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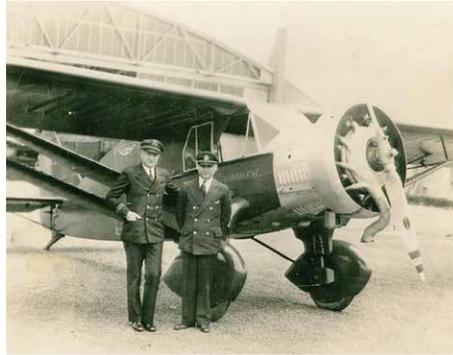


LITHUANIAN-AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

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bridges

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from the editor

Dear Reader,

As we approach the end of summer and think about the coming start of the school year, let me congratulate all of you who are active in the Lithuanian American Community and enrolled your children and/or grandchildren in Lithuanian Saturday schools. If there is no school near the place you live, perhaps distance learning would be a good choice. The Lithuanian American Community Education Council has a website, where you can learn more about Lithuanian distance learning. The address of the website is <https://svietimotaryba.org/LongDistance/>.

Another subject that I would like to touch upon is dual citizenship. As you might know, today dual citizenship is available for the descendants of Lithuanian citizens, i.e. those who lived in Lithuania between 16 February 1918 (Independence Day) and 15 June 1940 (Occupation of Lithuania by the Soviets) and left Lithuania while being citizens of Lithuania. Those born in Lithuania during the time of Soviet occupation and left after the second Lithuanian independence (11 March 1990) cannot be dual citizens, i.e. if they become citizens of the US or another country, they have to lose their Lithuanian citizenship. The Lithuanian Seimas recently decided that the referendum on dual citizenship will be held on 12 May 2024. 111 members of the Seimas voted in favor of the referendum, none voted against it, and five politicians abstained. The referendum will vote on the following law of the Constitution: "Citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania shall be acquired by birth and on other grounds and in the manner established by constitutional law. The Constitutional Law shall also determine the grounds and procedure for loss of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania." This would remove the prohibition of dual citizenship from the law. The detailed conditions, procedure, and other matters relating to the acquisition and loss of dual citizenship would be laid down by constitutional law. A draft has already been prepared and registered in the draft legislation database. An amendment to the Constitution on citizenship would be adopted if more than half of the citizens who have the right to vote and are on the electoral roll approve it, which would currently be over 1.1 million citizens. The Constitutional Court has clarified that only a referendum amending the Constitution can open up the possibility of dual citizenship to Lithuanian citizens who have acquired citizenship of other countries after the restoration of independence. If you could benefit from this referendum or know someone who would benefit from it, please participate and vote on 12 May 2024.

Wishing you beautiful rest of the summer,

Karilė Vaitkutė
Editor

Lituanica flight: causes of the crash remain unclear

Dr. Juozas Skirius
The Vytautas Magnus University Professor
and researcher at the Lithuanian National M.
Mažvydas Library)

July 17th marks the sad 90th anniversary of the tragic fate of the first Lithuanians, Steponas Darius (Jucevičius) and Stasys Girėnas (Girskis), who crossed the Atlantic, but did not reach Lithuania. The death of our heroes did not go unnoticed by the world media and shocked the Lithuanian public on both sides of the Atlantic, with a wide range of opinions. Decades passed, but this tragedy was not forgotten by the nation. Regardless of the political system in which our compatriots lived or live, in one way or another, the flight, as a historical fact, belongs to the group of the most famous events and individuals of the past; and is remembered as a feat, as an example of patriotism.

Commemorations of the feat

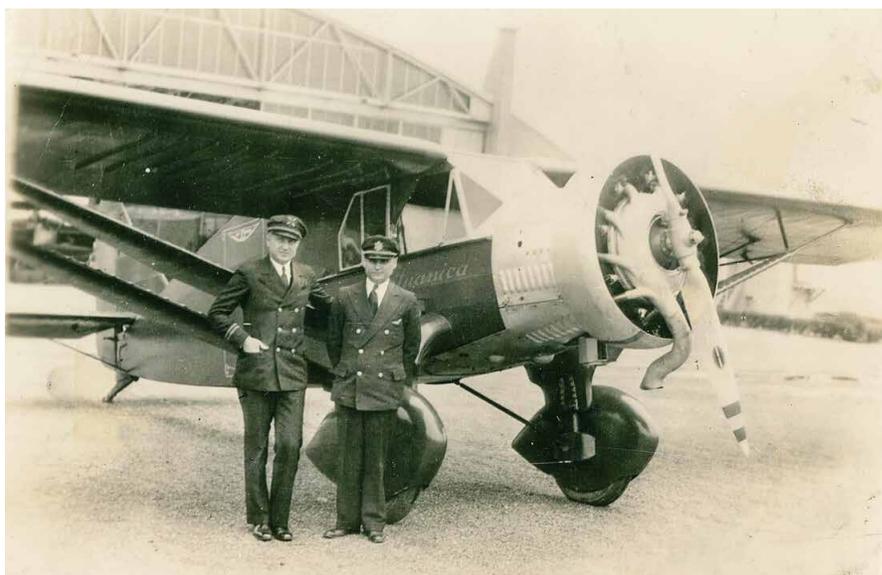
The flight and death of Lituanica belong to the category of important national dates, which, like 16 February and 11 March, and before the loss of Vilnius on 9 October 1920, have become pivotal in mobilizing Lithuanians, not only in Lithuania but also in the Diaspora. It is no coincidence that 17 July is celebrated annually as the Lithuanian World Unity Day. This tragic event, as we shall say, is engraved in the memory of the nation. This is perfectly illustrated by the graduation thesis "Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas in Historical Memory (1933-2013)", which was defended in 2015 by former Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences student historians Ieva Judickytė and Aurimas Palaima. This thesis, as the best student scientific work, was awarded the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Prize. The young authors collected, recorded, compared, and evaluated the reflections of Darius and Girėnas and Lituanica in Lithuanian culture and social life - in Lithuania and in the Lithuanian diaspora. At least 115 streets in Lithuania alone have been named after them, squares and other public spaces have been named after



them, monuments and works of fine art have been commemorated with them, exhibitions have been held, commemorative publications and stamps have been issued, they have been reflected in money and medals, films have been made, books and articles have been written, etc. It is interesting to note that the material gathered by the above-mentioned young historians shows that over a period of 80 years more than a hundred poems were written. And it goes on and on. And the new "Conqueror of the Atlantic" Aurimas Valujavičius linked his boat row to the sad anniversary of the Lituanica flight!

Flight preparation and difficulties encountered

Steponas Darius got the idea of flight while serving in the Lithuanian Army Aviation. When he left Lithu-



ania for the USA in 1927, he told everyone that he would return to Lithuania "with wings", i.e. flying from the USA across the Atlantic. This idea was reinforced when, in Paris in the same year, Steponas watched the welcoming ceremony of Charles Lindbergh, the first American pilot to fly solo across the Atlantic. He became a role model for Darius. After arriving in the USA, he began to promote his idea among the diaspora and found his future flight companion Stasys Girskis (Girėnas). Both of them bought a new plane with their own money, which they greatly improved. But more money was needed to prepare for the flight. The Lithuanian government did not help, as it was hard-pressed by the economic crisis (1929-1933), just like other countries in the world. Every government litas was saved. The government even refused



to take part in the World Exhibition of Achievements in Chicago in 1933, even though Lithuanians in the USA had high hopes.

Despite the fact that the crisis had a strong impact on the Diaspora, it contributed to the preparation of the Lituanica flight - although not as much as was needed. For the planned flight to Lithuania, the US Lithuanians, for patriotic reasons, decided to participate in the exhibition themselves on behalf of the Lithuanian state. They even bought a separate pavilion. Although it was expensive, it was important for the diaspora, because 1933 was the 15th anniversary of Lithuania's independence, and the date chosen for the flight was 15 July - the date of the Battle of Žalgiris. Lithuanians in the USA wanted to promote Lithuania and the Lithuanian nation. However, instead of focusing on flight preparations, Darius and Girėnas themselves had to raise some of the money at the Aviation Festival, flying 1,500 people for a fee. Sponsorship balls and evenings were organized and individual donations were received. Thus, for the planned flight to Lithuania, the sponsors raised about



\$13,000 (about \$200,000 at present). The cost of a new engine alone was \$2,980, plus the cost of rebuilding the plane and so on.

