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DEEP ROOTS

The “Šaknys” Project Continues in Pennsylvania

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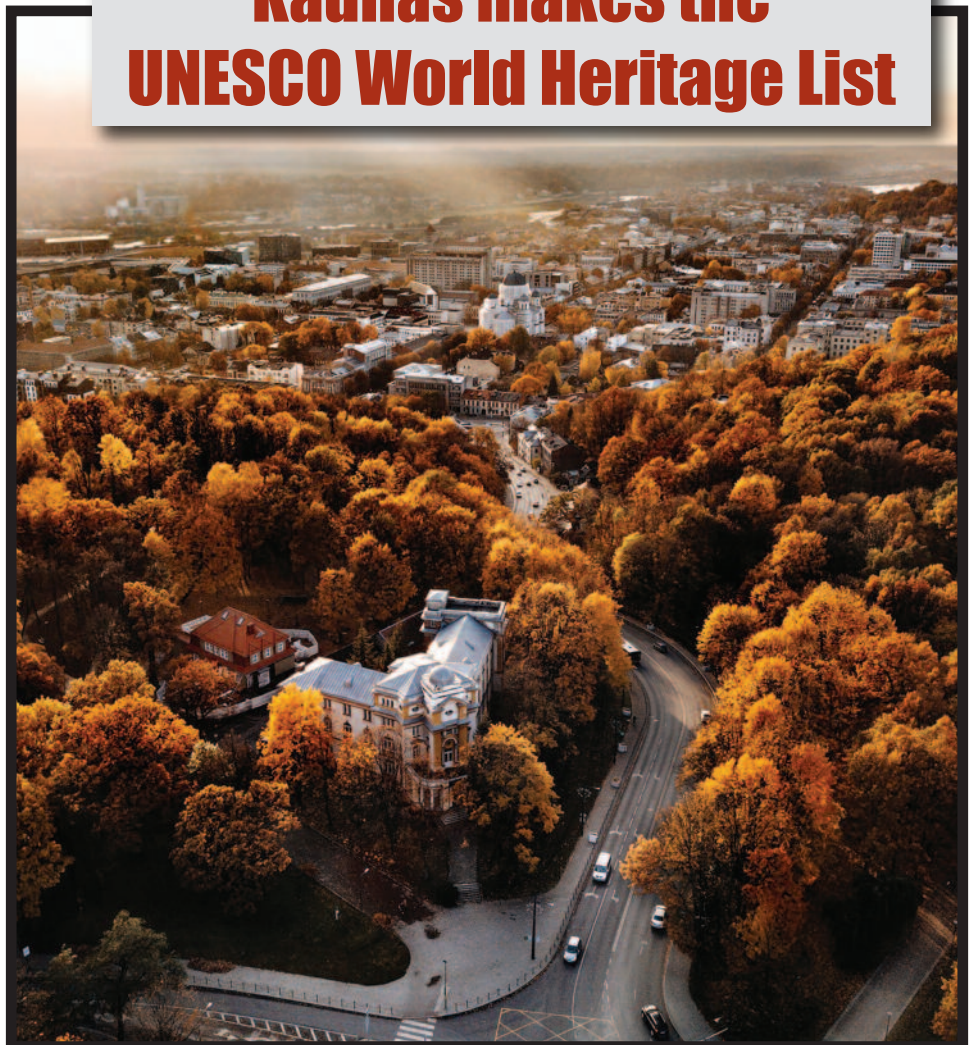


Homecoming: The Klaipėda Region Saga

Last year, Klaipėda, the oldest city in Lithuania, celebrated its 770th anniversary. However, for almost seven centuries, it existed outside the political borders of Lithuania.

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Kaunas makes the UNESCO World Heritage List



Kaunas, Lithuania’s second-largest city, has been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, which recognizes cultural and natural heritage sites of exceptional universal value.

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Kaunas makes the UNESCO World Heritage List

It's the fifth Lithuanian site to reach protective status

Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, has been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, which recognizes cultural and natural heritage sites of exceptional universal value. On September 18, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee accepted Lithuania's submission titled "Modern Kaunas: The Architecture of Optimism, 1919-1939," granting the city the highly coveted honor. This recognition is a significant accomplishment for Kaunas, as it can potentially boost the local economy by promoting tourism. Additionally, UNESCO oversees and funds various efforts to preserve and restore these sites.



House of the Iljinas family designed by architect Arnas Funkas – a modernism icon in Kaunas

Lithuania's proposal is a comprehensive document that spans over 400 pages. It includes maps, photographs, historical information, essays, and arguments explaining why the interwar buildings of Kaunas, specifically in its Žaliakalnis and Naujamiestis sections, are significant to humanity. The proposal was prepared by the Kaunas Municipal Administration and coordinated by specialists from Lithuania's Cultural Heritage Department. Lithuania was represented at the World Heritage Committee by the Permanent Delegate of Lithuania to UNESCO, Ambassador Jolanta Balčiūnienė, and the authors of the Kaunas nomination dossier - Sigita Bugienė, Marija Drėmaitė, Saulius Rimas, and Renata Vaičekonytė-Kepežinskienė.

What makes Kaunas unique?

During the interwar period, Kaunas was a dynamic and evolving city, and its architecture reflected the influences of both international modernist movements and local cultural aspirations. The resulting architectural landscape is a unique blend of modernist styles contributing to the city's historical and cultural identity.

Kaunas was planned in the mid-19th century and developed between 1919 and 1939. After the proclamation of the independent Republic of Lithuania in 1918, Kaunas served as the provisional capital of the state as Poland occupied the Vilnius region. With the help of the new national government and civic initiative, Kaunas was transformed into a modern city, incorporating current urban planning and architecture with pre-existing natural, urban and other local conditions. Two parts of Kaunas were considered in the application: Naujamiestis and Žaliakalnis. Naujamiestis (New Town), a generous grid planned in 1847, was attached to the eastern edge of the Old Town and extended eastward along the valley of the Nemunas River. It was intensively developed between 1919 and 1939.

Surrounding Naujamiestis to the north and east is Žaliakalnis (Green Hill) – a distinctive natural plateau rising to an average of 35-40 meters. According to a 1923 master plan of Kaunas, Žaliakalnis was developed as a garden city residential suburb. Public buildings, urban spaces and residences constructed during the interwar period demonstrate a variety of styles in which the Modern Movement found architectural expression in the city. Lithuanian architects designed buildings in various modern styles, including Functionalism, Bauhaus, Lithuanian National Romanticism, and Art Deco. Today, this legacy remains; Kaunas has many outstanding examples of modernist architecture from the 1930s.

According to a report by the Secretariat of the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, Kaunas' application and the decision in its favor were supported by the majority of the members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, including repre-



Pienocentras building (1932) by architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis won the bronze medal at the 1937 Paris Expo's International Exposition of Arts and Technology in Modern Life.

sentatives from Oman, Italy, India, Bulgaria, Greece, Belgium, Argentina and other countries.

Lithuania's Minister of Culture, Simonas Kairys, was pleasantly surprised by the World Heritage Committee's decision. "Kaunas' modernist architecture has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List! This is a historic moment, especially considering that Kaunas modernism is a relatively new heritage and especially considering how historically and politically important that period is for us when our modern statehood was born and developed," he said.

Lithuania has four other sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the Historical Centre of Vilnius, the Kernavė archaeological site, the Curonian Spit, and the Struve geodetic arc points.

The 45th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which took place in Riyadh, has also added these new sites to its list: Kuldyga in Latvia, the medieval Jewish heritage in Erfurt, Germany, a Viking-era ring fortress in Denmark, the archaeological site of ancient Jericho in Palestine, and various other locations.

BNS and Kaunas City Municipality



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Drs. Algirdas and Genovaitė Maciūnas.

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Ačiū.

Thank you

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President Nausėda exhorts world leaders Russia is waging “An old-style colonial war”



Baltic leaders at the UN (from left) President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda, President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs and President of Estonia Alar Karis greet UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

On September 21, President Gitanas Nausėda addressed the 78th United Nations General Assembly in New York.

“The despicable old-style colonial war is back. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine aggravates the global situation across many areas, such as food and energy security, finance, climate, global health, and migration. The international community can no longer allow Russia to manipulate and abuse global rules,” the President spoke.

His address focused on security issues, the global and collective response to Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine, accountability for war crimes and the crime of aggression, and upholding a multilateral world order based on international law.

President Nausėda stressed that, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Russia is recklessly committing atrocities such as the wholesale destruction of Ukrainian cities and towns, ecological disasters, murder of thousands of innocent civilians and displacement of millions. The President emphasized that the international community should put more pressure on Russia to stop deliberate attacks on Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure.

In his speech, the Head of State emphasized that what is still lacking is a tribunal dedicated explicitly to the prosecution of the crime of aggression committed by Russia’s top political and military leadership. According to the President, Lithuania calls for establishing such an international tribunal, supported by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, and failure to do so would mean further damage to the credibility of the entire global justice system.

The Lithuanian leader focused on the consequences of the war caused by Russia, in particular, on the issue of food security. According to the President, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has been a global issue, affecting global food security and nuclear safety.

“Russia is currently holding the world hostage, blocking Ukrainian grain exports, looting occupied Ukrainian territories, and devastating local agricultural infrastructure. Lifting sanctions against Russia is not even an option,” Gitanas Nausėda said.

The Head of State stressed that geopolitical solutions must be found to reinforce vulnerable economies, one of which could be to open more solidarity corridors by offering alternative transportation for Ukraine’s food products, for example, through trusted Baltic Sea ports.

“Accountability and the rules-based international order will be vital in forging a world that is fair

and secure. The politics of fear and coercion on a global scale must be stopped once and for all. We must resolutely defend the equality of sovereign nations, both large and small. Together we can change the world,” Gitanas Nausėda spoke.

In his address, the Head of State also focused on the fight against climate change and outlined Lithuania’s steps towards becoming a climate-neutral country.

President Nausėda attends UN Security Council debates

During his visit to the UN, President Nausėda also addressed the members of the UN Security Council. He pointed out that a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council started an unprovoked military invasion against an independent, sovereign state of Ukraine. According to the President, this invasion resulted from the international

community’s indifference.

“Russia started its brutal war more than nine years ago. And it was precisely the weak response of the international community that allowed violence to pester and grow, leading us all to the largest military conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War,” President Gitanas Nausėda spoke.

The Head of State added that the international community must uphold multilateralism and defend the rules-based international order from Russia’s relentless war of destruction.

According to President Gitanas Nausėda, Ukraine’s victory is the only way towards lasting peace and stability. During the UN Security Council open debates, the Lithuanian leader outlined the necessary conditions for achieving this, such as the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, the complete withdrawal of Russia’s troops and military equipment from Ukraine’s territory, the recognition of Russia’s responsibility for war crimes and the crimes of aggression committed in Ukraine, and the obligation to pay for Ukraine’s reconstruction.

