procession from Krakow, and he dressed in black for the remainder of his life, even after remarrying.

The story of the couple eventually became romanticized as a great tragic love affair, inspiring many poems, plays, films and other works.

315 years ago

November 18, 1700

The Battle of Valkininkai, a decisive breakthrough in the internal war in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania between the Sapiega family and opposing noblemen who were seeking to eliminate the domination of the Sapiegas in the government. The opposition, which comprised a coalition of the Radvila, Oginskis, Pac and Višnioveckis families, defeated the Sapiegas and destroyed the monopoly the family had held over top political offices in the duchy since the second half of the 16th century.

220 years ago

November 25, 1795

Stanislovas Augustas Poniatovskis (Stanisław August Poniatowski), the last king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was forced to sign the abdication statute at Grodno as part of the final partition of the Commonwealth. His abdication marked the end of the existence of the Lithuanian and Polish nations until 1918. A former lover of Russia’s Catherine the Great, he lived in St. Petersburg as her honorary prisoner until his death in 1798.



155 years ago

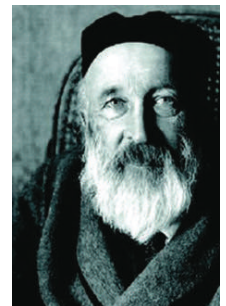
December 31, 1860

Birth of Silvestras Žukauskas, organizer of the Lithuanian Armed Forces after independence. Žukauskas served in the Russian army before returning to Lithuania in 1918 to establish the new Lithuanian army. He served as chief of general staff of the Lithuanian Armed Forces in 1919 and supreme commander of the Armed

Forces from 1919 to 1920 and again from 1923 to 1928. He successfully led the Lithuanian army against the Bolsheviks and Bermontians in 1919, and against the Poles from 1919 to 1920. He was granted the rank of general in 1920.

December 30, 1860

Birth of the “father of the Lithuanian language,” Jonas Jablonskis, in Kubiliai. Jablonskis was a major contributor to the development of Standard Lithuanian, written in a 32-letter Latin alphabet and based on the Western High-Lithuanian dialect, which Jablonskis chose because it had been least influenced by foreign—especially Slavic—elements and loan words.



His efforts, beginning with his book *Lietuviškos kalbos gramatika* (Lithuanian Grammar, 1901), written under the pseudonym Petras Kriaušaitis, changed the direction of written Lithuanian toward a form that was purely and authentically Lithuanian. His *Lietuvių kalbos gramatika*, first published in 1919, remains one of the best and most complete textbooks of the Lithuanian language for college students and secondary school teachers. He published more than 150 articles on the issue of language in *Varpas* and other periodicals. Jablonskis edited literary works by Žemaitė, Gabrielė Petkevicaitė-Bitė, Jonas Biliūnas and other Lithuanian writers.

130 years ago

November 17, 1885

Birth of Vladas Jurgutis, Lithuanian priest, economist and professor, in Joskaudai, near Palanga. First chairman of the Bank of Lithuania, from 1922 to 1929, he became unofficially known as “the father of the Lithuanian litas.” In 1943, when he was chairman of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, he was arrested by Nazi authorities and transported to the Stutthof concentration camp. He returned to Lithuania in 1945. The prestigious Vladas Jurgutis Award, which encourages scientific activities in banking, finance and macroeconomics, is named for him.



120 years ago

November 16, 1895

Birth of Petras Povilas Daužvardis, Lithuanian-American lawyer and diplomat. Daužvardis came to the U.S. in 1914, earned his law degree and entered the foreign service of Lithuania in 1925 as a secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed vice consul of Lithuania in New York City in 1927, consul in Chicago in 1937 and consul general of Lithuania in the United States in 1961, a position he retained until his death in 1971.

Active with various Lithuanian patriotic associations, he lectured widely and wrote numerous articles emphasizing Lithuania's right to independence and providing proof that the Soviet occupation of Lithuania was illegal. He was twice decorated by the Republic of Lithuania with the Order of Gediminas.

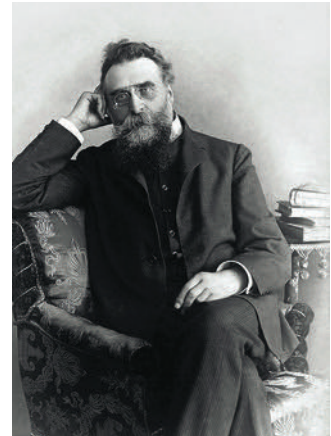
As consul general, Daužvardis successfully handled hundreds of inheritance cases in probate courts within his 32-state jurisdiction, refuting efforts by the Soviet Union to appropriate estates of deceased Lithuanian nationals.

110 years ago

December 4-6, 1905

Jonas Basanavičius chaired the Great Seimas of Vilnius, the first

modern national congress in Lithuania. Occurring at the height of the Lithuanian revival, and inspired by the Russian Revolution, the gathering addressed the political situation in Lithuania and Russia, the cultural and political aspirations of the Lithuanian nation, and how to bring Lithuanian society together to fight for autonomy by peaceful means. The congress was the first real political move in formulating the principles of the reestablishment of the statehood of Lithuania. More than 2,000 participants from throughout Lithuania, as well as Lithuanians living in other countries, took part in the Seimas.



100 years ago

November 16, 1915

Birth of Elena Viktorija Nakaitė-Arbačiauskienė-Arbiienė, Lithuanian poet and writer who worked under the pen name Alė Rūta. She first became known in Lithuania for writing children's dramas. She fled Lithuania in 1944 with her husband, painter Edmundas Arbačiauskas, then emigrated to the U.S., settling first in Detroit before moving to Santa Monica, Calif., where she lived until her death in 2011.

Recipient of numerous literary prizes for her poems, short stories and novels, she was also awarded the Cross of the Knight of the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas in 2006 for merits to Lithuania.

95 years ago

November 1920

During the Battles of Giedraičiai (November 17-21) and Širvintos (November 19), the Lithuanian Armed Forces recaptured all territories lost after the attack of Polish General Lucjan Żeligowski from Vilnius, preventing Poland from occupying the entire territory of Lithuania.

20 years ago

December 8, 1995

Lithuania submitted an official application for membership in the European Union.

