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A SHORT HISTORY OF HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

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Some six hundred years after the conversion to Christianity of Lithuania, it is interesting to take a look at the contributions made by the Catholic Church to Lithuanian life and customs in the early years of this century in America.

The following document, a short history of Holy Trinity Church in Hartford, Connecticut, was written in 1923. It may well be that the establishment of the Lithuanian colony in Hartford, and the founding of its church, in many respects is like those steps in other Lithuanian colonies in America and reveal certain constants in the difficulties they faced and the accomplishments they realized. It is for this reason that I have edited and translated this document, which came from the Archdiocesan Archives in Hartford.

Introduction

This short history of a Lithuanian community is written to commemorate the 20 years of existence of Holy Trinity Church, the 25th anniversary of its Lithuanian Sons under the protection of St. John the Evangelist Beneficial Society, and the 10th anniversary of Rev. John Ambotas (Ambot) as pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Hartford, Conn.

Lithuanians began settling in the Hartford area over 30 years ago (1890s), when Rev. Juozas Žebrys used this small nucleus of families to establish the Lithuanian Roman Catholic parish in Hartford. His was the difficult task of unifying the widely scattered Lithuanian families by laying the foundation of a religious, moral, and ethnic life. Attracted by the various organizations within the church, the number of Lithuanians grew. They found a second homeland in the church and its activities. Besides praying in Lithuanian, they found moral and ethnic support, guidance and advice in religious matters. Consequently, the majority of Lithuanians of today are practicing Catholics and good supporters of Lithuania.

Formation of the Parish

At the end of the 19th century Lithuanians, for various reasons, started emigrating to foreign countries, especially to the United States, where they settled in various cities and industrial centers. Most of them chose to live in the eastern part of the United States, where a better developed industry offered more jobs with better wages. By 1890 the few Lithuanian families living in the Hartford area became the nucleus of the Lithuanian parish and community.

In 1898 Rev. Juozas Žebrys from New Britain, Connecticut, visited the Lithuanians here. He contacted the scattered Lithuanian families and single individuals and rented a large room for \$12 a month to offer Holy Mass on Sundays and holy days. In the same room, they held meetings to discuss religious, cultural, ethnic, and other problems.

On April 8 of the same year, the Lithuanian Sons under the protection of St. John the Evangelist was established through the efforts of Rev. Žebrys. This first organization in the parish is still in existence today (1923).

It was difficult for the people to be without a church or parish hall from 1898 to 1903. Therefore, in 1903 through the efforts of Rev. J. Žebrys, the Lithuanians acquired some property, consisting of a lot and a two-story brick building at 41 Capitol Avenue for \$10,000. They renovated a part of this building to be used as a church, which was consecrated on August 18, 1903, as Holy Trinity Church.

Since this date the Lithuanians have been very proud, because they had their own church and hall for meetings and other organizational activities. There were not many Lithuanian families in the Hartford area at this period. The attendance at Sunday mass was small. Because of the energetic efforts of Rev. Žebrys and the parishioners, the \$10,000 debt was liquidated in 1912.

In the fall of 1912 Rev. Jonas Ambotas was assigned as permanent pastor of Holy Trinity Church. He was very energetic and dedicated as a priest and a leader working for the parish and for the welfare of the Lithuanian community. In the summer of 1915 a cornerstone for a new church was blessed. The high ceilinged basement and the beautiful facade of the future church were completed at Christmas of the same year. Since the lot for the new church was very small the existing chapel (the old building) was moved to the area behind the new church building.

The Knights of Lithuania, Chapter 6, had a designated room on the second floor of the old building. The first floor of the building was used as a hall for meetings and social activities such as plays and dances. The new church and the renovation of the brick building cost over \$30,000.

In 1916, two other buildings were acquired adjacent to the church property: one was a brick structure; the other, wooden with a parcel of land. The brick home was used as the rectory and the wooden one as a convent for the future teachers of the parish school (1924). Both homes cost \$20,000.

Today Holy Trinity parish owns the following property: a church, two brick and one wooden home — all adjacent to the church. It is important to note that at present Hartford's Lithuanian parish has no debts and \$20,000 in savings. This is an indication that Rev. J. Ambotas is an experienced, beloved leader and that parishioners worked together, devoting their time and money for this extraordinary achievement.