Unveils Ulpis plaque

As part of his working visit to New York, President Gitanas Nausėda attended the unveiling of a memorial plaque to the Lithuanian librarian and bibliographer Antanas Ulpis at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

Following the Nazi occupation of Lithuania in 1941, around 20 Jews from the Vilnius Ghetto, the so-called Paper Brigade, hid Jewish books, torahs and other documents risking their lives. Later, Antanas Ulpis, the director of the Book Chamber, saved these unique publications from destruction by the Soviets by hiding them in the nooks and crannies of St. George Church.

“This is not only an important part of the history of Lithuanian Jews that has been preserved, but also an example of humanism, when evil is countered with good and darkness with light,” said the President.

The Head of State noted that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto, which once again reminds us of the painful stages of history from which we must learn lessons and which we must not forget.

In 2022, YIVO completed a seven-year project to process, preserve and digitize YIVO’s pre-war library and archives rescued in Vilnius. Materials from New York and Vilnius, fragmented during the Second World War, have been digitally combined for the first time and are now available to the public.

The President’s Communication Group

First Lady Diana Nausėdienė at the UN Discusses assistance to Ukrainian soldiers

While visiting New York with her husband, the First Lady of Lithuania, Diana Nausėdienė, attended a reception hosted by her US counterpart, Jill Biden. During their meeting, the First Ladies discussed the cooperation between their countries in providing medical services to Ukrainian war veterans. They also talked about assistance in helping them integrate back into society after their return from the war zone.

Mrs. Nausėdienė emphasized that a critical aspect of our support to Ukraine is to receive as many wounded Ukrainian soldiers as possible and provide them with necessary medical treatment and rehabilitation. To this end, Lithuania has committed to providing 200 million euros in funding over the next three years to support the Ukrainian armed forces. This funding will be used to train personnel and provide essential medical assistance.

“Lithuania and the US can work together to help Ukraine strengthen the monitoring of injured soldiers. Joint efforts are also needed to help Ukraine rebuild and expand medical rehabilitation facilities not only for soldiers and veterans, but also for their families,” said Mrs. Nausėdienė.



Lithuania’s First Lady Diana Nausėdienė meets with US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Diana Nausėdienė also addressed the 78th United Nations General Assembly event, “Fighting for Future: Ukrainian Children in War,” hosted by Ukraine’s First Lady Olena Zelenska. This is the first time a First Lady of Lithuania has addressed an event at the United Nations.

DEEP ROOTS

The “Šaknys” Project Continues in Pennsylvania



The 2023 Roots team, from left, Lukas Šmidtas from Florida, Lukas Urbonavičius from Nebraska, Kęstutis Žalpys from Oregon, Emilija Dzeržauskaitė from Illinois, and expedition leader Vilius Žalpys.

This summer, **Vilius Žalpys** led the annual expedition, a third one so far, of college students to visit and restore historic Lithuanian cemeteries in the U.S. The project, named “Roots” or “Šaknys” in Lithuanian, is sponsored by the Lithuanian-American Youth Association and is supported by the Lithuanian-American community organization.

This year’s expedition, which ran from July 31 to August 5, focused on turn-of-the-century Lithuanian cemeteries in the coal-mining region of northeastern Pennsylvania. The area had the highest concentration of Lithuanian immigrants at that time. Young Lithuanian men immigrated there seeking coal mining work. As their numbers grew, they formed community organizations, built churches, published newspapers and books, organized fraternal insurance organizations, and purchased land for cemeteries. Žalpys, who has researched and identified numerous neglected Lithuanian cemeteries over the past decade, directed this summer’s focus to cemeteries near Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The expedition leader was joined by four students – his nephew, **Kęstutis Žalpys** from Oregon, **Lukas Urbonavičius** from Nebraska, **Emilija Dzeržauskaitė** from Illinois, and **Lukas Šmidtas** from Florida.

Vilius Žalpys provided *Draugas News* with his field notes from the 2023 Roots trip. His daily notations vividly recorded the expedition’s triumphs and challenges.



The 2023 Roots team were restricted from doing heavy work, but were able to document monuments that need repair.

Day 2

Old St. Casimir’s Cemetery (Larksville/Plymouth)

On Tuesday, we drove north for 50 minutes to work in Old St. Casimir’s Cemetery in Larksville/Plymouth. This is the final resting place of the famed Rev. Aleksandras Burba. His monument stands tall in the center, overlooking the cemetery. The front of the cemetery looked well maintained, but the back was overgrown, hiding scattered monuments in the woods. We discovered a large cross with a full-size corpus dedicated in 1976. At first, we could not see the cross as it was covered by large rhododendrons, which we cleared back to reveal three more headstones. A family stopped by to visit a grave that belonged to Martin and Mary Szaulinski. The visitor was honored with his grandfather’s name, Michael Martin Szaulinski (Saulinskas). He thanked us for our volunteer work and said he would happily help us next year if we returned.

On the other side of the Rev. Burba monument, the phrase “Uzsitarnavusiam Tautieciui” is inscribed, which means “To a Worthy Countryman.” In the late 1800s, many Lithuanian churches, whose members were both Polish and Lithuanian, held Mass only in Polish. Jonas Šliūpas, a Lithuanian activist and freethinker, invited Rev. Burba to America in 1889 because he could speak both Polish and Lithuanian. Rev. Burba insisted on celebrating Mass in Lithuanian. Within nine weeks of the priest’s arrival, the Polish and Lithuanians separated and established their own churches.

Elaine Luschas treated us to a large lunch basket of hoagies, pickles, and drinks. In fact, Elaine and Alvin Luschas (Lusys) went above and beyond to assist us before and during the trip, helping us connect with people, driving us around, providing us with food, and even opening up their home to us on the last day. They took great pride in their Lithuanian heritage, and it was evident throughout our time with them.

Day 3

Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery (Shenandoah Heights)

On our third day in Shenandoah, we submitted our “Hold Harmless” form, required by the Diocese of Allentown. The Diocese permitted us to perform only “light duty” tasks. As we arrived at the first cemetery, a local Lithuanian, Mr. Boxer, approached us and offered his dump truck to dispose of any debris. Later, he took us on a tour of other Lithuanian cemeteries. We introduced the Roots students to the first Lithuanian priest in the U.S., who built St. Casimir Church, which was deemed to be a Polish parish. The Lithuanians then built St. George Church, which was unfortunately demolished by the Allentown Diocese.

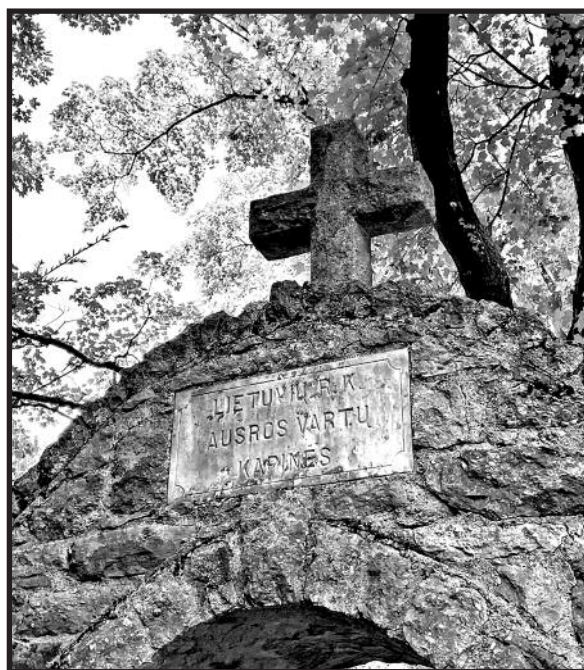
Field Notes by Vilius Žalpys

It was a bumpy six months, and sometimes it felt like there would not be a Season 3 for Roots. From a planning perspective, we faced difficulties in obtaining permission to work in the former Lithuanian cemeteries of the Allentown Diocese, which we only got at the last minute. Sadly, we never heard back from Girard Estates about working at the abandoned Lithuanian Cemetery just north of Mahanoy City. We felt that the lack of response on the owner’s part to our written request was disrespectful. This led us to organize a protest in front of the abandoned Old St. Joseph’s Lithuanian Cemetery.

Day 1

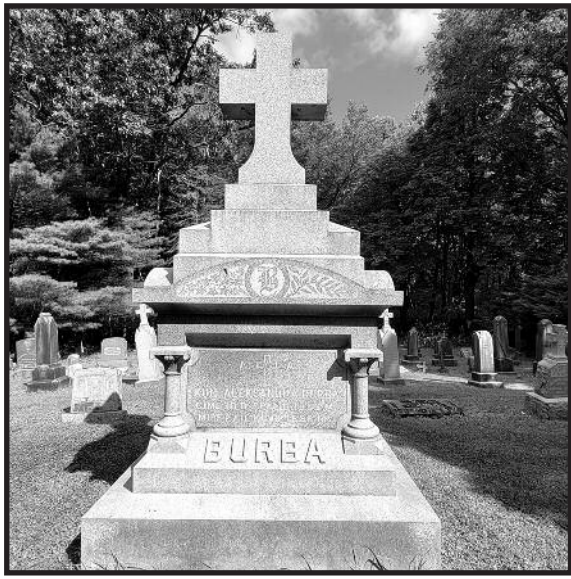
Old St. Mary’s Cemetery (Wanamie)

On Monday, we went to the Old St. Mary’s Cemetery. This was the first cemetery of the Lithuanian parish in Wanamie. A newer cemetery established later is located a few miles away. During our cleanup, a local Lithuanian American, Connie Tomosa, joined us and treated us to lunch. The local township loaned us a string trimmer and opened the facilities in a nearby park. Two historic headstones caught our attention. One mentioned the Lithuanian parish, “Motina Szvenciausis Ausros Vartai,” or Holy Mary Gate of Dawn. The Lithuanian parish was established in 1901. Actually, a Lithuanian priest, Rev. Juozas Juškevičius, is credited with beginning the Polish parish in neighbor-



Holy Mary Gate of Dawn parish monument at Old St. Mary’s Cemetery

ing Nanticoke in 1876, where both Lithuanians and Poles belonged. The other headstone we discovered was in the middle and towards the back of the cemetery. It read “Pirms Ant Seitu Kapinu Palaidotais, J. Szukwietis.” The English translation of this phrase is “The first to be buried in this cemetery, J. Szukwietis.”



Monument to Rev. Aleksandras Burba at Old St. Casimir's Cemetery in Plymouth.

On this day, Roma and Antanas Krušinskas drove for 2.5 hours from Philadelphia to treat us to lunch. Initially, we intended to visit a local Lithuanian deli, but unfortunately, it was closed, so we went to an Italian restaurant in the next town over. We were amazed that, for the third day in a row, local Lithuanian Americans joined in our effort to preserve our heritage. After lunch, we returned to Shenandoah Heights to clean up the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery, which is believed to be a free-thinker or National Cemetery.

Day 4
Lithuanian Museum (Frackville to Shenandoah)

We had set aside the day to help relocate the Lithuanian Museum from Frackville to Shenandoah. The museum, owned by the Knights of Lithuania Council #144, had outgrown its existing premises and required a bigger space to showcase its collection. The museum now occupies a former Lithuanian-owned Funeral Home, which is still owned by the Chaiwsky Family.

