

# bridges



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EDITOR  
Karilė Vaitkutė

ART DIRECTOR  
Daniel P. Craig, Jr.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CURRENT EVENTS  
Alan J. Stankus, P.E. (ret)

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER  
Laura Vidžiūnaitė

**Editorial Office**  
139 Willow Blvd., Willow Springs, IL 60480  
[kariledalia@yahoo.com](mailto:kariledalia@yahoo.com)

**Subscriber Services and Advertising**  
[spauda@javlb.org](mailto:spauda@javlb.org)

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[facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine](https://facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine)



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149 E Parkview Drive, Shirley, NY 11967  
Phone: 402-203-1119  
[finansai@javlb.org](mailto:finansai@javlb.org)

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## from the editor

Dear readers,

The month of May this year will be an important one to Lithuanians. The citizens of Lithuania will be voting in the presidential elections and participating in the referendum regarding double citizenship. We shall see if this referendum proves to be a historic one.

There are also many historically significant events that took place in the month of May in the course of history. As we all know, on May 1st many celebrate the International Workers Day. It used to be a big celebration in the Soviet Union. However, the holiday started in the United States of America in 1886.

Also in May, Lithuanians celebrate the day that Lithuania became a member of the European Union in 2004. On May 9, the Day of Europe is celebrated as on that day in 1950 the idea of the European integration was raised.

There are other significant dates in May that Lithuanians ought to remember. One of them is the Day of Lithuanian Press. On May 7, 1904, the press ban was lifted and Lithuanians once again, after forty years, could start reading and publishing books in the Lithuanian language. On May 14, 1905, teachers in Lithuanian schools could once again start teaching various subjects in the Lithuanian language. We all have to remember to cherish the Lithuanian language, learn it, and teach it to our children. Many brave men and women fought for the right to use it.

And, of course, we celebrate Mother's Day in May. In Lithuania, it is celebrated on the first Sunday in May, and in the United States we remember our mothers on the second Sunday of May. Happy Mother's Day to all mothers and grandmothers!

Sincerely,

Karilė Vaitkutė  
Editor



# Moving Back to the Land of Grandparents

Interview with Kęstutis Stančiauskas

By Karilė Vaitkutė

Kęstutis by the house of his grandparents in Pagiriai village, Lithuania.

## The Move

You were born in Germany, came to the United States as an infant after World War II and lived here all your life. Why did you decide to move to Lithuania?

On the surface, this would be a simple question to answer. Yet, there are very many nuances and in some ways, this is a difficult question.

All my life I have been involved one way or another in Lithuanian life, specifically the Displaced Persons Lithuanian life and culture in America. My parents did not speak English initially so of course only Lithuanian was spoken at home. It was and is a very important part of my life.

I lived in all the main Chicago Lithuanian neighborhoods: Bridgeport, Cicero, and Marquette Park. It seemed then that just about everyone was Lithuanian. The grade schools I attended were all Lithuanian Catholic schools: Saint Anthony's in Cicero, Nativity B.V.M. in Marquette



A postcard of Reinbek, Germany. Kęstutis was born in a DP camp in Reinbek after World War II.

Park; my sisters attended Maria High School in Marquette Park. The teachers were all Sisters of St. Casimir's nuns. I attended Lithuanian Saturday schools in Cicero and Marquette Park. All my children attended the Maironis Lithuanian Saturday School in Lemont, Illinois. Until recently, my wife Gailė was the music teacher there. When I started to play music professionally I spent a lot of time performing all over the United States and in many ways lost contact with the Lithuanian community. I didn't realize it at the time but other than speaking with my mother periodically I started to lose the Lithuanian language.

When my mother passed away, suddenly I realized that a very important part of my life that I had always taken for granted was gone. To somehow try to reconnect my heritage, I started purchasing Lithuanian books from Draugas newspaper publishing house and anywhere else that I could find them. I purchased Lithuanian history books, literature, memoirs, absolutely anything Lithuanian. I would read these books with a Lithuanian-English dictionary because I didn't understand much of what I was reading, but I never gave up.



A typical street in Marquette Park neighborhood in Chicago where Kęstutis has lived for many years.

Lithuania has always been a part of my life. America as a country and culture has changed a great deal during my lifetime living in America. In my opinion, America has changed in a negative way. When I met Gailė, my wife,



The inscription of the name of St. Anthony's Parish School in Cicero, Illinois.



Maria High School in Marquette Park neighborhood in Chicago.

who was born and raised in Kaunas, Lithuania and we started a family, the idea of returning to Lithuania became very strong. We made the decision to move to Lithuania because we wanted our three children to truly experience, learn, and appreciate their heritage and values by living in Lithuania. Visiting Lithuania for some sort of vacation, even an extended one, is not the same as breathing the air here every day.

What has been the hardest and most challenging in the past half a year? What was the most gratifying and rewarding?

Surprisingly there haven't been too many difficulties adjusting to Lithuanian life. Naturally, having to learn how a new system works, government, school, driving, and banking is always a challenge whenever you visit or live in any other country. Nothing is perfect anywhere.

Gratifying elements have included how very open and helpful most people are. For example, the principal, the teachers and the administrative staff at the school that our children attend, Vilniaus Balsių Progimnazija, have been amazing, supportive and endlessly helpful in every way. Our children are involved in numerous

extracurricular activities that are all integrated around the school. What is also really rewarding is how naturally and quickly our children have developed a very large circle of friends. What is wonderful is that unlike in America where everything is so structured, here, in Lithuania, it seems that at any given time children come to visit and hang out. It's much more spontaneous.

Somehow, for me, it's great to hear everyone speaking Lithuanian. The language is all around you, like good music.

Gailė has reconnected with her friends and family.

One of the really rewarding aspects of moving here is that both Gailė (Aldegunda) and I have really started to participate in the cultural and musical life in Lithuania. We have been the subject of television shows, such as Nuo Iki, International House Hunters, and Eurovision. Numerous newspaper and journal articles were written about us and we had a number of musical concerts.

A deep personal moment for me was finding and visiting my Grandparents land and home that they had built over 125 years ago, this is the home my Father was born in 1919. The family history is very deep and is completely wrapped in Lithuanian history.

How is your family responding to the move?

Initially, there were some awkward moments. Certainly having to adjust and change everything that you have been used to living in America can unbalance anyone. Yet, the excitement of traveling and then finally living in a new place I think shortened the response time. There was

so much to do, especially for Gailė. Right away within two weeks of our arrival, the children had to start attending a new school. The children have to wear UNIFORMS! It's great! Now, everyone is enjoying their life here, school, friends, and daily activities.

The area we live in is truly beautiful. We are a short five-minute walk from the Neris River. We are surrounded by beautiful nature and forests and yet we are only 20 minutes drive from the center of Vilnius.

## Family History

The story of your family is tragic and yet typical of many post-World War II Lithuanian families. Your parents were refugees who fled the Soviets and eventually settled in the USA, and your grandparents were exiled to Siberia. Growing up in Chicago, what did you know about your grandparents? Were your parents telling you anything about them or their life in Lithuania?

The tragedy for most Lithuanians was the events of WW2 and the great diaspora during and after the War. Some people even would say, events leading up to WW2 in addition. My parents never said anything about my Grandparents, on either side. In other words, I knew nothing. Since both of my parents have passed away long ago, I will never know why they never said anything.



Kęstutis's father Alfonsas Stančiauskas as a young man.

Three years ago when Gailė, myself, and the children were in Lithuania we happened to visit the Lithuanian Rumšiškės Museum. As part of the outdoor exhibit, there