The School

A Lithuanian parochial school was necessary to educate future generations with a firm religious, cultural, and ethnic background. Without the school it would be difficult to keep young Lithuanians together and have them strive for noble ideals. Several other Lithuanian parishes in various cities already had parochial schools. Therefore, in 1923, Hartford's Holy Trinity parish acquired a huge three-story, 18-room building (formerly the St. Joseph Cathedral School) for \$50,000. Two lower floors would be used for the school and the third floor would be remodeled for an auditorium complete with a stage for concerts, plays, and other educational and cultural events. To staff the school, they invited the Lithuanian Franciscan Sisters from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (who had just been established the previous year).

The Lithuanian Roman Catholic Sons

The newly-settled Lithuanians experienced material and financial difficulties, especially in times of sickness and death. To help themselves, they saw a need for a benevolent organization. Therefore on June 10, 1898, they formed the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Sons Society under the protection of St. John the Evangelist. The beginning was difficult. At the first organizational meeting there were only 14 persons. Convinced of the need for such a benevolent society, they elected the following officers: Vincas Laurinaitis, president; Povilas Jakštas, vice president, Kazimieras Pilipauskas, secretary; Benedictas Miknevičius, financial secretary; and Justinas Plikunas, treasurer.

At the beginning they had only \$12 in their treasury. But as the membership increased so too did their income. Here is some evidence from their books documenting their 25 years of existence. During this period the total income from membership dues, picnics, and other similar activities, and bank interest was \$25,396.92. The expenditures during the same periods were as follows: sick benefits to members, \$12,627.23; funeral benefits, \$2,015.00; Lithuanian Freedom Bonds, \$300.00; donations to the Holy Trinity Church, \$351.00; donations to Lithuanians suffering from the war, \$100.00; acquired 14 shares, \$1,400.00; other small expenditures for various purposes, over \$2,000.00 Presently the society has \$6,017.13 in its treasury.

The society is active and holds its meetings on a regular basis. They also sponsor cultural events, including several plays and lectures given by various artists and speakers. Currently the society has 358 members; 30 members died during the

25-year period. The present officers are Juozas Maziliauskas, president; Juozapatas Laučka, vice president; Felicijonas Grigaitis, secretary, Petras Labanauskas, financial secretary; Danielius Strugas, treasurer.

This year they celebrated their 25th anniversary with the participation of representatives from all Lithuanian organizations in the Hartford area. Early difficulties in their history did not deter them from achieving success.

St. Elizabeth Society

St. Elizabeth Society was formed on December 14, 1913, under the guidance of Rev. J. Ambotas, the pastor of Holy Trinity Church. At the beginning the society had over 60 members. The first officers were Paulinė Geležiūtė, president; Elena Masčiulienė, vice president; Uršulė Gurkliūtė, recording secretary; Teklė Kneižiūtė, financial secretary; Felecija Plikūnienė, treasurer; Kotryna Parzdienė, Paulina Skupaitė, and Antanina Ramoniūtė, trustees.

St. Elizabeth Society is the largest Lithuanian women's organization in the greater Hartford area. During the 10 years of its existence it has accumulated \$4,721.50, mostly from monthly dues, picnics, dinners, balls, and lotteries. The Society is affiliated with the Lithuanian Women's Federation. Each member pays 3 cents dues to the Federation treasury. Associated with the group is the St. Casimir Academy Auxiliary. Sick members receive a \$5.00 stipend per week. The family of the deceased member receives \$50.00 as a death benefit supplemented by an additional 50 cents from each member.

The society has also donated appreciable sums to the Lithuanian National Fund to help Lithuanians suffering from the war and to needy Lithuanian students seeking higher education. Total expenditures amounted to \$4,304.82. Presently there is \$1,417.00 in the treasury.

This year (1923) St. Elizabeth Society celebrated its 10th anniversary. The present officers are Elzbieta Melninkienė, president; Cecilija Dabackienė, vice president; Ona Povilaičiūtė, recording secretary; Marijona Katkauskaitė, financial secretary; Petronelė Labeckienė, treasurer; Marijona Čelkanienė and Adelė Strelčiūnienė, trustees; Monika Maženienė, sergeant-at-arms; Marcijona Pateckaitė and Veronika Petrukevičienė, Committee for Revisions. Today the society is increasing in strength and numbers 153 members with an energetic and productive administration. We believe that in the future they will do much more for God, for Lithuania, and for the greater Hartford Lithuanian community.