As soon as we arrived, Ann Rall (Domalakes) greeted us. We first walked to the Lithuanian church, which was closed, and took some pictures. We then got to work. Ann had everyone help pack the collection of Lithuanian printed matter such as newspapers, magazines, and books.

For myself, it was difficult not to open the old books to see what information they held, but we had little time for that. It was gratifying to overhear the young Roots members reading and sharing interesting things they found as they boxed and indexed the materials. We made several trips to the new museum. Ann approached me with tears in her eyes, expressing disbelief that young people were coming to help. It was a moving moment; we were all proud to be Lithuanian Americans.

On that day, we were visited by Peg Grigalonis, who brought us a delicious lunch of Lithuanian sausage, hunters' sausage, and, most importantly, horseradish with beets and mustard. After lunch, we decided to return to the Lithuanian Liberty Cemetery and continue the work we had started the day before. We wrapped up our work that day around 8 o'clock.

Day 5
Lithuanian Independent Cemetery (Nanticoke)

On Friday, we drove to Nanticoke to clean the Lithuanian Independent Cemetery, which we had added to our list at the last minute. It turned out to be one of the most challenging cemeteries we had cleaned so far. Unfortunately, we only had one string trimmer and could have used at least four. While one person trimmed, the others used hand tools. This cemetery was infested with poison ivy, which I still have on my skin while writing these notes weeks later. Although we did make an effort to improve the cemetery's condition, we could not finish cleaning it due to the lack of time and tools.

We spoke to a neighbor living near the cemetery. He was a Lithuanian American who had cleaned the cemetery several times in the past. He smiled at me and said, "You know, some people call it a Bolshevik Cemetery." I smiled back and replied, "So far, I haven't seen any headstones with a hammer and sickle. However, I did find some American veteran headstones."

After lunch, we planned to visit a former Lithuanian church, St. Joseph, in Nanticoke, which was turned into a private residence. This small mission church belonged to St. Mary in Wanamie, a neighboring town. The current owners, Lisa Mack, of Lithuanian descent, and her husband, Jim Mulhera, kindly gave an extended tour of their home. The altar area is now the living room, the side altar is the kitchen, the vestment room is a bar of sorts, the bell tower is now a beautiful four-sided viewing area, and the choir loft is a bedroom. Thanks to the Mulhera family, the shrine to Mary on the side of the church with Lithuanian writing is still in place, just as it was when the church was active.

Day 6
Coal Mine Ride and Farewell

The younger Roots team took a ride on a coal cart into Mine #9 to experience the working conditions of miners. I met with guests from Washington, including a Lithuanian embassy employee, Rytė Kukulskytė, and a correspondent from Lithuania, Augustinas Šemelis, and his wife. We were joined by Julijonas Matukas, the Lithuanian consulate's attaché from Chicago, and local guests, such as the owner of the Mahanoy Funeral Home, a fourth or fifth-generation Lithuanian. Later that day, we would all meet again at the Luschas home for a farewell party.

During our visit to the Luschas Family, we witnessed the process of making boilo – a local version of the honey liqueur "krupnikas" popular among Lithuanians. The word "boilo" comes from the English verb "to boil," with the Lithuanian genitive ending "o" added to make the noun form of the verb. Although the family recipe is a secret, you can find various versions online. Traditionally, people in the area make boilo on Christmas Eve and enjoy it

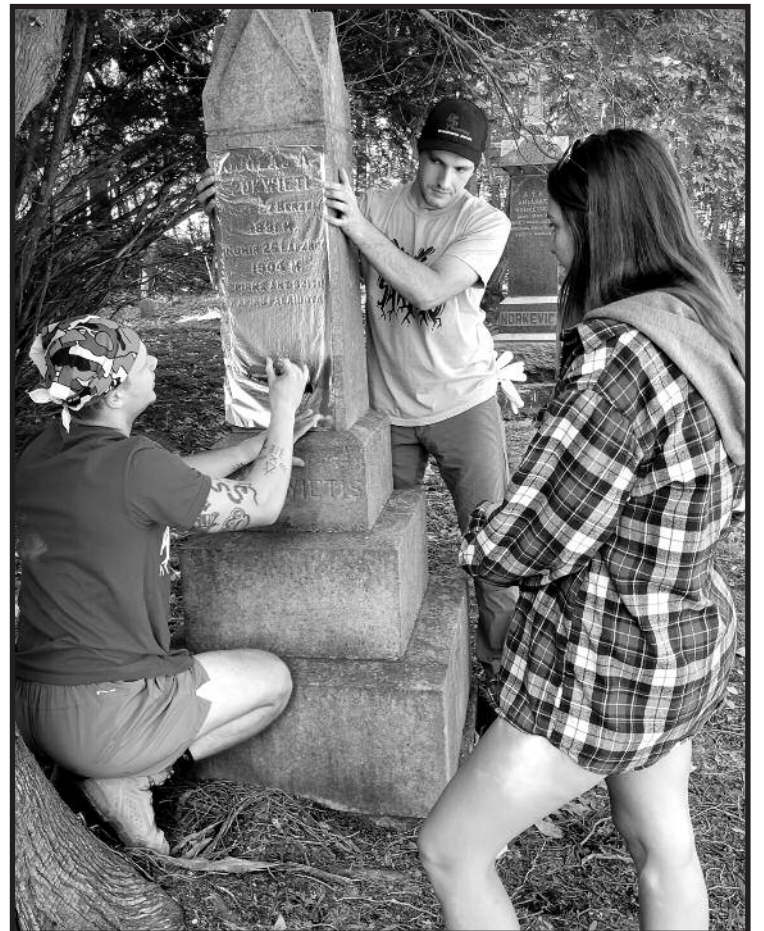
warm. Over time, it has been adopted by a broader population, and many people in the area now make it.

Global True Lithuania

Throughout the trip, I relied on the maps generated by the Global True Lithuania project of Augustinas and Aistė Žemaitis. The website <http://global.truelithuania.com> was an indispensable resource. During our trip, as we talked to a local Lithuanian, I noticed he was looking at their maps, too.

A Note of Thanks

The Roots project is grateful for funding received from the Lithuanian Foundation and the Knights of Lithuania. Their support made this season possible. The Roots team is also very grateful to Meredith Corrales (Domalakes). Meredith was the first and most active person online answering questions and offering suggestions.



The 2023 Roots team makes a tombstone rubbing of the first grave at St. Mary's Cemetery in Wanamie.

Lukas Šmidtas
wrote on Facebook:

I wanted to share a little about my incredible journey with the Šaknys 2023 program! Inspired by the legacy of the program "Misija Sibiras", Šaknys focuses on the location, documentation, restoration, and preservation of historical Lithuanian sites within the United States.

Led by the amazing Vilius Žalpys, our team explored communities across Pennsylvania, directing our focus toward towns that had witnessed high volumes of Lithuanian immigration before and after World War I. While our primary destinations were neglected Lithuanian cemeteries, our efforts extended beyond that horizon, as we also played a pivotal role in the preservation and relocation of an entire local Lithuanian heritage museum.

I've come to the realization that the Šaknys program isn't just a journey. It's a testament to our dedication, a tribute to our roots, and a promise to uphold the legacy of our forebears. This journey has become a part of me, and I'm genuinely humbled to be part of it. I'm already super excited for next year's mission!



The farewell party at Elaine and Alvin Luschas's home. The 2023 Roots team met with members of the Lithuanian diplomatic corps in the U.S.



Lithuania's Prime Minister Galvanauskas visits Klaipėda in 1923.



Lithuanian volunteers after the Klaipėda revolt in 1923. Photos from Lithuanian Central State Archives.

Homecoming: The Klaipėda Region Saga A Pivotal Moment for Lithuanian Sovereignty 100 years ago

TOMAS VALIŪNAS

Franciscan High School of Kretinga

Last year, Klaipėda, the oldest city in Lithuania, celebrated its 770th anniversary. However, for almost seven centuries, it existed outside the political borders of Lithuania. At a recent concert entitled "We have but one name – Lithuania," organized to commemorate the centenary of the return of the Klaipėda Region, actress Virginija Kochanskytė noted, "For a century, the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor fervently believed in unification with Greater Lithuania." But dreaming is one thing, and making it a reality is another. Actual unification required political will, courage, and a comprehension of historical continuity for Lithuania to attain maritime access to the Baltic Sea.

The founders of the modern Lithuanian state sought to unite all historically Lithuanian lands into a single state. After World War I, the Klaipė-

da region, then under German control, was handed over to the Entente, specifically to the French garrison. In the West and the Baltic Sea region, it was widely believed that this administration was only a temporary one. A diplomatic conflict ensued; the leaders of France, Poland, and the Weimar Republic planned to take control of Klaipėda. The French intended to declare it a free and independent political entity for their military purposes, while Poland and the Weimar Republic wanted to claim the region for their own. Lithuania, meanwhile, also tried to secure a claim to its historically ethnic lands.

In 1921, the first parliament of Independent Lithuania boldly stated that lands historically belonging to Lithuania Minor ought to be united to Greater Lithuania. The aim was to create a solid legal and political foundation for the Lithuanian state and thereby address its vital and legitimate claim to the Klaipėda region. The parliamentary discussions about the future of the Klaipėda region reflected the belief that a favorable solution to the issue of the status of the land inhabited by the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor was crucial to guarantee a prosperous and sovereign Lithuanian state. This was not without good reason – until 1923, Lithuania depended entirely on German imports and exports. Although Lithuania had a long border with Poland, it was non-productive due to Poland's ongoing occupation of Vilnius, while the Latvian market was too small. A strategic port was the only way Lithuania could escape its isolated economy and enter the free global market. Thus, Klaipėda was of vital importance to Lithuania's future economic development.

However, the politics of the major Western European democracies were not favorable to Lithuania. In October 1921, a select international committee was created to decide the future of the Klaipėda region. However, Poland's increasing strength in the area began to have a greater influence on the committee, while Lithuania's voice continued to diminish. The Klaipėda Region Convention adopted a plan to grant the region the status of a free country, with the governance of the port of Klaipėda turned over to a commission composed of representatives from Lithuania, Poland, and the Klaipėda region. However, it was doubtful that a free country in the Klaipėda region could have maintained its sovereignty for any appreciable time under such circumstances. This was simply an attempt to create conditions for Poland to have greater power over the Baltic Sea and eventually



Poster representing the reunion of Lithuania and Klaipėda region from the US-based Augustinas Laukžemis printing house (1920s)

absorb the lands of Lithuania Minor into its sphere of influence. As a result, the voice of the Lithuanians of Greater Lithuania would gradually weaken in Lithuania Minor.

Lithuania's government, under Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas, made a bold decision to take control of the area by force under the guise of an uprising. This act of rebellion defied the League of Nations and the military forces of France and Great Britain. The Principal Committee for the Rescue of Lithuania Minor (VMLGK), led by community activist Martynas Jankus, was tasked with the military operation.

Although it was claimed that the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor initiated the uprising in Klaipėda, there were probably not enough active Lithuanians in the region to carry out such a feat without external assistance. The VMLGK Committee was crucial in uniting Lithuanians from Lithuania Minor, Greater Lithuania, and Lithuanian diasporas worldwide. A committee was set up in Kaunas, the interwar capital of Lithuania, with branches spread throughout the Republic to support the Lithuanians of Klaipėda. American Lithuanians also supported the cause; for example, a local committee was established in Chicago.

The Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor, led by Mar-

Giedraitis Essay Contest Winner



Laimutis Purlys, a member of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters, presents Tomas Valiūnas with the award for best essay in the Juozas Giedraitis essay contest.

The New York-based Lithuanian National Foundation Inc., through its Juozas Giedraitis Fund, provides financial aid to Lithuania's youth, enabling them to seek a value-based education. As part of the scholarship application process, applicants are required to write and submit an essay. *Draugas News* is proud to partner with the Giedraitis Fund to showcase award-winning works written by young Lithuanians.

This year, the first prize was awarded to **Tomas Valiūnas** from Franciscan High School of Kretinga. The essay was translated and edited by *Draugas News* for publication.

tynas Jankus, required more than just political and financial aid. They needed actual military support. In 1923, the VMLGK issued a plea to “Brother Riflemen” (Broliai šauliai) that stated: “Brethren! You know that we are few and that we are unprepared and inexperienced fighters. That is why we call for your help today. We believe that you will come to our aid in the name of our Mother Lithuania, fortify our weak lines and help us liberate ourselves from a despicable slavery.” Lithuanian national solidarity was the crucial factor that let the joint forces of Lithuania and Lithuania Minor quickly expel the French garrison from the port of Klaipėda. By 1924, the governments of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan acknowledged this geopolitical maneuver by signing the Klaipėda Convention in Paris that transferred the region to Lithuania.

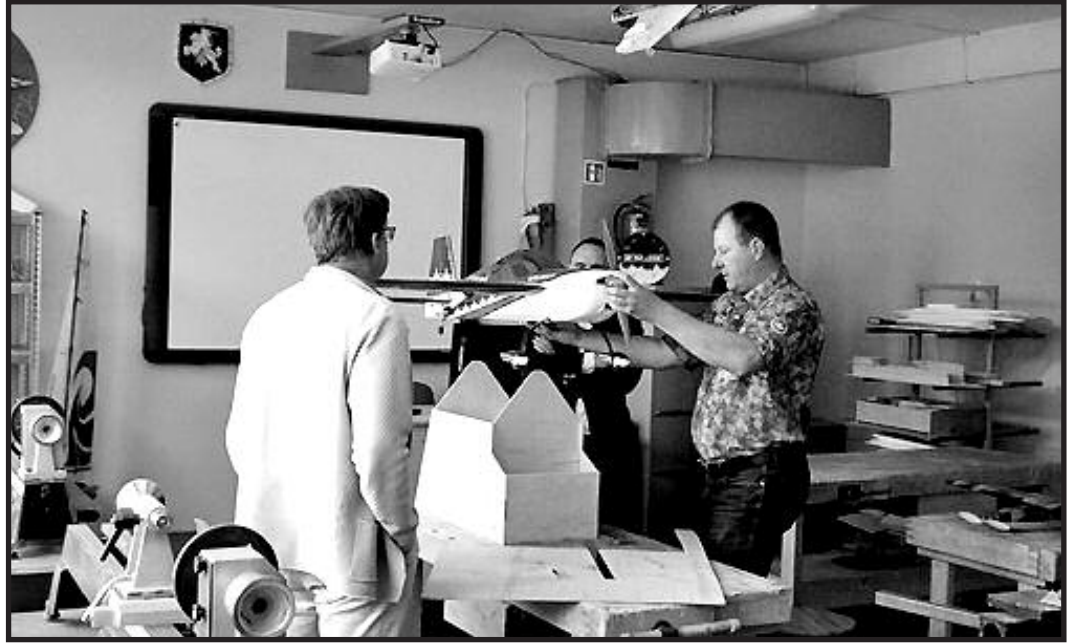
The political elites of Lithuania were overjoyed with the return of Lithuania Minor. However, how the general population of Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor felt about it is unclear. While people such as M. Jankus, Jonas Vanagaitis, and Jurgis Brūvelaitis enthusiastically led Lithuania Minor towards Greater Lithuania, most Lithuanians and other residents in the Klaipėda region remained reserved. It could be due to their Germanization and a loss of national identity, but economic factors must not be overlooked as well.

The Klaipėda region has played a significant role in Lithuania’s economy, but the union adversely affected the residents of Lithuania Minor. In the Lithuanian television series “The Mysteries of Being” (Būtovės slėpiniai), Prof. Edvardas Gudavičius stated that in 1923, the farmers of Lithuania Minor were cut off from the German market, which caused significant problems for them. Although they gained access to the Lithuanian market, it wasn’t as profitable and couldn’t match the market they had lost. Also, the integration process was complicated due to existing economic, cultural, religious, and social barriers. This situation forced successive governments of Lithuania to pay special attention to strengthening their relationship with the Klaipėda region and invest in the area financially.

Although it was a challenging task to integrate a region that was disorganized, complex, and constantly involved in conflicts into Lithuania, this effort did pay off by providing Lithuania with access to the sea on a global basis. The Baltic Sea opened a new path to the world and brought a fresh wave of change. Throughout history, waterways have played a crucial role in global trade and economy. By gaining access to the sea, Lithuania became a significant participant in the world market. Today, the port of Klaipėda is Lithuania’s most critical hub for international trade. Without Klaipėda, Lithuania would not have reached the level of sovereignty it has today. As Prof. Gudavičius stated, “The sea is of great importance! When you look back at the history of the world, who were the ultimate winners? The answer is clear - the victors were the countries with access to the sea. That’s a fact.”

The unification of the Klaipėda region to Greater Lithuania was a significant political victory for Lithuania. It was attained through a collective effort by Lithuanians from different parts of the world and a strong political will accompanied by a courageous spirit. Lithuania Minor eventually became integral to a unified country despite preexisting cultural and social differences. Klaipėda became a guarantor of a vibrant economy and international cooperation for Lithuania. Over time, Lithuania has evolved into a maritime state. The Klaipėda region and its frost-free port have become essential to Lithuania’s sovereignty.

Translated by **Rimas Černius**



Fablab in Vilkaviškis. Sunlight Children’s Aid created this Fabrication Laboratory to provide students from Lithuania’s smaller cities and towns an opportunity to work with cutting-edge technology.

New projects brought to fruition Sunlight Children’s Aid provides rays of hope

DAINA SILIŪNAS

You plant one seed, water it, and wait. Eventually, a plant grows, and then its flower blooms. That flower produces seeds from which more plants grow and more flowers bloom. Sunlight Children’s Aid, known as “Saulutė,” planted a “seed” in December 2020 by building their first dedicated classroom for special needs students using donations collected. Remarkably, they completed eight more classrooms in rural towns throughout Lithuania – Mosėdis, Salantai, Kretinga, Darbėnai, and Panevėžys – in less than three years.

As flowers grow, they spread, and so do our projects. In January 2023, Sunlight Children’s Aid initiated a new project – setting up “FabLabs” or Digital Fabrication Laboratories in Lithuania’s rural towns of Švenčionėliai and Vilkaviškis. These two undertakings were completed at the beginning of this fall semester.

Now, it is exciting to announce that recent anonymous donations have funded another Digital Fabrication Laboratory project at Voveriškių School in Lithuania’s Šaulių region.

What is a “FabLab”?

FabLab, short for Digital Fabrication Laboratories, provides students access to cutting-edge technology for learning and creativity that can later be applied to skilled jobs or advanced degrees.

Lithuania’s economy has evolved beyond its reliance on wheat fields for its GDP. The country’s highly educated and skilled workforce has gained global recognition. Sunlight Children’s Aid is committed to ensuring these desirable jobs are attainable to everyone, not only those living in Lithuania’s major cities.

Our Dedicated Special Needs Classrooms provide much-needed support to children with learning disabilities, speech issues, and autism. Additionally, our “FabLab” classroom projects are introducing highly technical instruction to children in rural towns who may not have had such opportunities before. As a result, we are opening doors of possibilities that were previously unimaginable for these children.



Sunlight Children’s Aid funded this classroom for special needs children in Panevėžys.

We give our all

Sunlight Children’s Aid has completed 11 school projects in Lithuania in less than three years!

However, our work is far from being finished, and we can only continue to make progress through the generous support of our donors. It is important to note that our organization does not keep funds in reserve but directs all donations toward our projects in Lithuania. We do not reimburse our volunteers for their travel expenses, nor do we pay any salaries. We are a US-based, volunteer, 501(c)3 organization committed to helping children in need.

Our next projects will be in the Kėdainių region of Lithuania. We need donations to get started, as each undertaking costs between \$15,000 and \$23,000, depending on size. Please consider supporting our projects by visiting www.SunlightChildrensAid.org. Your contribution can make a significant difference in providing quality education to children in the region.

REVISITING THE VISIT

Marking the 30th anniversary of the visit of Saint Pope John Paul II to Lithuania



The pope in Kaunas Santaka Park. Keeping the crowds at a distance reduced security risk, and this appealed to a force specially trained by Lithuanian expatriates. To a warm and outgoing pontiff, not so much.

Photo Archdiocese of Kaunas.

TOM GREGG (GRIGONIS)

Close to the center of his character, the man we call Saint John Paul II today was an extrovert. Many in his papal position have looked and felt more comfortable working out of the Vatican library. But Pope John Paul II/Karol Wojtyła, in contrast, enjoyed taking the word of the Roman Catholic faith out and about and even on international tour. This suited his disposition and his flock.

Across the 27 years of his papacy, he visited an unprecedented 129 countries, over half the world. Included were his native Poland on a record nine occasions, France eight and the USA seven. The Dominican Republic is distinguished as first in 1979, with France last in 2004. Partway between, predominately Catholic Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were graced on the same sweep for their first time ever to that date. His Baltic tour was 30 years ago this fall.

Setting the stage it would have been rude for any host nation to boast he had favorites among them, Poland included, or Lithuania from which his mother Emilia hailed. But early September 1993 could be considered a pivotal time for the Baltics. Totalitarianism was still an open wound, September 6 marking only the second anniversary of the Soviets formally acknowledging Lithuania's independence. And just four days before the pope's '93 arrival, they withdrew their last occupational forces, putting Lithuania first among the 15 former republics to be completely free. But free to do what?

Lithuania would have its share of problems shifting into second independence. Economics aside, how could it avoid the materialistic moral perils of the

free enterprise system and renounce the godless attitude fostered by its former landlord? The pope would be in-house to address these critical points – finally. Having twice been denied visiting rights by the Soviets in the '80s partly for his loud anti-totalitarian stance, he had first expressed interest in a free Lithuania visit shortly after the Soviet recognition of Lithuanian independence on September 6, 1991.

That triggered preparations, some of them extensive. Lithuanian clergy would be consulted on what topics to cover in speeches and where and to whom to address them. The pope would engage Vatican prelate Stasys Žilys to tutor him in the Lithuanian language (the Holy Father's fourteenth) with which to deliver 13 of these talks. Security measures for the pontiff's stay wouldn't be taken lightly either, not with two assassination attempts on his life in the early '80s. Evidencing plan progress in late 1992, the Vatican officially announced the visit as part of a week-long Baltics tour. Lithuania's turn would run first for four days and bestow on us the honor of becoming the first former SSR country to receive a pope.