15 years ago

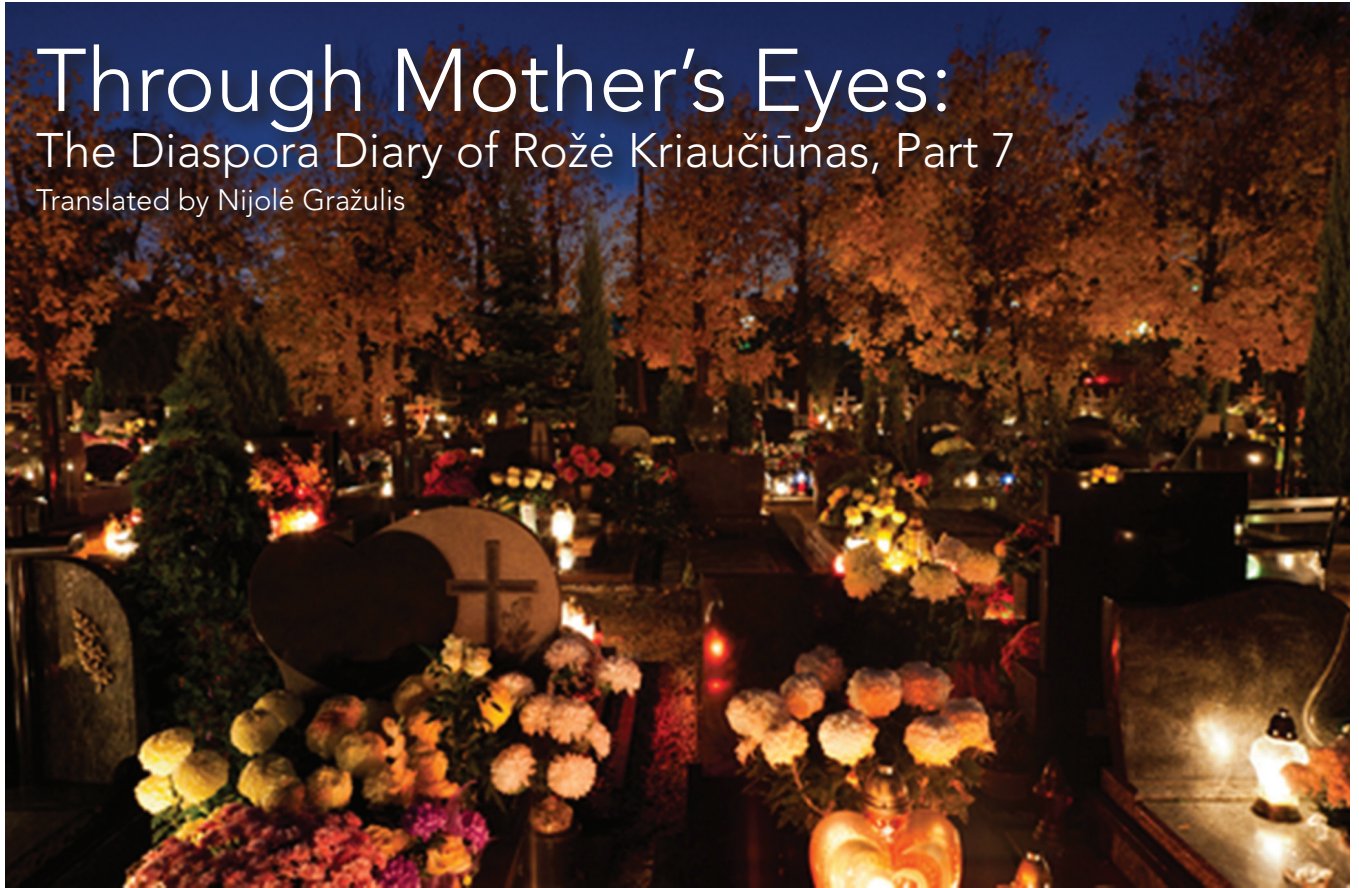
November 30, 2000

UNESCO named the Curonian Spit (Kuršių nerija) a World Heritage Site.



Through Mother's Eyes: The Diaspora Diary of Rožė Kriauciūnas, Part 7

Translated by Nijolė Gražulis



Cemetery on Velinės, the commemoration of All Saints and All Souls.

November 1, 1945

This holy day of All Saints enables us to transcend our earthly existence and attain their celestial realm. They have finished life's challenging journey successfully and are singing hymns of joy. I sent up my prayers to them and asked for their help and intercession in my difficult situation. Perhaps they will act as mediators with the Most High, and He will listen to their petitions for happier days for my family. Perhaps He will return our beloved Mykolas to us from wherever he is.

Back in Gustonys, in the evening of All Saints Day all our family members would gather to listen over the radio to the Mass celebrated at the Kaunas [Lithuania] cemetery. We would remember our dear parents and pray for them. Now it is even more important for me to spend this evening remembering my dear relatives and my beloved husband. I wonder if any of them are no longer among the living.

Maybe my dear Mykolas, too, no longer feels the pains of life's journey but has gone to his rest under the weighty foreign soil. O my God, please do not judge him too severely.

I have been at the cemetery in Eichstät. It is a very orderly and beautiful place. It looks as if only good people have been laid to rest there, in a kingdom of white chrysanthemums. It is sad that Lithuanians do not know how or do not try to prepare similarly pleasant surroundings for the eternal rest of their loved ones. Where, oh, where, my darling Mykolas, are you now? Perhaps at this moment you too are wiping away tears from your cheeks? Perhaps you are with us in your thoughts? May God give you the patience and the perseverance to endure all the difficulties of a refugee's existence.

November 9, 1945

It was like a dream or a mirage. For one second I was positive, Mykolas, that you

were back. I saw a man with a knapsack in the yard, and the thought flashed through my mind that it was he. I did not start running toward him only because I suddenly realized that it was the wrong face. O God, how my heart began to race, as if I were a fish out of water. I could barely stand. Happiness had been so close, and suddenly it was gone. Perhaps gone forever. Dear God, how hard it is at such moments, how the sky clouds up and all hope disappears. Can it be that my poor heart will never again feel true joy? O my God, please accept my suffering as recompense for my misdeeds and strengthen my spirit and my body.

November 11, 1945

Only in the land of dreams does my soul find joy and happiness. It is so pleasant to see the beautiful sights and remember the people I love. Last night I frolicked childlike amid the blossoms in a garden. With me were the friends of my youth

and my precious Mykolas, and we were delighting in the fragrant flowers, all due to the efforts of Verutė, I believe, whom we left back in Gustonys. I was so cheerful when I awoke. Someone told me that seeing flowers in a dream meant that there would be good news. Sure enough, I later heard that in Ravensburg [Germany] there was a teacher named Kriauciūnas. That filled me with hope, which at times tends to fade. How hard it is to endure the uncertainty, when one is as if surrounded by thick fog without any glimmers of light. Now I am again full of hope. Once again it's as if I am weaving a wreath from anticipated days of happiness. Perhaps it is our beloved "daddy," as Vitalija would say. Perhaps these tormenting days of uncertainty will soon be over. O my God, if it were so, You would be so good and just. We do not deserve such a painful and long-lasting trial. There has been enough of this poisonous anguish. Life is so short, and it is being spent in grief. I long to live, to love, and to be loved. With all my mind and all my heart I am longing to see my beloved as soon as possible, to be in his arms, to press him to my heart, and to kiss his remarkable eyes—passionately.

The children were overjoyed when they found out that "daddy" may be returning. Elvyra's heart began to beat faster. She understands a lot already, for she often sees my tears and tries to console me. The children now believe that their father will come back and will hug and kiss them again.

November 15, 1945

I was so happy today. It's been such a long time since I felt that way. Probably the hope that Mykolas might be in Ravensburg made me feel so good. I am eagerly awaiting news from there. As I wait, I sometimes feel uneasy, for if he isn't there, then I don't think I'll ever see him again.

I have received the first letter from Goštautas since the war ended. His news saddened me. He informed me that Antanas Rutkauskas had perished. My heart began to ache, so saddened was I

that our dear neighbor from Gustonys had gone to his eternal rest in Prussia. It was even worse to think of what might have happened to Mykolas. My heart was aching and I burst into tears, but I did not cry for long. I began to pray for Antanas' soul. Perhaps Mykolas too is in need of such prayers, but I continue to pray that he is of good health and that we will soon be reunited. I'll keep on waiting and petitioning the Good Lord. I believe that if he is alive we will see him again soon.