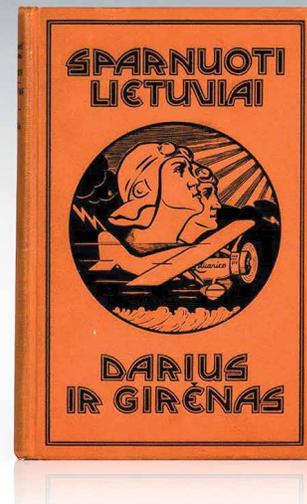
On April 15, 1933, the Flying Centre Committee (established by emigrants), with the approval of the pilots, gave the plane the name conceived and proposed by Antanas Vaivada: Lituanica. On May 6th, prelate Mykolas Krusas consecrated the plane, and Darius' mother, following the American custom, smashed a bottle of champagne into the propeller's axis. On 7 May, the pilots said goodbye to the Chicagoans and flew to New York, to Bennett Airport (Floyd Bennett Field), where they were greeted by a large crowd of US media.

The Secret of Soldin Forest

In the early hours of July 15, 1933, Lituanica took off without official permission from the US government and headed towards Europe, towards Lithuania. The flight to the crash took 37 hours and 11 minutes and covered 6,411 km. However, the second-longest flight in the world at that time did not become the first, as Kaunas was 650 km away.

The flight itself, its preparation, and the subsequent evaluations are discussed in great detail by Lithuanian aviation historian and media journalist Gražina Sviderskytė in her book *Lituanica*, published in 2019. *The Invisible Side* (based on her dissertation defended in 2016). Her observations and reflections are interesting, as well as her strong critique not only of earlier accounts but also of the post-catastrophe processes. The author notes that "if you look closely, beyond the dredges of the Lituanica myth, beyond the wreckage of the plane strung up on the stirrup, the story goes on:

you just have to pay attention and the unseen sides of it will be revealed" (G.S., p. 381). And in fact, the author has widely disseminated the circumstances of the pilots' deaths. The main myth in the book, according to her, is that immediately after the crash in Germany, two versions of the crash emerged and spread in the public domain: 1) the plane crashed due to a storm and pilot fatigue, and 2) it was shot down by the Germans. Both versions have their supporters. The French and Belgian media were the first to report on the possible downing of the plane. Even the German Social Democratic opposition press wrote about it. Interestingly, it was said in conversations among foreign diplomats in



Berlin that the Lituania had been shot down "supposedly as a Polish plane flying at night in Germany".

This and similar rumors were widely circulated. The author herself does not explicitly support either version, as if she wants readers to form their own opinion. So this myth, unfortunately, is left to continue to exist. A closer look at the historian's research and other material reveals that the version of the shooting is more convincing.

The German National Socialists, who were already in power in Germany at that time, with Adolf Hitler at the forefront, changed the German system of the time in a very short period of time by introducing totalitarian rule. No-fly zones appeared in German territories, one of which our pilots found their way into by mistake. The German authorities had no official information about the Lituania flight (the Washington administration did not inform them). But it was not a secret. Nor should it be assumed that the Nazis were pleased by the date of the flight's choice - the crusader (Teutonic) order, their ancestors, was defeated on 15 July 1410. Battle of Žalgiris. Interestingly, the crashed Lituania was first examined by German experts in the forest of Soldin (present-day Poland, in Misliborz), without the permission of the Lithuanians. Why such secrecy?! What was being cleaned and cleaned there? Their report treats the death of the pilots as an "accident". Later, the German authorities handed over the wreckage of the Lituania and the bodies of the pilots to Lithuania, where investigations were also carried out (there were unofficial rumors that gunshot wounds had been found...).

What was the position of the Lithuanian government? According to G. Sviderskytė, the official researchers in Germany and Lithuania had a specific mission:

to meet the higher needs of the states. For "in Berlin and Kaunas, for different reasons, there was a similar need: to protect public order, to prevent rumors about the shooting of Lituania, to avoid insinuations against the governments and to avoid tensions between them".

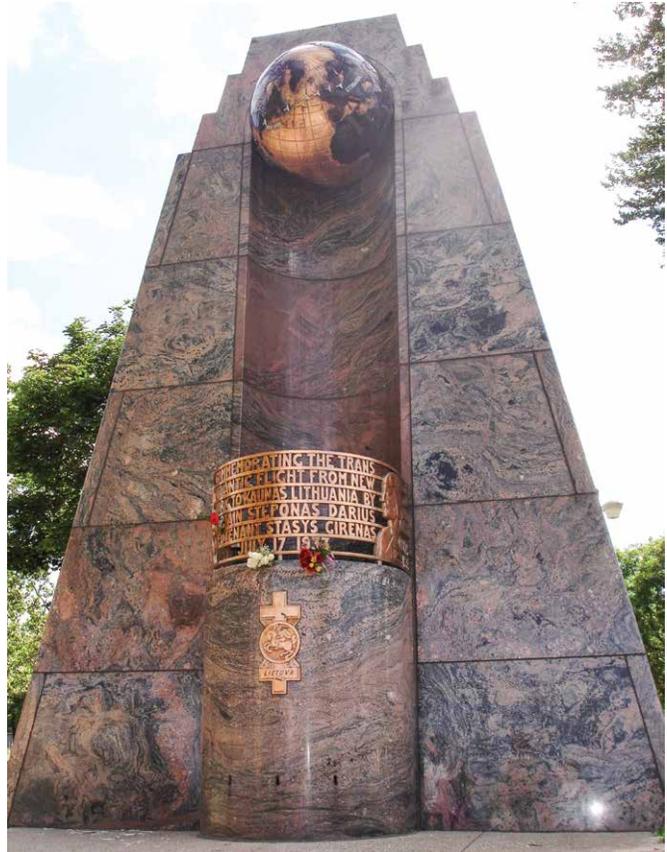
Obviously, the Lithuanian government avoided deepening the contradictions with Germany, as important negotiations on a trade treaty were taking place, and the Lithuanians were also troubled by the difficult situation in the autonomy of the Klaipėda region. This made it difficult to take a stronger stance. This was limited to the solemn funeral of the pilots in Kaunas.

Lithuanian Americans were the first to commemorate the heroes

Lithuanians in the USA were the first to commemorate the flight

On July 26, 1933, a joint meeting of the Darius and Girėnas Flight Supporters Committee and the Foundation's trustees was held in the premises of the Lithuanian Consulate in Chicago, where it was decided to erect a memorial to the heroes in Chicago. On the 28th of July, Lithuanian Americans unveiled the monuments in the Marquette Park neighborhood (heavily populated by Lithuanians). According to press reports, more than 60 000 people attended the ceremony. And in the same year, Lithuanian-American Petras Jurgėla published an excellent book - *Winged Lithuanians. Darius and Girėnas*. A monument was erected in New York City in 1958 and in Beverly Shores, Indiana in 1971. During that 90th anniversary, the flight was not forgotten in the Diaspora, as in Lithuania, and was always remembered not only in the press but also by events at the memorials.

Darius and Girėnas achieved their goal - the first Lithuanians to fly across the Atlantic. The tragic sacri-



fice of their lives has become a symbol of Lithuanian idealism. Setting aside the ideological stamps of certain periods, the flight of Lituania retains its value for the nation in the traditional narrative of courage, unity, and future aspirations.

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Kaunas Hosted 15th Conference of Baltic Studies in Europe

By Barbara Conaty

The 15th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE) took place in Kaunas, June 15-17, 2023. Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) and the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) together welcomed about 350 registrants to the three-day program entitled “Turning points: values and conflicting futures in the Baltics.”

There were more than 100 panels, roundtables, discussions, and book presentations on many topics. Many presentations focused on the war in Ukraine, as this theme has been most prominent in recent years. In addition, there were keynote talks, evening receptions, exhibitions, and a film screening. The chair of the conference was Prof. Dr. Ineta Dabašinskienė. The classrooms and other facilities of the VMU were available for the events of the conference. VMU is at the academic heart of Kaunas, with museums, Old Town, shopping, and cafes within easy walking distance. Still enjoying the fruits of having been declared the European Capital of Culture in 2022, Kaunas was a hospitable and beautiful venue for its international visitors. All the conference



Arūnas Gelūnas, director-general of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art, spoke at the Plenary II session of the CBSE conference to describe the effects of the Russian war against Ukraine on museums. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.

materials and presentations were given in the English language.

Plenary session II on June 16 was unusually emotional and dramatic. It described how Lithuania’s National Museum of Art (LNMA) responded to Russia’s looting and destruction in the course of its war against Ukraine. Russia has focused intensely on the destruction of Ukrainian culture and its artifacts in museums, libraries, churches, and schools. The Khanenko Museum of Contemporary Art in Kyiv was shelled. The statue of the crucified Christ venerated at the Armenian Cathedral in Lviv had to be removed and stored to protect it from war strikes. In Melitopol, Scythian golden items were stolen by Russian soldiers. Russians removed 15,000 works of art from the Kherson Art Museum and other cultural institutions in Kherson.