Vilnius, September 4 and 5 With all in readiness, Pope John Paul III flew into Vilnius airport on a Saturday and straight into the international media eye. Like many other visits beforehand, this would involve a series of culturally significant local sites, multiple large-scale convenings for the faithful throngs, and smaller and more intimate meets with insiders. Veteran members of his entourage had also witnessed such airport receptions before, with the pope stooping to kiss the tarmac upon disembarking in a country for the first time. They knew the custom derived from his first parish posting as a young priest in 1948. But jaded Vatican press corps members had witnessed fewer occasions that had captured worldwide attention like this.

There was political history and drama here, and scribes dutifully provided details for outlets in diverse languages. Following the brief address at the airport, they followed his motorcade past waving bystanders to Old Town, the smell of fresh paint everywhere. And inside Vilnius Cathedral, they recorded the pope's best-remembered words of the tour to assembled Lithuanian clergy: "For you there are neither winners nor losers, but men and women to help get out of error." The "winners" needed to forgive and the "vanquished" to atone in the wake of physical and psychological abuse and human rights violations of the Soviet era.

The pope was also in the Cathedral to view St. Casimir's tomb and would supplement that tour highlight with visits to the Lithuanian Parliament building and the Gate of Dawn chapel in the evening of the first day. Sept 5 would feature the first field mass in Vingis Park, attended by 100,000 despite a



One of two iconic photos is the pope's arrival at Vilnius Airport. Media giant *Lietuvos Rytas* would call this "one of the most eloquent moments" of the visit. The pontiff had often done this as a sound means of demonstrating love and respect.

Photo Lietuvos Rytas.

cold rain, and visits to the Bloody Sunday memorial near the TV tower and Antakalnis Cemetery.

Kaunas, September 6 Ringing all the city church bells for five minutes on his arrival here was a glorious touch, the Kaunas Daily recalled while awaiting the Pope Francis silver anniversary visit in



This is a commonly depicted approach to the Hill of Crosses, but usually shot from closer in and excluding the pope's remarkable gift of a crucifix commemorating his visit.

Photo Visit Baltics Facebook page.

2018. Coupled with an Old Town setting, including the castle, town hall, improved weather, and an outdoor mass attended by 150K, world press members could have done justice to the scene. Unfortunately, many of them had headed for the next breaking news dispatch after the weekend.

And yet, for alert media members remaining, there was another story angle this afternoon. These four days largely focused on the new order and a mature audience rejoicing over the first independence norms restored, including open religious worship. But here in the 30,000-strong youth gathering at Darius/Girėnas Stadium were people raised entirely under atheism who would be shaping the national future for generations. How to counsel this high-risk group without actually referring to them that way?

Appreciating the long-term import of their successful adaptation, the pope delivered the longest and probably most challenging address of the Lithuanian tour. Transcripts of his translated speeches are available on the Vatican website, but suffice it to say that this one urged a turning away from godless values and embracing scriptures and the Church. It's safe to assume that many listeners would heed the message.

Šiauliai and Šiluva, September 7 Despite a tight schedule, happily, none of the must-see Lithuanian places of faith were bypassed, although numerous other four-star sites were. Vilnius St. Anne and Sts. Peter and Paul Churches and Three Crosses Hill were among the missing, as were Trakai Basilica, Pažaislis and Kalvarija. The last two essentials came back-to-back on day four; none of the domestic media coverage needing to explain their cultural significance. A modest ceremony and mass were celebrated in Šiluva, the site of one of the world's earliest Marian apparitions. Effectively, this would close the visit on the eve of the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The day's more elaborate affair had been 50 miles north at the Hill of Crosses outside Šiauliai. Here was the final field mass, attended by 100,000, bringing the combined total to 350K, or one-tenth of Lithuania's populace. One sympathetic writer noted later that this is in the face of tough transitional times with low wages and



His Holiness greeting the people up close outside Kaunas city hall. He had never worked harder or waited longer for any of his previous 60 trips, a press corps member later wrote in a 1994 review for *The Atlantic* magazine. Photo Archdiocese of Kaunas.

rocketing prices. The faithful couldn't conveniently skip work on a weekday to attend at a newly constructed pavilion requiring a sizeable chunk of the estimated 90 million euro cost of visit-related improvements. But here the people were anyway.

Aftermath What long-term impact the pope's words and presence had on the country is difficult to gauge. Possibly not a lot. It's undoubtedly true, however, that sculptures of the pope would appear in cities around Lithuania after fall 1993. Typically, these feature Pope John Paul II with one or both arms upraised, saluting the beloved father figure. Meanwhile, in contrast, comes the crucifix the pope gifted at the foot of the Hill near Šiauliai. Here, the affection was reciprocated in an inscription in Lithuanian and English on the marble base, accompanied by the date and pope's signature facsimile. Every Lithuanian should know and be inspired by his words:

THANK YOU, LITHUANIANS / FOR THIS HILL OF CROSSES / WHICH TESTIFIES TO THE NATIONS / OF EUROPE AND THE WHOLE WORLD / THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS WHOLE LAND - - -



The pope praying over the Lithuanian people at the Hill of Crosses in a second iconic shot from the trip. One online source asserts that the pope's visit made the hill world famous. Call it a contributing factor anyway. Photo /Catholic News Service.

The Balzekas Museum of Lithuania Culture Gift Shop is pleased to announce its **1st Annual Holiday Craft Bazaar!**



Sunday, November 19, 2023
Noon to 4:00pm
Balzekas Museum Amber Room
6500 South Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60629

We are currently registering those crafters and vendors who would like to be a part of this holiday event. Please use the form below to sign up to be a vendor.

A great afternoon of holiday crafts, gift ideas, food and entertainment is being planned.

For additional information please contact Rob Martin at rob.martin.frr@gmail.com
 Table spaces are limited so please sign up today!

Balzekas Museum Gift Shop Holiday Bazaar Vendor Form

Contact Name: _____

Company Name (optional): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Table Fee: \$50.00 (per 8' oblong table).

I would like to reserve _____ table(s) @ \$50.00 each for the Balzekas Museum Holiday Craft Bazaar.

Please mail this form with payment made payable to Balzekas Museum to:

Rob Martin
Balzekas Museum Gift Shop
6500 South Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60629

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Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe



Baltic Studies in Europe Conference participants.

Photos by Ramunė Kubilius

This summer, on June 15-17, Kaunas, Lithuania's "Second City," hosted the 15th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE). This conference takes place on alternate years to the AABS conferences in North America. Its theme "Turning Points: Values and Conflicting Futures in the Baltics" attracted 448 registrants, including academics, independent researchers and individuals interested various Baltic subjects. The conference committee, chaired by Ineta Dabašinskienė, successfully organized over 100 events, including panels, roundtable discussions, book presentations, film screenings, and photo exhibits. The closing concert and reception took place nearby, at SALA restaurant in the Žalgiris Arena complex.

The conference was divided into 11 academic categories, including Anthropology, Sociology, and Religion; Digital Humanities, Museums, and Libraries; History, Memory, and Identity; International Law, Economics, and Political Studies; International Relations; and Regional Security. Sessions on history and international relations were particularly popular, as they focused on the recurring theme of the war in Ukraine. Dovilė Budrytė, the AABS president and a faculty member at Georgia Gwinnett College, delivered the first plenary address on "A Decolonizing Moment: Vicarious Identification with Ukraine in the Baltic States and Beyond." Arūnas Gelūnas, the Director General of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art, discussed the role of memory institutions as humanitarian and diplomatic agents in armed conflicts. Conference attendees also watched the documentary film "Mariupolis 2" by Marius Kvedaravičius, who was killed in Ukraine during filming in March 2022. A discussion followed, featuring Jurgita Staniškytė, Edgaras Klivis, and Gintautas Mažeikis from Vytautas Magnus University, and Kateryna Horiunova from Mariupol State University / Vytautas Magnus University. CBSE 2023 attendees came not only from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, but also the United States, Canada, Germany, France, England, Scotland, Sweden, Norway, Australia, Israel, and Japan.

– RAMUNĖ KUBILIUS

Other academic themes International relations and more

DOVILĖ BUDRYTĖ

As is typical for AABS and CBSE conferences, the presentations and roundtables on international relations focused on important topics for the Baltic states. This year's conference featured discussions on the ongoing war in Ukraine and transatlantic relations, particularly with the United States. Since the outbreak of the full-scale war waged by Russia against Ukraine, it has become increasingly clear that the Baltic States' people and governmental structures fully identify with Ukrainians and their struggle. Their emotional identification has gone beyond delivering help, although they have provided enormous assistance, including significant military support.

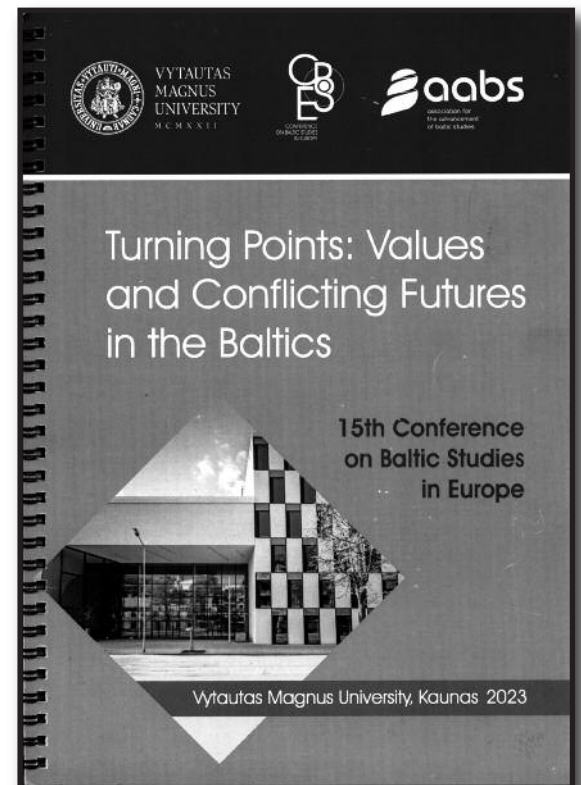
Dovilė Budrytė argued in her plenary speech "A Decolonizing Moment: Vicarious Identification with Ukraine in the Baltic States and Beyond" that the Baltic states have formed a shared identity with Ukraine and are waging a war at home by attempting to decolonize themselves. This includes the removal of monuments associated with the so-called "Great Patriotic War" to rid themselves of Russian influence.

During his plenary speech, Arūnas

Gelūnas presented a number of examples of how the Lithuanian National Museum of Art has taken on new roles and activities to help Ukraine, ranging from saving artifacts to providing humanitarian aid. The concept of decolonization was also highlighted in several other presentations, including that of Emilija Pundziūtė-Gallois from Vytautas Magnus University. In her original research, Pundziūtė-Gallois linked decolonization to diplomacy, suggesting that the study of diplomacy could be transformed by in-



Conference Chair Ineta Dabašinskienė and AABS President Dovilė Budrytė.



corporating the experiences of the Baltic States into the field of post-Soviet studies. Diplomatic efforts led by the Baltic countries focused on spreading democracy and empowering other countries in the territories previously occupied by the Soviet Union, including Ukraine. According to Pundziūtė-Gallois, such efforts at decolonization can be seen as expressions of emancipation, and they demonstrate how "small" states like the Baltic countries can play a significant role in international relations.

