

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

The first Lithuanian to arrive in Manitoba was Juozapas Groinius, who worked in Beausejour in 1894. According to *Lietuviai Manitoboje* (Lithuanians in Manitoba), he was born in Kaunas in 1860. About 1904, another Lithuanian, J. Žilinskas, came to Winnipeg. By 1912, there was a handful of Lithuanians in the city.

Lithuanians kept arriving, and different ways of uniting them were explored. Quite a few societies were established: the Sons and Daughters Mutual Aid Society, the Lithuanian Workers' Literary Society, the Winnipeg Lithuanian Association *Kultūra* (Culture) and others. A workers' mutual aid association based in Winnipeg lasted the longest.

On 3 December 1911, at the instigation of P. Jauniškis and S. Paknys, a meeting of Lithuanians from the Winnipeg area was called and the proposal made to establish a fraternal mutual aid society. J. Popas, V. Kevelaitis, M. Žilinskas, P. Jauniškis and J. Vasutis were elected to the executive committee. By 28 April 1912, a constitution had been prepared and a name chosen: the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas Mutual Aid Society. On 21 December 1921, a Mr. Laurinavičius suggested changing the name to the Winnipeg Lithuanian Workers' Mutual Aid Society.

The Lithuanian cultural association was founded in 1931, with W. Dylis as chairman. M. Vidrukas called a meeting of Winnipeg's Lithuanians at his St. Boniface home in January 1935 to establish the Sons and Daughters Mutual Aid Society. The executive committee was composed of M. Vidrukas, chairman; Mr. Gustaitis, vice-chairman; M. Puras, secretary; P. Gudžiūnas, cashier; and J. Savickas, treasurer.

These societies lasted for varying periods, some longer, some shorter. In 1983, K. Benūšis commented, "These organizations no longer exist in Winnipeg. They died off as their members passed away." Unfortunately, the organizations' archival materials also disappeared.

The Manitoba Lithuanian Club lasted the longest. It had its own premises, where many get-togethers took place both before and after the War. The first immigrants from the post-war DP (Displaced Persons) camps arrived in the autumn of 1947. There were many women and girls who fulfilled their contracts with Canada's Department of Labour at the St. Boniface Sanatorium. A formal dinner was organized so that those who had arrived before the War and the DPs could get acquainted. The evening was full of patriotic speeches, Lithuanian music and songs. Expressions of mutual respect and understanding were made and plans for future cooperation outlined, but this cooperative spirit was short-lived. The *V Lithuanian Days* publication noted that in 1951, the majority of the post-War immigrants wanted to become members of the Lithuanian Club. Certain of the earlier immigrants did not want them to join and even tried to change the Club's Constitution to exclude them. The DPs were accused of wanting to convert the Club into a church. (There was no Lithuanian church in Winnipeg at the time.) The new arrivals, for their part, thought the Club was overly pro-communist. Renewed efforts at cooperation were made in 1960. By about 1964, then-Chairman of the Lithuanian Canadian Community (LCC) National Executive Dr. P. Lukoševičius had visited Winnipeg and was able to report that the Club was a sincere supporter of Lithuanian activities.

Lithuanian Canadian Council, Winnipeg Branch. The Winnipeg branch of the Lithuanian Canadian Council was established in 1948 by Mr. and Mrs. Aleksas Urbonas, Pranas Matulionis, Jurgis Januška, Antanas Matulevičius and Jurgys Račys. They were joined by Povilas Liaukevičius, an active community member of the earlier generation and a former founding volunteer of the Lithuanian army.

This organization hosted plays, commemoration services and concerts. On 11 November 1949, it invited the opera soloist Elzbieta Kardelienė from Montreal to perform a concert. The program also featured the actress Elena Dauguvietytė-Kudabienė and the writer Birutė Pūkelevičiūtė.

The activities of the Winnipeg branch of the Council ceased in 1960, when chairman P. Matulionis moved to the United States. He handed the Council's documents and its Lithuanian flag over to the Winnipeg branch of the LCC. The Lithuanian tricolour adorned St. Casimir's Lithuanian church until 1999.