2284	Sodomytė	Janina	Vinco	1928	48.05.22	57.05.15	5	Pavučio	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo
3483	Spungienė	Marija	Vladio	1915	48.05.22	58.07.17	5	Barevičių	Krasnojarsko	Jeniseisko
3483	Spungis	Antanas	Marijono	1942	48.05.22	58.07.17	5	Barevičių	Krasnojarsko	Jeniseisko
14284	Spungis	Stasys	Antano	1908	49.03.27	57.01.11	1	Barevičių	Krasnojarsko	Abakano
3483	Spungis	Tadas	Marijono	1946	48.05.22	58.07.17	5	Barevičių	Krasnojarsko	Jeniseisko
4090	Stakūnaitė	Mečislavas	Kazimiero	1912	41.06.14	49.09.24	4	Kašladorys	Archangelsko	s.d.
4090	Stakūnaitė	Emilija	Stanimiro	1920	41.06.14	49.09.24	4	Kašladorys	Altajaus	Slavgorodū
4205	Stalėtūnas	Vytautas	Jono	1944	45.07.17	56.05.15	4	Pypūnų	Permės	Jusvos
4205	Stalėtūnienė	Domicelė	Mykolo	1920	45.07.17	56.05.15	4	Pypūnų	Permės	Jusvos
3887	Stančauskaitė	Raimūnė	Stepo	1939	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
3887	Stančauskaitė	Alfonsas	Stepo	1937	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
490	Stančauskas	Alfonsas	Kazio	1891	48.05.22	57.12.26	5	Pentikių	Krasnojarsko	Jeniseisko
3687	Stančauskas	Antanas	Kazio	1872	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
5057	Stančauskas	Jurgis	Kazio	1899	48.05.22	56.05.31	5	Pagirių	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo
3887	Stančauskas	Stepas	Antano	1907	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
3887	Stančauskas	Vilimas	Stepo	1945	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
5057	Stančauskaitė	Domicelė	Dominiko	1903	48.05.22	56.05.31	5	Pagirių	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo
490	Stančauskaitė	Pranė	Mykolo	1916	48.05.22	57.12.26	5	Pentikių	Krasnojarsko	Jeniseisko
3887	Stančauskaitė	Stasė	Jono	1913	49.03.27	57.03.25	1	Dovainionių	Krasnojarsko	Užtaro
4809	Stančauskaitė	Genovaitė	Benedikto	1925	45.07.17	48.08.11	4	Palomenės	Permės	Belorojevo
4809	Stančauskaitė	Vytautas	Benedikto	1931	45.07.17	57.11.19	4	Palomenės	Permės	Belorojevo
507	Stankevičienė	Juozas	Kazimiera	1882	48.05.22	57.04.19	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stankevičiūtė	Kazimiera	Stepo	1920	48.05.22	57.04.19	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stankevičiūtė	Alina	Stepo	1927	49.04.11	56.10.15	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stankevičiūtė	Jadvyga	Stepo	1928	48.05.22	57.04.19	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stankevičiūtė	Natalija	Stepo	1924	49.04.11	56.05.15	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stankevičiūtė	Ona	Stepo	1924	49.04.11	56.05.15	5	Taduliškių	Irkutsko	Zimos
507	Stasiūnaitė	Karolina	Alekso	1923	48.05.22	57.09.10	5	Ringailių	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo
507	Stasiūnaitė	Ona	Alekso	1927	48.05.22	57.09.10	5	Ringailių	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo
507	Stasiūnaitė	Aleksas	Alekso	1927	48.05.22	57.09.10	5	Ringailių	Krasnojarsko	Jarcevo

A page from the book that lists the exiles to Siberia. Kęstutis found the names of his grandparents and the locations to which they were exiled in this book displayed in the Rumšiškės Museum.



Kęstutis's son, Ažuolas, by the farm buildings of Kęstutis's grandparents. Pagiriai village is a few miles east of Rumšiškės. In 1923 there were 7 homesteads and 48 inhabitants in Pagiriai. The village was divided into 8 plots in 1936. The owner of the largest plot was J. Stančiauskas. In 1948, eight residents (members of the Stančiauskas and the Virbickas families) were deported to Siberia.



Kęstutis on his grandparents' farm.



is a train boxcar that was used to deport Lithuanians. Inside the boxcar, there are various exhibits including a very large book listing the names of Lithuanians arrested and deported from the surrounding area. Gailė found the names of my Grandparents listed with the dates (deported May 22, 1948, released May 31, 1956) and file numbers they were arrested and deported through Jarcevas, to Kraslag, Krasnoyarsky ITL, Krasnojarsk, Eastern Siberia. With the file number listed, we were able to access information regarding my Grandparents through the Lithuanian Archives in Vilnius.

Did your parents tell you how they fled Lithuania after the Second War? What was their journey like?

My Father, Alfonsas never said anything, ever. Later I was able to find out through old photographs and such that my Father had somehow ended up in the British occupied zone (where I was born in Reinbek Germany, displaced persons camp), I even have photographs of my Father in a British Army uniform. Information that I discovered later indicated that my Father and his sister left home on the advice of my Grandparents.

One brother, Klemensas, a freedom fighter, was killed by Soviet forces within sight of my Grandparents' farm. Another brother, Zigmas was the warden for the Kaunas prison and he is documented as having been involved with sending secret messages from VLIKas to the Western allies during the Nazi occupation. The entire command structure of VLIKas (Vyriausiasis Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo



Kęstutis and Elena on Kęstutis's grandparents' land. Elena's daughter, Zita Gyvienė, contacted Kęstutis after seeing a television program and newspaper article about his family. Elena lived on a farm right next to Kęstutis's Grandparents' land. She used to work on their farm when she was young. Elena told Kęstutis that the reason some of the farm buildings survived is because during the time of the forced Soviet collectivization and when many were deported, his grandfather's farm buildings were the home and office of the Soviet collective farm manager and his family. The home is in very poor shape, the roof has many holes in it but there are still two families living in it. In one end of the house two very elderly women live and the other is another small family. The house is over 125 years old. It is built out of logs with boards covering the logs for decorative purpose. At one time this was considered a very large house with wooden flooring. All the logs and wood boards are clearly hand cut with axes.



Kęstutis and his family visiting the remains of his grandparents' farm.



Arija, Ažuolas, and Akmeja Stančiauskas in their new home in Vilnius, Lithuania.



The Stančiauskas family near the Neris River in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Komitetas - Chief Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania), was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944. My parents met each other in what was then West Germany towards the end of WW2. How they met, I'll never know. I do have their German marriage certificate.

My mother, Mikasė, told me that she was forced labor for a Nazi army family that was stationed in Lithuania during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania. The Nazis forcibly stole "appropriate Aryan" children from their families for servants and other work. This Nazi army family took her to Germany as the Russian front was breaking down. I suppose in a very peculiar way they may have saved her life.

There is much that I don't know, perhaps I'll never know, but, maybe one day, one way or another I'll discover more information.

Did your Father ever go back to Soviet Lithuania to visit his parents?

No, he never visited Soviet Lithuania. My Grandparents returned to Lithuania from exile in 1956. Soon after, they both had passed away. I don't believe that it would have been possible for him to visit Lithuania because of the Soviet oppression against Lithuanians and in particular because of our family history and anti-Soviet views.

What did you know of your Grandparents' life in Siberia? How did you find their homestead in Lithuania? What was the feeling when you went to the same house your Grandparents lived in?

At this time I know very little of my Grandparents' life in Siberia. I believe that I will discover more information

as I search. I do know per the archives that I have found, that upon returning from Siberia to Lithuania, my Grandfather went to a Soviet court in order to try to reclaim his land that had been confiscated by the Soviets. His land and the land of his surrounding neighbors had been turned into a Soviet collective farm.

I found my Grandparents' land, house and farm buildings through a combination of research, desire and pure luck. It started with finding their names in the Rumšiškės Museum train box car, which then gave me the information to go to the Lithuanian National Archives in Vilnius. The archive gave me the Soviet era documentation used to deport and confiscate my Grandparents' land. I received the official Lithuanian stamped land survey that was made in 1935. This survey gave me concrete information as to the size of the land (30 hectares) and the location (Pagiriai village).

I knew per my memory of my Father's Lithuanian identity cards that Rumšiškės was listed as his area. In Lithuania, I contacted the Rumšiškių Seniūnija (local government body) center. The Seniūnija directed me to the Kaišiadorių Rajono Seniūnija where they informed me very politely and professionally that I would have to contact an attorney in order to get official information regarding the land.

The real break for me came completely unexpectedly. Gailė and I with the children were in the middle of filming a program about our move to Lithuania from America called International House Hunters. We filmed for five days. On the last day of filming the program, I received a Facebook message from a complete stranger, Zita Givienė, who told me that her elderly mother knew my Grandparents and that her parents' farm had been located next to their land.

Well, this was a complete shock and an amazing event in my life. Zita invited us to visit and meet her mother. They lived in Antakalnis, Kaišiadorys County, about five minutes away from my Grandparents' land. Zita's mother was quite elderly by extremely intelligent and lively. She told us so much.

We drove to the land. There, still standing was the house that my Grandparents had built over 125 years ago. My Grandfather was born in 1877. I was deeply moved. The house itself was made out of logs with decorative boards laid over the logs. I could see that at one time this was a very nice home. The house and the farm buildings still standing were in very poor condition but amazingly there were people living in the house. Zita's mother described every inch of the land and buildings. The only reason the house was still standing was that the Soviet collective farm manager lived in the house.

We went inside the house and there I saw the place where they had lived and died. Both Grandparents passed away inside the house. My Grandmother passed away two days after my Grandfather had died. Their bedroom was where the wake was held. My Father, brothers, and sisters were all born in the house.

As we left the house I was shown the woods not far from the farm where my Father's brother Klemensas and a friend had been ambushed and killed by the Soviet troops. Mushroom hunters had found the bodies, badly decayed and mutilated by the Soviets. The people secretly

wrapped the bodies in moss and brought the bodies to a house, no longer standing about 300 meters from my Grandparents' house. A wake was held and then they were buried.