The role of small states in international relations is the focus of a new book edited by Giedrius Česnakas and Justinas Juozaitis from General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. The book, "European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security," was recently published by Routledge. During the conference, contributors to the volume, including Gerda Jakštaitė-Confortola, Ieva Karpavičiūtė, Ieva Gajauskaitė, and the two editors, discussed the concept of European Strategic Autonomy, which is primarily associated with France and its desire to play a leading role in European security, and reactions from various states, including the Baltic states, to this initiative.

The Baltic states and Poland, which have traditionally valued the transatlantic link in European security, have reservations about European Strategic Autonomy. They support strengthening European defense as long as the United States plays a major role in European security. The authors also discussed important security debates, going back to the arguments between the so-called Continentalists, who have argued for a more prominent role of independent Europe in security, and Atlanticists, who have argued that the part of the United States remains indispensable.

The authors also presented their insights from case studies, which included interviews with foreign policymakers. It appears that the war in Ukraine has somewhat reduced the attractiveness of European Strategic Autonomy, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, and demonstrated the continued relevance of United States leadership.

During the conference, several experts discussed the importance of the United States in ensuring Baltic security. Prof. Ginta Palubinskas from West Virginia State University highlighted the significance of transatlantic links and emphasized the role of Baltic diasporas in North America in providing for Baltic security. The professor argued that these resources should be utilized in the future. The United States became even more crucial for Baltic safety following Russia's war on Ukraine, and the diasporas can help by getting involved in political activities like lobbying.

The Baltic states have implemented several changes in their politics and societies to maintain good relations with the United States. For instance, they have created history commissions to address



Ann Senn from Bethel University speaks on Understanding Immigrant Identity.

their past, including the Holocaust. Prof. Saulius Sužiedėlis from Millersville University of Pennsylvania, an expert in Holocaust studies, discussed the differences in interpreting the past related to the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America. He also identified the challenges still facing Lithuania concerning the Holocaust. However, the professor noted that Western models (described by the professor as “Spielberg’s model”) may not work in

the region due to the different traumatic experiences suffered by its people.

What’s next?

If you are interested in Baltic studies, history and politics, consider attending the 2024 AABS conference at Yale University and the 2025 CBSE conference, which will take place at Cambridge University. For more information, please visit aabs-balticstudies.org.

What’s in Vogue?

Lithuanian Diaspora is a hot topic

One can gain insights into what is on scholars’ minds by simply perusing the list of topics presented at a conference. At CBSE, Lithuanian scholars explored the history, sociology, and perspectives of immigrants – mostly Lithuanian Americans, but also Ukrainians. Many of these scholars have conducted research at Lithuanian archives in the US. Let’s take a closer look at the topics they covered:

- **Vaidotas Vaičiaitis** (Vilnius University) *Lithuanian and Ukrainian Constitutionalism: Two Perspectives.*
- **Natalia Poda** (Kaunas Archdiocese, Kaunas) and **Daiva Kuzmickaitė** (Mykolas Romeris University) *Forced Migration and Religion: Ukrainian Families’ Case in Lithuania.*
- Architect **Liutauras Nekrošius** (Vilnius Gediminas Technical University) spotlighted Chicago’s Catholic parish school buildings in *To Learn and Pray in Lithuanian Chicago.*
- **Ignas Stanevičius** (Vilnius University) *Lithuanian Catholics in the Diaspora in Relations with the Roman Catholic Church in Soviet-Occupied Lithuania from the 1960s to the 1980s: Problems and Obstacles.*
- **Justas Stončius** (Klaipėda University), *Prosecuting War Crimes Suspects: The Problem of Lithuanian-Jewish Relations in the United States during the Cold War.*
- **Egidijus Balandis** (Vytautas Magnus University) *Baltic Athletic Cooperation in North America (1950-1990): Baltic Diaspora or a Coalition of Diasporas.*
- **Giedrius Janauskas** (Vytautas Magnus University) *The Cooperation of Baltic Diaspora(s) in the USA: Lithuanian Citizen Diplomacy in the Cold War Politics.*

During the conference, two Lithuanian photographers displayed exhibits featuring American scenes that caught their attention. **Mindaugas Kavaliauskas** presented “Indiana Dream (2007-2016),” while **Romualdas Požerskis** showcased “Crazy Sculptures in the Nevada Desert.”

Lithuanian American Scholars

US presenters covered a wide range of topics related to Lithuania, including the country’s history, events, people, and the Lithuanian diaspora.

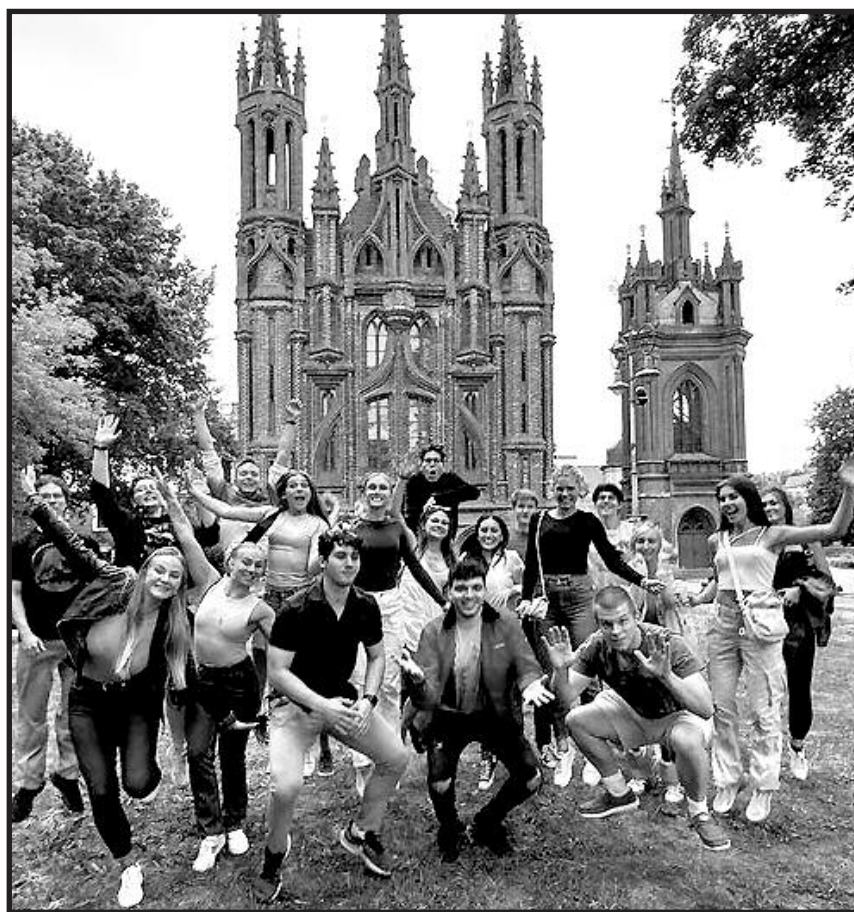
- **Laima Vincė Sruoginis**, from the University of South Maine, presented *Expressions of Cultural Memory in Lithuanian Diaspora Memoirs* by **Daiva Markelis** and **Antanas Šileika**, which discussed Lithuanian-American and Canadian-Lithuanian authors.
- **Ann Senn**, from Bethel University, and **Daiva Kuzmickaitė**, from Mykolas Romeris University, presented *Understanding Immigrant Identity. The Transnational Connections of Lithuanian Americans.*
- **Ramunė Kubilius**, from Northwestern University and independent researcher, presented *Intersections and Parallel Paths: Six Lithuanian Diaspora Cultural Memory Institutions in Today’s Landscape.*
- **Ann Traitor**, from the University of Albany, spoke about the life of a Lithuanian religious sister in *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes: The Missionary Life of Sister Aldona Kezytė.*
- **Michael Strmiska** addressed *Religious Politics in Lithuania: Competing Claims on National Identity.*
- **Saulius Sužiedėlis**, from Millersville University, discussed *Perceptions of the Holocaust East and West: Problems in the Case of Independent Lithuania.*
- **Aušra Park**, from Siena College, presented *Women in the Baltic States’ Diplomacy (1991-2021): Changes, Disparities, and Challenges Ahead.*
- **Ginta Palubinskas**, from West Virginia State University, spoke on *The Implications of Russia’s War on Ukraine for Baltic Security and the Future of Transatlantic Peace.*

AABS 2024 at Yale

Mark your calendars for the 29th biennial conference of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), which will be held at Yale University from June 14-16, 2024. The conference program will feature scholarly panels and roundtable discussions, film screenings, other cultural events, as well as exhibitions of Yale University’s various Baltic collections. Scholars are encouraged to present research papers while the general public is welcome to participate. For further details, please visit aabs-balticstudies.org

AN UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER IN LITHUANIA

Twenty-one students participated in the unique LISS program this year.



2023 LISS participants by St. Ann’s Church in Vilnius.

Photo: LISS program

ROMENA ČIŪTIENĖ

In the summer of 2023, a group of American and Canadian students took part in the Lithuanian International Student Services (LISS) program, sponsored by the Lithuanian American Community organization. The program lasted for five weeks and aimed to provide students with an opportunity to intern in their respective fields of study while also experiencing Lithuanian culture and daily life. By working and traveling, the students had a unique chance to improve their Lithuanian language skills. Moreover, the program allowed them to learn about the changes taking place in Lithuania’s post-Soviet culture and daily life. It was more than just a visit with relatives or a summer vacation; it was a valuable experience that enriched their understanding of Lithuanian society.

Over the past decade, the LISS program has welcomed hundreds of young people who have successfully completed the program. The program continues to grow; this summer, it welcomed 21 new students from the U.S. and Canada.

The LISS program includes an intensive cultural initiative where students travel throughout Lithuania to develop a deeper appreciation for their Lithuanian heritage. They discovered a creative, open, high-tech Lithuania that is becoming more westernized. They visited biomedical, laser companies, and other high-tech science centers during their stay.

Upon completing the internship, program participants can add Lithuanian work experience to their resumes and receive university credits. All students who participate in the LISS program become students of Vilnius University. After five weeks, they receive university certificates

confirming the completion of their internships.

This year, students worked at Vilnius University Hospital, V. U. Life Sciences Center, Innovation Agency, Thermo Fisher Scientific Baltics, State Forest Enterprise, and other companies and institutions. Each student’s internship was selected according to their interests and prospective future specialization and considering the academic knowledge already acquired from their home universities.

Tomas Pelesinas, a LISS participant from the U.S., noted: “Although I had visited Lithuania when I was younger, that experience had long been erased from my memory. However, as soon as the LISS program started, I was immediately involved in excursions and trips that helped me learn more about Lithuania’s history and culture. The internship at the State Forest Enterprise was a unique opportunity for me to explore the beautiful Lithuanian nature, which was beyond my expectations. The passion of my colleagues for their work was truly inspiring, and I will miss them dearly. Above all, I will miss Lithuania the most.”