Lithuanian Alliance of Canada, Winnipeg Branch. The Alliance was established in Winnipeg on 15 May 1949. The executive was composed of chairman J. R. Simanavičius, vice-chairman Mykolas Januška, secretary S. Vanagaitė, treasurer A. Pauplys and member Dr. Juozapavičius. Disagreement and friction developed between the Council's and Alliance's Winnipeg branches. These two organizations were disbanded and a Winnipeg chapter of the LCC established.

LCC. On 20 January 1950, a meeting was held during which it was decided to establish a chapter of the LCC. The meeting was attended by representatives from various organizations: P. Matulionis and Aleksas Urbonas - Lithuanian Canadian Council, J. Šmaižys - Lithuanian Alliance of Canada, J. Račys, J. Dambaras, J. Stanaitis – Youth Club, V. Šmaižienė and B. Bujokienė – Lithuanian Catholic Women's Association of Canada. The Alliance's and the Council's branches agreed to suspend activities and establish an LCC chapter. Two days later, on 22 January, the founding meeting of the Winnipeg branch of the LCC took place.

Community events used to include Independence Day and Deportation commemorations, the Coronation of King Mindaugas and Armed Forces Day ceremonies, Mother's Day celebrations, plays, dances, balls, concerts and get-togethers for children. "The first commemoration of the deportations to Siberia is noted in the 1949 minutes of the Lithuanian Canadian Council," wrote Evaristas Fedaras in 1998. He described the services organized by the Baltic Federation: "The services near the war memorial were very impressive in the early years, with many participants. The parade, with national flags and a huge floral wreath, used to stretch for a few city blocks. The Ukrainian community would join in from time to time. Guest speakers used to include representatives from the Canadian government. In later years, as the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian communities got smaller, the commemoration would consist of religious services at the church, a wreath-laying at the war memorial and a get-together after the formal ceremonies." Other activities used to include protests at false accusations made against Lithuanians, various events to publicize the situation in Lithuania among Canadians and demonstrations.

The biggest and most labour-intensive event was the XX Canadian Lithuanian Days weekend in 1974. The organizing committee spent an entire year preparing for it. The Folklorama festival also required considerable energy and dedication. Virtually

every member of the Lithuanian community was involved, regardless of which organization he belonged to.

Folklorama. This multicultural festival was established in Winnipeg in 1970 to mark the province of Manitoba's centennial. The festival was unusual in that it did not take place in only one location. Rather, each national group chose its own venue, most often a cultural centre or a school auditorium. City buses would provide free transport from one pavilion to another. From 28 participating groups in 1970, Folklorama grew to 42 in 1997. The festival lasted a week in the first years, but was extended to two weeks as the number of pavilions grew. Half of these would operate the first week, the other half the second, thus enabling the volunteers staffing the pavilions to act as visitors as well.

The Lithuanian community operated its Vilnius pavilion for 20 festivals, from 1970 to 1991, except for 1972 and 1988. A week-long festival requires many volunteers and, as the community got smaller, participation in Folklorama ceased.

Participation in Folklorama was organized by the Winnipeg branch of the LCC and other Lithuanian organizations and used to take place at St. Casimir's parish hall. As the number of visitors grew, the handicrafts display was moved into the church itself. The display was interestingly prepared and varied from year to year. Members of the Lithuanian community also used to perform at Folklorama, but occasionally groups were invited from other Lithuanian centres. The first was the Windsor girls' choir *Aušra*, directed by V. Tautkevičienė, in 1975. Later performers included the group *Gintaras* from Toronto, a men's octet from Cleveland, the soloist V. Ratkauskaitė, the quartet *Harmonija* from New York, the women's choir *Ramunėlės* from Ottawa and others. The industrious cooks in the community used to start preparing the ever-popular Lithuanian dishes sold at the Vilnius pavilion months before the opening of the festival.

The Baltic Federation. The Federation's Winnipeg section was quite active, as the earlier description of the commemoration services for those deported to Siberia shows. The Winnipeg branch used to organize dances in the winter and St. John's Day festivities with the Latvian community in the summer. In 1967, Baltic Federation representatives planted five silver pines and five birches in a circle with a 20-metre diameter in Assiniboine Park. In the centre, they planted a birch grown from a seed from Lithuania, and a pine originating in Latvia. This was done during Canada's centennial to commemorate Winnipeg's Balts. This attractive spot in the middle of the park is now known as the Baltic Circle.