Dr. Arūnas Gelūnas, director-general of the LNMA gave specific examples of the emergency aid provided by Lithuania in partnership with other members of UNESCO whose conventions guide the preservation and protection of artwork when military hostilities break out. Early on, LNMA, with the aid of



Dr. Navickaitė with discussants Drs. Dovilė Budrytė, Viktoras Bachmetjevas, and Aušra Park as they commented on the biography of Lithuanian American archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.

its 465 employees and discretionary resources, accumulated large amounts of packing materials, fire extinguishers, and other items needed for conservation. France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the USA prepared similar emergency responses. In Lithuania, the Museum's own vans were used to haul the materials to the Polish border at Rzeszów where Ukrainian transport took the boxes to the museums under fire. Between November 22, 2022, and February 2023, 800 artworks worth millions of dollars were evacuated to Vilnius. Works by Goya, Boucher, and other world-class artists were saved. LNMA has been organizing events at its four locations to display selections from these rescued collections. So far, seven exhibitions have been curated and displayed at the Museum's four locations to great popular acclaim.

In Vilnius, Dr. Gelūnas and his staff provided jobs, housing, and Lithuanian language training for several Ukrainian museum workers. Dr. Gelūnas described several activities and influences that affected him. Two Ukrainian refugee artists, Sofia Atlantova and Oleksandr Klymenko, are painting religious icons on ammo boxes, some of which were purchased by LNMA for its holdings. The funds are donated to support a military hospital. Rūta Meilutytė, an Olympic swimmer, plunged into a blood-red pool near the Russian embassy in Vilnius in a video she posted as a call for action to support Ukraine. There was a photo exhibit of work by the Ukrainian documentary photographer Alexander Glyadyelov showing images of shelled buildings in Kyiv. Two organizations produced 2023 calendars to be sold with proceeds going to assist two causes in Ukraine: the purchase of drones to be used by the Ukrainian army and the support of



Rasa Navickaite, Ph.D., introduced her new book, *Marija Gimbutas: Transnational Biography, Feminist Reception, and the Controversy About Goddess Archaeology*, at the conference. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.



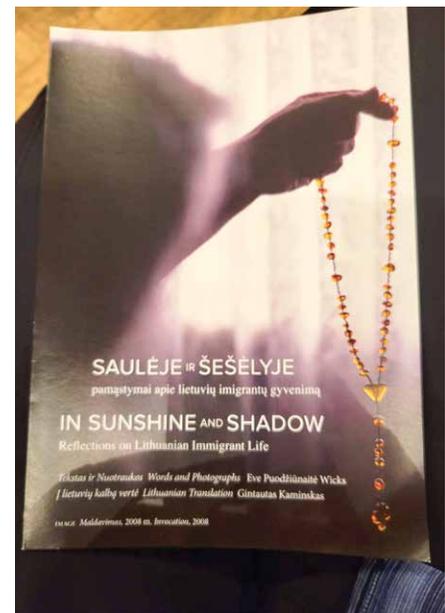
Author Dr. Eve Puodžiūnaitė Wicks with former President Dalia Grybauskaitė at the exhibition of Dr. Wicks' work. Photo: Courier Mail.

child refugees in Poland. Two organizations, Strong Together and Warm up Ukraine, cooperated to raise funds for generators, electric heaters, lubricants, and fuel provided to Ukraine when so much infrastructure was destroyed. Dr. Gelūnas participated in these efforts and witnessed that art galleries and museums had been converted into refugee shelters and humanitarian centers.

Political enemies use art and culture as Trojan horses to bring in unwanted influences under the cover of aesthetics "free of politics", Dr. Gelūnas said. "You've got to be aware that the Russians are the Mozarts of lying," he warned. Dr. Gelūnas stressed that art should not be locked into an ivory tower. Museums should be raising topics like climate change and should be using social media and technology. These media allow communication at the personal, intimate level. He noted that service to the community shows the public's taxes at work for the benefit of the community.



Dr. Eve Puodžiūnaitė Wicks of Brisbane, Australia, presented her account of how she created the art book *Saulėje ir šešėlyje: In Sunshine and Shadow* in 2018. Photo: Brisbane Living Heritage.



Eve Puodžiūnaitė Wick's art book *Saulėje ir šešėlyje: In Sunshine and Shadow* is available online from the author. It describes in many voices the experiences of Lithuanians who settled in Australia after World War II. Photo: Barbara Conaty.

for her dissertation, she expected to write about the participation of women in Lithuania's politics and society. Intrigued by the many mentions of Prof. Gimbutas as a socialist feminist, a proponent of goddess-spirituality, and as a public intellectual, Dr. Navickaitė decided to explore the many faces of this influential scholar.

The recent centenary of Prof. Gimbutas' birth in 2021 brought fresh attention to this Lithuanian American archaeologist who lived from 1921-1994. Her work and opinions influenced people in several fields, such as the environment, feminism, and prehistoric religion. Her popular fame solidified with the publication of three academic works in 1974, 1989, and 1991. Dr. Navickaitė used historical methods such as the examinations of Prof. Gimbutas' substantial archives and provided theoretical perspectives developed in contemporary feminist studies and related disciplines. In addition, Dr. Navickaitė examined controversies arising from Prof. Gimbutas' strong beliefs and opinions. Of special interest was the reception given to Dr. Gimbutas' work by the emerging Lithuanian women's movement of the 1980s and 1990s.



Martha Thomas created and presented a multi-media presentation combining writings by her aunt, letters from her grandfather, her imaginative photos of her aunt's Siberian experiences, and music composed by Lithuanian and other composers and played by Gabija Vaičekonis. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.



The Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe recruited a crew of student workers who handled registration and many other duties at VMU during the three-day conference. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.

A panel of three discussants amplified Dr. Navickaitė's introductory remarks. They were: Dr. Dovilė Budrytė, Georgia Gwinnett College; Dr. Aušra Park, Siena College; and Dr. Viktoras Bachmetjevas, Vytautas Magnus University.

Dr. Budrytė commented that the biography showed that Prof. Gimbutas helped the marginal feminist movement in Lithuania even though there was a tense relationship between her and feminism. Dr. Bachmetjevas found that the portrayal of Prof. Gimbutas showed her as "one of the mythical Lithuanian intellectuals who mean something in the world." To him, the book flows like a drama or a novel as Prof. Gimbutas promoted Lithuanian nationalism during her years of exile in the USA. Dr. Park, commenting on the continuing dismissal of women's accomplishments throughout Eastern Europe, stated that Prof. Gimbutas and her research topic could be "a foundational place to start to build from the bottom-up. We need to start cleaning up the dirty word 'feminism' and find a comfort zone."

The American Association of Baltic Studies awarded one of its two annual AABS Book Publication Subventions to the publishing firm Routledge to offset the costs of publishing Dr. Navickaitė's monograph. The costs of scholarly publications have risen steadily making it harder for readers to afford the book for their personal use. AABS intends to publish excerpted chapters of the books on its website: <https://aabs-balticstudies.org/>

The second book presentation which I attended was the work of Dr. Eve Puodžiūnaitė Wicks. Her book, *Saulėje ir šešėlyje: In Sunshine and Shadow* (2018, published by the author, Queensland) is an art book that brings together oral history stories, original and historical photos, poems, and songs that express the migration and settlement experiences of Lithuanian refugees from World War II who made their way to Australia. She is the author and photographer; the Lithuanian translation is by Gintautas Kaminskas.



Daina Klimauskaitė's writings were featured in a multi-media presentation created by Seattle photographer Martha Thomas whose Lithuanian heritage inspired her photos. Ms. Klimauskaitė, the aunt of Ms. Thomas, was transported with her family to the Laptev Sea in 1941 to a forced labor camp. Photo: Barbara Conaty.

Dr. Wicks was born to Lithuanian parents who fled their Soviet-occupied homeland in 1940. She was raised in Brisbane and made a career in the field of immunology as a medical researcher and lecturer. She raised her family and worked as a university student counselor. An earlier version of this book is part of Dr. Wicks' dissertation written for her Ph.D. degree awarded in 2019 from Griffith University, Brisbane, in the discipline of Fine Arts Photography. She noted in her remarks, "I could not have written this book as a young person. I needed my life experiences; I learned camera techniques. All had to come together to make this book."

At the time of her family's arrival, Australia's immigration policy stressed assimilation to the



Kateryna Horiunova, one of the CBSE organizers, welcomed this article's author, Barbara Conaty, to the conference held at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas in June 2023. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.

dominant British rule. Deportation loomed for those who hung on to their Lithuanian language and culture. She found ties to the local Lithuanian community in Brisbane and actively volunteered for events. Lacking the Lithuanian language, she nevertheless gained the trust of her circle and created an oral history exhibit in Queensland that astounded Lithuanian viewers who were not familiar with what their people had gone through. Dr. Wicks called her book a "polyphony of

oral voices” and created her “intermodal book” to bring out nine major themes, such as Motherland and Under a Southern Cross.

