

## TORONTO, ONTARIO

In 1914, the Lithuanian newspaper *Vienybė Lietuvninkų*, published in the United States, counted 380 Lithuanians in Toronto. Among them were 114 labourers, 23 cabinet-makers, 2 cobblers, 2 mechanics, 2 businessmen and 1 barber. According to the 1951 Canadian census, there were 3,587 Lithuanians in Toronto.

The first Lithuanian organization in Toronto of which any information remains is the Saint Joseph's mutual aid society, established in 1907. Listed among those who joined the society that year were Pranas Regina, Antanas Morkis, Juozas Vasiliauskas and Jonas Simonaitis.

Because of disagreements about its religious obligations, the society fragmented on 12 April 1912. The non-believers formed the Sons of Lithuania Society, which later became the Sons and Daughters Society. In 1920 the Catholics established the Saint John the Baptist Society, which purchased a church and founded the Saint John the Baptist Parish in 1928. A branch of the Lithuanians in America Union was formed in 1934 due to the efforts of J. Yokubynas.

Aside from their purposes of mutual aid and assistance to their members, all of these groups were cultural organizations. All arranged concerts, staged plays and organized outings. In 1932 the Toronto Lithuanian Joint Choir performed on radio station CFRB. Choir members included Viktoras Dagilis, Jonas Yokubynas and Alfonsas Garbenis. There were active Lithuanian socialist and communist groups. The communists published the newspaper *Liaudies Balsas*, ed. Jonas Yla. The Sons and Daughters Society had their premises on Claremont Street, and Saint John's Parish on Dundas.

**The Lithuanian Canadian Community (LCC).** Establishing the LCC began in 1949, with the formation of a Provisional Organizing Committee which represented 28 organizations. 9 of these formed the executive committee: the Lithuanian Canadian Council; the Lithuanian Alliance of Canada; the Lithuanian Canadian Merchants', Manufacturers' and Craftsmen's Alliance *Veršlas*; the Scouts; the Lithuanian Rebirth Movement; the Lithuanians in America Union; the Catholic Cultural Association; the Lithuanian Evangelical Reform Association; and the Social Democrat Alliance. This committee conducted the first elections to the LCC chapter's executive committee in February 1953. Soon after, committees for education and aid were formed. The first Toronto chapter council, composed of 25 elected members and a fluctuating number of representatives of various organizations, was elected in 1955. An executive committee was elected from this council, although it was not always easy to find willing candidates. In 1957, when it proved difficult to elect a new executive committee, it was decided that council members could not refuse being elected. Everyone concurred, and a new executive committee was elected.

**LCC Activities.** The executive committee of the Toronto chapter looked after the Maironis Lithuanian Saturday school, advanced courses in Lithuanian studies and the choir *Varpas*; provided financial support for folk-dancing groups and youth organizations; and established the folk-dancing group *Atžalynas*. There used to be a Toronto chapter relief committee, established in 1953 under the aegis of the LCC, to aid Lithuanian refugees in Germany and especially the Lithuanian High School in Hüttenfeld and Lithuanian elementary schools. From 1953 to 1955, this committee, chaired by V. Bačėnas, collected \$6,749.49 in donations. The newsletter *Lietuvis* was published in 1972-73.

The Toronto chapter organizes the largest Independence Day (February 16) ceremonies in Canada. Noteworthy lecturers are invited from Canada, the United States or, more recently, from Lithuania. Federal and provincial parliamentarians, as well as the mayor of Mississauga, are frequent guests. Obviously, considerable effort and good organization are required to attract such distinguished guests. Other events have been organized on Lithuanian themes: a reception for the dissident Vincas Kudirka, a memorial for the poet Henrikas Nagys, a celebration of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the first book in Lithuanian, concerts, literary evenings,

etc. In 1996-1997 chapter chairwoman D. Garbaliuskienė and Vincas Piečaitis assumed a particularly heavy workload organizing various events.

The Toronto chapter has always been active in demonstrations and political lobbying. In 1999, for example, petitions were signed and letters sent to Canada's members of parliament, urging them to support Lithuania's joining NATO. That same year, the executive committee organized a reception for Lithuania's president V. Adamkus and the leaders of Canada's Lithuanian organizations.

The current executive committee is composed of D. Garbaliuskienė, Fr. A. Simanavičius OFM, E. Steponas, G. Stasiulevičius, Dr. A. Kazlauskienė, I. Kairienė and K. Pajaujis.

**LCC Toronto chapter chairs:** J. Beržinskas, J. R. Simanavičius, J. Senkus, L. Tamošauskas, S. Juozapavičius, Dr. J. Matulionytė, E. Čuplinskas, A. Kuolas, S. Juozapavičius, G. Balčiūnas, L. Švėgždaitė, V. Bireta, A. Puteris, P. Šturmas, M. Abromaitis, J. Karpis, R. Sakalaitė-Jonaitienė, Dr. E. Birgiolas, A. Vaičiūnas, L. Radzevičius, R. Strimaitis, K. Budrevičius, A. Barysaitė-Oleinikienė and D. Garbaliuskienė. Fr. A. Ažubalis, Msgr. J. Staškus-Staškevičius, S. Dabkus, B. Saplys, A. Kuolas and J. Karka have contributed much to the work of the chapter's executive committee.

**Libraries.** There was a small library in the first Lithuanian Hall in 1954. Since 1955, a 2,000-3,000 volume library under the direction of P. Jurėnas has operated out of the Resurrection parish. The Lithuanian Museum-Archives in Mississauga have a small academic library.

**Schools.** There were Lithuanian schools in Toronto as early as 1933. They lasted until about 1945. In 1948, Lithuanian classes resumed to accommodate the children of the post-War immigrant community. The school was named the Maironis School in 1951-1952.

**Parishes.** There are three parishes: the Redeemer Evangelical-Lutheran parish, as well as the Resurrection and the St. John the Baptist Catholic parishes.

**Events.** Toronto's Lithuanians have organized Canadian Lithuanian Days II, VII, XII, XXVI, XXX and XXXIV (in 1954, 1960, 1966, 1981, 1985 and 1996). Each year Lithuanians participate in Toronto's multicultural Caravan Festival. Toronto has hosted the World Lithuanian Community Conventions in 1963, 1978 and 1988 as well as the World Lithuanian Days in 1978.