

MONTREAL, QUEBEC

Montreal is the port city where their crossing of the Atlantic ended for many Lithuanians. So it is not surprising that the 1951 Canadian census indicates 3,438 Lithuanians in Montreal and 552 in the suburb of Verdun. Community leader Jonas Kardelis wrote in *Lietuvių Enciklopedija (Lithuanian Encyclopaedia)* that “Montreal’s Lithuanian community was established about 1900, but the exact date is unknown. Before 1901, no statistics were compiled about Lithuanians and later census figures lumped Lithuanians together with Hungarians and Moravians. It was only after 1921 that Lithuanians were listed separately... The first recorded Lithuanian family name is that of the Štarkas brothers, who arrived from Glasgow in 1902... The number of Lithuanians in Montreal increased after the 1905 revolution because many fled czarist repression... A Lithuanian émigré office was opened in Montreal, with a branch office in Kaunas.”

Lithuanians established many organizations in Montreal from 1904 onwards: the Saint Anthony and Saint Paul Mutual Aid Society (established in 1904 and disbanded the following year); the Saint Casimir Mutual Aid Society (22 October 1905); a local chapter of the Lithuanians in America Union; Saint Casimir’s Parish (1907); the Vytautas the Great Society (1907); the Lithuanian Socialist Alliance (1908); the *Birutė* Mutual Aid Society (1909); Saint Ann’s Society (1911); Saint Elizabeth’s Society (1919); the newspaper *Darbininkų Balsas (Voice of the Workers)* (1932); a chapter of the Sons and Daughters of Lithuania Society (1928); the Lithuanian Canadian Council (1940).

Later on the LCC and the *Seimelis*, an umbrella group for Montreal’s Lithuanian organizations, were established. Lithuanian activities were supported by the CFMB radio program produced by L. Stankevičius and the newspaper *Nepriklausoma Lietuva (Independent Lithuania)*.

The movement to separate Quebec from Canada had a negative effect on Montreal’s Lithuanian activities. As Fr. J. Kubilius, founder of Our Lady Gate of Dawn parish, noted in 1986, “This caused considerable concern in the community and led to a migration to other provinces. Another factor was the French language. It was impossible to find more prestigious employment without mastering the language...but Lithuanians...had concentrated on learning English” and sent their children to English schools. Many of Montreal’s Lithuanians are moving to Ontario and the community is losing its leaders and active members as well as the younger generation. Montreal’s loss is Ontario’s Lithuanians’ gain.

LCC. J. Kardelis, a member of the national Lithuanian Provisional Organizing Committee (POC), invited representatives of Montreal’s Lithuanian organizations to a meeting in 1950, where he convinced them to form a local chapter of the POC. The chapter functioned for two years and was chaired by J. Navikėnas, K. Toliušis and J. Viliušis. In 1952, after the establishment of the Lithuanian Canadian Community, a Montreal chapter was formed. Only 202 people voted in the elections to the executive committee. The *Seimelis*, “representing Montreal’s organizations and elected representatives,” was formed early in 1955. According to an article in the V Canadian Lithuanian Days yearbook, for all intents and purposes it took over the functions of the LCC in Montreal.

There is no information about *Seimelis* activities after 1961, when the LCC chapter resumed its functions. As in other chapters, Montreal’s executive committee has

organized Independence Day ceremonies, Deportation commemorations and Mother's Day celebrations, as well as special events. In 1997, for example, there was a memorial for the poet Henrikas Nagys. A Montreal Lithuanian Community Choir is named in a list of Montreal organizations functioning in 1956. The executive committee supported Montreal's Lithuanian schools and the *Baltija* youth campground in the Laurentian Mountains. The committee assisted in establishing Lithuanian schools, advanced Lithuanian courses, summer camps, and local branches of the National Foundation and the Baltic Federation.

An LCC Relief Fund used to send over 40 packages of clothing annually to Suvalkai, an area inhabited by Lithuanians in present-day Poland. The executive committee and a small group of local Lithuanians used to take care of visitors from Lithuania. During the independence movement, visitors from Lithuania could only fly on Aeroflot, and only into Montreal. Mr. and Mrs. Staškevičius and a committee chaired by Juozas Piečaitis took care of hundreds of guests, found accommodations for them and showed them around Montreal. Yves Mainville, a French-Canadian married to a local Lithuanian, provided six containers of medical supplies for Lithuania. Shipping costs were defrayed by the executive committee, the credit union *Litas* and the national executive of the LCC. Professor B. Shore of McGill University collected 44 boxes of academic journals and texts for the University of Vilnius, with shipping costs paid by the Lithuanian Canadian Community Fund.