It is impossible to truly and accurately describe my feelings. I feel so fortunate to have seen not just the land but to feel the spirit of my ancestors.

Do you have any relatives in Lithuania? If yes, what is your relationship with them?

I haven't found any direct relatives to date. I have no living relatives in Lithuania that I am aware of at this time.

## The Future

What awaits you in Lithuania? What are your plans as far as your family is concerned and as far as your family history is concerned?

Our plans are to be as involved as much as possible in the social, economic and cultural life of Lithuania. This is our home now. I think of not just Lithuania but exploring Europe as much as possible. I have dual Lithuanian/American citizenship as do all of my children. This gives us great flexibility as regards to educational and professional opportunities for us all. We are all happy and thrilled to be living in Lithuania.



The Stančiauskas family children attend the Vilnius Balsiai High School.

In Commemoration of the 90th Birth Anniversary and the 10th Death Anniversary of the Lithuanian Honorary Consul General Vytautas Čekanauskas

## The Appointment and Recognition of Vytautas Čekanauskas as the Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Los Angeles in 1977

By Prof. Juozas Skirius  
Vytautas Magnus University Education Academy



Consul Anicetas Simutis with Janina and Vytautas Čekanauskas. December 11, 1977, Los Angeles.

Vytautas Čekanauskas, future electronics engineer and Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Los Angeles, was born ninety years ago on March 7, 1929 in Kaunas, Lithuania. In 1944, he fled from Lithuania to Germany together with his father, and in 1949, he moved to the USA. From 1951 to 1952, Čekanauskas served in the United States Army and fought in the Korean War. He was injured, awarded the Purple Heart and other medals. In 1957 he graduated from the University of Illinois and moved to Los Angeles, where he worked for the North American Aviation and Hughes Aircraft company until 1991. As a young man, Čekanauskas was active in the Scout Movement. From 1967 on, he was active in the BALF (Bendrasis Amerikos Lietuvių Fondas - United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America) and ALT (Amerikos Lietuvių Taryba - Lithuanian American Council). He was also a member of the Lithuanian Republicans, worked in the committees of the occupied Baltic nations and other European nations, as well as in the Lithuanian American National Union. In 1973 the Western District of the Lithuanian American Community elected him to the 4th Parliament of the World Lithuanian Community. He was a member of many American organizations, including the American Legion. In 1976, he led the Los Angeles Ethnic Groups Committee that organized the commemoration of the Bicentennial of the US Independence.

From 1968 to 1973, Čekanauskas was the Chairman of the Parents Committee and a history teacher at the Lithuanian School in Los Angeles. He was married to Janina Budriūnaitė Čekanauskienė and raised three daughters: Daiva, Rita, and Vida.

Alongside with participation in the Lithuanian activities, he often assisted Lithuanian consul Dr. Julius Bielskis during various events. The consul even recommended him to the position of a press attaché. Therefore,

it is not surprising that after Dr. Bielskis's death, most of the organizations in Los Angeles wished Čekanauskas to take the consul's position. However, it was not something that was achieved in a simple and easy way.

### The continuance of Lithuanian representation prior to 1990

After the Second World War and during the Cold War, the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service abroad and the leadership of Lithuanian immigrants deemed their main political goal to be the preservation of the status of non-recognition of Lithuania's annexation by the Western countries, primarily the United States. The promise not to recognize the occupation of Lithuania and the other Baltic States constantly given by the US Presidents illustrated the fact that Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian representations were functional, even though just symbolically. Embassies, consulates, and honorary consulates were called "the lights of independence." They were important to Lithuanian immigrants and strengthened their hope of re-establishing their homeland's statehood.

It is understandable that the question of the Baltic representations constantly emerged in the relations and negotiations between the US and the USSR, and this question was not exactly convenient for the US politicians who tried to improve the relations between the two countries. In the negotiations, the Americans argued that the representations of the former Baltic States would be functioning until the representatives appointed by those states were alive. It was quite dangerous because the diplomats who worked there were in their senior years. This situation prompted the leaders of the diplomatic service and the diaspora to find ways to maintain the representations as long as possible, especially since, as one diplomat said, they "were hanging by a thread." The above-mentioned American position regarding the Baltic States was influenced by the ever-increasing strain in the relationship between the US and the USSR. Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian immigrant communities and diplomatic services successfully took advantage of this strain. For example, after Ronald Reagan became the US President, the US State Department's dangerous stance to refrain from confirming new career diplomats and consuls was changed. (1) It became possible to choose the staff of the embassies from the immigrant communities. Of course,



Front row: Daiva, Rita, and Vida Čekanauskas. Second row: Consul Anicetas Simutis, Janina Čekanauskienė, Dr. Kazys Bobelis, Vytautas Čekanauskas, and Adelė and Alfonsas Budriūnas. Third row: Alfonsa Pažiūrienė, Antanas Skirius, composer Bronius Budriūnas. December 11, 1977, Los Angeles.

it was easier to appoint honorary consuls because they could be US citizens. However, there were no guarantees that they would be confirmed. Efforts were needed to achieve that. Besides, certain obstacles were created by immigrants themselves.

The diplomatic archives are now available, and they allow us to see the complex processes that took place in trying to preserve the functioning of independent representations under the conditions of occupied Lithuania. They are well illustrated with the history of preserving one of the honorary consulates.

### A candidate to the position of the Lithuanian consul in Los Angeles emerges

It all started on December 26, 1976, after the death of the first Honorary Consul General of Lithuania in Los Angeles, Julius Bielskis (1891-1976). The question of who will take the vacant post immediately arose to the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service and the immigrant community. Lithuanian representative Dr. Stasys Bačkis sent the Lithuanian Consul General in New York Anicetas Simutis to attend the funeral of Dr. Bielskis at the beginning of January 1977. In addition to attending the funeral, Consul Simutis was obligated to "discreetly investigate the matter of whom the Los Angeles Lithuanian community would want to suggest to the post of the Lithuanian Honorary Consul in case the US government would agree to confirm the consul." (2) Thus, the question of the continuity of the activities of the Honorary Consul in Los Angeles



Lithuania's ambassador Stasys Lozoraitis, Jr., Honorary Consul Vytautas Čekanauskas, and Father Jonas Kučingis. November 25, 1987, Los Angeles.

was being addressed. It is interesting to note that the Latvian and Estonian communities in Los Angeles were also working on this matter. In Los Angeles, Consul Simutis met with the Estonian Honorary Consul Ernest Lauer, who advised to do everything in order to maintain the Honorary Consulate of Lithuania. According to him, it would be very strange if the Lithuanian community which was bigger than both Estonian and Latvian communities put together would not have its own consulate in Los Angeles.

It turned out that the matter could not be solved discreetly, i.e. not publicly because, as Consul Simutis admitted, after he arrived in Los Angeles, "every Lithuanian whom he met would ask him right away who was going to take the place of the late Dr. Bielskis." In response, Consul Simutis was forced to advise the Lithuanian community to propose its own candidates from whom the head of the diplomatic service would be able to choose. (3) It was a mistake. Such a way to solve the question had given rise to the deepening of the rift between Californian Lithuanians as they began quite profusely proposing their potential candidates.

Before leaving Los Angeles, Consul Simutis already had several suggestions. Lithuanian community leader Alena Devenienė recommended several individuals who had some working contacts with the former Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely Stasys J. Paltus, Jonas Kutra, and Hypatia Yčaitė Petkuvienė. (However, later it turned out that they had almost no working relations with the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Several

other Lithuanians actively involved in the community work were suggested, including engineer Vytautas Čekanauskas, homeowner Kazys Karuža, and actress Rūta Kilmonytė Lee. Jonas Kučingis, the pastor of St. Casimir Lithuanian Parish in Los Angeles, suggested two candidates, namely Vytautas Čekanauskas and Nida Žibutė Brinkienė. (4)

After returning to New York, Consul Simutis summed up the results of his visit and came to the conclusion that it was necessary to have such an honorary consul general in Los Angeles who would be "a robust and energetic helper." In his opinion, "engineer Vytautas Čekanauskas would be the most suitable candidate in every respect." At that time, Mr. Čekanauskas was 48 years old, fluent in Lithuanian and English, well-established and able to financially

"maintain the dignity suited for the consulate." His wife, Janina, was an artist and a singer. They were raising three daughters who attended Lithuanian Saturday school, and at home, the family spoke Lithuanian. Mr. Čekanauskas's relationship with the older generation of immigrants was very friendly which was rare. (5) He was active in the public affairs as the President of the Los Angeles Division of the Lithuanian American Council and Vice-President of the Los Angeles Division of BALF (Bendrasis Amerikos lietuvių fondas - United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America). Mr. Čekanauskas was also a member of several American organizations, including the American Legion. It was noted that he had contacts and was known in the government of the City of Los Angeles. Besides, in 1971 Dr. Bielskis suggested Mr. Čekanauskas for the position of "an honorary consular attaché for press affairs." (6) This concise Čekanauskas's description given by Consul Simutis laid the foundation for his future diplomatic career. However, it did not happen immediately due to the fact that some representatives of the Lithuanian American community showed strong activity in trying to "push through" their candidates, and regretfully, belittle others.