Knights of Lithuania (Vyčiai)

When this organization was formed on January 19, 1913, it was named St. Casimir Cultural Youth Society. On May 18, 1914, it changed its name to Knights of Lithuania, Chapter 6. From the beginning its membership grew until it had over 200 members, shortly diminished, but after the war there was a revival in both. Presently there are 97 members: 54 young men and 43 young women. Fundraising social events numbered 52; of these 3 were for the benefit of the parish; 4 for the support of Lithuania's freedom, 7 for other community organizations. The profit from two events was donated to the support of St. Casimir Convent in Chicago, 111. They also sponsored 16 lectures featuring prominent speakers. To support Lithuania's new independence, they purchased Freedom Bonds for \$1,250.00 and donated \$150.00

Presently they have \$63.49 in their treasury, a billiard table in their club room, and a library of 500 books for the use of members and non-members without charge. Active within the group are a drama and sports section. Its baseball team enjoys special renown. During winter months, the "Vyčiai" sponsor evening courses. Since its inception, the following members have been especially active: Antanas Kučas, Antanas Mazalas, Kastantas Tamošiūnas, Petras Mikalauskas, Andrius Pateckis, Paulina Geležiūtė, Marijona Pateckaitė, Marijona Ivanauskaitė, and others.

Particularly active were Antanas Kneižys and Steponas Kneižys, who is presently studying in the seminary. For his tireless work with the youth and unflagging support of the organizations, Rev. J. Ambotas was made an honorary member.

St. Cecilia Choir

Hartford's Lithuanian choir began to form as soon as it got its first permanent pastor. Organist Valerijonas Kancleris formed a choir with ten members in 1912. Before long the choir was able to present several concerts to provide entertainment for the parish. It also learned to sing a variety of Masses and hymns; "Tertia" and "Tota Pulchra Est, Maria"; hymns for Vespers were also learned and are sung to this day.

Kancleris was succeeded by Onufras Rosmanskis as organist. Rosmanskis was able to attract native-born Lithuanian men and women with talent and accomplishment to form a new group, St. Cecilia Lithuanian Roman Catholic Choir.

Rosmanskis was succeeded by Petras Kamantauskas, under whose direction the choir learned new musical compositions: St. Michael, Leonard, and others. They also gave several concerts. They did not neglect Lithuania's needs, donating \$150.00 to its National Fund and \$150.00 to Lithuanians suffering from the war.

On June 1, 1922, Petras Bružauskas became the new organist. Under his direction the choir made good progress and grew in membership. Presently the choir gives concerts and takes part at various picnics and excursions. They are well-respected for their talent and fine performances. They hope to surprise the Lithuanian community with an operetta performed during the Christmas holidays.

Present officers of St. Cecilia's Choir are Jonas Mančiūnas, president; Pranas Karalius, vice president; Kristina Sungailaitė, Petras Jankauskas, sergeant-at-arms; Petras Bružauskas, treasurer and choir director.

St. Cecilia's Choir creates a fine impression with its performances; its members attend rehearsals faithfully, Some of them have belonged to the choir since 1912. Long life and prosperity to the Choir!

(Note: One of the choir members, Anna Kaskas, (Ona Katkauskaitė) was discovered by a scout of the Metropolitan Opera Company and eventually sang with the company. She was a coloratura.)

Lithuanian Women's Alliance, Chapter 17

As women in the country gained more political rights, our Lithuanian Women's Alliance, Chapter 17, was formed on May 25, 1915. Its first officers were Antanina Stravinskaitė-Špilienė, president; Paulina Supaitė-Ambrozienė, vice president; Marcijona Pateckaitė, secretary; Leontina Paradienė, treasurer; Marcijona Stanslovienė and Veronika Smidkaitė, trustees.

Within a short time the Alliance made remarkable progress in education and in charitable works. They donated \$180.00 to Lithuania and acquired \$50.00 worth of Lithuanian Freedom Bonds. They assisted the poor and the sick; they sponsored 17 social events and the same number of lectures and speeches, as well as five picnics. Annually they have sponsored some cultural and educational events.

In 1922 Veronika Petrukevičienė and Marcijona Pateckaitė formed a chapter of St. Casimir Auxiliary to help the Chicago Sisters of St. Casimir financially.

