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LITHUANIAN RELIGIOUS IMMIGRANT LIFE IN PENNSYLVANIA

WILLIAM WOLKOVICH-VALKAVIČIUS

A scholar of immigration and ethnicity could easily spend a lifetime studying the panorama of people who settled in this heavily-populated state of William Penn. In the early days came the Dutch, Swedes, and English, soon followed by Germans and Scoth-Irish. The growth of railroads and the opening of coal mines after the American Civil War brought still newer immigrants such as Poles, Slovaks, and Ukrainians. Among the newcomers one likewise finds the non-Slavic Lithuanians. They were among several ethnic groups toiling under the heel of czarist oppression since 1795 when the Russian empire overpowered Lithuania as well as Poland. In the aftermath of famine, population growth, scarcity of jobs, and the uninviting prospect of enforced military service, young Lithuanian men quietly emptied many villages, finding their way through an underground network to a port such as Hamburg, Germany, or Libau, Latvia. From there they set sail for America, hoping to find enough work to allow savings for a return trip. Nevertheless, the vast majority never returned to their homeland and never again saw their parents. Except for some of their siblings who followed to this country later on, the first immigrants never looked on the faces of their brothers and sisters, either.

Next to Ireland, Lithuania experienced the largest people drain in proportion to its total population. Sooner or later, smaller numbers moved to England, South America, Canada, and even South Africa. In the United States, Pennsylvania received the first major wave of Lithuanians scattered about the state in coal mines and steel mills. From 1899 to 1914, census records indicate that 70,019 Lithuanians gave Pennsylvania as their destination, outnumbering Illinois with its 47,339 and both New York with 37,912 and Massachusetts with 37,049. Consequently, these original settlements have drawn serious notice from a variety of people.

1) The writer Margaret R. Seebach focused her interest in a novel about a Lithuanian coal miner called *That Man Donaleits [sic]* (Philadelphia, 1909). It became an instrument for publicizing the Lutheran faith, since the hero leaves his Roman Catholicism and embraces Lutheranism.

2) The leading folklorist, Jonas Balys, spent considerable time in 1957 traveling about, especially in Pennsylvania, with his writing tablet and tape recorder, visiting with senior women and some men, too, in order to give permanence to countless folk song melodies and lyrics. In one of his volumes called *Lietuvių Dainos Amerikoje* (Lithuanian Folksongs in America) (Boston, 1958), he collected and catalogued 470 melodies and 472 sets of lyrics. In the final segment of his book he identifies the immigrants who sang each of those songs. Magdalena Takazauskienė of Pittsburgh, age 72, was by far the most prolific; From sheer memory she sang 43 folk songs. Twenty-eight others, including three men, offered smaller numbers of songs, ranging from one to ten. All those interviewed were native Lithuanians, except one who was born in Gilberton.

3) In 1977 journalist Vladas Butėnas teamed up with photographer Algimantas Kezys to produce a photo album called *Pennsylvanijos angliakasių Lietuva,* (The Lithuania of the Pennsylvanian Coal Miners). This album includes interviews with elder immigrants, short sketches of some colonies, and is abundantly illustrated with striking photos.

Readers of Lithuanian heritage may possibly have known some of the participants on this list.

4) An ethnographic folk ensemble called "Sodauto" in the Boston area prepared a highly-successful program of dance, song, and monologue about coal miners called *Kur anglių kalnai stėri* (By the Mountains of Coal), performed during the Patch Town Days in June 1991 and again in 1993 at the Eckley's Miners' Village in Weatherly. Later, Sodauto presented the same scholarly researched program at the Lithuanian parishes in Frackville in November 1993 and in Shamokin in March of 1994. This folk ensemble also brought this nostalgic program on a tour of eight major cities in Lithuania in the summer of 1992.

5. Finally, the second volume of a projected three-volume series, *Lithuanian Religious Life in America,* on all the Lithuanian churches in the United States is devoted exclusively to Pennsylvania. This volume contains entries on 45 parishes, three women's religious communities, as well as some data on Lithuanian Protestants and those who separated from the pope and local bishop, forming independent parishes under the Polish National Catholic Church, headquartered in Scranton.

A lengthy essay contrasts the Lithuanians described in Volume One on the eastern seaboard, including New England, New York, New Jersey, and Baltimore. For lack of a better name, let's call the Lithuanians of Volume One the "eastern" people. They were principally in the cities or at least in nearby suburbs. There they worked rather steadily, with fewer strikes that the Pennsylvania coal miners underwent. The easterners for the most part earned only modest wages; the Pennsylvania coal miners endured much poverty. Easterners suffered injuries such as finger, hand, or leg amputations in hazarous factories lacking safety features. But their fate was nothing like that of the Pennsylvanians who almost routinely fell victim to severe injuries and fatalities, to say nothing of the long-term, black lung disease. The less attractive surroundings of dingy, gloomy, often impoverished coal towns attracted many of the less saintly vagabond clergy, whereas the easterners were mostly blessed with pastors of long incumbency, though often autocratic and stern in bearing. In any case, the earliest immigrants hardly enjoyed much freedom in selecting a place to live. They found housing anywhere at all once they were able to secure a job. For the first wave of newcomers this meant the state of Pennsylvania.