#### Lithuanian Americans divide in their views

At that time, the Lithuanian community in Los Angeles, and especially its leaders, apparently felt that Vytautas Čekanauskas was the most likely candidate for this post. However, some didn't like it. Dissatisfaction was apparent even among some of the leaders of the Lithuanian Ameri-

can Community. The old and persistent disputes between the Lithuanian American Community and the Lithuanian American Council regarding the priority in political activities also had an effect on this issue. Vytautas Čekanauskas found himself in the midst of political rivals. The Lithuanian American Community opposition was formed and on January 27, 1977, it proposed two more candidates for the post, namely physics professor Dr. Jonas Stasys Žmuidzinas and one of the richest Lithuanians, Algis Raulinaitis, who soon refused to raise his candidacy. (7)

In their own turn, the representatives of 18 Lithuanian organizations and societies in Los Angeles, came together in a meeting on February 17th, and wrote a letter to Stasys Lozoraitis, Stasys Antanas Bačkis, and Anicetas Simutis, expressing their wish to see Vytautas Čekanauskas in the position of Honorary Consul General and reiterating his advantages over other candidates.

At the beginning of March, Stasys Lozoraitis received information that Dr. Nida Žibutė Binkienė and actress Rūta Lee were suggested as possible candidates once again. Vytautas Čekanauskas was also suggested twice again. The head of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service did not see anything wrong with the appearance of more candidates. He wanted to have as much information as possible about all of them. According to him, the main condition was that "a candidate would not be involved in any controversies in the Lithuanian community at the time."(8)

Only on April 7, 1977, Stasys Lozoraitis made the final decision to approve the candidacy of Vytautas Čekanauskas. Besides, this candidate was supported by Monsignor Ladas Tulaba, Rector of the St. Casimir's Lithuanian College in Rome who had been asked to evaluate the candidates as an observer "from the side." Prelate Tulaba was impressed by Mr. Čekanauskas's impartiality saying that "he was neither a Christian Democrat nor a frontininkas; he did not belong to any party." It could be assumed that the Chairman of the Lithuanian American Council, Dr. Kazys Bobelis, strongly supported the candidacy of Mr. Čekanauskas, and it played a significant part as well. Meanwhile, Ambassador Stasys Bačkis remained neutral for a long time. Once again, his exaggerated precaution became evident. Only on August 1st, Stasys Bačkis wrote in his letter to Stasys Lozoraitis that he was constantly receiving letters in support of as well as



Vytautas and Janina Čekanauskas and Gražina and Vytautas Landsbergis. May 9, 1991, Los Angeles.



Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and Vytautas and Janina Čekanauskas. Los Angeles.



President Valdas Adamkus and Mrs. Alma Adamkus with Vytautas and Janina Čekanauskas. July 29, 2000, Los Angeles.



Vytautas Čekanauskas. February 13, 2005, Los Angeles.

in opposition to Vytautas Čekanauskas, and he "stopped paying attention to this because there were no other serious candidates (except Čekanauskas, author's note) anyways. It would all depend on the answer from the S[tate] D[e]partment], which, hopefully, would come soon." (10)

Vytautas Čekanauskas is appointed and recognized

On August 26, 1977, Lithuania's representative Stasys Bačkis, upon the authorization by Stasys Lozoraitis, informed the US Secretary of State in writing that Vytau-

tas Čekanauskas has been appointed Honorary Consul General of Lithuania in Los Angeles and asked for his confirmation. On October 6th of the same year, the US State Department replied to the Lithuanian representative in writing saying that Vytautas Čekanauskas was confirmed as the Honorary Consul General of Lithuania in Los Angeles, and in the same letter, he enclosed the certificate of consular status (11). This way, having pulled through all the "Lithuanian peripeteia" in 1977, it was ensured that the Lithuanian Honorary Consulate on the West Coast of the United States would continue its functions.

The Lithuanian American press recorded the first steps of the new consul. On November 20th, he took part in the commemoration of the Independent Lithuanian Armed Forces that was organized by the Lithuanian National Guard, the Birutė organization, and the Ramovė organization in St. Casimir's Lithuanian Parish Hall. K. Karuža, the Chairman of the local Juozas Daumantas National Guard Company, invited Honorary Consul Vytautas Čekanauskas to present the Order of the Star of the National Guard to Stasys Paltus, a prominent lawyer, public figure, journalist, and member of the National Guard. Medals were also presented to Uksas, Orloviene, and Janušauskas, all members of the National Guard (12). The Los Angeles Lithuanian Community Committee was formed in order to organize a public event on December 11, 1977, during which the new Honorary Consul General was introduced to the public in St. Casimir's Lithuanian Parish Hall (13). Among the guests that were invited were diplomats Dr. Stasys Antanas Bačkis, Anicetas Simutis, Juzefa Daužvardienė, Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania Dr. Kęstutis J. Valiūnas, Chairman of the Lithuanian American Council Dr. Kazys Bobelis and Chairman of the Lithuanian American Community Algimantas Gečys. Alfonsas Tumas, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, promised to cover travel expenses for the Lithuanian diplomats. Anicetas Simutis represented the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service, Dr. Kazys Bobelis participated, and A. Činga congratulated Vytautas Čekanauskas on behalf of Algimantas Gečys. Estonian Honorary Consul Eric Lauer and his wife attended the festivities as did the Chairman of the Latvian Community, the Chairman of the Committee of the Enslaved European Nations, and heads of several American organizations. Congratulations came from approximately 25 organizations. The organizers of the event were surprised because the parish hall which could accommodate over 400 people ran out of space and close to a hundred people had to left outside (14).

After the restoration of Lithuanian independence, Honorary Consul General Vytautas Čekanauskas continued to work for the benefit of Lithuania until his death on November 30, 2009.





Sitting from left: Janina Čekanauskas and Rūta Lee. Standing from left: Vytautas Čekanauskas, Los Angeles male quartet, Ona Katilienė, and Juozas Pupius. September 10, 2006, Los Angeles.



Father Tomas Karanauskas with Vytautas and Janina Čekanauskas. May 24, 2009, Los Angeles.



From left: Vytautas Čekanauskas, Aldona Brazdžionis, Bernardas Brazdžionis, and Janina Čekanauskas. Los Angeles.

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2. Copy of S. A. Bačkis's confidential letter to the head of Lithuanian Diplomatic Service S. Lozoraitis written on December 29, 1976. LCVA, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 69.
3. Ibid, ap. 1, b. 32, l. 237.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. S. A. Bačkis's confidential letter to S. Lozoraitis in Rome written on February 8, 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 13.
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10. A. Bačkis's letter to S. Lozoraitis in Rome written on August 1, 1977 (copy received by A. Simutis in New York). LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 77.
11. Ponas Vytautas Čekanauskas pripažintas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu Los Angeles, Kalifornijoje. *Lietuvių dienos*. November 1977, nr. 9, p. 8; Vytautas Čekanauskas paskirtas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu. *Lietuviai Amerikos Vakaruose*. November 1977, nr. 11, p. 1.
12. Naujojo Lietuvos garbės konsulo Los Angeles, Cal. pirmieji darbai. *Vienybė*. November 25, 1977.
13. Chairman of the Organization Committee Alfonsas Tumas's letter to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, DC written on November 25, 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 99.
14. A. Simutis's confidential Pro Memoria written on December 15, 1977, Nr. 1686/45-B addressed to the members of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service. Ibid, l. 100.

# A Pilgrimage from Lemont, Illinois to the Holy Land

Thirty-four pilgrims participated in a Matulaitis Mission organized special trip

By Ramunė Kubilius



The group of pilgrims on a trip in the Holy Land. Photo credit: America Israel Tours.

When people mention a pilgrimage, they usually have in mind the religious term referring to a spiritual (and physical) journey to a holy place. It is a term used by persons of various religions, and usually is a journey made by a group to a special destination that speaks about people who once lived there. In bygone days, pilgrimages were made by sea and land, and now one may fly to the destination and travel by bus from one site to another. To this day, pilgrimages still involve a lot of walking.