The book is in print and can be purchased online. It has been featured in an exhibition of Lithuanian heritage artists in the world diaspora presented in Vilnius in 2018. It was featured at Lit-EXPO, an international book fair in 2020, and at the Brisbane Writers Festival in 2019. Dr. Wicks’ work is the winner of the inaugural book award of the International Oral History Association (IOHA) in 2021. Her passionate work of history and connection received financial assistance from Arts Queensland, Brisbane City Council, the Australian Lithuanian Foundation, Inc., and Lithuania’s own Department of Ethnic Minorities and Emigrants Abroad.

My final paragraphs describe the photo exhibit of Martha Thomas, a Seattle photographer who learned of her Lithuanian heritage only after the re-emergence of Lithuania as an independent state. Entitled “*Do not forget, you are not in Lithuania*,” Ms. Thomas’ presentation combined her public reading of the writings and letters written by her aunt, Daina Klimauskaitė and her grandfather, Kazimieras Klimauskas, with piano compositions composed by Čiurlionis, Dvarionas, and others, played by Gabija Vaičekonis.

Briefly, the Klimauskas family was separated in 1941 when Soviet agents seized and deported the parents, Kazimieras and Apolonija, and their 7-year-old daughter Daina and transported them to the Laptev Sea, where they remained for 17 years. The mother and Daina returned to Lithuania in 1957; the father passed away in 1953. A younger sister, Vida, age 3, was not with the family in 1941 but in a hospital being treated for salmonella under the care of an aunt, Mara. Eventually, Vida and her aunt found a new home in the USA. Vida and her mother never met again; Apolonija died in 1974. Daina is now 89 years old and lives in Kaunas. She had a career spanning three decades as a singer and entertainer with the Kaunas State Musical Theater. Vida and Daina met in 1989 after 48 years of separation. Vida married in the



Dr. Dovilė Budrytė is the incoming chair of the 2024 event to be held at Yale University. Photo: Jonas Petronis, CBSE.

USA and has three children and six grandchildren.

The multi-media presentation’s photos are the work of Ms. Thomas’ imagination. She commented in her notes for a related exhibition of her work that “This art exhibition is a mixture of fact and fiction. The entire text is Daina’s notes about her struggle growing up in Siberia. My photographs are interpretations of Daina’s memories of how Daina might have felt in the situations she describes.” Ms. Thomas’ work was featured at the VMU Gallery 101 at the same time that she presented her work at the CBSE conference.

Ms. Thomas was chosen as one of the eight finalists of the “Kaunas Photo” festival in 2021 when she presented *Do not*



Dr. Ineta Dabašinskiė was the chair of the 2023 Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe held at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas in June 2023. Photo: American Association of Baltic Studies.

forget, you are not in Lithuania for the first time. The title refers to an incident recalled by Ms. Klimauskaitė at her school in Mukhtuya, Yakutia. She wrote in this narrative that she felt joining the communist youth group at her school would be false, “and my participation in

these organizations would not be honest.” Her teacher warned her, “Nepamišk, čia jums ne Lietuva.”

Gabija Vaičekonis accompanied Ms. Thomas at the presentation of the multi-media performance. She is a pianist of Lithuanian origin who grew up in Seattle, Washington. She received a bachelor’s degree in music studies at Western Washington University. Now she is studying for a master’s degree in jazz and piano at VMU.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the incoming chair of next year’s conference is Dr. Dovilė Budrytė, professor of political science at Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. Upcoming conferences will be held at Yale University in 2024 and at the University of Cambridge Centre for Geopolitics in 2025.

Barbara Conaty is a retired government librarian, Falls Church, Virginia. Her parents lived in the Kėdainiai and Jurbarkas regions and in Kaunas before immigrating to the United States in 1949.

XVII Lithuanian World Youth Congress - June 2023 with 100+ Delegates, Representing 18 Countries, Hosted in North America

The XVII Lithuanian World Youth Congress took place in North America - Boston, MA, Camp Neringa (Vermont), and Montreal, Canada from June 14-22, 2023 in a series of unforgettable days. There were over 100 delegates (ages 16-35) representing 18 different countries: Argentina, Belarus, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Poland, Netherlands, France, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The Lithuanian World Youth Congress, first held in 1966, convenes every few years in a country where Lithuanian youth associations are active. The Congress consists of two parts: the academic delegate portion and a cultural portion. In 1972, during the second Lithuanian World Youth Congress, the Lithuanian World Youth Association (LWYA) was formed and still operates today as a non-political volunteer organization whose primary goal is to unite Lithuanian youth across the globe, foster networking and represent their interests year-round. In 2021, it was decided that for the first time in 25 years, the Congress would be held in North America.

Over the course of 8 days, delegates debated 'hot topics' for the Lithuanian diaspora, enriched their Lithuanian identities, expanded their professional and personal networks, and crafted resolutions and motions. Delegates learned about the similarities as well as differences of their Lithuanian culture across the eighteen countries



that they represent. They also shared their experiences about what it means to them to be a first-, second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Lithuanian.

Congress Theme: “Everywhere and Always”

The Associations of the United States and Canada organized the XVII Congress and chose the phrase “Everywhere and Always” as its motto, a phrase taken from the Lithuanian Charter. On June 14, 1949, the Supreme Committee for Liberation of Lithuania announced the Lithuanian Charter while in exile, which describes the aspirations of the Lithuanian nation - to be independent and to preserve Lithuanian culture freely.

One of the 13 articles in the Charter states, “A person has the natural right to profess and cultivate their ethnic identity. A Lithuanian remains a Lithuanian everywhere and always. They pass on to future generations the Lithuanian culture and traditions which were maintained and passed on by earlier generations.” With those words, “Everywhere and Always” was decided as the Congress’ theme. Wherever they are and regardless of their circumstances, North American Lithuanians cherish and never forget their Lithuanian roots.





Cultural Portion: Boston, MA USA

The cultural program of the Congress is a great opportunity for the hosts of the Congress - in this case, the Lithuanian youth associations of the United States and Canada - to present the history, culture, traditions, and local Lithuanian community of their homeland.

The Congress kicked off in Boston, Massachusetts, USA from June 14-16, with great excitement as many of the delegates were coming to North America for the first time. The Boston Lithuanian community warmly welcomed the delegates, touring them around the most famous attractions in Boston, and providing insight into the 100+ year Boston-Lithuanian history. The delegates even attended an American baseball game at the Red Sox's Fenway Park.

The Congress Opening Party took place at the South Boston Lithuanian Citizens' Association banquet room with approximately 200 people in attendance including the ~100 delegates and ~100 guests. The evening's program opened with greetings and warm wishes from several Lithuanian community leaders from the US and abroad. A panel discussion featured four Lithuanian Americans representing different immigration stories - they shared their personal and family histories and reflected on what Lithuania has meant to them. The night continued on with dinner and dancing to lots of Lithuanian, American, and Spanish music, and of course some polka.

Global friendships were starting to form and an idea of what it means to be Lithuanian in North America was developing.



Academic Days and Delegate Convention at Camp Neringa, Vermont, USA

From June 16-20, the Congress moved to the Green Mountains in W. Brattleboro, Vermont at the Lithuanian Camp Neringa for the most important part of the Congress - the Academic Days and Delegate Convention. During this time, delegates from each country make the most important decisions for the organization, including amending the Statutes, adopting resolutions and motions, electing a new Lithuanian World Youth Association board as well as choosing the location of the next Congress.

Resolutions

There were four resolutions that were workshopped and agreed to by the delegates, each seeking to spotlight attention and highlight the position of the Lithuanian world youth on real and substantive global issues.

1. Support for Ukraine and strengthening civil resilience.
2. Preservation of Belarusian Lithuanian schools and ensuring the safety of their employees.
3. The referendum, taking place on May 12, 2024, aimed at preserving Lithuanian citizenship acquired by birth.
4. Establishment of the LWYA opportunity fund.

Motions

There were also 15 motions that were crafted and voted on by the delegates to formulate the LWYA's strategy and work leading up to the subsequent Congress. Some of the motions touched on topics such as: supporting the annual general meetings of Lithuanian youth in South America, raising awareness of current mental health issues, drawing attention to the current



situation of Lithuanian education centers in Eastern countries, and supporting equal rights for LGBT+ persons in Lithuania.

There was also a motion to honor the first LWYA president, Antanas Saulaitis SJ, as an honorary member for his long-time work with the Lithuanian diaspora.

If you're curious to read all the motions, they will be uploaded to pljs.org at the end of August of 2023, or reach out to kongresas2023@pljs.org.