The settlement pattern is also interesting. The vast majority of Lithuanians have been Roman Catholic. Thus the first and easiest way to locate these immigrants is to chart their network of ethnic parishes. A glance at a map immediately identifies Lithuanian enclaves in northeastern and eastern Pennsylvania around the Scranton area in the hard coal region, in southwestern Pennsylvania in the soft coal and steel mill region around Pittsburgh, and finally in the metropolitan surroundings of Philadelphia in southeastern Pennsylvania - roughly one-third of the Lithuanian state population in each corner. Altogether, Lithuanians established forty-five Roman Catholic churches. Lithuanians in settlements housing smaller numbers of these immigrants often joined Polish parishes for worship. Sometimes the local clergy would invite a Lithuanian priest to come at least once a year in the spring around Easter time for confessions. According to the 1995 *National Catholic Directory, 25* of the original 45 parishes are still functioning as specifically Lithuanian parishes, while the others have merged with neighboring churches or closed. These changes, needless to say, did not take place easily, and in many instances most painfully.

Not all Lithuanians remained Catholics under the pope. A hundred years ago, a large segment of Poles gradually formed a separatist body that came to be called the Polish National Catholic Church. This independence movement also influenced Lithuanians. One finds such short-lived parishes in Scranton, Pittsburgh, Wilkes-Barre, Du Bois, and Philadelphia. Finally, a small number of Lithuanian Lutherans founded a parish in Philadelphia for a short time.

Nor did all Lithuanians remain Christian in the fold of their traditional faith. A large minority became leftists, i.e. socialists or freethinkers *(laisvamaniai)* as they were populary called. Their leading voice was a physician, the controversial freethinker-nationalist Jonas Šliūpas. This colorful figure and others like him taught the message that capitalism and religion were the archenemies of the working people. Their only salvation was through education. In response, leading Catholic clergy became alarmed at the inroads of such leftists, among whom were many nationalists. By definition, a nationalist was anyone especially anxious about the welfare of his homeland, while seeking to separate this sentiment from religion. These mostly churchless immigrants heavily influenced the early ethnic press and the Lithuanian National Alliance, a network seeking to bind scattered countrymen through local chapters. Nationalists and, especially, the radicals among them likewise infiltrated local mutual-aid societies and parish boards of trustees, causing almost constant bickering. Hardly a Lithuanian parish ever existed in Pennsylvania that did not experience considerable turmoil in its origin and early years. The classic case is that of St. George Parish in Shenandoah. The constant pastor-trustee bickering lasted for decades in the civil courts. From 1910 to 1937, the disputes generated some 760 pages of legal documents. What was a continuous bitter drink for the bishop proved to be nectar for local attorneys.

To counteract the freethinkers, Catholic priests employed various means. Since the 1890s, they had discussed the need for a religious order of women to teach catechism and staff parish schools. Finally, leading clergy such as Fr. Antanas Milukas, Fr. Antanas Kaupas, and especially Fr. Antanas Staniukynas succeeded in establishing the Sisters of St. Casimir at Mount Carmel in 1907. Within a few years, the community transferred to the burgeoning Lithuanian center of Chicago.

An urgent social need to care for orphans and widows gave rise to another sisterhood at Elmhurst in 1922, the Sisters of Jesus Crucified, initiated by a Passionist priest, Fr. Alfonsas Urbanavičius. Meanwhile, the demand for parochial school teachers continued unabated. As a result, the Sisters began to devote more time to religious instruction and to staffing schools. Though the original foundation in Elmhurst burned down, there remains to this day a modern nursing home - St. Mary Villa.

In Pittsburgh, yet a third women's religious congregation took root, or more accurately put, was transplanted. Out of brooding, lengthy nationalist differences, a group of Lithuanian Sisters left the Polish community of the Holy Family in Chicago and started an independent branch of Franciscan Sisters in 1924. To this day, they maintain their mother house and retirement home in the Mount Providence section of the Steel City.

To offset the negative influence of freehinkers, the Catholic community used other means to preserve and protect its faith. A nationwide Catholic Federation was formed at Wilkes-Barre on February 13, 1906. Fr. Staniukynas revived the

Lithuanian Priests League in 1909 in New York City, quickly setting up a newspaper, *Draugas* (Friend), in Wilkes-Barre, on July 12, 1909. After it shifted to Chicago in 1912, another Catholic newspaper, *Garsas* (Sound) started May 17, 1917 in Brooklyn, New York, but moved to Wilkes-Barre in 1930- *Garsas* was the voice of the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Alliance, still headquartered in Wilkes-Barre.

Though Chicago gradually became the more populous Lithuanian enclave, the Lithuanian settlements of Pennsylvania long continued to be vibrant colonies. One significant indicator is the vast output of newspapers and magazines in Lithuanian, many of which were religious-oriented. Philadelphia led the way with 32 publications. Other statistics include: Pittsburgh and Shenandoah with 12 each; Scranton -7; Wilkes-Barre - 5; Plymouth - 4; Mahanoy City - 3; McKees Rock - 2; and one each in DuBois, Elmhurst, Girardville, Kingston, Minersville, Mount Carmel, and Pittston.