To Christians, there are a number of important pilgrimage destinations- France, Italy, Portugal, and definitely the Holy Land. It is not uncommon to hear about excursions to the Holy Land by various groups from all over the world, including the United States and Lithuania. In recent years, Lithuanian American Catholic parishes from Los Angeles, CA and Southfield, MI, have organized pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and this year, a group of pilgrims consisted of thirty-four persons (with a spiritual advisor) who traveled there during Lent, from March 30 through April 8. The idea of organizing a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was initiated by Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Mission (Lemont, IL) director, Rev. Algis Baniulis, SJ. He had earlier spearheaded other Mission-organized trips, to holy places in Mexico City, Washington, DC, and Kentucky.

Most of the travelers participating in the Spring 2019 trip were Matulaitis Mission members, and they were joined by members of other Lithuanian Catholic parishes in Chicago (Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and Cicero, IL (St. Anthony of Padua), as well as several friends, including one from Seattle, WA and one from Toronto, Canada. Because Rev. Baniulis was unable to travel with the group this time, Rev. Lukas Laniauskas, SJ, a Chicago area Jesuit high school vice-president and theology doctoral student served as spiritual advisor on the trip, becoming an essential thirty-fifth pilgrim. He actually was the only person in the group who had been to the Holy Land previously. Father Laniauskas grew up in Cleveland, and since his ordination, he has often said Mass and been part of religious ceremonies at the Matulaitis Mission church and other Lithuanian Catholic parishes in the Chicago area, so he knew many of the pilgrims beforehand. Mission council member Irena Vilimas served as coordinator of the trip, doing a lot of research to ensure a schedule and logistics that would be interesting and productive. She made sure to keep the pilgrims informed prior to and during the trip. The group fully appreciated the amount of time, effort, and heart that Rev. Laniauskas, Rev. Baniulis, and Irena Vilimas put into planning and making the trip meaningful for all participants.

## A FEW HIGHLIGHTS

The Holy Land is a region of historical significance to different world religions- Jewish, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Islam. History and geographic locations are intertwined and connected, and the group visited places of significance in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible- Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Cana, to name just a few. Walking through the Old City of Jerusalem one day took the pilgrims on the Way of the Cross past the markets, to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Another stop for Mass was to the now 130-year old Pontifical Institute-Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center, a complex that features a beautiful church devoted to Mary, a guest hotel, a cheese and wine restaurant, and a gift shop featuring many interesting religious items.

Bodies of water visited by the group were historically significant and symbolic- the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea, as were visits to higher elevations- Mount Tabor, Mount of Beatitudes, Mount Carmel, Mount of Olives, and Masada. The travel agency with which the Mission worked, made reservations, so that daily Mass could be said in unique and inspiring churches and chapels- in Cana, Capernaum, Magdala, Betania, Dominus Fleuit, Holy Sepulcher, and Shepherd's Field. In Magdala, Mass was celebrated in a beautiful modern church which had an altar in the shape of an ark, while in the nearby grounds, excavations were underway to uncover an ancient synagogue. Mass in Shepherd's Field was in a chapel built into a cave, very much like the one in which the Holy Family took refuge during the birth of Jesus.

In the Holy Land, the Franciscan order traces its presence to 1217, and the official title of Holy Land Franciscans province is The Custody of the Holy Land. "Custody" refers to the task of caring for the sacred shrines of the Holy Land, a role recognized by Pope Clement VI in 1342. So, that meant that the Matulaitis Mission pilgrims were met and greeted at each site by a member of the Franciscan order, and the Franciscans were from many countries around the world).

## SOME LITHUANIAN CONNECTIONS

There is a World Lithuanian Community chapter in Israel, and it would have been nice to meet with



Father Lukas Laniauskas points out the Lithuanian Aušros Vartai (The Gates of Dawn) mosaic in the courtyard of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. The mosaic paintings in the Basilica of Annunciation are hanging on the wall around the front courtyard and inside the upper Church. What is interesting in this Annunciation display is that each mosaic bears the characteristics of the contributing nation.



Altar in the church at Magdala.



After Mass at Magdala, Jesuit Father Lukas Laniauskas and one of the Franciscans who cares for the church there.

its members during the trip to the Holy Land. Some “hellos” were exchanged in Vilnius when Matulaitis Mission council members who were planning the trip happened to encounter Israel chapter representatives at the World Lithuanian Community chapter marketplace in the Summer of 2018. Informational e-mail exchanges also took place prior to the 2019 trip. However, an in-person meeting of the two groups could not be fit into the tight pilgrimage travel schedule. What did occur, though, were several brief encounters that showed how small the world is in which we live. While at the airport in Chicago and at several sites in the Holy Land, on more than one occasion, the group encountered a fellow pilgrim group from a parish in Wilmette, Illinois. Matulaitis Mission group members could be heard speaking Lithuanian among themselves, and this served as a point of connection to meet fellow pilgrims- from Lithuania. During one stop, the group met a Belgian Brother of St. John who has lived and worked in Utena, Lithuania, for the past 16 years (and in that time, became a fluent Lithuanian language speaker). At another stop, the adult Matulaitis Mission pilgrims met a younger pilgrim group, high schoolers and their teachers from the Vilnius region of Lithuania, some who were of Lithuanian and others who were of Polish descent. Two women pilgrims from Klaipėda, Lithuania, introduced themselves to the group and were blessed by Father Laniauskas at a stop on the banks of the Jordan River.

During visits to various holy places, it was an interesting challenge to examine various framed prayers and



Some of the pilgrims prepare to enter the Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem.

religious artwork from around the world, looking for (and sometimes successfully finding) those in English- and Lithuanian. One can't help but wonder about whether pilgrims, the religious, or locals played a role in advocating for the languages of the prayers or the artwork from various parts of the world.

#### A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS

Some fellow travelers to the Holy Land probably would agree that reading (or re-reading) some books after the trip may increase the level of consciousness and comprehension about the significance of the sites and scenes experienced. One Lithuanian language book, “Šventoji žemė: kelionės vadovas” (The Holy Land: A Travel Guide), by Lionginas Virbalas

SJ was published in Kaunas, Lithuania in 2018. An English language book published in 2016, and entitled “Jesus: A Pilgrimage” was authored by Jesuit, James Martin. It features much information and, according to blurbs: “lighthearted stories about traveling through the Holy Land with a fellow (and funny) Jesuit, visiting important sites in the life of Jesus”. Reading about this pilgrimage would reinforce the information heard throughout the trip from our spiritual advisor, the very knowledgeable English-speaking guide in Israel and the sincere guide in Bethlehem.

There are many reasons why one might want to travel to historic and far-flung places. Some persons prefer to travel alone or in small groups of family members and friends. The opportunity for Christians to be pilgrims offers the advantage of a group of like-minded travelers who have similar goals for their travels. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land can be exhausting, if one wishes to take advantage of the unique opportunity to see so many historical sites with religious significance. As pilgrims are often reminded, a pilgrimage is not a typical vacation—it has a whole spiritual dimension. Yes, one must set aside the funds for the trip and prepare for the trip. Once there, as with travel to many popular destinations, one must also overcome a level of travel fatigue and lines at some sites. The Holy Land is a desirable destination.

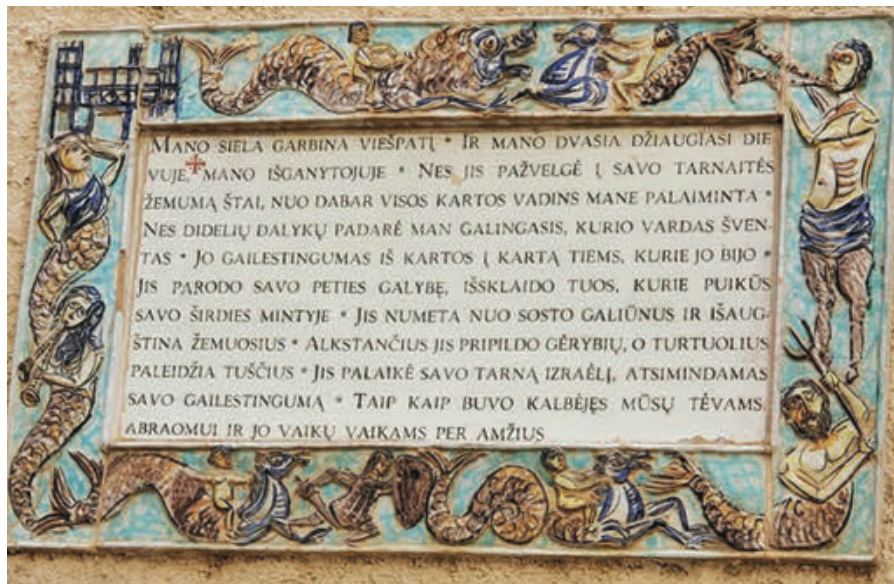
It is said that life is a pilgrimage. Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis Roman Catholic Mission pilgrimage group members who travelled to the Holy Land in Spring 2019 will probably be like other pilgrims before them- their pilgrimage experience will be long-term and continuing... There is also quite a bit to learn about being a pilgrim.