The internship was intensive, with after-hours meetings with prominent Lithuanian political, scientific, and cultural leaders, excursions, and many public events. One of the program’s highlights was meeting the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, Ingrida Šimonytė, for a lively and engaging conversation that lasted two hours. Participants met with other dignitaries such as the Speaker of the Parliament, Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, Member of the Parliament, Dalia Asanavičiūtė, Mayor of Vilnius, Valdas Benkunskas, Deputy Minister of Defense, Žilvinas Tomkus, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Survila, and other influential individuals.

Continued on page 14.

sports

The FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 was held in the Philippines, Japan, and Indonesia from August 25 to September 10. Germany, Serbia, Canada, USA, Latvia, and Lithuania were the top six teams in order of finish.

A BITTERSWEET FIBA WORLD CUP FOR LITHUANIA

MILTIADES VARVOUNIS

What Lithuania achieved in the 2023 Basketball World Cup was truly remarkable, even though they missed out on reaching the Semi-Finals and winning a medal or earning an automatic ticket to the 2024 Paris Olympics. Lithuanian fans have every reason to be optimistic about the future after their team defeated Team USA, which was composed of NBA stars. This year will hold a special place in the hearts of Lithuanian fans.

LOW EXPECTATIONS

In 2010, Lithuania, coming off a disappointing Eurobasket performance in Poland, went undefeated in the World Cup until the Semi-Finals, where the team fell to eventual champions USA. They bounced back by beating powerful Serbia and securing an honorable 3rd place. This year, Lithuania survived a tough group in Cologne during the Eurobasket but eventually lost to the champions Spain in the Round of 16, albeit in overtime (94-102). As a result, Lithuania was not being hyped as a team that would reach the podium, let alone the Quarter-Finals of the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

Indeed, Lithuania was undervalued and not considered a favorite for a medal due to the absence of some of their best players, such as NBA's Domantas Sabonis, Ažuolas Tubelis, and the Euroleague's "pistolero" Marius Grigonis. As a result, fans had lower expectations for the team's performance than in previous years.

Lithuania had some cause for optimism, thanks to the presence of top NBA center Jonas Valančiūnas, Barcelona star Rokas Jokubaitis, experienced Mindaugas Kuzminskas, and former NBA players Ignas Brazdeikis and Donatas Motiejūnas, although most of the rest of the squad were not members of the prestigious Euroleague teams.

Regardless of the low expectations, Lithuania started their World Cup campaign in the best way possible, with a sweep of all their opponents in Group D. Lithuania's winning streak was a matter of playing efficient basketball on both ends of the court while also enjoying hooping with each other. During these first games, AEK Athens star Kuzminskas said: "This team is special. As you know, we have a lot of absentees, but despite that, the guys who came adapted really, really well, and out of the court we have a great atmosphere. We don't have too much talent, Jonas is obviously way more talented than the others, and others are kinda like more or less the same level, which is to help the team as much as possible."

Having taken a perfect 3-0 record to the Second Round, Lithuania was now set to face Team USA and Greece. The European battle between Lithuanian coach Kazys Maksvytis' men and the always dangerous Greek team would determine who would advance to the Quarter-Finals. Greece looked like the better team in the first half, opening up an eight-point lead, but after the break, Maksvytis' team came out of the tunnel for the second half with a different approach, hitting shots from deep, stopping Greece from getting near the rim. Just like that, a 25-15 third quarter put Lithuanians in front, and

when they held Greece to four points in the first five minutes of the fourth quarter, it was clear the area around the Mall of Asia Arena would become a one-way street for Maksvytis' unstoppable boys. Fourth quarter score? 28-9 Lithuania. Second half score? 53-24 Lithuania. Final score? 92-67 Lietuva!

Excited after the game, Brazdeikis commented, "We started the first half a little bit slow. We didn't play as aggressively as usual, especially on defense. But in the second half, we all had the same plan: come out aggressive and execute the game plan."

With their victory over Greece, Lithuania secured their place in the Quarter-Finals. Fans remember that Lithuania had missed the Quarter-Finals in two consecutive FIBA Eurobasket events and the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 and failed to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The bleeding finally stopped after six painful years, as the Lithuanians made it back to the elite eight phase!

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2004, USA DEFEATED!

The next rival was Team USA, the favorite for the gold medal. With such confidence and accuracy entering the game, Lithuania spread its wings. Jonas Valančiūnas dominated and forced the NBA's best defensive player of the year, Jarren Jackson, into early foul trouble. Instead of trying to slow down the pace to prevent the Americans from running, the Lithuanians played like All-Stars and were all over the court. The celebrated opponent was desperate and unable to find a solution.

In the second half, however, American NBA stars finally increased the intensity, pushed the Lithuanians out of their positions, and came close to closing the gap. But with a few perfectly executed plays here and there, a lucky shot now and then, those 12 Lithuanian heroes made an entire country and diaspora proud. Final score: 110-104 Lietuva! For the first time since 2002, the USA suffered a group stage defeat in a FIBA Basketball World Cup.

Lithuania claimed a legendary victory over the American team, marking the first time they had beaten them since the 2004 Olympics, with a score



Final score: 110-104 Lietuva! Team Lithuania overpowers the US.

of 94-90. Following the game, the official FIBA website posted, "They won in 1998, they won in 2004, now they did it again in 2023. Lithuania have connected three wins against the USA, with three different generations, and showed the world that they are here to fight for the top step of the podium."

But how did the Lithuanians keep up the pace against the loaded US team for 40 minutes? The credit goes to Maksvytis, who expertly rotated his players and balanced their minutes in what he called a "cat and mouse game." No player played more than 18 minutes in the first three quarters, and none played more than 24 minutes in the entire game! Disappointed US coach Steve Kerr painted an even clearer picture about Lithuania's intensity: "We didn't play particularly well against Montenegro, so we wanted to come out and play better. But they just punched us in the mouth."

In a surprising turn of events, the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the Lithuanian team in this historic game wasn't Valančiūnas or Jokubaitis. Instead, it was a 29-year-old point guard who currently plays for the Lithuanian M Basketball Mažeikiai club, which was recently promoted to the top Lithuanian basketball league. His name? Vaidas Kariniauskas, a career journeyman who even played in the Romanian basketball league! Even today, Greek journalists can't help but smile when they hear his name, considering that just four years ago, he was playing in the Greek second division!

Continued on page 14.



Former Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė visits with Team Lithuania before a game at the 2023 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

Grassroots Fundraiser for Medical Supplies for Ukraine

LAIMA VINČĖ

Every small effort to help the Ukrainian nation defend its democracy and its people against the Russian terrorist state in this unjust war feels like a drop in a bucket compared to their enormous need. There are 20,000 amputees in Ukraine, maimed by the proliferation of landmines planted by Russian forces in violation of the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines. The Russian military has stacked landmines, sometimes in triplicate, in densely packed configurations across the front lines, indiscriminately wounding soldiers, civilians, and even children. Tourniquets are badly needed to stop the bleeding when a landmine injury occurs.

In a grassroots funding effort, together with two Ukrainian women poets and translators – Hanna Leliv and Olena Jennings – we raised \$540 to buy tourniquets and supplies, which were delivered to Ukraine by three Lithuanian poets: Marius Burokas, Laurynas Katkus, and Donatas Petrošius. This is a story of a network of Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and American poets doing what they can with their limited resources to help the wounded in Ukraine.

On July 29, 2023, Hanna Leliv, Olena Jennings, and I presented an hour-long poetry reading on “Ukrainian and Lithuanian Poetry of Freedom,” at the Franciscan Monastery in Kennebunk, Maine. Brother Aurelius Gricius, OFM, kindly allowed us to host the reading in the monastery’s beautiful Antique Room in exchange for cleaning services. Local Lithuanian poet and translator Živilė Simonidis helped not only with cleaning but also with setting up the reception and reading poetry in Lithuanian.

Perhaps we did not nearly collect as much money as we had wished, but as Hanna Leliv expressed, “When people gather together to listen to Ukrainian poetry of war, even if they are only a few, but if they are really listening, we are reassured that our voices are heard, and we have not been forgotten.”

Hanna Leliv is a native of Lviv, Ukraine, where she works as a freelance translator and runs literary translation workshops at Ukrainian Catholic University. She was a Fulbright fellow at the University of Iowa’s Literary Translation Workshop and mentee of the National Centre for Writing’s Emerging Translators Mentorship Programme. During 2022 – 2023, she was a faculty fellow at the Leslie Center for the Humanities at Dartmouth College and now teaches courses in translation at Princeton University. She has translated 30 books, and her translations are regularly published in top literary journals.

Olena Jennings was born in the United States and learned Ukrainian from her grandparents, who emigrated after World War II as displaced persons. She is the author of the poetry collection *The Age of Secrets* (Lost Horse Press, 2022) and the chapbook of poetry *Memory Project* (Underground Books, 2018.) Her novel *Temporary*



Poets and translators express support for Ukraine. From left, Hanna Leliv, Laima Vincė and Olena Jennings, together with Brother Aurelius Gricius, OFM.

Shelter was released in 2021 from Cervena Barva Press. Her translation from Ukrainian with Oksana Lutsyshyna of *Nobody Knows Us Here, and We Don't Know Anyone* by Kateryna Kalytko was released in September 2022 from Lost Horse Press. Her translation of Vasyly Makhno’s collection *Paper Bridge* was released in October 2022 from Plamen Press. She co-edited an anthology of poetry, *Ukrainian American Poets*. She is the founder and curator of Poets of Queens.

Rain and politics discouraged some from attending the reading, but we were grateful for the 25 people who did come. Iranians forced to leave their homeland because of religious persecution of the Bahai came from Portland, Maine, to listen to poetry of freedom. A Tibetan yogi recently arrived from China came to revel in the freedom of expression we too often take for granted. Other local people attended and donated generously. Brother Algirdas Malakauskis, OFM, was our host that evening and opened the reading, leading us in prayer for Ukraine.

Hanna and Olena read in Ukrainian and English, sharing stories of the poets whose work they have translated. I read a selection of my translations of Lithuanian poetry that addresses love of freedom and resistance against political tyranny.

One of the most powerful moments that evening was hearing Hanna’s translations of the poetry of 21-year-old poet soldier Artur Dron, who is fighting with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Artur Dron was a student of the Ukrainian poet Halyna Kruk before the war. His poetry is raw and authentic and is composed under conditions of war. For example, the poem “Mama” addresses the pain of a mother who says goodbye to her son as he leaves to fight for Ukraine’s freedom, telling him, “...from now on you are a rock.”