New LWYA Board

Congress delegates also elected a new LWYA board. An impressive group of 13 people from around the world ran for the board. The new board includes president Agita Beržanskaitė (Netherlands), secretary Elena Urbonaitė (Sweden), treasurer Simonas Bingelis (USA), and board members Ingrida Vaznelytė (Poland), Alejandro Brom Švobas (Uruguay), and Gabriela Avalos Liesinskas (Venezuela / Lithuania) and Antanas Paukshtis (Russia / Lithuania). Congratulations to the new board!

Lectures and Camp Experience

A consistent highlight for many participants was the lectures, intended to feature the Lithuanian diaspora in North America. Video documentors Gabaleliai Lietuvos hosted a fun and engaging trivia game about Lithuanian sites in the USA and Canada. A panel discussion took place about Lithuanian Camps in North America which had representatives from Camp Dainava, Camp Kretinga, and Camp Neringa. The lecture about Lithuanian folk songs transitioned to a stereotypical campfire with skits, chants, and songs, enjoyed especially by the European and South American participants who had never seen anything like it. The fourth lecture was an interactive workshop hosted by the Lithuanian Society and Business Development Institute Representatives that discussed the motivation and commitment of regional youth associations.

Despite the busyness of the official schedule, delegates made room for typical camp activities such as swimming in the river, playing volleyball, and “Bulvė” along with other outdoor activities. Father Saulaitis celebrated mass in the beautiful Birch Shrine for delegates, encouraging all to discover and share the gifts that we have with each other.



Delegates not familiar with Camp Neringa commented on how the camp felt like they truly were in Lithuania. They loved the cabin accommodations with true camp-style bunk beds and enjoyed the delicious food prepared by the kitchen volunteers. Local volunteers also acted as ‘counselors’ to simulate the camp experience and plan evening events like icebreaker activities.



Cultural Portion: Montreal, Quebec, Canada

By bus, the final stop was Montreal, Canada from June 20-22 where delegates familiarized themselves with the Québécois culture and the Lithuanian-Canadian community.

The closing party, dubbed “Bulvepalooza” took place at the Our Lady Gates of Dawn Church. First, there was a mass honoring the late Monsignor Edmond Putrimas, a long-time supporter of the Congresses and South American Lithuanian youth. Following the mass, the Montreal Canadian-Lithuanians of the dance group “Gintaras”, and music groups “Viena Sirdis” and “Garbanotos Mintys” performed, engaging the crowd. Several honored guests from the Lithua-



nian-Canadian community offered congratulations for a successful Congress.

The following day, the delegates hiked up to Mount Royal Park Hill for a stunning view of Montreal and were guided around the city by local Lithuanians. Before everyone knew it, it was time to say tearful goodbyes, wish each other safe travels home, and for the new board to get started in their roles.

Memories Lasting a Lifetime

A gathering of young Lithuanians from all over the world, the Congress gives Lithuanian youth the opportunity to create lifelong international friendships and a global professional network that is ever important in our global world. “Everywhere and Always” became not only the theme of the Congress but a rallying phrase. Several delegates embraced the philosophy of this motto, that their Lithuanian heritage and identity is something that will be with them “Everywhere and Always”.

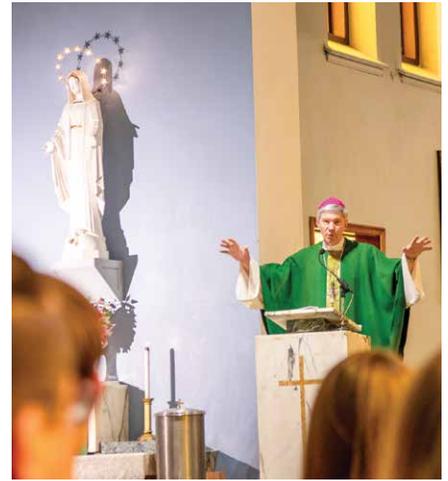
Next Congress

During the XVII LWYC, delegates determined by vote that the next Congress will take place in Iceland. For more information, please visit PLJS.org.

The XVII LWYC organizing committee is deeply grateful for the support of the Lithuanian Communities of the USA and Canada, the Lithuanian Foundation and its other sponsors, and volunteers that contributed to a successful Congress in North America.

The XVII Lithuanian World Youth Congress was organized by: Marija Cyvas, Alina Orentas, Lina Samonis, Elyte Austras, Liepa Ivanauskas, Lina Jaugelis-Zatkovic, Simonas Bingelis, Elena Zubrickas, Maja Chiapetta, Gintare Daulys, Lukas Smidtas, Austėja Galinyte, Indre Statkute, Gabriele Zitikyte







The National Anthem of Lithuania Echoed in the Mountains of Colorado

Eglė Paquette

Every year, as the summer approaches the halfway point, one of the most important public holidays awaits Lithuanians - Mindaugas Coronation Day, celebrated on July 6. Lithuanian Americans in Colorado came together at the Regina Caeli Hermitage to commemorate this historic event.

On a sunny Sunday morning, Colorado Lithuanians attended Holy Mass, celebrated outdoors by Brother Pranciškus. The important and meaningful words of Brother Pranciškus mingled with the chirping of birds, and each participant was enveloped in a blanket of peace and unity.

After the Mass ended, it was time to raise the historical flag of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Vytis, riding on a red background, fluttered in the mountain wind as Maironis' song "You are beautiful, my dear homeland" sounded. Listening to these words sung in Lithuanian, nostalgia and love fluttered through the hearts of those present.



Participants of the celebration at the top of the mountain



Hiking to the top of the mountain



Donatas Juodzevičius hoists the flag of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

This year, the Lithuanians of Colorado celebrated the Mindaugas Coronation Day by hiking up the mountain along the path of reflection on the history of Lithuania. While climbing up and carrying the tricolor together, members of the community stopped at seven stops where they remembered the most important moments of Lithuanian history and the heroes who defended it.

Brother Pranciškus started the historical reflections with wise words. He briefly discussed the deep past and the fact that the Balts have lived in the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for centuries. The first stop was dedicated to Mindaugas and the special importance of his decision to be baptized.

While walking on, community member Kristina Vyšniauskienė told about the times of Gediminas, remembered the legend of the founding of Vilnius, and the fact that Vilnius is celebrating its 700th anniversary this year. The third stop was about Vytautas, his outstanding achievements, the greatness of the GDL at that time, and the thunderous victory of the Battle of Žalgiris.

During the hike, the participants remembered centuries of painful experiences for our country. At the fourth stop, Donatas Juodzevičius spoke about the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth and the external and internal factors that led to this decision. At the fifth stop, Vaida Juodzevičienė shared a reading about how the Lithuanian nation suffered but survived under the oppression of Tsarist Russia.

At the sixth stop, Snieguolė Radzevičienė surprised everyone with a deep story about the declaration of Lithuania's independence and the fight for freedom. She reminded us that to restore independence, the council members had to decide what kind of Lithuania to restore, where its borders would be, and who its citizens would be.

After climbing to the top of the mountain near the altar and the cross, Brother Pranciškus discussed the ultimatum of the communist Soviet Union to Lithuania and the oppression that followed. He remembered the brave partisans who led the resistance for decades and the restoration of Lithuania's independence in the 1990s.

At the end of the historical reflections, the participants sang the Lithuanian national anthem, and its words echoed on the mountaintops.

Finally, after returning to the Hermitage, the members enjoyed a delicious lunch and fun conversations. We are happy to be Lithuanians and be united.



Vaida Juodzevičienė with her son



Participants of the celebration by a Lithuanian cross

current events

Security

In preparation for the NATO summit in mid-July, Germany has deployed 12 vehicles used with their Patriot missile launchers for use against ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and airplanes. Sixteen NATO allies have sent 1,000 troops to safeguard the delegates, including President Joe Biden.

The Speaker of the Seimas, Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, has asked NATO to increase its military presence in the Baltic region by increasing its Forward Presence Battle Group to the level of a Forward Brigade, increasing the air defense positions and increasing prepositioning NATO equipment and supplies. She presented her requests at a meeting of NATO parliament speakers in Vilnius in early June.

The telecommunications company, Telia Lithuania, has established the Center of Digital Progress to educate businesses and organizations about digital crimes, denial of service, and cyber-attacks, including some that originated in Russia.



Lithuania's state-owned air navigation service, Oro Navigacija, will install a new air traffic management system for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) by the summer of 2024 at a cost of 2.5 million euros. This drone U-Space system will be provided by Austria's Frequentis. It will provide general information, flight confirmation, and traffic information via a mobile application and will integrate emergency services with companies and institutions that are concerned about drone traffic.