Present officers are A. Stankienė, president; Ona Kesienė, vice president; Teklė Blužienė, recording secretary; Viktorija Elijošienė, financial secretary.

The Alliance continues to grow and has over a hundred members. We believe that in the future they will make great progress in educational and cultural activities.

St. Joseph Society

Lithuanians of greater Hartford dearly understood the importance and value of organized life and they formed various organizations under different names. On June 22, 1913, they formed a new beneficial society, St. Joseph Society. Attendance at the first meeting was small, approximately ten.

The first officers were Juozas Jokubauskas, president; Antanas Riškus, vice president; Juozas Blužas, recording secretary; Jonas Kalizna, financial secretary; Pranas Treigis, sergeant-at-arms; Jonas Stanslovas, and Juozas Mušinskas, trustees. Currently the membership consists of 89 people, with \$8,894.11 in the treasury.

Since its formation until the present they have paid \$2,982.04 in sick and death benefits to their members. Together with St. John's Society, it celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. During this time the society was engaged in cultural, educational and moral activities. It helped unite and strengthen the morale of the Lithuanian community.

Present officers are Juozas Barolis, president; Dominikas Plikūnas, vice president; Kazimieras Kasmonaitis, recording secretary; Juozapatas Laučka, financial secretary; Benedictas Kalvinskas, financial secretary; Juozas Bernotas, treasurer; Jeronimas Rimeika and Matas Karanda, collectors; Pranas Žebrauskas, sergeant-at-arms.

St. Joseph Society stands in all respects on a sound foundation, and we believe that it will be a most active organization in the future.

St. Mary's Children Society

This society was formed on April 11, 1920, under the guidance of Rev. A. Vaškelis. The first officers were Felicija Plikūnaitė, president; Marijona Labeckaitė, vice president; Elena Valavičaitė, secretary; Marijona Kavaliauskaitė, treasurer.

The members are active in education as well as in stage presentations. To date, they have organized four events with the recitation of poetry, songs, and plays. The majority of the members belong to the choir and sing in the church on Sundays.

The present officers are Jieva Alenskaitė, president; Barbora Kriščiūnaitė, vice president; Kastancija Jesmantaitė, secretary; Agnieška Plikūnaitė, treasurer; Marijona Jakavičaitė, trustee. The society has 30 members and is growing.

The Lithuanian Workers' Alliance

The Lithuanian Workers' Alliance, Chapter 6, was organized on July 11, 1916, through the efforts of Rev. F. Kemėšis. Many prominent members of the Lithuanian community came to the first organizational meeting, and they were elected as the first officers of the organizations: K. Karoblis, president; P. Gležiutė, vice president; A. Kneižys, recording secretary; P. Kauklis, financial secretary; K. Tamašiūnas, treasurer; J. Laučka and V. Kanclieris, trustees.

The chapter was active in educational and cultural activities by organizing lectures and social evenings. They supported Lithuanian causes financially and donated funds to other workers' organizations. They gave \$9.00 to the Soldiers' Fund; they bought shares in the Lithuanian newspaper "Darbininkas" for \$150.00 and donated \$20.00 to offset the newspaper's debts. They bought shares in the "Draugas" corporation for \$10.00, donated \$20.00 to the Lithuanian National Fund, \$30.00 to the city of Lawrence Strikers' Fund and \$17.00 to the Waterbury Strikers' Fund.

They purchased Lithuanian Freedom Bonds for \$50.00. The chapter sent Lithuania a large number of books and participated at all Lithuanian conventions in the U.S.A. They continually recall Lithuania's name to the non-Lithuanian public and donate to workers' organizations.

The present officers are A. Mašiotas, president; J. Kočiūnas, vice president; A. Keršis, recording secretary; A. Pateckis, financial secretary; J. Tamašiūnas, treasurer; J. Važnionis and J. Burbulis, trustees. They have 42 members at present under the direction of energetic officers. We believe that they will be successful in achieving much more in the future.

Lithuanian Roman Catholic Alliance in U.S.A. Chapter 89

The 89th Chapter was formed on March 1, 1914, through the effort of Rev. J. Ambotas. The first elected officers were Rev. John Ambotas, spiritual director; B. Sarapas, president; P. Saulėnas, secretary; V. Kancleris, treasurer.