November 20, 1945

These very similar gloomy autumn days are passing quickly. Life is so monotonous, so sad, so hopeless. There is no longer any talk of returning to our homeland. No one is encouraging us to hope for a better tomorrow.

Only in the world of dreams is there some variety. Here, with no restrictions and without anyone making fun, one can even return to one's beloved birthplace and spend some time with persons who are dear. Last night I was happy because Mykolas appeared in my dream. He was somewhat thinner but looked quite good. We greeted one another most cordially and talked for a while. He said he was living well in Prussia, and that was why he has not returned for so long. He placed Vitalija on one of our beds and lay down next to her, saying he had brought several boxes of chocolate. I lay on the other bed listening to their conversation. Then I awoke. Though this was just a dream, I felt sad that we were able to talk for just a short time. Even so this dream gives me hope. I think that he is still alive and that we will be reunited for sure. It might even be soon, if he is in Ravensburg. Yet, who knows the future? Who knows God's plans? Maybe in a day or so I'll be much happier, or maybe my last hope will be torn from me. It's been like this all year—this awful uncertainty. Dear God, how difficult this is! Only You have been giving me the necessary strength to bear this, and I thank You for that.

November 28, 1945

One gloomy and dreary autumn day fol-

lows another. Our future is still uncertain, as if shrouded by a pitch-dark mist. The fate of the Lithuanian refugees is still unclear, and there is no good news. Just the opposite. The Germans detest us and keep reporting to UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] that we foreigners are misbehaving. In turn, UNRRA threatens to repatriate us or to stop providing us with necessities.

It's true that there are some troublemakers among us. Many do not want to work and are just looking for a good time. They get into all sorts of mischief after getting drunk. Then we all have to bear the blame and suffer undeserved reproaches for what a few have done.

All I can think of now is whether Mykolas will finally come back to us. It is three weeks already since I sent a letter to Ravensburg, but there has been no news. Almost every night I dream that he has come back and that we are full of joy because we can start a new life, a better life than before. Vitalija and Elvyra also dream of him often. The dreams are lovely, but reality is as empty as ever, as sad, and even frightening. If this time too nothing will come of it, then I think there is little hope of seeing him ever again. Why, dearest Mykolas, haven't you put a notice in some newspaper? I can't believe that you have forgotten us and have found a new family for yourself. Is it possible that you have broken your word like so many others? No, I can't believe that you could forget your sweet Vitalija, or quiet Romualdas, or clever Elvyra. You were so good to them, and you will probably remain true to your family. Dear God, please take care of and safeguard our dear and precious Mykolas.

December 3, 1945

Each day of autumn is more overcast than the last. Through the mist it is barely possible to recognize who's approaching only several yards away. As the thick fog covers the earth, so also my soul is being smothered by an unbearable loneliness, by the painful not-knowing. I have lived through so many hours of longing. Many



In front of the school at the Rebdorf displaced persons camp in Eichstätt, Germany, 1948.



Beginning the journey to the United States, the Kriauciūnas family with others by the train that will take them from Munich to their waiting ship.

of my hopeful daydreams are but a memory. The harsh reality remains unaltered by my entreaties.

My Romualdas found in a Lithuanian newspaper a notice placed by K. Mikšys that he is searching for our dearest Mykolas. Dear God, it makes me so sad that everyone is helping, everyone is concerned about him, but it is all in vain. Since so much common effort is devoted to this search, how can he not be found?

How can he not show up in this corner of the world where he is ever-present in our hearts?

Vitalija is still dreaming about her father. Last night she dreamt that she spoke with him by telephone. He told her that he is very far away, not in Ravensburg. I always dream that he is back and that I am with him. At least I can see him in my dreams, and then I feel good when I awake, but it also hurts. If he is alive,

dear God, how he must be suffering, all alone, separated from his family. It is so much better for me, for I have the children to delight in, to take comfort in, and to worry about. Even so, sometimes the unbearable loneliness torments me. So it is even worse for Mykolas. In addition, he does not particularly like to socialize with strangers.

Soon I shall be all by myself again. My friend is leaving for Ingolstadt. She and I have spent many hours together, both relaxing and commiserating. She is very cheerful and kind and has many friends. Sometimes it was nice to talk about our happy days back in our homeland. Sometimes I would tell her my troubles. She lost both her sons, who also were conscripted to dig fortification trenches. Our similar worries and grief created a strong bond between us. I'll be sad to see her go. She is trying to talk me into moving there too, but I will stay here so that the children's schooling would not be interrupted. And, of course, Mykolas might still come looking for us here. I was in this prison-like room when autumn began, and I will spend the winter here and then greet the wonders of spring.

December 7, 1945

"Do not sell out the land of your fathers." Those words are from a telegram sent by the Rev. Alfonsas Lipniūnas to our councilor during the German occupation of Lithuania. How he loved his homeland and his fellow Lithuanians! I just read the news that he died in enemy territory just before the end of the war. How sad, how distressing it is that the best sons of our nation perish whereas the worst continue to muddy the good name of Lithuanians by their wayward lives. Among the good ones is my beloved Mykolas. He cannot be found anywhere, and he too may have perished. Dear God, why is this so? Why is our nation so unfortunate? Today my heart is as pure as the tears flowing from my eyes. I am asking the Blessed Virgin Mary to intercede and to help my dearest Mykolas, whether he is alive or dead. I am asking for help for my children in this vale of tears and suffering, who may

be fatherless. O my God, it is so hard for me today! I am grief-stricken. Only with You can I share my distress, only to You can I bare my wounded heart. In your mercy, please heal me and refresh me. I can expect no protection or consolation from anyone else. I am all alone among strangers. My beloved brother, John, may be dead, and my other relatives may have been deported far, far away. Who is there to comfort me and console me? Oh [illegible text] there are so many problems and there will be more.

December 12, 1945

I was deeply moved today. My tears fell, but this time from joy and gratitude. Although nothing has yet eased my heartache, some unexpected practical assistance has filled me with joy. S. has brought me some necessary things that other Lithuanians could spare, and someone else has promised shoes for Vitalija, which are desperately needed. In a word, I will have everything that was lacking. My children will have warm clothes. They will not feel as intensely their difficult situation as orphans and refugees. Isn't this how God watches over us? In His mercy He has not forgotten my family. My prayers now are of thanksgiving, with a plea for continued protection.

December 24, 1945

It is our second Christmas Eve in a foreign land among strangers. Last year we ate the traditional Christmas Eve meal in Zimmerbude. Then too we were alone, without Mykolas. Who would have thought then that this year, too, Christmas Eve would be so unhappy, even tragic? We were sad last year that Mykolas was not with us, but I knew then that he was laboring somewhere nearby. Today we still know nothing about him, and it has been that way for over a year now.

My beloved Mykolas, if you only knew how eagerly we are waiting, yearning for you to return! Why did you leave us? Why hasn't your heart sensed where to find us? Can it be possible that you don't even think about us, about your pretty daughter Vitalija and the other children? Where



The U.S.N.S. General A.W. Greeley, on which the Kriauciūnas family sailed to America in 1948.

have the whirlwinds of war carried you? Where are you waging your struggle for survival all alone?