A two-week Lithuanian-German military exercise, dubbed Griffin Storm, extends from June-July in eastern Švenčionys, 84 km north of Vilnius. The German 411th Panzergrenadier Battalion and its attached units including around 1,000 military personnel and 320

pieces of military equipment, were deployed by air, ferry, rail, and road.

The floating storage and regasification unit, Independence, will be purchased from Norway's Hoegh LNG by Lithuania's Klaipėdos Nafta. Prior to purchase, it is scheduled to have preventative maintenance done in France, Portugal, or Spain during May-June 2024, during which time natural gas will be supplied via the Lithuanian-Polish pipeline and from Latvia's Incukalns storage facility.

Ukraine

In commemoration of the International Day for Protection of Children, about 50 people protested outside the Russian Embassy in Vilnius because of Russia's abduction of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia.

Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, who resides in exile in Lithuania, has provided information that more than 2,000 Ukrainian children, mostly orphans, were illegally transferred from Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine to camps in Belarus.

Lithuania has allocated 10 million euros to a new European Investment Bank (EIB) trust fund that will finance the reconstruction of Ukraine's essential infrastructure.

Covid-19

More than 390,000 doses of bivalent Covid-19 vaccines donated by Lithuania have arrived in the Philippines. Bivalent vaccines provide protection against the original Covid-19 strain (SARS-CoV-2) and Omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5. President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. thanked Lithuania, "The Philippines conveys its gratitude to the Republic of Lithuania for their generosity and their donation of the country's first batch of bivalent vaccines." In December, the Philippines and Lithuania will celebrate 32 years of diplomatic relations.

Business

Hokodo, a London-based international Business to Business (B2B) payments provider, will open an office in Vilnius with 30 new hires. It will service Hokodo's clients in the Baltic, Nordic, and Central European markets. It provides immediate payment and trade credit- Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) options.

The Seimas has approved the beginning of charging users for the use of electric vehicle chargers in 2024. There are currently about 850 EV charging stations, and the number is expected to reach 1,200 by 2025 and 6,000-7,000 by 2030. About 100 million euros is expected to be spent on the expansion.

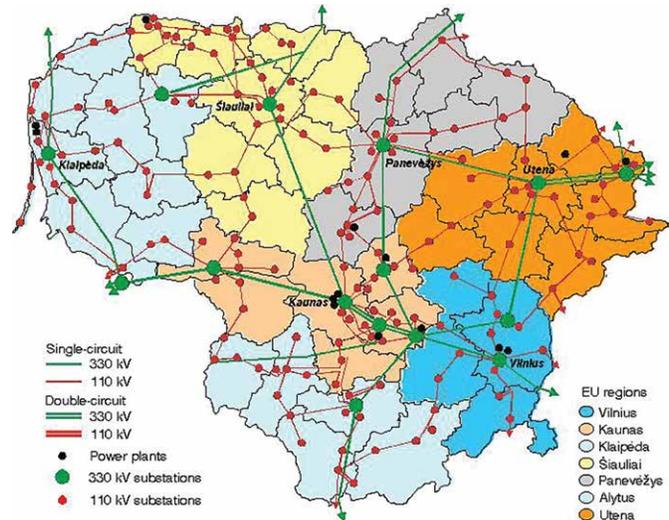
The Bank of Lithuania (BOL) has revoked the electronic money institution license of PayrNet, a subsidiary of banking service provider Railsr. In February 2023, the BOL found that PayrNet owed more money than it possessed, making it insolvent because it incurred over 7 million euros in expenses for other companies in Railsr, which it couldn't recover. The BOL found that it grossly and systematically violated the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing because of inadequate internal controls, poor compliance with due diligence procedures, and failure to properly monitor client transactions. The BOL intends to begin bankruptcy proceedings against PayrNet and seek potential criminal offenses.

The Lithuanian railway operator, LTG Link, has ordered 15 Fast Light Intercity and Regional Train (FLIRT) units from the Swiss manufacturer, Stadler at a price of 226.5 million euros. The order includes 9 FLIRT Intercity electric multiple units, which have five-car units 93 meters long with the capability of up to 200 passengers and 14 to 30 bicycles. These units will run between Vilnius and Klaipėda. The order also includes 6 FLIRT battery electric multiple units of three passenger cars and a Power Pack car with batteries 65 meters long that can seat 128 passengers and 6 to 30 bicycles. The battery trains will replace diesel engine trains that are now operated on non-electrified sections of track. Delivery is scheduled for 2025, with passengers expected in mid-2026. Stadler has already sold over 2,500 FLIRT trains worldwide, including 38 units to Estonian operator Elron.

In 2022, Lithuania attracted 222 million euros of venture capital funding. A developer, Tech Zity, plans an infrastructure project worth 100 million euros, to convert unused sewing factories in Vilnius' New Town into 55,000 square meters of a tech campus, which will make it the largest startup campus in Europe. In addition to office space, the campus will include co-living spaces, restaurants, and bars, plus cultural and educational facilities. Tech Zity already manages three tech campuses in Vilnius, including Tech Park, Tech Loft, and Tech Spa, which include tenants such as Google, Bored Panda, and Kilo Health.

General

The Seimas has approved the early implementation of synchronizing the country's electrical grid with the Continental European Grid in the first half of 2024. Latvia and Estonia are on the original schedule to synchronize by late 2025.



The International Skating Union announced that Lithuania will host the ISU European Figure Skating Championships in 2024. The championships were originally scheduled for Budapest, but Hungary had to withdraw because of economic and energy price problems.

Lithuania plans on responding to the International Monetary Fund's recommendations to lower taxation on labor and raise taxes on capital and property and adverse effects on the environment. The draft tax reform package includes increasing the threshold for the additional income tax rate, changing the way the corporate income tax for small companies is calculated, and raising the threshold for tax-free residential real estate.

Drought warnings have been issued in 10 municipalities in Lithuania, but the Lithuania National Crisis Management Center has refrained from declaring a national emergency, at least for now. The municipalities include Klaipėda, Kretinga, Mažeikiai, Pakruojis, Plungė, Rokiškis, Šakiai, Šilutė, and Telšiai.

The Seimas has banned the sale of heated tobacco products with added aroma or flavor after October 23.

UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

Memoir of a Siberian Deportee

By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė

Translated from the Lithuanian by Giedrė Kumpikas, Ph.D., niece of the author, and Isabel Kumpikas, sister of the author

73. LITTLE BIRDS THROWN OUT OF THEIR NEST (continued from the June 2023 issue)

Their mother, having remained in Siberia, could not stand the longing, especially since the children took so long to make the trip, and she had had no news of them. Only after a month, did she receive a bit of news from her sister that the children were safe.

The mother decided to run away to join them. She made an agreement with another woman. She obtained a permit from the local administration to go to the regional center. She arrived in Parbig. Again 1000 rubles. Again, she made an agreement with the pilots. They told her to come straight to the airport when it was dark. There they met her and shoved her into the mail section, in the baggage hold, and when it was light, they left. And so then she was in the dream of Tomsk!

Skukauskienė went to buy a ticket boldly since she still had a passport with her maiden name. The cashier looked her over suspiciously and flipped through the passport. In it were only old Lithuanian registration stamps.

“Why are you in Tomsk and your passport is not registered?” he asked.

“I came here to visit relatives,” she answered.

“What’s their address?”

What could she answer? How could she justify herself? The cashier took the passport and went to the militia to ask for an explanation. Of course, the passport was not returned, and she was arrested. Her co-traveler, Paulauskienė, having been seized as well, put all the blame on Skukauskienė.

“She’s not Brazauskaitė, but rather Skukauskienė from the Parbig region, the Burka settlement. I would never have run, but she talked me into it.”

The denouncer, as an atoning person who had only been lured by Skukauskienė, was brought back in stages through the prisons, but Skukauskienė was locked up in prison, where she died. Her sister and children found out about it much later.

The aunt, not receiving any news, was still caring for the children, sent them to school: Birutė to elementary

school, Jonukas to the technical school in Vilnius. They would sometimes go back to their aunt’s to pick up some food and money. She would give him Tsarist five-ruble gold pieces, which he would sell to speculators, and on that, they lived. Besides, at their aunt’s house, much of their father’s sheet music was left from the days when he had been a student at the Riga Conservatory. These also, Jonukas was selling to the Conservatory School.

In this way, with these poor means, the children were surviving and studying. But they did not succeed in completing their studies.

One fine day, they were summoned to the militia.