Accurately conveying the theological significance requires more background and training than this writer has. As for the personal significance, that is something with unique spiritual highlights and “ah ha” moments experienced by each pilgrim in the group. If recent few years are an indication, the trip to the Holy Land has now become one in a series of Matulaitis Mission organized pilgrimages. For those interested in a unique journey of spiritual significance, try becoming pilgrims, and join a parish or other group.

*All photos are by Ramunė Kubilius.*



Jerusalem cross. The Jerusalem cross, a major symbol in Christianity can be found everywhere. The Jerusalem cross is believed to represent several things. Historians note that the four crosses surrounding the large center cross represent the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The four crosses also are believed to represent the four corners of the earth, in which Jesus desired His word to be proclaimed by His disciples. The large cross symbolizes Christ. Other historians believe that the five crosses together symbolize the five wounds Jesus suffered on the cross. The four small crosses represent the four wounds of Jesus’ hands and feet, while the large cross signifies Jesus’ pierced heart.



Magnificat in the Lithuanian language at the Church of the Visitation. On the wall opposite the entrance to the lower church are forty-two ceramic tablets bearing the verses of the Magnificat in as many different languages.

# FREEDOM IS NEAR

By Paula Martinson



Onyx nuzzled up against her mother in the cold barn and could feel many bruises and cuts on her mother. One door to the barn hung open letting in cold air. Onyx eyed the door knowing that her mom would not be leaving with her. All her life Onyx suffered mistreatment along with her mother who also endured pain and suffering

her entire life. Slowly, Onyx's mother shut her eyes as her breathing lessened. This time, Onyx would never see her mother's beautiful eyes again. Onyx cried into her mother lifeless body. While mourning for her mother's passing, Onyx heard a noise coming from the detached cabin that sat a short distance from the barn lied.

“Why in the world is that barn door open Samuel?” spoke a gruff voice.

“No idea Pa. Thought I closed it. The latch must be broken again”, came a less harsh tone.

The gruff voice bellowed, “Well then get to it and close it now! Take this rope to tie it shut if you must.”

As instructed, the ranch owner’s son took the rope and headed out into the snowy, cold night. Onyx knew she must go now. She couldn’t live her whole life to eat and sleep. She needed a purpose. Onyx dashed out the open door not thinking of anything, but to run. She ran toward the forest, still hearing the wind rock the barn back and forth. Finally, she made it to a clearing at the edge of the forest where no noise lingered except a gentle breeze. Onyx rested her head on a log and fell asleep.

Onyx awoke the next morning to the same gentle breeze, but much more snow piled around her. She arose and shook the snowy blanket off her back. Suddenly everything flooded back in her thoughts about what happened the night before. She felt a piece of her heart ripping apart. She looked around and tried to think where she might be, but nothing came to mind. She walked around a bit until she could find where a path used to be before it was coated in snow. No branches or ferns covered that line on the ground so she trusted that she trudged a worn path. Onyx’s muscles ached from all the running the night before, but not even close to how much her heart ached. She tramped along the path as fast as she could walk wanting to get out of the shadowy woods. As she followed the path it seemed to become more visible. This gave Onyx courage to keep going.

After several hours Onyx approached a clearing deep in snow with a well-kept barn with noises of chickens clucking and cows mooing. As she came closer to the barn Onyx remembered with tear filled eyes the horrible life she lived and her mother’s final moments. But Onyx believed she could live a new and better life. As Onyx drew nearer the noises from the barn became louder and louder. Onyx strode through deep snow to the doorstep of the barn. She hoped she would find someone that could tell her where she was. Onyx slowly pushed open the barn door with her snout. There she felt such warm air and smelled clean straw. She heard a deep neigh coming from the stables and followed that sound to a cozy little stall near the end. She looked inside through a small window at the bottom of the door. There lay a large, muscular and content horse.

“Excuse me?” Onyx whispered.

“Who are you?” Asked the horse opening one eye, and twitching his ear in her direction. “Can’t you see I’m done for the day?”

“Yes sir, but do you mind telling me where I am?”

“You stand in Scarecrow Farmlands.”

“Scarecrow Farmlands...?” That did not sound good.

“It goes for miles and miles around with plenty of farms all around here.”

It dawned upon Onyx that she may not really have escaped the place she came from.

“How do I get out of Scarecrow Farmlands?” Onyx asked, pleading with the big horse.

“You need to head west to find the nearest village.”

“Thank you so much sir,” Onyx thanked him and headed for the door.

Onyx galloped west with as much power her legs as could muster. Soon though, the sun began to set. She lay down on a grassy spot with no snow to regain her energy, but not for long. In front of her lay a cornfield, with some tall dead stalks rustling in the breeze. Onyx knew cornfields were hard enough to run across in the day, but in the dark, it would be close to impossible. She would have no way to tell what direction she was heading in. Once Onyx regained her strength she galloped into the cornfield.

“Just go straight, just go straight,” Onyx whispered to herself over and over again.

Onyx slowed and suddenly her heart tensed with shock. Had she started to drift to a side? Was she too distracted talking to herself that she didn’t even go straight? Onyx ran again. She didn’t want to be stuck in a big cornfield alone in the dark and barely any light lit the field now. After a few more minutes of running, she didn’t have a clue how to find west. She just had to wait until sunrise. Onyx rested her head on some fallen corn stalks and drifted off to sleep in the chilly night. When Onyx felt the warmth of the sun hit the side of her face, she jolted awake. It took her a moment to remember how she got there. When it came back to her, she looked around to find west and when she did; Onyx ran with all her might and finally felt her hooves touch grass again. Onyx collapsed in the snowy grass breathing heavily. Then she saw a gate about 50 feet away and next to the gate a sign read: Thanks for Visiting Scarecrow Farms! Come Again Soon!

Relief rushed over Onyx as she slowly paced up to the gate. What a wonderful morning. If she went through the gate she would be free. Onyx hesitantly put one hoof out and then quickly scampered through the gate to freedom and the promise and purpose it held.



Paula Martinson

# current events

## Security

...President Dalia Grybauskaitė visited the Pennsylvania National Guard (PANG) during her visit to the United Nations, the Council of Women World Leaders, and YIVO Institute in NYC. She met with Commander Major General Anthony J. Carrelli in celebration of 25 years of security partnership. The President was accompanied by Rolandas Kriščiūnas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S. and Col. Gražvydas Liubinas, Lithuanian Embassy Defense Attaché. Most recently the PANG used its summer exercises to construct facilities at a Lithuanian airbase and plans were made to help in implementing the cybersecurity center in Kaunas.



Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli, left, Pennsylvania's adjutant general, and Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė receive a brief on the Stryker armored fighting vehicle during a visit at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., on March 13, 2019. (U.S. Defense Department)

...The President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, made an official visit to Lithuania and visited the National Cyber Security Center under the Ministry of Defense. Last year President Grybauskaitė visited Tbilisi, Georgia. Although Georgia is 3,000 miles from Lithuania, it also faces Russian creeping occupation and shares common security concerns. Lithuania reports that last year it faced 55,000 cyber-attacks aimed at paralyzing the functions of public authorities, energy, finance, and transportation sectors. In March Lithuanian troops will participate in joint exercises in Georgia. Georgia is working to become a full participant of the European Union and future member of NATO.

...Russia powered up a new gas power plant in Kalin-

ingrad to make it more self-reliant since it currently depends on electricity via Lithuania but Lithuania plans on disconnecting itself from the Russian power grid by 2025 and connect to the European grid. This plant joins two other gas-powered plants that were completed in March 2018. In May 2019 Russia plans to test Kaliningrad's capacity by unplugging from the Lithuanian supplied power. A backup fourth coal power plant is scheduled to be powered up in 2020.

...Russia accused Lithuania of unfriendly and provocative acts for the trial and conviction in absentia of former Soviet Defense Minister, Dmitry Yazov, 94, for war crimes during the January 1991 fight for independence when 14 Lithuanian civilians were killed and 700 wounded. He was sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison. He and 66 other Soviet-era officials from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine were put on trial in 2016 and is just wrapping up with sentences ranging from 4 to 14 years. Consequently, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Linas Linkevičius, advises the four Lithuanian judges and prosecutor not to travel to Russia or Russian friendly countries because of concern of retaliation. In a related action, the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports that the Lithuanian Embassy in Moscow received a threatening letter from a Russian veterans' organization which advised the Embassy's employees and their families leave Moscow within a month.

