

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

According to a 1957 report, the first Lithuanians settled in British Columbia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the earliest arrivals were Aleksas and Ona Kazlauskas. The III Lithuanian Days publication indicated that they had come to British Columbia in 1905 and were still living in New Westminster in 1955.

Before the War, Algirdas Grinkus organized a politically left-leaning Lithuanian Literary Society. Over 200 Lithuanian immigrants came to Vancouver from 1948 to 1950. Most of these left for Montreal or Toronto, seeking larger concentrations of Lithuanians.

The first post-war immigrant organization, a folk-dancing group led by D. Kaunaitė, appeared at the Independence Day (16 February) ceremonies in 1949.

In the 1951 Canadian census, 738 British Columbians identified themselves as Lithuanians. This number did not include everyone of Lithuanian descent, and excluded those born in Canada. It was impossible to draw all these Lithuanians into community affairs because of the sheer size of the province: Lithuanians lived at considerable distances from each other, often separated by hundreds of kilometres.

**LCC.** A branch was established in 1953 due to the efforts of Jonas Juškaitis. Chairpersons: J. Juškaitis, Jonas J. Justis, Adomas Kaulius, Dr. Julius Sakalauskas, J. Šmitas, Algis Janušonis, F. Valys, Edvardas Gumbelis (1974-75, 1980 and 1988), L. Macijauskienė, Balys Vileita, Marytė Račys.

**Activities:** The executive of the LCC organizes Independence Day, Christmas and Mother's Day events, as well as picnics, especially on the feast day of St. John the Baptist. There used to be New Year's Eve celebrations, children's pageants, programs on Lithuania on the local radio station and handicraft displays at the multicultural festival in Vancouver. Local Lithuanians were active participants in demonstrations against the Soviet Union. The younger generation took part in demonstrations in support of subjugated nations when Soviet premier Kosygin visited Vancouver. Lithuanians sent letters of protest and petitions to the government of Canada and wrote to the Archbishop to request religious services for the faithful of Lithuania. From January to May of 1991, Vancouver's Lithuanians, Estonians and Latvians organized 15 demonstrations to publicize Lithuania's struggle for freedom. In August of that year, about 50 Lithuanians in Vancouver took part in a celebration to give thanks for Lithuania's regained independence, collecting \$2,600 for the SOS Lithuania Fund in Toronto.

There is an active Lithuanian community in Vancouver, with Canadian-born leaders and Lithuanians who have moved here from other places in Canada. A folk-dancing group was re-established in 1998, with Zita Kaulienė as director. The *Viltis* (Hope) sports club is constantly expanding.

Vancouver's Lithuanians celebrated Christmas in 1999 by getting together for a cultural program and coffee and cake. Speakers included Chris Juras, the newly-appointed honorary consul of Lithuania in British Columbia; Bernadeta Abromaitytė-Verch, who spoke about ancient Christmas Eve traditions; and Z. Kaulienė, who described Christmas in Lithuania. The choir sang English and Lithuanian hymns, the folk-dancing group performed three dances and J. Kuzmickaitė played Mozart's works on the piano. Such variety serves to demonstrate the vitality of Lithuanian culture in Vancouver.

**Other organizations.** The Vancouver branch of the Lithuanian Canadian Council was still active in 1955. Its executive committee was composed Emilis Smilgis, Jonas Macijauskas and Balys Vileita. Somewhat later, there was a group formed to support the Lithuanian High School in Hüttenfeld, Germany. Also active were chapters of the National and Cultural Foundations, the *Bebras* (Beaver) Club, a chess club, the folk-dancing group *Atžalynas* (New Growth), a women's singing octet and the singing group *Rudenėlis* (Autumn). A group of young Canadian-Lithuanian singers was formed in 1998, and there is the new sports club *Viltis*.

**Parish.** Lithuanians used to meet for Sunday services at the Ukrainian community's Cordova church in 1949-50. There were no regular Lithuanian religious services after that time.

**School.** A Lithuanian school was established by the LCC chapter's executive in 1956, with principal Zita Kaulienė. Approximate student numbers:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
1956	27
1956-57	25
1957-58	18
1960	School operations suspended.
1966	17
1967	14

**Media.** In 1972-73, the radio program *Gimtosios Padangės Garsai* (Sounds of the Homeland), sponsored by the local LCC executive and produced by F. Valys and Z. Kaulienė, was broadcast on CJVB 1470. Lack of funds led to its cancellation. The monthly newsletter *Rūta* has been published in English and Lithuanian since 1961.

**Statistics.** At the 1960 convention of the LCC National Council, the representative from British Columbia reported that there were 300 Lithuanians in the province, with 119 belonging to the LCC. The VIII Lithuanian Days publication (1961) indicated about 300 Lithuanians, including family members, while at the 1970 convention of the LCC National Council it was reported that approximately 110 Lithuanian families lived in the area. About 30-35 participants attended Lithuanian events by 1977. Then community events were revived, and groups from other centers were invited to perform. According to British Columbia's LCC figures, in 1984 there were 150 Lithuanians, about a quarter of them involved in community affairs. In 1999, the LCC counted approximately 250 families on its rosters. Of these, perhaps 80 from the Vancouver area participated in Lithuanian events. There is a fairly active group of younger Lithuanians, all born in Canada and from outside the province, who still speak Lithuanian and want community events to continue.