For the majority of Lithuanians and their offspring, the local parish was the traditional focus of social and cultural activity as well as the center of religious life. When the pastor proved to be a strong and sometimes charistmatic leader, a particular enclave fared well. The first pastors were natives of Lithuania, though they spoke Polish, too. Gradually they were replaced by second-generation Lithuanians. A few of the European-born served in Pennsylvania and then returned to Lithuania. The European-trained priests were especially skilled in speech, some in four or five languages. The majority belonged to their Priests League, and the Catholic Federation. In the aftermath of World War II, a small number of Displaced Persons (DPs) came to this state.

As a group they present a colorful array of biographies. Many engaged in activities beyond the scope of their parishes. Some held office in national organizations, published devotional literature and edited newspapers. More than a few took part in political action to benefit their homeland. A few even tried their hand at extensive banking until their bishop caught up with them.

Who were some of the more prominent clergy worth remembering? One of the best known was Fr. Aleksandras Burba (1854-1898), the fiery pastor of St. Casimir in Plymouth. For three years he published a weekly journal called *Valtis* (The Skiff), printing each Sunday Gospel, as well as brief news items about nearby enclaves. He frequently engaged in polemics with Poles and leftist Lithuanians.

Fr. Juozas Karalius (1889-1982), longtime pastor of St. George in Shenandoah was a generous patron of writers. He subsidized a large variety of publications on Lithuanian topics.

Fr. Juozas Kaulakis (1868-1933), pastor for many years at St. Casimir, Philadelphia, ventured into social work. During World War I, he was director of the Immigrant Aid Alliance to benefit new arrivals at the port of Philadelphia. After World War II, Fr. Juozas Končius, onetime assistant at Mount Carmel, headed the United Lithuanian Relief office in Brooklyn, New York.

Fr. Antanas Kaupas (1870-1913), shines as the first priest-sociologist. He not only wrote prolifically for Lithuanian publications, but contributed the article on Lithuanians to Volume XIII of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at the turn of the century. He showed his language skills by translating works from Russian, Polish, and English into Lithuanian, including the classics *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island.*

The DP - Fr. Vladas Budreckis (1905-1985) - was a musician and composer who served, among other places, in Easton, Philadlephia, and Pittsburgh. He is remembered for his hymn to St. Casimir among his compositions.

Msgr. Peter Madus (1942 -), present pastor of St. Joseph, Scranton, has been very active in the National Guard, most recently at the rank of Colonel. The now retired Msgr. William Pakukta taught philosophy at Marywood College, Scranton, for twenty years (1947-67).

Scholars have been no rarity among them. To name a few holders of doctorates and their study, there is the present pastor of St. George in Philadelphia, Fr. Joseph Anderlonis (1944-), who wrote about the Swedish theologian, Gustav Aulen. The Benedictine monk at Latrobe, Fr. Donald Raila wrote a dissertation: "On Analytic Models for Two Types of Wind-Induced Oscillations of Suspension Bridges."

Among the earlier holders of doctorates was sociologist Fr. Kazimieras Širvaitis (1911- 1985), onetime chaplain of the St. Casimir Sisters at Holland, outside Philadelphia. He composed a monumental study called "Religous Folk Ways in Lithuania and Their Conservation among the Lithuanian Immigrants in the United States." Fr. Antanas Staniukynas (1865-1918), onetime pastor at Mount Carmel, acquired his doctorate in Sacred Scripture in Jerusalem.

A human interest story attaches to Lithuanian-born Fr. Antanas Rakauskas (1895-1966). He came to the United States as a teenager in 1913, obtained a medical degree at Northwestern University, Chicago, and practiced medicine there from 1930 to 1940. When he became widowed in 1938, he began studies for the priesthood and was ordained in 1946. He held parish assignments at Pittsburgh, Fairchance, Leckrone, Blairsville, Dawson, and Delmont, as well as hospital chaplaincies at Torrance and Greensburg.

The lay people, especially the women, have been the backbone of Lithuanian parishes, as is generally true of all parishes. Unfortunately, there is hardly a substantial study that acknowledges the essential role of these unsung heroes. One would have to sift through newspapers and histories of organizations and their house organs in order to compile even a cursory biographical dictionary. One would find these deserving people in places such as the Lithuanian chronicles of the Catholic Federation, Catholic Alliance of America, Catholic Women's Alliance, Knights of Lithuania, Organists Alliance, and the St. Joseph Lithuanian Workers Alliance. In the aftermath of World War II, one would further have to search records such as those of United Lithuanian Relief, Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, and Ateitis (Future). The full story of lay people is yet to be recorded. They await a researcher to do them justice.

N.B. This is a slightly revised version of a paper given at the Pennsylvania Historical Association, Annual Meeting, State College, PA, October 3-4, 1996.

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