As in other chapters, various efforts were made to educate Canadians about little-known Lithuania. These ranged from getting a thoroughfare in the LaSalle district named "Lithuania Street" to participating in demonstrations organized by the Montreal branches of the Baltic Federation, the Black Ribbon Day Committee and the United Nations Human Rights Committee. Letters and petitions were sent to federal and provincial politicians. In 1975, political prisoner Simas Kudirka was invited to Montreal to participate in the Deportation ceremonies and at a press conference with local media.

The start of the independence movement in Lithuania in 1988 had a considerable impact on the activities of the local executive committee. It organized demonstrations at the Soviet consulate, a parade through the streets of Montreal during the Soviet Union's economic blockade of Lithuania and a motorcade in the downtown core when the government of Canada recognized Lithuania's independence. The executive committee maintained good contacts with the media and kept Lithuania in the public eye, especially after the murder of Lithuanian civilians by Soviet armed forces on 13 January 1991. Montreal's Lithuanians participated in demonstrations at the Soviet embassy in Ottawa and were generous contributors to the SOS Lithuania fund-raising drive.

The executive committee organizes Independence Day ceremonies and participates in the Baltic Evening reception for parliamentarians and senators in Ottawa. It invites dance groups, musicians and performers from other cities for concerts and plays. The executive committee has assisted Lithuanian military personnel studying English or French at the Canadian Forces Language School in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. The executive is composed of A. Staškevičius, Inga Giedrikienė, Donaldas Giedrikas, Vitalija Keršulienė, Antanas Mickus, Bronius Niedvaras, Alfredas Piešina and Silvija Staškevičienė.

LCC Montreal chapter chairs: L. Balsys, L. Balzaras, S. Naginionis, S. Kešgaila, J. Malaiška, J. Adomonis, A. Norkeliūnas, A. Rusinas, Juozas Šiaučiulis, K.

Andruškevičius, R. Verbyla, J. Lukošius, P. Klezas, S. Piečaitienė, V. Piečaitis, Juozas Šiaučiulis, Arūnas Staškevičius.

Events. Montreal has organized seven Canadian Lithuanian Days: III in 1955, VIII in 1961, XIII in 1967, XVIII in 1972, XXII in 1976, XXVII in 1982 and XXXI in 1986.

Credit union. Montreal Lithuanian Credit Union *Litas*.

Schools. The first Lithuanian school in Montreal was established by Fr. Juozas Vyšniauskas in 1918. By 1929 there were four full-time elementary schools supported by the provincial government. Dwindling student numbers caused the schools to close in 1934. The post-War immigrants established three Saturday schools in various areas of Montreal. They functioned during the 1950s and -60s. There has been a single Lithuanian school in Montreal since 1969. From 1954 until 1974 there were also advanced Lithuanian courses provided under the direction of poet Dr. Henrikas Nagys.

Library. The *Rūta* Pensioners' Club has a library of over 2000 books. Non-members may use the library.

Organizations. Montreal's Lithuanian *Seimelis*, *Baltija* campground, Montreal's Lithuanian Academic Association, Lithuanian National Guard, CFMB Lithuanian Radio Program, Montreal Men's Octet, *Pavasaris* choir, *Gintaras* Folk Dance and Music Ensemble, *Kovas* Sports Club, Montreal Lithuanian Theatre Troupe, Lithuanian Catholic Women's Association of Canada, Scouts, Lithuanian Catholic Federation *Ateitis*, *Tauras* Basketball Club, *Ramovė* Veterans' Association, Montreal Lithuanian Credit Union *Litas*, *Rūta* Pensioners' Club, Saint Ann's Society, Saint Elizabeth's Society, Vytautas the Great Society.

Parishes. Our Lady Gate of Dawn and St. Casimir's Parishes, Evangelical-Lutheran Lithuanians.

Media. *Nepriklausoma Lietuva* newspaper and CFMB Lithuanian Radio Program.