I know that if you only could, you would crawl on your hands and knees to your loved ones, who long for you so. You are so dear to us and always will be. Perhaps we will never see each other again in this vale of tears, but maybe you will find us soon. There are no answers to any of these questions. Sometimes I even pray for your soul, but then a shudder goes through me and I cannot finish the prayer. For you must be alive, you have to be alive because your family needs you. You took such good care of us and were so faithful. Why was your family torn from you? Why was it necessary for the two of us to be parted? So many families are intact. They have their husbands. The children have their fathers. For us it is the second such unhappy Christmas. The people here have managed to prepare Christmas feasts for themselves using their meager rations. But that is not why I am so sad or why my heart is aching. If only Mykolas were here, we would need nothing more. We'd be one of the happiest families here.

I dreamed of him a few days ago. He must be alive, since I dream of him so often. Even if he is alive, he must be very

unhappy, being all alone among strangers. Perhaps he is in the Russian Zone of Germany? There is no joy in life if life is very hard and there is no hope of a better future. Recently, when my fortune was read I was told that he would have a good life. Perhaps that is how it is? I feel so sorry for him, for he is all alone. I see how hard it is for the men here without their families. They have to cook and do their own laundry. Our Mykolas doesn't even know how and never liked doing such chores.

Bronius made me feel good today. He brought little presents for me and the children. Though simple, they were much appreciated. He is like an older brother to them, and they have grown somewhat and give him some advice now and then or scold him a bit. He doesn't listen to me all of the time, but he's a good boy, if somewhat weak-willed, and his friends boss him around and try to lead him astray. You can't compare him and Zenonas. Though Zenonas is a close relative, he has been the cause of many of my tears, but Bronius has even brought me joy by showing his appreciation of my concern for him.



The Kriaučiūnas family celebrates Christmas in the United States just a few years after their arrival.

December 25, 1945

My darling Mykolas, clasp each other's hands we would sincerely wish each other Christmas joy and happiness. That was long ago. Today I also wish you, in my heart, and perhaps you also wish me, every joy, but alas our hearts cannot reach one another. How I long to kiss your azure eyes, to wash away with my tears all that is troubling your heart, and be happy, so happy again. Mykolas, my dearest, when will I see you again and hear you speak words meant just for me? When, oh, when?

Epilogue

By Romualdas Kriaučiūnas

As her hopes dwindled, my mother stopped writing the diary she had started in the hope of sharing her experiences when she was reunited with her husband. Though our family, and perhaps the reader, hoped for a happy ending, it was not to be. The question my mother posed throughout and in the last entry of her diary—"When will I see you again?"—was answered by the political situation of the times: Never! Not in this life, at least. Thankfully, the unbearable and long-lasting uncertainty did not last as long as that, but it was only several years later that Rožė finally found out the whys and the wherefores.

The separation was permanent, but not

because my father had perished. From her relatives in Lithuania Rožė finally learned that Mykolas, after being conscripted into a forced-labor unit for the German Army, had been captured by the Soviet Red Army and was forced to work for them at the front lines until the war ended. Then he was forcibly returned to Soviet-occupied Lithuania. The details remain sketchy, but, more than likely, he lived in Lithuania under an assumed name and pretended to be single. The Soviet regime treated even innocent persons whose relatives escaped to the West, or whose family members became freedom fighters, as enemies of the people. Many ended up in Siberia.

After the war ended in 1945, Rožė and her three children lived in refugee camps in Western Germany until immigrating to the United States in 1950. While earning a living doing menial jobs, she also returned to part-time teaching at a Lithuanian school in Chicago, Illinois. It was not easy, but our family did not fare as badly as my mother had feared in her darkest hours. We children grew into adulthood and, with all of us contributing, were able to achieve a higher education.

Rožė and Mykolas started corresponding with each other probably after Stalin's death in March of 1953. However, their correspondence had to be clandestine.

Rožė would write letters to her elderly mother in Inkūnai, Lithuania, using the fictitious male name of Jurgėnas. She used as a return address that of a friend who also lived in Chicago, in the same neighborhood. This person would bring Mykolas' letters to her. In turn, Mykolas wrote back using his mother-in-law's name and address at Inkūnai. Both Rožė and Mykolas had distinct handwriting, which was reassuring proof as to who were the true authors of the letters. We children also wrote, but less frequently.

In time Mykolas was able to return to his beloved profession of teaching until his retirement in 1970. He died in 1975 and is buried at Inkūnai, district of Anykščiai. Throughout the years, we children and our mother were never able to see our father and husband again after our forcible separation. After his death, we received two handwritten booklets of poems with the notation: "For safekeeping for my loved ones." With that intention, in 1977 these 27 poems were typed, copied and circulated.

Rožė was finally permitted to return to Lithuania for a short visit a few years after Mykolas died. It is not known if she was able to visit his grave. The Communist regime had multiple restrictions for visitors from the West, especially the U.S. She died in 1986 in Chicago and is buried at St. Casimir's Lithuanian Catholic Cemetery there.

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1990, my family and I were able to establish contact with the Gustonys village school at which Mykolas and Rožė had taught until 1944. Through our initiative, in 1992 a memorial plaque was affixed to the outside of the school building commemorating Mykolas and Rožė Kriaučiūnas. A few years later, the road fronting the Gustonys school was named Mykolo Kriaučiūno gatvė (Mykolas Kriaučiūnas Street).

In 2005, to commemorate the occasion of my parents' 100th birthday, her diary and his poems were combined into one publication, disseminated among family and friends, titled "Pagaliau, Vėl Kartu!" [At Last, Together Again!].

Have Map, Will Run

By Rimas Gedeika

The past 200 years have seen a great evolution in sports. The number and variety of both men's and women's sports have increased greatly. Athletes have become bigger, stronger, faster, possessing amazing skill levels. Improved training methods and better understanding of nutrition have enabled athletes to achieve results their predecessors never dreamed of.

As sports evolved, they have become increasingly attractive to broader segments of our population, including athletes with disabilities. Today, athletes with disabilities compete not only in the Paralympic Games (for athletes with physical disabilities) and Special Olympics (for athletes with intellectual disabilities), but also in national and world events and the Olympic Games.

Lithuania has some of the world's best athletes with disabilities, though their names are not well known to the general public. In this article, I will acquaint you with the sport of orienteering and Lithuania's deaf athletes.

The Sport of Orienteering

Orienteering began as a land navigation training exercise for Sweden's military officers in the 19th century. It wasn't too long before civilians began to show interest in this training exercise, and it evolved into a very popular sport. As the sport grew, so did the number of its variations, the oldest and most popular being foot orienteering. Orienteering using skis and bikes, racing through towns and racing both day and night are some other variations.

The essence of orienteering is the ability to read a topographical map accurately, choose the best route and finish the designated course in the time allotted or sooner. Navigation skills are as important as strength and speed.

At the start of the race, each competitor is given a topographical map with the location of the features (control points) that he must reach in sequence and within a given time period. The course is through diverse and unfamiliar terrain.

The map does not show the route the athlete must follow to reach the control points. He must determine that, taking into consideration his navigational skills and physical abilities. In many cases the apparent shortest route is not the quickest.

Once the athlete sets out on his selected route, he must, while on the run and continuously referring to his map, monitor his position to make sure that he is on track toward his designated control point. Should he find himself off course or encountering an unexpected obstacle, he must determine, on the fly, the best way to get back on course.