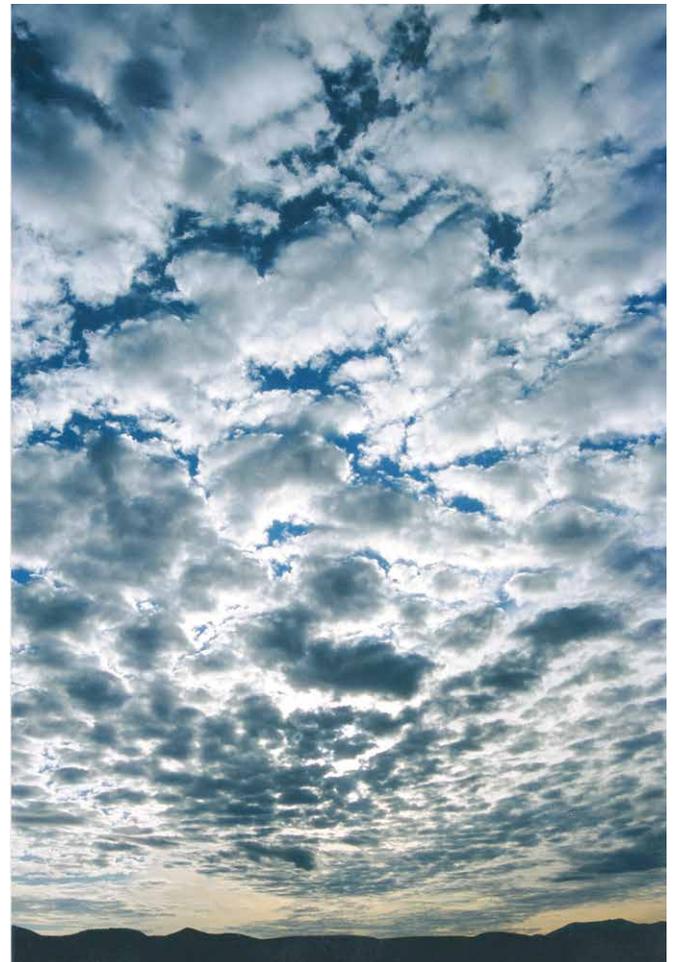
“Where does your mother live?” asked the interrogator.

“Tomsk district, Parbig region, Burka settlement,” answered Jonukas, since he knew no other address.

“Don’t lie! Tell the truth! Where is your mother?” the interrogator yelled angrily.

Jonukas repeated the same: “Tomsk district, Parbig region, Burka settlement.”

The interrogator raised a stick threateningly and



Siberian Sky. Photograph by Rolandas Žygas

yelled furiously.

Birutė began to cry, but even through her tears, she said the same thing as her brother. Jonukas, even though he was frightened, still repeated the same. The interrogator was Russian and ordered the children to be taken out and locked up in a cell.

The next day, they were interrogated by a Lithuanian. Jonukas complained that the man had wanted to hit them and had threatened them with punishment. The Lithuanian interrogator became angry at how the other one had dared behave in such a manner with minors and promised to do everything he could to have them released.

But the power was on the Russian's side. The children were once again forced back to Siberia: this time by stages through the prisons "na sojedeninije semji"—to rejoin the family. For such was the decision of the closed court. And so, after a journey of one and a half months, as part of a convoy, the children again found themselves in Parbig. With that same echelon, more of those children, who had been returned to Lithuania before, were now brought back again to Siberia, children whose mothers had remained there and whose fathers had died in the camps:

always officially for the uniting of families. Was this humane?

On the journey, the Skukauskas children became friends with another boy from Parbig, the son of a woman agronomist who was working in a Parbig market garden. They were brought to Parbig after nightfall. The little Jurgaitis boy invited them to his place, but the mother refused to take them in. She was probably afraid that the children would remain not just one night but forever. She only had a little corner, separated within her landlord's chata.

And so, these two little birds thrown out of their nest wound up in the dark, cold Siberian night. Where to go?

They were free. There was no room in prison. They went back to the commandant's office. There it was light and warm. The commandant Romashkov was a humane man. He looked at the children with sympathy. He knew that their mother was not under his command. What her fate was, he did not know. She had been crossed off the commandant's office list.

"It's all right, children. We'll think of something."

He sent for the militiaman. He brought two large Siberian fur coats.

"Children, tonight you'll sleep in my office. Only don't touch anything, and tomorrow we'll find an abode. Sleep on the fur coats, it's soft and warm. 'Utro vechera mudreje—the morning is wiser than the evening.' Sleep peacefully," the commandant consoled the children and went out.

In the morning, they were taken to the barracks, in which Armenians recently brought from the Caucasus, had been settled. They looked at them askance and mumbled, "The space is very tight as is, and here they squeeze in these children. But, you can't blow against the wind.

The administration gives orders and you have to obey! They are giving jobs in the manufacturing enterprise to Lithuanians who had gotten away from the collective farms and begun career." The Armenians were thinking about people like my husband, my son Liudas, Doctor Šakenienė, and many others.

So there! Jonukas and Birutė were provided with lodging and with the job of going to the taiga to prepare firewood and with some privileges. They didn't have to go far, only 3-4 km. The forest had been thinned out. It had been many years since anyone had cut there. The norm for minors is only two cubic meters. They get 500 grams of bread each. The only other food was whatever they managed to get somehow and prepare themselves. The bread freezes like a rock in the forest. Birutė wanted to make a small bonfire to warm up the bread and to heat some water from melted snow in a can she had found.

Jonukas protested: "If we start making a bonfire, melting snow, when will we finish our norm." And that norm is no joke. It is easy to say two cubic meters, but to do it? Cut down the trees, cut off the branches, cut up the trunks into pieces half a meter each, chop them up, load them into piles, and then pile the branches into heaps. Such work is not for youngsters! But, Siberia is Siberia—it is a cruel country, and a deportee is a deportee—no one pities him.

And for what is this hardship? For what are these tortures? Only because their mother was a teacher and their father an officer? They were decent people.

Who will list all the injustices, all the injuries, which man does to man?

What is the purpose? Who will answer for it?

But, nothing is forever. Whoever kills others, sooner or later perishes himself.

*gira - bread-cider.

*kugel - grated, baked potatoes, see Ch. 19.

*Plotkelės - Christmas wafers.

*Kūčios - traditional Christmas Eve Supper at which twelve dishes are served, but no meat.

*kisielius - a thin cranberry pudding,

74. DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

The daughters of the former Minister of Agriculture were also brought back to Siberia. They went back to their mother in Svetlo-Zelionoe. She lives in real pov-

erty. She welcomes the girls with a mixture of heartache and ironic humor:

“So, my ladies have come clattering back... Girls, what you have brought with you, that you will have...”

She thought, that the girls had been provided for in Lithuania, since there, not far from Vilnius, lived their father, Jonas Aleksa, who had returned from Germany and who was the brother of Angarietis, a well-renowned communist activist from before the war.* He worked as a translator of books and articles. Whatever he earned, he immediately brought to the girls. They lived in Vilnius. The oldest one, Daina, worked and studied in the School of Agricultural Technology, the younger ones: Jane, worked in the agrochemical laboratory, while Ada attended middle school.

One day, they were arrested, as they stood, they were not even permitted to go home, and, in stages, by train, through prisons, they were forced back to Siberia “to be united with the family,” while the father was sent to the Altai region. Janė was wearing only a dress and a sweater, the other two with some sort of coat, but not suitable for the Siberian cold.

In the Parbig sewing shop worked two sisters of Father Bielskus, the former Head of the Presidential Office during the entire existence of Independent Lithuania: one was the wife of General Reklaitis, the other, the wife of the Veterinary Doctor Rutkauskas. They advised one of the Aleksaitės, who was, so to say, “naked,” to go and work as a maid for the director of the sewing shop. He agrees to provide her with clothing and food. The other two remained on the collective farm: Daina works as a tractor operator, and the younger one, as a common worker.

Everyone is amazed. A young woman, not having attended any courses, only by reading the instructions, became one of the best tractor operators on the collective farm.

Her story is tragic, but everything cannot be recounted. The Minister's daughter, Janė, becomes the maid of a tailor in a Siberian village.

One day, Liudas, my son, comes home and says:

“What would you say if I married Janė?”

“I would have no objections, but where would you live?”

“We made an agreement with Steponavičienė. She's being sent to Kionga (80 km away) to the taiga, to fell trees. She has no one to whom she can leave her chata. She doesn't want any Russians, she suggests we live there and take care of it until she returns.”

“Think it over, after all, you are already of age. I will not interfere in matters of the heart.”

“Mamyte, one more thing: when she leaves, she has nothing to wear. I'll make felt boots for her myself,

maybe you can come up with some sort of clothing for her to put on?”

What to do? From my poor provisions, I gave her a set of underwear, a skirt, and a blouse...

