

## CALGARY, ALBERTA

Lithuanians have lived in Calgary since 1923. There was new immigration from Lithuania in 1947-48 and some since 1990. An effort to organize a local chapter of the Lithuanian Canadian Community (LCC) in 1950 proved unsuccessful because of opposition from some local Lithuanians. A Lithuanian Committee was active at the time, organizing picnics and other events. The Committee became the Calgary Lithuanian Cultural Society on 28 March 1953 and remains active to this day.

The Calgary chapter of the LCC was established on 9 December 1956, but had only 27 members by the following year. Active members included Antanas Nevada, Liudas Bruzga, Pranas Gluoksnyš, Juozas Dubauskas, Antanas Snieckus, Veronika Grigienė, Petras Devenis and Kęstutis Dubauskas.

**Activities.** Each year the executive committee organizes Independence Day (February 16) ceremonies. In the past, the 14 June deportations and Armed Forces Day were also commemorated. There are annual picnics, and various traditional holidays (St. John's Day, St. Peter's Day, New Year's, Christmas, Mother's Day) used to be celebrated from time to time. From 1968 to 1991, the Lithuanian flag was raised outside City Hall on Independence Day. There used to be dances and displays of Lithuania handicrafts. Lithuanians participated in the first such display organized by V. Grigienė in 1949, and took part in Canada's centennial celebrations in 1967.

Calgary's Lithuanians organized the second convention of Lithuanians in Western Canada in 1960 and the fifth in 1971. In 1977, the younger generation of Lithuanians from all over Canada came to a youth camp near Calgary organized by Antanas Vyšniauskas.

The National Foundation was supported from the founding of the Calgary chapter of the LCC until the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence. The Foundation was represented by Petras Devenis, Stasys Kvietys and Pranas Gluoksnyš. Two folk-dancing groups were established in 1975 and performed for about a decade. The groups were led by Gražina Noreikienė, Ida Barutienė, Elvyra Krausienė and Julė Vyšniauskienė. The newsletter *Vėjas*, published since 1977, has been edited by Kęstutis Dubauskas for over 20 years. News about Calgary's Lithuanians by correspondents K. Dubauskas, Albinas Kaziūnas and Nelė Astraviene appears in the newspaper *Tėviškės Žiburiai*. A cookbook on Lithuanian foods, *Lithuanians Cook in Calgary*, was published in English in 1984. For several years, beginning in 1989, a Lithuanian radio program was heard in the "Cultural Crossroads" series.

Calgary's Lithuanians were represented on the multicultural Alberta Heritage Council and the Folk Arts Council by E. Krausienė, K. Dubauskas, A. Lederytė, I. Barutienė and J. Vyšniauskienė. Lithuanian art was displayed during the annual Canada Day exhibitions and Lithuanian pastry sold during Heritage Days events, with profits going to LCC events.

In 1990 and 1991 Calgary's Lithuanians became politically engaged to help Lithuania regain its independence. They were active in the Calgary Coalition for Democracy and demonstrated at City Hall, despite the extremes of hot and cold weather in Calgary. They were interviewed on television and radio and wrote letters to the editor. Lithuania's premier G. Vagnorius paid a visit to Calgary in 1991.

A significant number of community leaders passed away from 1990 to 1996, almost as if they had attained their lives' objectives. But the local LCC chapter still organizes Independence Day and Christmas Eve ceremonies. The latter is quite difficult for Lithuanians in the Calgary area, as they live at some distance from each other. In 1996, for example, to avoid having seniors and families with children drive the snow-covered highways, a bus was rented to take community members from Calgary to Lethbridge for Christmas Eve. There was a lottery held during the Independence Day ceremonies in 1999, with the profits donated to a children's clinic in Kaunas. The chapter's Lithuanians participate in Calgary's Remembrance Day and Celebration Canada ceremonies.

The Calgary Lithuanian Youth Club receives support from the LCC. The Youth Club organizes excursions, Lithuanian film showings, museum visits and sports events. The Club published a series of English calendars: in 1997, with Lithuanian historical events, as well as current news and scenes; in 1998, with Lithuanian athletes' photos and biographies; and in 1999, with Lithuanian cultural figures' biographies and photographs. The calendars were prepared by A. Stasiulis, W. Urtonas, K. Dubauskas and E. Balkytė-Zubis.

The current executive committee of the LCC chapter is composed of Petras Devenis, Silvija Kasper, Nelė Astravienė, Cynthia Yaunish, Albertas Stasiulis, Kęstutis Dubauskas, Aldona Condon, Elvyra Krausienė and Pranas Gluoksnyš.

**LCC Calgary chapter chairs:** Antanas Nevada (1956), Liudas Bruzga, Pranas Gluoksnyš, Juozas Dubauskas (all in 1957), Antanas Nevada (1958-1966 and 1968-1974), Petras Devenis (1966-1968), Stasys Noreika (1975-1976), A. Shukys (1976-1981 and 1983-85), Kęstutis Dubauskas (1981-1983), Dr. Antanas Vyšniauskas (1985-1986 and 1991-1996), Ron Kuzmickas (1986-1988), Dr. Arūnas Šlekys (1989-1991), Tony Kasper (1991), Elvyra Krausienė (1996-2000).

On 27 November 1999, the government of Lithuania opened a consulate in Calgary and appointed a local Lithuanian, Dr. Antanas Vyšniauskas, honorary consul. The new consul hopes to make contact with all of Alberta's Lithuanians.

**Organizations.** The Calgary Lithuanian Cultural Society has functioned since 1953. In 1990, the artist Yonė Kvietytė-Young established the Calgary Lithuanian Women's Association. The Association has built bridges between the LCC and the Society. The Women's Association collected valuable materials for the Lithuanian Museum-Archives of Canada in Mississauga in 1990. Association President N. Astravienė brought the materials to Toronto herself, spending six hours at the airport and on the plane holding a valuable, but brittle, photograph in her lap.

**Parish.** While there is no Lithuanian parish in Calgary, the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Priests' League of Canada sends priests for the annual Easter retreat.

**School.** The Vytautas the Great Lithuanian School was established in 1975.

**Library.** The Lithuanian library was closed in 1959. The executive committee has purchased books to donate to the Calgary municipal library.

**Publications.** The newsletter *Vėjas: The Calgary Lithuanian Community Newsletter/Kalgario lietuvių žinios*, ed. K. Dubauskas; E. Krausienė; *Lithuanians Cook in Calgary* (Calgary, 1984); the publications *Kalgario Lietuvių Bendruomenės Veiklos Apžvalga 1956-1997 (An Overview of Calgary's Lithuanian Canadian Community Activities 1956-1997)* and N. Astravienė, *Kalgario lietuvių Vytauto Didžiojo mokyklos Jubiliejinis leidinys 25 metų proga (Calgary's Vytautas the Great Lithuanian School's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication* (Alberta, 2000).

**Statistics.** According to the 1951 Canadian census, there were 124 Lithuanians living in Calgary in 1951. By 1961, the number had risen to 324. The Calgary chapter of the LCC counted 88 individuals or families as members in 1997, but only about 40 families paid the annual membership fee. In 1999, 30 to 50 people attended Independence Day ceremonies, Christmas Eve or Easter events. Attendance is highest at summer picnics rather than at Independence Day in February, as snowstorms and the resulting hazardous driving conditions frequently keep people away.