When the athlete reaches his first control point, he "punches in" to record his time (for every 10 seconds that he exceeds the allotted time, 1 minute is added to his time) and receives another map showing his new control point. This continues until

he finishes the race.

Orienteering is divided into two categories: individual races and team races. Individual races use a staggered start, no less than a minute apart between each runner. This is done to ensure that each athlete has a chance to do his own navigating—no following the leader. At the start, each competitor is given a map with different control points and the sequence that they have to be reached. In the end, all the competitors complete the same legs but in a different sequence.

Team races are divided into three divisions: women, men and mixed teams. The men's and women's teams are composed of three members, while the mixed team is composed of four members running in the following order: woman-man-man-woman. The team race is a mass start. Each member of the team runs the entire course before passing off to the next.

Three distances comprise foot orienteering:

- Sprint distance is an all-out race. Here the emphasis is more on speed than on navigational skills. The winning time is usually 10 to 15 minutes.
- Middle distance has frequent changes in direction with greater number of control points. Fine navigational skills are of greater importance than pure speed and stamina. The winning time is generally 30 to 40 minutes.
- In the long distance, the emphasis is on strength, stamina, speed and the ability to select the best route. Control points normally are 1-2 km apart. The winning time is generally 70 to 90 minutes. The race resembles a cross-country race, but with a map.

Lithuania at the World Deaf Orienteering Championships

Since its earliest participation, Lithuania has always had a strong team both in orienteering's individual and in team relays races. This year was no exception, as the country won five medals—two gold and three bronze—in the Elite Division of the 2015 Championships in Rochester, N.Y., in August.

Tomas Kuzminskis, one of Lithuania's premier deaf orienteering athletes, won the individual gold medal in the middle distance, placed fourth in the sprint and seventh in the long distance race. He, Vytautas Remeika and Mantas Volungevičius won another gold medal in the team middle distance relay in a tie with Ukraine.

In the women's races, Judita Volungevičienė won the bronze in the sprint and placed fourth in the middle distance and eighth in long distance. She, Gedvilė Diržiūtė and Adria Kulbokaitė won the bronze medal in the women's middle distance relay.

In the mixed team sprint relay, Kuzminskas, Volungevičienė, Diržiūtė and Remeika won the bronze medal.

The First Thanksgiving, *Lithuanian Style*

By Daiva Venckus



U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle arrived in Vilnius in January 1992 to sign diplomatic treaties with Lithuania and to officially open the American Embassy in Vilnius. Photo: D. Venckus

The first official Thanksgiving celebrated in Lithuania was back in November 1991.

Lithuania had gained its independence from the Soviet Union and had begun down the road of integration into the modern world and family of European nations. Foreign diplomats arrived each week in Vilnius to reestablish diplomatic ties with the new republic. The first United States Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania, Darryl N. Johnson, presented his credentials to Vytautas Landsbergis in September 1991 and had begun setting up the first post-World War II U.S. mission in Lithuania.

Although the embassy was not yet open for business (that would happen in January 1992), Ambassador Johnson invited the American ex-pats in Lithuania, such as myself, for a traditional Thanksgiving dinner. When we arrived, we were sent into the kitchen to work. This was not a fancy-schmancy embassy party. The embassy had not yet hired a staff and didn't have much in the way of supplies, like cooking utensils, so we all pitched in to cook and put together our meal, just like a typical family would.

Ambassador Johnson had a turkey, among other traditional ingredients unavailable at the time in Lithuania, flown in especially for our dinner. (Thanks, U.S. taxpayers!) We enjoyed a hearty meal and went around the table expressing what we were grateful for. Most of us ex-pats were thankful to be in Lithuania to witness independence, and to be able to continue working toward helping Lithuania build a new democratic nation. And we were all grateful for the turkey. After all that we had gone through during the revolution—Moscow's economic blockade, food shortages, tanks in the streets, etc.—we were happy for American comfort food, and plenty of it! After our meal, we were back in the kitchen doing the dishes.

The first official Thanksgiving was not a glamorous event. That came a year later. That time, in November 1992, Lithuanians also had much to be grateful for: the new Lithuanian Constitution had just been ratified.

On November 6, 1992, on the third floor of the Parliament building where we held our press briefings, Vytautas Landsbergis, surrounded by parliamentarians, signed the Lithuanian Constitution into force. The Constitution had received approval from Lithuanian citizens in a referendum held on October 25, 1992, with 75 percent of those who voted favoring its adoption.

I stood up against the wall among my Parliament co-workers to witness the historic event—and I couldn't stop thinking that I was in the same room as the George Washingtons, Benjamin Franklins and Thomas Jeffersons of Lithuania—the representatives of the regular men and women who happened to stand up to the Moscow Bear and lead Lithuania to freedom.

Lithuanians have much to be grateful for. Each Lithuanian on the planet contributed somehow to Lithuanian independence. It was Lithuanians in Vilnius standing before the tanks or serving as human shields for months around parliament and other buildings. It was émigrés maintaining Lithuanian traditions and raising new generations who would help with independence efforts. It was leaders like Landsbergis (who might have been stubborn at times) who had the “right stuff” to deal with Moscow and lead Lithuania to freedom. It was émigrés sending money to Sąjūdis to support the cause. And it was Lithuanians around the world participating in demonstrations to raise awareness.

Adapted from “A One-Way Ticket to the Revolution: The true story of a young American's journey to her ancestral homeland during the collapse of the Soviet empire” at daivavenckus.com.

Daiva Venckus was a press spokesperson (1991-1992) for the Lithuanian Parliament during its struggle to break away from the Soviet Union. She currently guest lectures on the topics of the Soviet Union and Lithuanian independence to schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District as well as private schools. She also provides consulting for companies doing business in the region of the former Soviet Union. She climbs mountains for fun.



Vytautas Landsbergis signs the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania on November 16, 1992. Photo: Gediminas Svitojus, courtesy of the archives of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

Two Vegetable Salads for Kūčios

By Jana Sirusaitė Motivans



The customs of Kūčios (Christmas Eve) unite Lithuanians around the world. It is a time for families to gather together and celebrate in a traditional Lithuanian way.

The most important custom of Kūčios is the blessing and the sharing of plotkelės (blessed Christmas wafers). The meal is started with a prayer, and then the plotkelės are distributed. Each person breaks bread with every other person at the table and offers a Christmas greeting. In smaller gatherings, this can often be done while everyone remains seated. At larger gatherings, this usually involves everyone getting up and moving about to greet everyone else. This is a joyous way to start the celebration.

It is common practice to prepare 12 dishes for Kūčios, representing the 12 apostles. In Catholic tradition, Christmas was a day of fasting, therefore these 12 dishes are made from grains, peas and beans, potatoes, beets, carrots and other vegetables, mushrooms, herring and other types of fish, cranberries, poppy seeds and honey. Traditionally the meal was not only meat-free, but also dairy-free and egg-free. Modern Kūčios is still meat-free, but dairy and eggs are usually included in all but the most strictly observant homes.

The first course usually consists of cold foods such as vegetable salads, herring, smoked fish and mushrooms. The cold

foods are then followed by a hot main course, usually more fish. After the meal, šližikai (Christmas Eve biscuits, see recipe in *Bridges*, November 2013) are served with poppy seed milk and kisielius (cranberry pudding, see recipe in *Bridges*, December 2012). This is usually followed by more desserts, such as Napoleonas (a very rich layered cake) or honey cake. After dinner, gifts are exchanged and the celebration then continues with midnight mass at the nearest Lithuanian church or local parish.