She managed to make herself a coat at the sewing shop. They moved into that promised chata, but not long after that, the owner came back and Liudas and his wife had to move out. Liudas went back to the barracks and his wife came to us in Melstroy. Shortly thereafter, another single woman agreed to take them in as renters. This house had two rooms, it was light. In the taiga, there was as much firewood as one wished, one only had to prepare it and bring it back.

The thought came to him to build his own “palace” in Parbig also. On Sundays, he called the Lithuanian men together to help. Stasiukas, Juozukas and I also came. I bake rabbit meat and make soup. Very quickly, a fourth Žukauskas “palace” arose in Parbig.

Glass for the windows, a permit for bricks from the MTS, boards for the roof, the ceilings, the floors, and partitions, he cut himself at the mill from forest material he had prepared himself.

You did not have to pay for trees.

Cut and transport as much as you like.

The housewarming. Liudukas and his wife move into their own house. It is spacious, light, and warm. They disturb no one, and no one disturbs them.

75. ONE MORE JOB

Stasys and I continued working at the zagotzerno. Here the administration kept on changing while average territorial and warehouse guards like us remained in place. Stasiukas was still the acting bookkeeper, and I worked at whatever came along.

Starvation was over. Gone were the sores on my legs. And my teeth were not loose anymore.

From the district came an order to set up an eatery for those farmers bringing grain from the collective farms. I was appointed supervisor. The job pleased me because it was not strenuous and there were no mosquitoes to sting me. Besides, lunch did not cost anything, and I was able to get bread.

For those eating, the norm with one glass of tea, 100 g of bread, and 10 g of sugar, and with dinner it was 200 g of bread.

I ordered the supplies from the warehouse at the government price, and the prepared dinners were served with a 30% markup. Even though the price was not high, the poor collective farm workers could not always afford even that. For this reason, the crowd that came consisted of the laboratory worker, the chief of security,

bookkeeping employees, and the wife of the director, who came with containers and took back dinner for her whole family. My cooking pleased everyone. Sometimes officials came from the regional center. But conflicts could not be avoided.

Once, the Second Secretary of the Regional Communist Party came with his son and a guest. They ordered 100 g of vodka with some little sandwiches, and the child, having looked at the menu, asked for “a potato biscuit.” That biscuit was a Lithuanian grated potato kugelis with a sour cream sauce. I served it.

The Secretary glanced angrily at the “biscuit” and said, “That’s a biscuit?”

Another guest added, “She probably doesn’t know what a biscuit is.”

Very quietly I took down from the shelf a package of biscuits with the words “biskvit.” The price was 15 rubles, and the weight was 200 g. I brought it to the table and said, “Here you are! She knows what a biscuit is. Besides that, she knows also how much it costs. And this is not supposed to be a real biscuit. It is listed in the menu as a potato biscuit. A real one is even more expensive. You really do not understand that, if you are getting a meal for 69 kopecks, you cannot expect it to be real! If it were real, you would pay 37 and a half rubles for 500 g.

“So, why do you write such nonsense?”

“Before, I used to write baked meal, but, one young man said to me, ‘Baked meal’ is completely unclear. My grandmother used to bake something like this and she called it ‘biskvit.’

He, as a native of the place, had to know the name of such a meal, because, as you see, he did not like my invented name. What should the menu say to please everybody? So, shall I bring you a serving of the real biscuits?”

“No, that’s not necessary. We’ll find that elsewhere.”

Other diners were quietly looking in our direction. I went behind my bar, and the guests departed to their own destinations.

After two days, I went to the Parbig region’s cooperative administration so that they could issue a new apportionment to get supplies.

Hearing my voice, the director himself came out of his office:

“How are you? What happened there with the Party Secretary? He called me and said that you had been impolite.”

“How so! He picked on the advertisement wording in the menu and wanted to mock me. I answered him in kind and proved to him—very politely—that I was not the ignorant one, but he was. Apparently, he was angered since it was in front of witnesses.”

In detail, and not without humor, I recounted how

everything had occurred.

“Good, good, Žukauskiene, write as cleverly as you like, let them guess. I go to Tomsk, I go to an eatery, there is written a clever name for a dish. You wonder what it could be? You order it, and it is just meat, nothing unusual,” the director said, in a very good mood and addressing me for the first with the familiar “thou.”

Another occurrence.

The assistant to the director of the cooperative, an expert on merchandise, arrived at the merchandise base. He stopped by to eat. As usual—100 g of vodka. I measure out 100 grams with a small top-off. Having poured it into a glass, I brought it over to the table.

“Why didn’t you fill it up?” he asked in a gruff voice.

“You asked for 100 grams, not a glassful.”

“This is not 100 grams.”

Everyone began to stare. He was well known for his grasping ways, and all the servers tried to cater to him and then take it out on the rank and file. I was not one of those.

“We shall check,” I say. I take the 100 g measure and in front of everyone I wipe it dry. I go up to the table.

Taking the glass, I carefully pour the vodka out into the measure. It was full to the top and a few drops were still left in the glass, which I hold up so that everyone can see.

“As you can see, only your eyes are greedy, it was full even with a bonus. I am not one of those who leaves drops for herself.”

Andrikov (such was his last name) at first became sort of confused but then, recovering, said, “Your glass is smaller.”

“For that, I am not responsible. Whichever one you supplied from the base is the one I am using.

Finally, I can even check that. I have not checked up to this point to see whether a half-liter bottle would have anything left over after five glasses were poured out. Whoever wants to participate in the checking is welcome.”

A teacher, sitting at a table, scowling angrily, looked displeased at Andrikov. “What’s there to verify?” the teacher says, speaking up. “This is a government measure.”

“But I, nevertheless, want to prove to ‘Mister’—this was an insulting form of address in Soviet times—“Andrikov, that he doesn’t know what he is looking for.

I am not Lyda or Prosia or Anya.”

I take a half-liter and pour it out into glasses. The last one is not quite full. Well, what do we see? Maybe the half-liter is too small?” I say, mockingly.

The teacher adds, “One shouldn’t insult a person without a reason.” Take it however you like as to who insulted whom.



On May 12, 2024, a referendum on the legalization of multiple citizenship will be held in Lithuania. The draft Constitutional Law on Citizenship, which elaborates on the principles of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania and the grounds for acquiring and losing it, is available here: <https://e-Seimas.lrs.lt/.../3a2ea860d44d11ed9b3c9397e1236c2a>. The World Lithuanian Community is preparing a plan for engaging the diaspora and disseminating the referendum to it. Meetings are also planned with the Chief Elections Committee (CEC) and other institutions to improve the automation and dissemination of voting registration processes. If you have ideas and/or would like to contribute, please contact plb@plb.lt.



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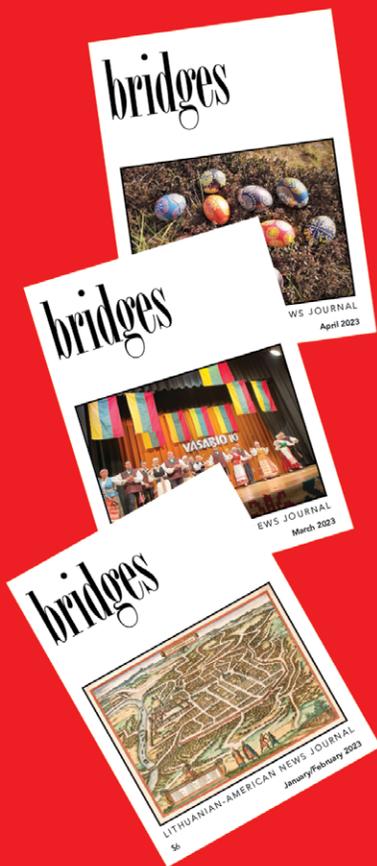
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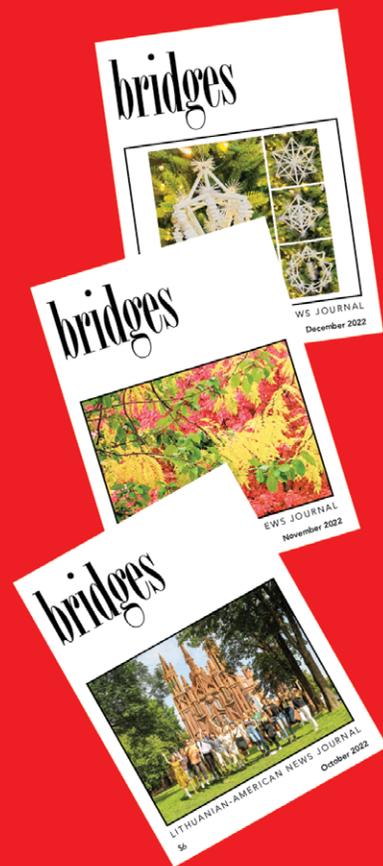
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