The chapter did much to help war-torn Lithuania in addition to assisting other organizations and individuals financially. They donated \$82.00 to help suffering Lithuania and contributed \$25.00 to the Lithuanian National Fund. They purchased Lithuanian Freedom Bonds for \$50.00 and for the Lithuanian Army, \$15.00. From 1914 to 1923 they donated over \$300.00 for other worthy causes. They sponsored cultural events like lectures, concerts, and plays.

The present officers are Rev. J. Ambotas, spiritual director; P. Jankauskas, president; A. Keršis, vice president; P. Jesmontas, financial secretary; J. Varkala, secretary; J. Remeika, treasurer; T. Kripienė and J. Pateliūnas, trustees; A. Kaunietis, reporter, A. Nakčerys, sergeant-at-arms. Currently there are 143 members.

Lithuanian Freedom Bond Committee

The committee was formed on January 13, 1920, for the purpose of selling Lithuanian Freedom Bonds. The following persons were on the committee: Juozas Šontas, Konstantas Kručikas, Marijona Labeckaitė, Aleksandras Pavilionis, Pranas Kveselis, Paulina Geležiuotė, Juozas Barolis, Antanas Jatautas, Antanas Mašiotas, Jonas Labeckis, Antanas Keršis, Vincas Dzikas, Antanas Mazalas, Rev. J. Ambotas, Rev. A. Vaškelis, Petras Kamantauskas, Petras Jankauskas, Jadvyga Kamantauskaitė, Marijona Poteliūnienė, Theodora Kripienė, Matas Švilpa, Teresė Buivydaitė, Vincas Gailiūnas, Jonas Žukauskas, Veronika Tamošiūnienė, Morta Kručikienė, Pranas Gybas, Kostantas Tamošiūnas, Agota Kazlauskienė, Vincas Žemaitis, Povilas Žukauskas, Jieva Alinskaitė, Veronika Petrukevičienė, Petras Žilius, Andrius Pateckis, Marijona Kavaliauskaitė, ir Tamas Motiejūnas.

The officers were Petras Jankauskas, president; Aleksandras Pavilionis, vice president; Jonas Labeckis, secretary; Rev. John Ambotas, treasurer.

This committee worked most successfully for the resurrection of Lithuania as a free country. Through its efforts over \$30,000.00 in Lithuanian Freedom Bonds were sold in Hartford's small Lithuanian community. Jonas Labeckas and Andrius Pateckis distinguished themselves as the most outstanding workers in this effort.

Lithuanian-American Citizens' Political Club

The club was formed in 1910 through the efforts of several individuals. The members were of various beliefs and political opinions. Because of these differences, they could not concur on a specific course of action politically, culturally, or educationally. Therefore, despite its title, it was actually a beneficial organization. Hopefully, in the future they will devote more energy to and to have a better understanding of, the needs of the community for raising its cultural awareness.

Lithuania's Freedom Guard

After preliminary discussions among young Lithuanian men, the Lithuania's Freedom Guard was formed on May 5, 1919. Military discipline and devotion to work for Lithuania's freedom was the goal of the organization. The majority of its members were former soldiers with the American military; some of them have participated in the battles against the Germans in France. At the beginning they were eager to work for Lithuania's cause. Many were ready to go defend Lithuania's freedom as soldiers; some actually did.

Their accomplishments included a \$200.00 donation to the Lithuanian Red Cross, the purchase of various military clothes for \$40.00 and mailing them to the Lithuanian army, and various other donations. They also boasted of a good-sized band with personally owned instruments.

The officers were Rev. A. Vaškelis, chaplain; Vladas Vilkelis, captain, Stasys Šrupšas, first lieutenant; Ambrozijus Karolius, second lieutenant; Petras Jankauskas, master sergeant; Feliksas Tamošaitis, corporal; Andrius Pateckis, reporter.

They influenced young men in New Britain to form a similar organization. When Lithuania regained its complete freedom, the 80 members disbanded.

Conclusion

This short history has been written to present the facts concerning the development of Hartford's Lithuanian community in educational, cultural, moral, and ethnic areas. There are several other small organizations not mentioned in this booklet, because they did not provide the writer with the necessary information.

This booklet should provide some valuable information to future authors about the life of Lithuanians in Hartford and its vicinity. It should be noted that Lithuanians were not interested in establishing businesses. They have only a few small stores. But they are the owners of well-organized and productive farms in the vicinity of Hartford. The Lithuanian population of greater Hartford is approximately 3,200 persons (in 1923).