A traditional salad served for Kūčios is raudona mišrainė (red mixed vegetable salad), also commonly known as vinegretas. My močiutė served this every year as one of her 12 dishes, usually with herring mixed into it. Needless to say, this was not a childhood favorite. One year we went to my aunt's home for Christmas day. My Teta Dana had a balta mišrainė (white mixed vegetable salad) on her table. It was delicious—and no hidden herring! From then on, we added that to our Kūčios menu as a welcome complement to the red salad. My recipe has evolved from that memory from many years ago. The recipe for the red version comes from the Toronto cookbook *Treasures of Lithuanian Cooking*.

I wish you and your family a joyful celebration. Try to keep it traditional to honor our heritage. Linksmų Kalėdų! Merry Christmas!

a taste of lithuania

Raudona Mišrainė

(red mixed vegetable salad)

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 pound (approx. 1 cup) dried white navy beans -or- one can (16 oz.) of small white beans
 - 2 pounds fresh beets -or- two (16 ounce) cans of beets (not pickled)
 - 2 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and diced
 - 6 medium-sized dill pickles, diced, well-drained (approx. 1 1/2 cups)
 - chopped herring (optional)
- DRESSING
- Mix together:
- 1 cup sour cream
 - 1 teaspoon horseradish
 - 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
 - 2 teaspoons salt
 - 1 teaspoon sugar
 - pinch of pepper



1. Rinse beans, place them in a large bowl, cover with water and soak overnight. The next day, pour off the water and place the beans in a large pot. Cover with fresh water, about two inches above the beans. Cook beans until soft (about 60 minutes). Drain thoroughly and set aside to cool. Alternatively, you can substitute one can of prepared beans.
2. Also prepare the beets the day before serving. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Place a large piece of aluminium foil onto a baking sheet. Place a piece of parchment paper on the foil, and then put the beets on the parchment paper-lined foil. Wrap up tightly, using more foil if needed, to enclose the beets. Slide the baking sheet into the oven and bake until tender. This usually takes about an hour, but if the beets are large it could take up to an hour and a half. The beets are done when they can be pierced easily with the tip of a knife. Let the beets cool, then peel them. Alternatively, you can substitute two (16 ounce) cans of prepared beets (not pickled). Be sure to drain them completely. Chop the beets into small cubes.
3. In a large bowl, mix the beans and chopped beets with eggs, pickles, herring (optional) and dressing. Decorate with fresh dill or parsley and slices or wedges of hard-boiled egg before serving.

Balta Mišrainė

(white mixed vegetable salad)



INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium-sized carrots
- 2 medium-sized potatoes
- 1 cup frozen lima beans
- 3 hard-boiled eggs
- 1 Granny Smith apple
- 1 cup frozen green peas, thawed
- 1 can small white beans, such as navy beans, drained
- fresh dill, chopped
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

1. Peel the carrots and potatoes and cut into small cubes. Boil each in a separate pot until soft. In another small pot, boil the lima beans until tender.
2. Peel the eggs and chop. Finally, peel and chop the apple. Try to cut everything into approximately the same size pieces to make a nice-looking salad.
3. Place all the ingredients into a large bowl and mix together. Add more salt, dill, sour cream and mayonnaise to taste. Garnish with dill before serving.



75th Anniversary of Lithuanian Nationality Room Celebrated at University of Pittsburgh



The Lithuanian Nationality Room in the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning. Photo: Karen Blaha

In a joint celebration at Polishfest '15 in November, the Lithuanian and Polish nationality rooms in the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning marked 75 years since their opening.

The Lithuanian Nationality Room (LNR) was dedicated in October 4, 1940, becoming the 10th classroom in the university's Nationality Room Program, which showcases the history and culture of the various ethnic groups that have settled in the Pittsburgh region. It is used both as a classroom and a space to promote Lithuanian heritage through events, performances, lectures, films and exhibits.

The LNR Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Peter Pivaronas and Dr. Joseph Baltrušaitis, funded construction of the room through donation drives and outreach to Lithuanian communities and organizations in the U.S. and Lithuania. The design process began in 1935 and included two trips to Lithuania for design inspiration and selection of Kaunas architect Antanas Gudaitis. Support came from Lithuanian government officials and the U.S. envoy, Minister Povilas Žadeikis.

After several delays caused by issues in securing materials (Lithuanian linen and rare Lithuanian black bog oak) and getting them through customs, construction began in April 1940. By the time the room was dedicated, Lithuania was under Soviet Occupation. In news coverage *The Pittsburgh Press* called the space a "room without a country," along with the Polish and Czechoslovak rooms.

The room features a mural of M. K. Čiurlionis' "Two Kings" painting, white oak and black bog oak in furnishings, hand-made linen wall coverings and folk art elements throughout. The door's diamond pattern is similar to those of many farm structures and the carved rosette at its center symbolizes fire. Above the entrance, a stylized sun between two horse heads represents light and sound believed to ward off evil spirits. The room's oak trim recalls granary decorations. Names of famous Lithuanian artists, writers and composers are carved into the woodwork. The linen on the walls is woven in a design called "the path of the birds." The professor's desk is modeled after a household table and the lectern incorporates details of a spinning wheel spindle. Student chairs are carved with a design found on household utensils. The radiator enclosure is perforated with a design of rūta (wild rue) leaves. The leaded glass medallions in the windows are modeled on the sun ornaments often found on roadside shrines.

The 75th anniversary celebration on November 8, 2015, featured Lithuanian and Polish food, music, crafts and displays. The Lithuanian portion of the program included ethnic singing group Bočiai, a brief children's program and the re-creation of the "Echoes of Lithuania" radio program by Len Barcousky and Bill Količius. Christine Luschas demonstrated Lithuanian techniques for decorating Easter eggs (margučiai) and volunteers helped children make Lithuanian straw Christmas ornaments.

Wayside Crosses Restored in Brooklyn

By Pat Sidas



Dr. Algirdas Lukosevičius and Phillip Caponegro with children of the parish who came to watch and learn about the restoration process.



Dr. Algirdas Lukosevičius teaches Olivia Žukauskas to use a sander.



Linas Chacar-Palubinskas, Olivia Žukauskas, Elzbieta Žukauskas and Elzbieta Kungys lovingly and gently sand the face of the Rūpintojėlis (worrying Christ).

On Sunday, November 8, 2015, Annunciation Parish, Brooklyn, N.Y., celebrated the completion of the restoration of the second of the two wayside crosses that stand in front of the 150-year-old church, at North 5th and Havemeyer Streets, Williamsburg.

Led by Annunciation's altar boy corps, about 100 parishioners, along with the Annunciation parish choir, processed out to the front of the church along with Mass celebrant Rev. Vytautas Volertas, where Father Volertas blessed the restored wayside cross.

The congregation then proceeded to the Parish Hall where Lithuanian Affairs Committee member Vida Penikas introduced sacristan Phillip Caponegro and volunteer sacristan Dr. Algirdas Lukosevičius. Lukosevičius gave a brief presentation on how both of the wayside crosses were restored, and how he obtained replacement carvings for one of the crosses from Lithuania. To loud applause, he paid tribute to the work that Phil Caponegro had done, as well as to the work of their "apprentices" Jonas Lukosevičius and Matas Slizys. The participation of some of the parish's younger children was one of the Ateitis Youth projects carried out at Annunciation Church during the past year.