## Business

...The Cognizant Group has been recognized with a Top Employer 2019 award. With 680 employees in Lithuania, they provide services for business optimization and has set up IT service centers for banking, pension administration, and insurance. A spinoff from Dun & Bradstreet with headquarters in Teaneck, NJ, the global company has 220 offices and 281,600 employees (150,000 in India). The award is presented after evaluation of 100 topics including areas of talent recruitment and management, workforce planning, the involvement of new employees, learning and development, performance management, leadership promotion, career planning, compensation and benefits, and the internal corporate culture. They encourage lifelong learning. For Lithuanians who serve Scandinavian clients initial work includes five to six months learning Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. The company encourages the formation of volunteer committees for socially responsible goals, e.g. help for senior citizens, which enables aspiring managers to hone their skills.

...The Norwegian IT company Omega plans on doubling



its 25 employees in Klaipeda over the next few years. Omega has expertise in project management software support for oil and gas industries and the public sector. Clients include Equinor, BP, Maersk Oil, Shell, Chevron, and the Oslo Municipality. The local office provides internships for students from Klaipeda University and other colleges.

...A German structural engineering firm, Eisfeld Ingenieure AG, will hire 20 professionals for its new office in Vilnius. Headquartered in Kassel, Eisfeld has 75 years of structural engineering experience in addition to utilizing the latest Building Information Modeling (BIM) to manage the digital planning processes for one-stop support for the construction industry. They are working with Vilnius University and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University to create Artificial Intelligence solutions to automate structural design.

...Building on the opportunities provided by Brexit, Solomon Securities is looking to build a team of 75 finance, management, sales, and IT professionals to establish a new headquarters in Vilnius. Solomon's primary focus is to bring its internationally based clients into Lithuania with aims to become a market leader in creating Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plus institutional capital market liquidity for Lithuania 365 days a year. General Manager, Mantas Katinas, plans on providing performance coaching for front line personnel to improve client services. Vilnius is already home to other U.S. based financial services companies including NASDAQ, Western Union, and Moody's.

### General



President Dalia Grybauskaitė is meeting Pope Francis in Vatican City.

...President Dalia Grybauskaitė visited the Vatican and thanked Pope Francis for his September 2018 visit to Lithuania for the centennial celebration of independence. She presented him with a children-decorated jar of honey and a photo album about Lithuanian freedom fighters "The Partisans of Lithuania: 1944-1986". They expressed shared respect for international law with respect to Ukraine and Georgia to fight aggression and expressed support to fight violence and abuse, reduce social exclusion, promote environmental protection, and tackle climate change.

...Two satellites from Lithuania were included in a payload of 29 launched by the Indian Space Research Organization from its facility in Sriharikota in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh. One of the Lithuanian satellites will be used to connect devices to the web for the "Internet of Things". India has become only the fourth power to demonstrate an anti-satellite weapon after the U.S., Russia, and China. In 2014 it launched an unmanned Mars mission which cost about 10% of NASA's MAVEN Mars mission and in 2022 it expects to put a man in space for the bargain price of \$1.2 B.

...In 2018 there were 30 cases of measles reported in Lithuania. So far in 2019, there are 310 cases with 149 cases reported in Kaunas. Sixty-five percent of cases have resulted in hospitalization due to complications including pneumonia, and inner ear inflammation. Although vaccinations are free, the percentage of children being vaccinated has dropped from 97% in 2009 to 92.2% in 2018 which is below the 95% threshold considered the minimum to prevent an outbreak.

...Evaldas Rimašauskas of Vilnius has pleaded guilty in New York of defrauding Google and Facebook of \$100 million via a wire fraud scheme from 2013 to 2016. The companies have recouped most of the money from accounts in Cyprus, Hong Kong, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania. Sentencing is scheduled for July 24 and a plea agreement recommends that he be sent to prison for at least 9 years, forfeit \$50 million, and face likely deportation.

...The Seimas voted to allow prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment that after 20 years can ask the court to reduce their sentence to a finite length. This bill comes in response to the European Court of Human Rights directive to offer at least the hope of possible release. Lithuania has over 100 life prisoners.

## Partisan Adolfas Ramanauskas - Vanagas Honored

By Aleksandras Radžius



A display honoring partisan leader Adolfas Ramanauskas - Vanagas. From left, Vytautas Brasauskas and Aleksandras Radžius.

Since the remains of partisan leader Adolfas Ramanauskas - Vanagas were found last year, a special display was prepared to honor Adolfas Ramanauskas - Vanagas during the Lithuanian Independence Commemoration in Baltimore of March 9, 2019.

A well-known photograph of the partisan was displayed, the one where he is kneeling on one knee holding a WWII Russian SVT-41 semi-automatic rifle and on each of his shoulders sits a hawk. The warm memory our people have for his memory was represented by three candles on each side of the photograph. And, in front of the photograph, were pine twigs and cones reminding us of how our forests protected the partisans.

Behind Ramanauskas's photograph stood our tricolor flag. On the right was a poster depicting the partisan on the February 16, 1949 Declaration of Lithuanian

Independence. In the document, Ramanauskas's signature could be seen and underneath the document was another photograph of him together with photos of the rest of the signatures. In front of the poster, a German WWII MP-40 submachine gun was placed. And to the left of Ramanauskas's photo was another poster showing photographs of partisans individually and in groups. In front of this poster, a Russian WWII PPSH-41 submachine gun was placed.

The table on which these items were displayed was covered with a German WWII infantryman's pup tent, with a camouflage pattern on one side and light green on the other. Such tents and similar ones sheltered our partisans during the early years of the Partisan War, e.g. from 1944 to about 1946.

## News from Our Community

On March 23, 2019, the Lithuanian Community in Hartford, Connecticut commemorated the 101st anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's statehood and the 29th anniversary of Lithuania's independence. During the event, Arvydas Urbonavičius, Chairman of the LAC National Board, and Rasa Dooling, the Treasurer, led discussions on the upcoming elections and the referendum on the preservation of Lithuanian citizenship. Dr. Elona Vaišnienė, a long-time board member of the Lithuanian American Community, and guests from the nearby state of Worcester participated in the celebration.



On Sunday, March 24th, 2019, the leader of the Diocese of Brooklyn, His Excellency Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio celebrated a historic rededication Mass for the newly renovated Church of the Annunciation. The Mass was attended by the Republic of Lithuania's Ambassador to the US, Rolandas Kriščiūnas, the acting Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York, Gitana Skripkaitė, the President of the Lithuanian-American Community of the US, Arvydas Urbonavičius. Rolandas Kriščiūnas, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania to the United States, congratulated the Lithuanian, Spanish, and Italian communities, who had gathered in the church, and

thanked everyone who contributed to the renovation of the sanctuary. Singer Simona Minns performed together with joint Lithuanian, Spanish and Italian choir.



From left: Raimundas Šližys, Trustee of the Church of the Annunciation, Gitana Skripkaitė, acting Consul General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York, Rasa Sprindys, Chair of the New York District LAC, Rolandas Kriščiūnas, Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania, Ambassador Audra Plepytė, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations in New York, Arvydas Urbonavičius, President of the Lithuanian American Community Executive Committee, and Laura Vidžiūnaitė, member of the New York District Executive Committee.

The Lithuanian community in Los Angeles celebrated Lithuania's independence with various events. Students in the Lithuanian Saturday school participated in a quiz, discussions about the activities of the Lithuanian American Community and the registration for the elections were held, Holy Mass was held in the Lithuanian parish church. Arvydas Urbonavičius, Lithuanian American Community President participated in the festivities.



## our community

On April 28-29, 2019 the Lithuanian American Community National Executive Committee met in the Lithuanian World Center in Lemon, Illinois. The Committee mem-

bers discussed various affairs, including work with the youth, Lithuanian education, the upcoming dance festival, and relations with other organizations.



The Lithuanian American Community National Executive Committee. From left: Marius Vilemaitis (IT specialist), Kristina Petraitienė (Treasurer, Educational Affairs), Laima Apanavičienė (Member of the Educational Council), Rima Žiūraitis (President of the Lithuanian American Youth Association), Juozas Polikaitis (Chair, Social Affairs), Rasa Sprindys (Secretary), Skirmantė Phillippone (Vice President, Special Projects), Arvydas Urbonavičius (Lithuanian American Community President), Giedrė Knieža (Chair, Cultural Affairs), Loreta Timukienė (Vice President, Information), Austėja Sruoga (Executive Vice President), Matas Kvizikevičius (Vice President, Organizational Affairs), Rasa Mitrulevičienė (Vice President, Financial Affairs), Rasa Dooling (Treasurer), and Tomas Mitrulevičius (Vice President, Sports). Photo credit: Artūras Žilys.

### Marius Jakulis Jason's non-profit foundation will support Lithuanian future talents

Lawyer and investor Marius Jakulis Jason is establishing a non-profit foundation (MJJ Foundation) with an initial capital of 3.5 million euros. It is intended to provide financial support to talented businessmen, academics and students who can and want to contribute to the growth of the Lithuanian economy. "Lithuania has given me the opportunity to launch new interesting activities and businesses I could not even dream of having when working as a lawyer in New York. Therefore, today I want to invite other talents to contribute to Lithuania's success," Marius Jakulis Jason, the founder of MJJ Foundation says.