Winnipeg's Lithuanian activities. What with Lithuania regaining its independence and the leaders of the community getting on in years, the Independence Day ceremonies have become the principal annual event. Other important dates were observed with religious services and an appropriate sermon while St. Casimir's parish was still operating. For the last few years, Winnipeg's LCC has welcomed five Lithuanian students from the University of Klaipėda and the Lithuanian Christian College who spend a semester studying at Winnipeg's Concord College. The executive committee and other members of Winnipeg's LCC sent 25 letters to Canadian government ministers and 100 to each Member of Parliament, urging them to support Lithuania's entry into NATO.

LCC Winnipeg chapter chairs: J. Šmaižys (1950), J. Činga (1951-1952), J. Malinauskas (1953-1954, 1962-1971), Č. Kurauskas (1955), J. Demereckas (1956-1957,

1977), P. Matulionis (1958), M. Januška (1959-1960), T. Lukas (1961), V. Januška (1972, 1978-1979), K. Strikaitis (1973), A. Eimantas (1974), J. Grabys (1975, 1981-1982, 1992), B. Vaičaitis (1976), R. Balčiūnas (1980), M. Timmerman (1983, 1987, 1989-1990), J. Razmaitė (1984-1985), A. Stankevičius (1986), V. Gustys (1988), R. Galinaitis (1991). Juozas Grabys has been chairman of the Winnipeg chapter of the LCC since 1992. Active supporters of Lithuanian activities included P. Liaukevičius, M. Šarauskas, V. Šmalzienė, J. Demereckas, J. Grabys and E. Fedaras.

Library. A small library associated with St. Casimir's parish was operating in 1954. The VIII Canadian Lithuanian Days publication of 1961 mentioned that the Lithuanian library had been reorganized.

Parish. The consecration of St. Casimir's church in Winnipeg took place on 14 June 1959. The final Mass was held on 28 November 1999.

School. Winnipeg's Lithuanian school was officially established in 1950. It provided classes in Lithuanian language and history to a fluctuating student population until 1983. In 1984, the program was changed to religious instruction in English.

Organizations. Baltic Federation; Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas Mutual Aid Society; Lithuanian Canadian Foundation; Manitoba Lithuanian Club; Lithuanian Catholic Women's Association of Canada; Lithuanians in America Union; National Foundation; supporters of the Lithuanian High School in Hüttenfeld, Germany; Winnipeg Lithuanian Workers' Mutual Aid Society; Winnipeg Lithuanian Literary Society; Sons and Daughters Mutual Aid Society; Lithuanian Catholic Federation *Ateitis*; Relief Fund; Winnipeg Lithuanian Choir. There was also a folk-dancing group from 1949 to 1965 directed by Mrs. Kupčiūnienė, T. Lukoševičius, Mrs. Gedgaudienė, T. Lukas, V. Šmaižienė, J. Krikščiūnienė, H. Barkauskaitė and M. Matulionis.

Statistics. According to the 1951 Canadian census, there were 388 Lithuanians in Winnipeg out of a total population of about 354,000. The V Canadian Lithuanian Days publication of 1957 mentioned that various Lithuanian businessmen were working in the city, and that a Lithuanian bakery as well as a Lithuanian grocery store were in operation. At the 1961 convention of the National Council of the LCC, it was announced that in the Canadian census, 365 men and 288 women from the Winnipeg area had listed themselves as Lithuanians. At the 1977 National Council convention, the complaint was made that "Only 120 families and 20 single persons registered with the Lithuanian parish of Winnipeg regularly pay their parish fee."

By 1981, according to government of Canada statistics, there were only 515 Lithuanians in the entire province of Manitoba. The Lithuanians of Winnipeg explain that "the generation born here left Winnipeg after finishing their studies or drifted away from their heritage because of mixed marriages. They only make appearances at baptisms or funerals. Most do not speak Lithuanian." In 1998, it was announced that there were about 100 Lithuanians. Of new immigrants after 1991, there are only 9. At the 1999 National council convention, it was reported that about 50 people come to the Independence Day ceremonies.