The wayside crosses, originally carved by master carver Mindaugas Jankauskas, proclaim to all who pass by the church in this busy and growing Williamsburg neighborhood the faith of the Lithuanian people. Just as they do in Lithuania, where they literally stand by the wayside, these crosses extend a warm welcome to Lithuanians seeking a spiritual home, to Catholic people of all ethnicities, and to men and women of good will seeking to find the Lord.

Mugė: 39 Years of Fun in Philadelphia

By Rimas Gedeika



Dancers from Aguonelė, Philadelphia's children's dance group.
Photo: Rytas Vebeliūnas



Ah, good old Lithuanian dishes! Photo: Rimas Gedeika

Every city has its unique features and happenings. Take Philadelphia, for example, which has the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, the hoagie, the Mummers Parade, Rocky and the oft-maligned Eagles. It also has a unique ethnic community—the Lithuanian community—which this year celebrated its 39th consecutive fall arts and crafts fair, better known as "The Mugė."

Mugė is a traditional two-day event that always occurs over the first weekend in November. It is here that attendees can enjoy the "world's best" potato pancakes as well as traditional Lithuanian cuisine such as kugelis and balandėliai, sample some truly fine Lithuanian beers, and judges entries in the krupnikas contest. For the latter, contestants make their krupnikas (a spicy honey liqueur sometimes called boilo or vyritas) in accordance with recipes passed down to them from their parents or grandparents. This magical potion has honey as its base and then secret ingredients know only to the contestants.

Attendees also enjoyed seeing the various vendor arts, crafts, wearables and consumables. The most popular artwork, necklaces, bracelets, pins and earrings were made from Lithuanian amber by Lithuanian artisans. There were many wood carvings representing characters from Lithuanian folk legends. A number of the carved pieces were of Lithuanian wayside crosses and the Rūpintojėlis—the "worried Christ" who sits with one arm on his knee holding up his chin. Yet other tables were laden with hand-crafted Lithuanian breads, sūris (farmers cheese), smoked meats and šakotis (tree cake).

Finally, what would a festival be without music and entertainment? This year the music was provided by Kaimo Kapela, which played a repertoire spanning traditional folk music, current popular music and lively polkas. Entertainment was pro-

vided by Aguonelė, the children's dance group from Philadelphia's Vinco Krėvės Lithuanian School, and Malūnas, Baltimore's adult folk dancing group. The dancing was so up-tempo that after the program, the group had no problem getting the audience to participate in more dancing. On Saturday evening, the songs were more sultry during Ramunė Stankevičiūtė's "Moonlight Cabaret."

The event attracted close to 1,000 people from throughout the mid-Atlantic region, among them Philadelphia 76ers starting forward Nick Stauskas. The Sixers have great hopes that the Lithuanian forward will bring back the glory days of the past.



The Cultural Center at the Lithuanian Music Hall was open during Mugė weekend. Photo: Teresė Vekteris

Amber Roots Honors Long-Time Coordinator

By Stephany Gutasukas



Amber Roots members gather to honor Millie Helt (seated, center) for her service to the club.

Philadelphia's Amber Roots Heritage Club gathered recently to pay tribute to and show our appreciation of Millie Helt, who, for more than a decade, was the coordinator of our club.

Millie freely gave of her time and talents once a month to gather together people of Lithuanian ancestry to socialize and preserve our common culture.

Millie opened our meetings with prayer in the Lithuanian language, for it was important for us to speak, hear and perpetuate our ancestral tongue.

Millie unfailingly brought us news about current events in Lithuania and the Lithuanian-American community via snippets from the Internet and articles in the Lithuanian press.

When it came to heritage, variety was Millie's trademark. Occasionally, she would read to us a Lithuanian folk tale or poem. She encouraged us to share our own talents or knowledge at our meetings.

At Easter time, club members once decorated dyed eggs via the scratch technique. We played the "uppers" game or who has the strongest egg, the egg that doesn't crack? We played a game of rolling eggs down an incline. Those whose egg was bumped by another lost their egg. Another time, members played a Lithuanian Jeopardy trivia game. Always, there were prizes.

Two members put on a skit about the life and death of Grand Duke Kęstutis as seen through the eyes of his wife, Biruté. We learned something about Lithuanian history because of them. Millie also encouraged us to record the immigration experiences of our relatives, friends, neighbors and/or acquaintances and relate their tales at our meetings. If someone had recently

traveled to Lithuania, Millie asked them to speak about their visit to our ancestral homeland.

Millie was persuasive in getting musicians and vocalists to perform at our annual sing-along. Lithuanian lyrics were translated into English, and members sang Lithuanian songs well into the evening. Who could forget Bronius Krokys, our resident expert on Lithuanian folk songs, leading us in a rousing rendition of "Girioj"?

When the Mugé came to the Lithuanian Music Hall, Millie performed a yeoman's job at manning our Amber Roots Heritage Club table. Sometimes in the Hall for hours at a time, she imparted information to all who would listen in an attempt to recruit new members.

Once, when Christmas was approaching, we fashioned traditional Lithuanian ornaments out of paper straws and sturdy string. We took our completed handiwork home to decorate our own Christmas tree or make our house festive during the holiday season.

Each year at our club's annual Kūčios, we had a short program explaining what occurs on a traditional Lithuanian Christmas Eve. We thoroughly enjoyed the good-will gesture of breaking blessed wafers with one another. Each year at our Kūčios, a miracle happened—we all brought a different Lithuanian delicacy to savor at our gathering. Millie's specialty was salmon mousse always presented in the shape of a fish. Millie set aside a small space for presents such as Lithuanian Christmas cards, cologne or story books written by Lithuanians, which she freely offered to us. We appreciated Millie's remembering us during the holiday in her own special way.

Occasionally, during our meetings, Millie would distribute photocopies of short passages in Lithuanian for us to read out loud and translate into English. Sometimes Millie would introduce us to new Lithuanian vocabulary. The goal was to pronounce Lithuanian words correctly and preserve a language so precious and dear to us.

On the personal level, Millie allowed a young woman from Lithuania to stay at her home, obtained a summer position for her and generally helped her to get established and earn a living in the United States. What an exemplar of Christian virtue Millie is!

For more than a decade, Millie was our "Earth Mother." Once a month, she reserved her time for us, diligently prepared for our meetings, shared her knowledge with us at those meetings and, for all her efforts, made us better Lithuanian-Americans, proud of our heritage and willing to persevere in preserving it.

Stephany Gutasukas is a 15-year member of the Amber Roots Lithuanian Heritage Club. She is also a 16-year member of the Knights of Lithuania and has attained the Fourth Degree.

Džiugas Lithuanian Cheese Comes to Vermont

The Lithuanian flag was hanging from the balcony and wheels of Lithuanian cheese were stacked on the table at Grafton Village Cheese in Brattleboro, Vermont, on October 23, 2015, for the American premiere of Džiugas.

Honorary Consul of Lithuania to Vermont, Kerry Secrest, was responsible for negotiating the agreement that brought the Lithuanian cheese to the United States, and had organized the night's tasting. Secrest's role as honorary consul is to promote educational, cultural and economic relations between the two regions.