A desire to open the door of opportunity  
Marius Jakulis Jason born in a refugee camp in Germany

moved back to Lithuania from the US shortly after Lithuania regained its independence in 1992. Since then, due to successful businesses and investments, M. Jakulis has become one of the most successful private investors in the country. He has founded a law firm AAA Law and is serving as AAA Holdingas chairman of the board. The company owns Radisson Blu Royal Astorija Hotel, Vilnius and Grand Hotel Kempinski Vilnius. Together with his partners, he founded Nordic Airport Hotels Fund for the development and procurement of hotels near Vilnius, Krakow, Riga, and other European airports. Marius has also contributed to the establishment of Vilnius International School and Erudito licėjus. "When I was doing business, my aim was not only to create jobs but also to

contribute to the growth of a certain Lithuania. I wanted the visitors and tourists to have great experiences in our country that would propel them to move here, to work or invest. Having lived and invested in Lithuania, I have long had the idea of allocating funds for a foundation that would provide financial support. I want the foundation - which I established with my peers - to help others discover such opportunities to live and work in Lithuania as I had."

### Inspired by wife

The businessman says that his wife Liisa Leitzinger - a Finnish citizen who speaks great Lithuanian and loves our country - pushed him towards this decision. "Why wait and put things off if you can start making changes today, Liisa told me, and that was the beginning of MJJ Foundation," Marius remembers. Mindaugas Strélis, a partner of Orion Securities with over 13 years of experience in investment banking, asset management, and capital markets, joined the board of directors shortly. Mindaugas, who takes care of the capital investment, emphasizes that the new foundation is a good example of how a successful investor can contribute to attracting talents to Lithuania. The management of the foundation was entrusted to Kotryna Stankutė-Jaščemskienė who, after having gained international experience in Malaysia and Singapore, returned to Lithuania in 2012 and became the head of the Lithuanian network of professionals Global Lithuanian Leaders (GLL). The founders of the foundation have no doubt that Kotryna's experience of gathering global Lithuanians and attracting talents will help reach the target audience. "It's great news for global Lithuanians who maintain close contact to the country and look for opportunities to contribute and settle in Lithuania. MJJ Foundation will become a financial backbone that encourages people to start their own business, carry out their academic research or teach. I hope our foundation will become an inspiring example for others to contribute to the changes that attract talents to Lithuania," Kotryna Stankutė-Jaščemskienė, the director of the new foundation, says.

### Will be operating in three directions

MJJ Foundation has set a task to operate in three directions - science, business, and knowledge. The first is the direction of business. It will offer financial support for gifted entrepreneurs and specialists who intend to return or come to build a business in Lithuania. The second - sci-

ence - direction is intended to contribute to the establishment of competitive salaries for academics graduating abroad who wish to come to live in Lithuania and continue their scientific work and share their knowledge with Lithuanian students. The direction of knowledge will focus on providing scholarships for active, public-spirited, and talented Lithuanians, so they could continue their master's studies at the best universities in the world. It would be anticipated that after graduation they would return to the country and contribute to the future of Lithuania with concrete work and acquired knowledge. The mentor network that is being created currently will take care of the participants in all three directions and help them establish themselves and become successful in Lithuania. Marius, the person behind the foundation, who himself has discovered many opportunities in Lithuania, invites everyone to develop our country together.

Credit: <https://en.delfi.lt>



Marius Jakulis

# our community

## Chicago Lithuanian Saturday School Students Celebrate Mother's Day



bridges

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Order online at [lithuanian-american.org/bridges](http://lithuanian-american.org/bridges)

May 2019

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

## ONGOING

Most Fridays,  
4:30-7:30 p.m.

**Friday Fish Fry at the  
Rockford Lithuanian Club**  
716 Indiana Avenue, Rock-  
ford, Ill.

Open to the public. Weekly  
specials vary. First Friday  
of the month—Lithuanian  
dumplings.

Info: lithuanianclub.org,  
815-962-9256

Every Sunday,  
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

**All-You-Can-Eat Lithuanian  
Brunch Buffet**

Lithuanian Club and Gintaras  
Dining Room

877 E. 185 St.,  
Cleveland, Ohio

\$15 per person; \$6 kids 6-12  
Info: lithclub@gmail.com,  
216-531-8318

First Sunday of the  
Month, 12-4 p.m.

**Lithuanian Brunch**

The Avenue Restaurant, 71-22  
Myrtle Ave., Glendale, N.Y.  
Reservations strongly  
recommended.

Info: 347-725-3853

First Sunday of the  
Month

**Rockford Lithuanian Club  
General Membership  
Meeting**

716 Indiana Avenue,  
Rockford, Ill.

Open to all members.

Info: lithuanianclub.org,  
815-962-9256

Every Third Saturday,  
Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov,  
1-3 p.m.

**Amber Roots Lithuanian  
Heritage Club**

Lithuanian Music Hall,  
2517 E. Allegheny Ave.,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Use Tilton Street entrance.

Bring a dish to share.

Info: milliemarks@aol.com

**Exhibit "For Freedom:  
Lithuanian American Sup-  
port for Lithuania's Inde-  
pendence and Recognition"**

Balzekas Museum of  
Lithuanian Culture  
www.balzekasmuseum.org

## MAY

May 12, 2019

at 1 pm

**Mother's Day Celebration  
Children's Computer  
Graphics Art Exhibition**

Presented by: Valdas  
Kančiauskas  
Detroit Lithuanian Cultural  
Center

Divine Providence Parish  
25335 West Nine Mile Rd.  
Southfield, MI 48033

More information:  
vilka@aol.com

## JUNE

June 1-2, 2019

**Talka / Work Weekend**

We can't wait to see Ner-  
inga's friends come and help  
prepare the Neringa camp-  
site for the summer once  
again during the annual Talka  
/ Work Weekend. If you are  
planning to attend, please  
contact director Regina  
atregina@neringa.org or call  
978-582-5592.

June 15, 2019

at 12:00 pm

**Lithuanian World Center  
2019 Charity Golf Tourna-  
ment**

Old Oak Golf Course  
14200 S. Parker Rd.

Homer Glen, IL 60491

Register at www.lithuanian-  
golf.com

## GOT EVENTS?

Let us help you spread the word! Please send your event notice to [kariledalia@yahoo.com](mailto:kariledalia@yahoo.com) two months in advance of the month in which you would like to see it listed.

June 28-30, 2019

**Neringa's 50th Celebration  
at Neringa**

Please plan to come and  
celebrate Neringa's big  
anniversary!

The Neringa50 page is live on  
the website:

[http://neringa.org/en\\_ner-  
inga50.html](http://neringa.org/en_neringa50.html)

## JULY

July 21, 2019

**Lithuanian Summer Festival  
(Putnam, CT)**

Camp Neringa, Inc. will  
replace the annual Putnam  
Picnic and run the Lithuanian  
Summer Festival.

We will need a lot of volun-  
teers to help!

Historically, this event has  
relied on close to 100 volun-  
teers, helping with everything  
from moving tables and  
benches into the picnic area,  
to making kugelis, to selling  
meal tickets and everything in  
between.

This year we are asking  
Neringa camper parents,  
alumni and friends to help.  
If you would like to be a part  
of the team, please refer to  
Neringa's website for more  
information or contact Vida  
Strazdis, the chairperson of  
this event: [strazdis@comcast.  
net](mailto:strazdis@comcast.net)

Let's help to ensure that the  
tradition continues!

## AUGUST

August 4-11, 2019

**Lithuanian Education Week**

Dainava Camp, Michigan

More info:

[www.svietimotaryba.org](http://www.svietimotaryba.org)

Registration for camps at  
Neringa is continuing.

**Registration forms and any  
other information may be  
found at [http://neringa.org/  
en\\_forms.html](http://neringa.org/en_forms.html)**

Would you like to work at  
Neringa this upcoming  
summer?

Counselor application forms  
are online at [http://neringa.  
org/en\\_counselors\\_forms.  
html](http://neringa.org/en_counselors_forms.html)

Counselor applications for  
Heritage Children's Camp  
will be accepted until April  
22, 2019. Applications for  
the Lithuanian Speaking  
Children's Camp are due by  
March 25, 2019.

The Lithuanian  
Foundation Inc. is  
accepting 2019 grant  
applications

**The application deadline is  
April 1, 2019.**

The Lithuanian Foundation  
provides grants that propa-  
gate Lithuanian culture, urg-  
ing a better understanding of  
our language and promoting  
the Lithuanian identity.  
[http://www.lithuanianfounda-  
tion.org/grants-application-  
guidelines/](http://www.lithuanianfoundation.org/grants-application-guidelines/)

# bridges

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LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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