The Lithuanian Writers Union Literature Fund for Ukraine was started by three Lithuanian poets and translators: Marius Burokas, Laurynas Katkus, and Donatas Petrošius. Laurynas Katkus explains that initially, the three poets planned to travel to Ukraine to see the war firsthand and write about it. Then, they realized that they needed to bring aid and supplies if they were going to Ukraine. They appealed for donations and were surprised by the generosity of the Lithuanian people. As of this writing, they have made four trips to Ukraine and have purchased and delivered vehicles, medical supplies, books and activities for children’s libraries in liberated regions of Ukraine. They drive the vehicle they

are donating to Lviv, Ukraine, themselves, where they are met by poets like Kataryna Mikhalitsnya, who are working to document war crimes and witness testimony as members of Ukrainian PEN. These poets serve as guides as they deliver the badly needed aid and vehicles to liberated territories and areas close to the front lines. In this manner, a completely grassroots network of Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and American poets work together to collect donations, purchase necessary medical and other supplies, and deliver them to those who need them most.

Mama

You shall now become a man of rock.
A solid and sturdy man,
slightly chipped.

As I always told you:
not a stone of stumbling,
not a cornerstone.
but a rock that river won’t cut through.

Now both of us know:
there are no vacations from war.
Only farewells.
May each of us
who added to your tears
also add firmness
to your body of rock.

It’s not a farewell
but let me tell you this:
I’m always on your shoulder.
The world’s softest child—
from now on, you are a rock.
Amen.

Artur Dron

Translated from Ukrainian by Hanna Leliv

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letters

I liked the nostalgic look back to Lithuania’s pantheon of gods and goddesses in Tom Gregg’s article “Faces of Lithuanian Mythology” in the July-August issue of Draugas News. More recently, Lithuanians would name their children with one of these old Lithuanian names like Gabija as a tribute to Lithuanian ethnicity and then add a Christian name, say Marija, to Christianize the effect. When Lithuania lost its independence after World War II, many boys were named after Grand Duke Vytautas or other dukes as a silent protest. Vytautas freed his countryman from the yoke of the Teutonic Knights. Christian middle or baptismal names were added to acknowledge the One God who gives us everything, even our ethnicity.

A few years back, I stumbled upon an article about Lithuania’s neo-pagans who had requested to be recognized as a traditional denomination but were denied. Although neo-pagans do not necessarily worship pagan gods and goddesses, they do share a particular mindset that was also written about by Frederick Nietzsche, a German philosopher who identified as a neo-pagan. Unfortunately, the German Nazis used his philosophy to justify many of their actions.

The pagan Samogitians, also known as Žemaičiai in Lithuanian, had a famous saying that went like this - “Tu man - aš tau.” In English, this translates to “You do to me, and I’ll do it back to you.” This phrase was often used to seek revenge against neighboring tribes. It was only after the adoption of Christianity, with its more inclusive value system, that the Lithuanian tribes started to unite.

Vytas Stanevičius
Chicago, IL

I would like to point out some inaccuracies in the article “The New Darius Girėnas Exhibit at the Balzekas Museum” by Virginija Petrauskienė in the July-August 2023 edition of *Draugas News*. The piece claims that the Balzekas Museum is exhibiting the archive of Steponas Darius, the famous transatlantic flyer, for the first time. However, during my tenure as the Executive Director of the Balzekas Museum from 1986 to 1994, I organized a commemorative event in 1993 to mark the 60th anniversary of Darius’ fateful flight and displayed a significant portion of Darius’ archive at that time. Moreover, complete or partial lists of the items in the archive were published in the Lithuanian press both in the United States and Lithuania.

The Darius archive, stored in a travel trunk, was gifted to the Balzekas Museum by Darius’ American relatives. It remained untouched in the basement of the original museum on South Archer Ave until the museum was relocated to its current location on South Pulaski Ave in 1986. At that time, no one at the museum knew what the trunk contained until I started working as the Executive Director. When I opened the trunk, I was amazed at what I saw. Either Stanley Balzekas had forgotten about the chest, or he didn’t realize the treasure he had. In any case, I started cataloging the archive, but unfortunately, I couldn’t finish the job before leaving the museum. Besides the exhibit at the Balzekas Museum, a significant part of the Steponas Darius archive was showcased at an exhibition hosted by the Lithuanian Philatelic Society.

Val Ramonis
Lemont, IL

An unforgettable summer in Lithuania

Continued from page 11

On the anniversary of King Mindaugas' coronation day, LISS participants had the opportunity to meet with members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The soldiers showcased their weapons and equipment. The unit's internal procedures, daily routine, and professionalism impressed the participants.

LISS participants also explored the unique natural attractions of Lithuania, which are off the beaten tourist path. They embarked on an endurance hike in the swamps, visited dunes, forests, and scenic routes around Vilnius, and went canoeing. They also got to experience the pleasure of an ancient Lithuanian sauna and learn about its traditions. Many said it was the best sauna they had ever been to!

On the weekends, the group went on excursions to the Curonian Spit on the Baltic and the island castle of Trakai. The program ended with a scenic hot-air balloon ride over the Trakai area. After spending so much time together and sharing so many experiences, the LISS team became like a family, and it was difficult for them to say goodbye.

Urtė Zakarauskas, a participant in the LISS program from Chicago, shared her thoughts on the program. "I am a pre-physical therapy student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. During my time in LISS, I had the opportunity to work with many physical therapists at the inpatient rehabilitation unit of the University Hospital in Vilnius. This experience allowed me to

consult with other physiotherapists and physicians, assist in patient care, and even take over many patient cases from start to finish. Without the LISS program, I would never have been able to gain such practical experience in my career, let alone get to know Lithuania as well. Although I have been to Lithuania many times, LISS provided us with a rich cultural program, from a grand tour of Nida to wonderful conversations with Prime Minister Šimonytė and many others. These experiences gave me a much deeper understanding of Lithuanian history, politics, and way of life that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I am extremely grateful to the LISS program for such a wonderful five weeks full of so many memories."

Una Greblikaitė from Canada recalled her internship: "Thanks to the LISS program, I was able to work at the Life Sciences Center of Vilnius University. I extracted RNA, DNA and proteins from the cells. The study was done in a newly built building, so everything was very modern, and I looked forward to going to the lab every day. LISS gave me such an unforgettable summer, allowing me to forge stronger bonds with my home country of Lithuania, make extraordinary friendships, and create countless wonderful memories during our travels. I will be forever grateful!"

Registration for LISS 2024 opens in November. Stay updated on LISS news at <https://www.facebook.com/LISS-internships> and Instagram @liss_summer_in_lithuania.

Romėna Čiūtienė is the Program Director of LISS

A Bittersweet FIBA World Cup for Lithuania

Continued from page 12.

Recently, Kariniauskas endured criticism from Lithuanian basketball fans for his mediocre performance during the World Cup preparations. However, he was able to redeem himself during the game against the USA, where he outplayed one of the most popular members of Kerr's team, Austin Reaves, the second-highest scorer on the top-ranked team in the tournament. The Los Angeles Lakers player was not able to defend the low post effectively and ended up conceding consecutive 'and-one' plays to Kariniauskas. It was Kariniauskas' moment to shine, and he made the most of it.

"We sat on the bench and couldn't believe what he [Kariniauskas] was doing on the court," said Rokas Jokubaitis, one of the biggest Euroleague stars, with a smile. "I'm very happy for him. Stepping onto the court and leading the team like that, getting an 'and-one' play, and then hitting the three... He even found time to trash talk. I'm genuinely delighted for him. He needed a game like this."

Kariniauskas finished the game with 15 points in less than 17 minutes,

inspiring a whole nation. "It's a great feeling. It's nice that we played as a team." He admitted facing a country with a population of 300 million was challenging when his own nation had only three million people. "I still can't believe we won," said the game hero.

A BITTERSWEET EPILOGUE

In the Quarter-Final, the Maskvytis boys faced Serbia. Unfortunately, Serbia caught Lithuania off guard with their aggressive defense, resulting in a loss for Lithuania against the later finalists with a score of 68-87. This defeat meant Lithuania would now compete for the 5-8 places at the World Cup. However, Lithuania managed to bounce back and win their first Classification Game against Slovenia in a blowout victory.

The Lithuanians were no match for Luka Dončić's Slovenia (100-84). Jonas Valančiūnas paced Lithuania with another double-double (24 points, 12 rebounds), Ignas Brazdeikis (15 pts) and Mindaugas Kuzminskas (14 pts) followed. Overall, Maksvytis' team recorded 28 assists and only 10 turnovers in that game.

Scholarships announced



Ieva Piragis



Aija Dilba



Tadas Baltaduonis



Gabrielius Bazikas

The Taupa Lithuanian Federal Credit Union Scholarship Committee announced on September 1st that it awarded scholarships to four university students. The scholarship recipients are **Ieva Piragis**, studying Corporate Finance and Accounting at Bentley University; **Aija Dilba**, studying Early Childhood Education at Worcester State University; **Tadas Baltaduonis**, studying Business Management with a Concentration in Finance at Massachusetts University Boston; and **Gabrielius Bazikas**, studying Criminal Justice and Psychology at Salve Regina University.

In operation for over 40 years, the Boston-based credit union is open to persons of Lithuanian ancestry and their immediate family members. Scholarships are awarded to active Taupa members.

Details regarding scholarships for the upcoming year will be announced on the credit union's website, www.taupaboston.com, in the spring of 2024.

In the "Baltic Final," the Lithuanian team seemed to have run out of energy, especially after Brazdeikis left the court with a knee injury. As a result, they could not resist Latvia, losing 63-98. However, the game's most memorable moment was when both teams came together for a group photo as brothers before their Baltic derby.

Beating Team USA and getting 6th place out of 32 teams, above Slovenia, Spain, Brazil and France, was no easy feat! The entire Lithuanian nation and its worldwide diaspora can take pride in Malsvytis' boys! This time, Valančiūnas and the other players created an inspirational story against the NBA All-Star players of the American team. This story will be remembered for years, despite the lost opportunity to play in the Semi-Finals.

The emotions such a historical victory brings are immeasurable by any medals, Olympic berths, or Eurobasket trophies. These moments carve memories into our minds for a lifetime, moments that we can say, "I watched that game on TV." These are the games that children will imagine replaying on neighborhood courts.

Tournament standings, playoff brackets, medals and trophies? Yes, they will settle in the sports history books. But basketball is about the satisfaction and inspiration that Lithuania's victory against the USA brought to all Lithuanians worldwide, including young kids who dream of playing basketball and becoming the next Sabonis or Marčiulonis. That is what matters, after all.

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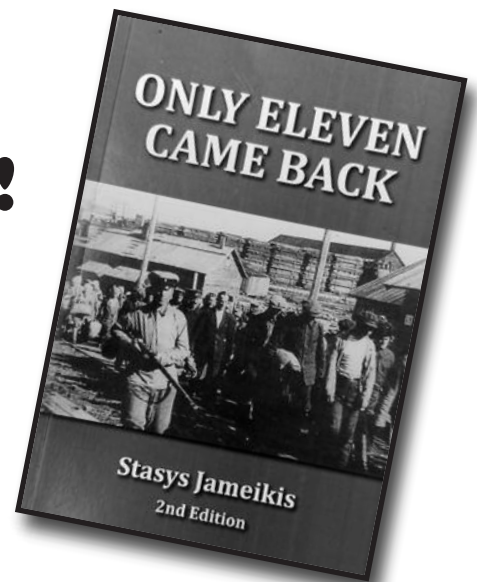


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