

## EDMONTON, ALBERTA

No one knows exactly when Lithuanians first arrived in the Edmonton area. In the 1957 Lithuanian Days publication, the local executive of the Lithuanian Canadian Community (LCC) reported that Petras Baltrušis came to Alberta about 1890 and passed away in 1948. Quite a few Lithuanians arrived in Edmonton and the surrounding area in 1927-28. A new wave of immigrants started arriving in 1947. It is noteworthy that the pre- and post-war groups of Lithuanians worked together harmoniously. Adomas Kantautas, who later published a very useful Lithuanian bibliography, made the rounds of Edmonton's Lithuanians, persuading them of the necessity of working together. And work together they did, both groups cooperating to build the Lithuanian Hall.

A large gathering of Edmonton's Lithuanians took place during the Independence Day (16 February) commemoration in 1949. At the end of that year, the Lithuanian National Committee was established and it created a chapter of the LCC a few months later. In 1953-54, on the initiative of Fr. B. Jurkšas, the Lithuanian Hall of Edmonton was built.

**LCC:** The first executive committee of the Edmonton chapter of the LCC was elected on 28 May 1950. In 1955 the executive committee assumed responsibility for the Lithuanian school, founded the previous year, from the parents' committee. Fr. B. Jurkšas, V. Kynienė and V. Vidugirienė were invited to teach and classes were organized at the Lithuanian Hall. The school, unfortunately, did not last long.

**LCC Edmonton chapter chairs:** Dr. Jonas Dovydenas (1950), Povilas Šiugždinis (1950), Adomas Kantautas (1951-52 and 1961), A. Mažonis (1953), Henrikas Jogaldas (1954), Dr. B. Vidugiris (1955), Justas Augis (1956), P. Zaleskienė, J. Pilipavičius.

**The Canadian Lithuanian Society of Edmonton:** For a short while there were two Lithuanian organizations in Edmonton: the LCC and the Canadian Lithuanian Society of Edmonton/Edmonton Lietuvių Namai. The two organizations united and, as far back as 1960, the local executive of the LCC wrote in the VII Lithuanian Days yearbook that the Lithuanian Hall was the center of Lithuanian activity. For about 20 years, the Canadian Lithuanian Society of Edmonton has been the driving force of the community. It maintains positive relations with the national executive of the LCC and, though it does not officially transmit membership fees, it sends donations. A representative from Edmonton attends the LCC's annual National Council convention.

The Lithuanian Hall is registered in Alberta as the corporate society "The Canadian Lithuanian Society of Edmonton." There are several halls, a chapel and a kitchen. Lithuanians maintain the Hall, putting in many hours of volunteer work. For example, Edmonton's Lithuanians were offered half of the Casino's profits if they agreed to supervise the games of chance for two days. Thirty people volunteered to work from morning and as late as 3:00 a.m.

Once the Lithuanian Hall was built, most of the Lithuanians in the Edmonton area contributed to the community's religious and cultural activities. Significant work was done by former executive committees and others: Adomas and Filomena Kantautas, J. Kairys, J. Pilipavičius, the family of J. Karosas, Fr. B. Jurkšas, P. Zaleskienė, J. Gustainis, J. Pašukonis, Fr. I. Grigaitis, A. Dudaravičius and others. Noteworthy contributions were also made by Helen Papey, Titas and Eugenia Uogintas, J. Garbenčius and family, Eileen Kadis, Ann Gazankas, Jean Luke and others. Over the past 21 years, the chairmen of the Lithuanian Hall were A. Dudaravičius, P. Klemka, V. Kadis, J. Gazankas and K. Žolpis.

**Activities and events.** As in all LCC chapters, 16 February and Mother's Day are celebrated. Other important events for Edmonton's Lithuanians are New Year's Eve, Edmonton's Heritage Days, summer picnics and the autumn harvest festival. Edmonton's Lithuanians have contributed to the National, Relief, and Lithuanian Canadian Foundations and, more recently, directly to Lithuania. The Lithuanian community has always maintained contacts with the local press and kept them informed about Lithuania. During the re-establishment of

Lithuania's independence from 1990 to 1992, Edmonton's Lithuanians participated in demonstrations organized by the Baltic communities, circulated petitions, took part in religious services for Lithuania, etc.

**Parish.** The Lithuanian Catholic Mission in Edmonton was established in 1953. Lithuanian Masses were held in the chapel of the Lithuanian Hall by Fathers B. Jurkšas and Izidorius Grigaitis until 1974. Then Lithuanian priests from other parishes came to conduct retreats in Lent and to hold Masses. Bishop Paulius Baltakis OFM, responsible for the Lithuanians of the diaspora, also visited from time to time. Later, Masses were held at the chapel once a month, but not by Lithuanian clergy and not in the Lithuanian language. There is a crisis now because the rector of the seminary, who used to hold Masses at the chapel, passed away and it is difficult to find another priest.

**Organizations.** In 1961 there was a folk-dance group. There also used to be a Lithuanian choir led by Fr. B. Jurkšas.

**School.** Edmonton's Lithuanian School was established in 1954, with teachers J. Gustainis and A. Dudaravičius. The LCC assumed responsibility for the school in 1955. Fr. Br. Jurkšas, V. Kynienė and V. Vidugirienė were the teachers, but the school did not last long.

**Publications.** The newsletter *Edmontonio Lietuvių Žinios (Edmonton Lithuanian News)* is published 3-4 times a year. It contains announcements about Lithuanian events and general information about the community.

**Statistics.** According to the 1951 Canadian census, there were 146 Lithuanians in Edmonton at that time. The 1961 Lithuanian Days publication indicated that there were 400 Lithuanians in the area, 300 of whom were enthusiastic supporters of community affairs. Then-Chairman of the LCC's National Executive Dr. P. Lukoševičius visited Edmonton around 1964. He reported that there were 254 Lithuanians. At the 1970 convention of the National Council of the LCC, it was announced that there were about 130 families in the area, but that only about 40 of them were involved in Lithuanian life. In 1997 Dr. Kadis reported, "As far as we know, there are about 140 people in the Edmonton area who maintain ties with Lithuanians, either because they themselves are of Lithuanian descent or are married to someone of Lithuanian descent. Only about a third of these still know the Lithuanian language. Approximately 70 to 90 people participate in Lithuanian events."