Secrest said Džiugas cheese had come home with her family from almost every trip they made to Lithuania, prompting her to think about making it available here. She also wanted to support Džiugas because Russian President Vladimir Putin closed down food imports from Lithuania into Russia last year, leading the cheesemaker to looking for new markets. Secrest approached Joe Green, cheesemonger at Grafton Village Cheese, and asked if he would consider adding Džiugas to his inventory. After a taste and hearing the story, he agreed.

"Grafton Village Cheese is a mission-driven cheese-making plant," said Green. "We're trying to support the rural economy. And this is one way to do it and share the love all around the world."

Džiugas is a Lithuanian cheese established in 1924. Made from pasteurized milk from grass-fed cows, the cheese is aged for 12 to 48 months. It is described as a blend of Italian Parmigiano-Reggiano and aged Dutch Gouda.

Secrest spoke to guests consisting of local residents and visi-



Kerry Secrest, Honorary Consul of Lithuania to Vermont, with Joe Green of Grafton Village Cheese. Photo: Teresé Vekteris

tors with Lithuanian roots, drawing similarities between Vermont and Lithuania. Secrest's daughter Alina, whom she says loves the cheese so much she put it on her Christmas list last year, read the legend of the beloved Samogitian giant, Džiugas Telšys, who is credited with first making the cheese, and after whom the town of Telšiai is named.

Guests at the tasting sampled Džiugas paired with Vermont quince, a simple drizzle of honey or fennel salami.

"I hope this brings awareness to those who come here to learn a little about Lithuania," said Secrest. "Food is a way we can learn to appreciate different cultures."

Land of Songs Garner Special Mention

Filmmaker Aldona Watts received a Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award Special Mention on October 25, 2015, after the New York premiere of her documentary, *Land of Songs*, about a group of grandmothers in Lithuania who keep the Dainava singing traditions alive. The award recognizes documentary filmmakers who embody the spirit, energy and innovation demonstrated by anthropologist Margaret Mead in her research, fieldwork, films and writings. The award is given to a filmmaker whose feature documentary displays artistic excellence and originality of storytelling technique while offering a new perspective on a culture or community remote from the majority of the audiences' experience.

The film had its West Coast premiere on December 7, 2015, during the Baltic Film Series at Stanford University in California. Additional showings across the United States are planned.



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Please verify all events, as places and times are subject to change.

ONGOING**One Sunday a Month
Lithuanian Brunch**

The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22 Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.
12 - 4 p.m. Call for dates. Reservations strongly recommended.
Info: theavenuebarandgrill.com; 347-725-3853

**Every Friday, 2-10:30 p.m.
Fish Fry Fridays at the
Rockford Lithuanian Club**

716 Indiana Ave., Rockford, Ill.
Open to the public.
Info: rockfordlithuanianclub@hotmail.com or 815-962-9256

JANUARY 2016**January 10 12 - 2 p.m.
Road of Life and Death
Walk/Run**

Green Lake, Seattle, Wash.
2.8 mile run/walk to honor those killed during the Soviet aggression in Vilnius in January 1991.
Info: rasamt@yahoo.com.

**January 15-17
Winter Šventė/Celebration**

Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org

**January 31, 2 p.m.
Dainava in Concert**

Nativity BVM Church, 6812 S. Washtenaw Ave., Chicago
\$25 in advance; \$30 at door;
\$15 youth
Info: dainava.us

FEBRUARY 2015**February 6, 7 p.m.
Kugelis and Krupnikas 3.0:
Contest and Tasting**

Lithuanian World Center, 14911 127th St., Lemont, Ill.
Info: www.facebook.com/
/Biciu-Burelis-191994260908697

**February 7, 12:30 p.m.
Child's Gate to Learning Annual
Activity Update**

Lithuanian World Center, 14911 127th St., Lemont, Ill.
Info: vvm@childgate.org

**February, date TBA
Poker Tournament to benefit
Versmė Lithuanian School of
Kansas City**

Info: facebook.com/
kansascitylithuaniancommunity

MARCH 2016

March 6, 10 a.m.

St. Casimir Scout Fair

Info: facebook.com/
kansascitylithuaniancommunity

March 19, 1-3 p.m.

**Amber Roots Heritage Club
Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E.
Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
Everyone welcome. Use side
entrance on Tilton Street. Bring a
dish to share.**

Info: milliemarks@aol.com

**March, date TBA
KC Lithuanian Community
Independence Day Celebration**

Info: facebook.com/
kansascitylithuaniancommunity

**March 30 - April 5
SALFASS/LAUNA/ALGS Lithuanian
Snow Ski and Winter Trip**

Snowbird Ski Resort,
Snowbird, Utah
Reservations: Linda@ski.com,
(800) 525-2052 x3329
General info: edmickus1@aol.com
or vsaulis@sbcglobal.net

APRIL 2016

April 16, 1-3 p.m.

**Amber Roots Heritage Club
Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E.
Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
Everyone welcome. Use side
entrance on Tilton Street. Bring a
dish to share.**

Info: milliemarks@aol.com

MAY 2016**May 7-8, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.
44th Annual Baltimore Lithuanian
Festival**

Catonsville Armory, 130 Mellor Avenue, Catonsville, Md.

May 21, 1-3 p.m.

**Amber Roots Heritage Club
Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E.
Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
Info: milliemarks@aol.com**

May 26-28

**Association for the Advancement
of Baltic Studies Conference
University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia
Info: aabs-balticstudies.org****JUNE 2016**

June 4-5

**Talka Work Weekend
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

June 18, 1-3 p.m.

**Amber Roots Heritage Club
Lithuanian Music Hall, 2715 E.
Allegheny Ave., Philadelphia
Info: milliemarks@aol.com**

June 25-29

**Heritage Family Camp in
English
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org****JULY 2016**

July 3

**15th North American
Lithuanian Dance Festival
Royal Farms Arena, Baltimore
Info: sokiusvente2016.org**

July 4-9

**Family Camp for Lithuanian
Speakers
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

July 10-24

**Children's Camp for Lithuanian
Speakers 7-15 years old
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

July 24

**Lithuanian Friendship Day
(Putnam Picnic)
600 Liberty Highway,
Putnam, Conn.
Info: neringa.org**

July 24-30

**"Third Week" Youth Camp
for Lithuanian Speakers 12-16
years old
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

July 31-August 13

**Heritage Children's Camp in
English, ages 7-16
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org****AUGUST 2016**

August 5-7

**Knights of Lithuania National
Convention
Doubletree by Hilton,
Binghamton, N.Y.
Info: knightsoflithuania.com**

August 13-20

**"Third Week" Youth Camp in
English, ages 12-16
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

August 21-28

**Meno8Dienos Adult Lithuanian-
Language Art Camp
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: danguale@kuolas.com,
(781) 383-6081****OCTOBER 2016**

October 7-9

**Iškyla/Walk-a-Thon
Camp Neringa, Brattleboro, Vt.
Info: neringa.org**

October 9

**Golden Jubilee of Our Lady of
Šiluva Chapel
Shrine of the Immaculate
Conception, Washington, D.C.
Info: siluva50usa.org****GOT EVENTS?**

Let us help you spread the word. Send your event notices to bridges.terese@gmail.com two months in advance of the month in which you would like to see it listed.

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