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THE MONSIGNOR AND HIS ARCHIVES

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Nestled between the borders of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, lies the small town of Putnam, Connecticut. In this isolated rural corner, surrounded by trees, is the Convent of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and its beautiful chapel. In close proximity is a building upon which the following letters are clearly inscribed: ALKA. These four letters, to those understanding the Lithuanian language, represent a monument of Lithuanian culture, for they stand for the American Lithuanian Cultural Archive. This building was built several years ago, and is now filled with all types of artifacts — pictures, books, handicrafts, magazines, letters, works of amber, farming implements — things which have been collected since 1922.

One man — Monsignor Francis M. Juras — who died in 1980 at the age of 89 — is responsible for the institution of this museum and for dedicating himself to the preservation of the Lithuanian ethnic heritage. Francis M. Juras came to the United States in 1912. When he arrived, he secured work in a pharmacy in Brooklyn, New York. This job afforded him exposure to his new country and enabled him to become better acclimated to his new surroundings and to strengthen his knowledge of the English language. Having been taken from Lithuania in the middle of his studies, he made a firm resolution to finish college, enroll in the seminary, and follow his vocation to become a priest.

Monsignor Juras was born and raised in a religious family. His oldest brother finished the seminary in Lithuania, but died of TB before his ordination. Diligently, Pranas Juras lived for one goal — to become a priest. Having completed college and preparatory courses for the seminary, he was accepted into Boston's Archdiocesan Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. He successfully completed his studies in 1922 and was ordained into the priesthood in the Boston Archdiocese. A colleague of Monsignor Juras in the seminary was the future Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Richard J. Cushing.

From his earliest days as a student, Monsignor Juras was actively involved in Lithuanian-American organizations. While still a theological student in 1929, he was chosen President of the Knights of Lithuania, or "Lietuvos Vyčiai." Through his ministry as a priest, Monsignor Juras took an active part in the major Lithuanian organizations — the League of Lithuanian Catholic Priests, the Lithuanian Catholic Alliance, the Lithuanian Catholic Women's Organization, and the Lithuanian Catholic Workers Association, which published the biweekly paper "Darbininkas."

Monsignor Juras was constantly concerned with maintaining and strengthening the Lithuanian heritage in America. In 1921, at the Knights of Lithuania National Convention, he spoke out, encouraging closer ties between American-Lithuanian Youth and the Youth of Lithuania. His appeal resulted in the commencement of the Lithuanian Catholic Youth *Pavasarininkai* and Knights of Lithuania exchange visits.

Monsignor Juras was not only a supporter of organizations, but he himself was an active participant in their diverse activities. He was the Religious Director of the Lithuanian Catholic Alliance, and served in various capacities in the Lithuanian Catholic Federation of America as a member of its Board for 20 years. He also served as President four times and General Secretary for 8 years in the League of Priests.



Monsignor Juras and the Lithuanian wayside cross at ALKA in Putnam, Connecticut.

When the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in the summer of 1940, Monsignor Juras was among the first organizers of the Lithuanian American Council, and later one of the founders of the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America. In 1941, when the Lithuanian Catholic Federation established the Lithuanian Cultural Institute, Juras immediately took charge of building and organizing its archival section. When a new wave of Lithuanian immigrants began to arrive in 1949, Monsignor Juras founded a children's journal, "Eglutė." The first editor was poet Bernardas Brazdžionis.

Throughout his life, Monsignor Juras was a dedicated supporter of religious congregations. He personally supported the Franciscan Fathers in Lithuania, then in Kretinga; he took a special interest in their high school, St. Anthony's, in Kennebunkport, Maine, and helped the Franciscans to establish a publishing house, which now functions in New York. He aided the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Šiauliai, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Putnam, the Sisters of Jesus Crucified in Brockton, and the Sisters of Saint Casimir and the Sisters of St. Francis. In the post-war years in America, Monsignor Juras helped the Franciscan Fathers acquire *Darbininkas* in Boston, and later, relocate it to New York. *Darbininkas* was very dear to Monsignor Juras, since for several years he managed the publication as President of the Lithuanian Catholic Workers Association, publishers of *Darbininkas*.

His longest years of spiritual work were spent in Lawrence, Massachusetts, as the pastor of St. Francis Lithuanian parish, where he served from 1929 until he retired in 1967. Monsignor Juras was not a stranger to Lawrence. As a student, he had spent several summers among the Lithuanian youth of Lawrence instructing them in the Lithuanian language and literature; his first Mass was offered in St. Francis Church in 1922; and as its pastor, he completed the building of the church and established a parish grammar school.

In 1937, under his sponsorship, the Lithuanians of Lawrence, Massachusetts, organized the Congress of the Lithuanian Catholic Federation of America, commemorating the 550th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Lithuania. A

year earlier, in 1936, the New England Lithuanian Song Festival was held in Lawrence, under the sponsorship of Monsignor Juras. More than 500 voices thrilled a crowd of over 10,000 people!

Monsignor Juras gave most of his time, energy, and prayers to his parish in Lawrence, which to him had become his family. He organized and served as moderator for numerous parish organizations, fostered religious practices among his parishioners, gave well-prepared sermons, and often invited guest speakers from other parishes.

Monsignor Juras' pastoral work was well-recognized by the Church. In 1951, he was raised to the title of Monsignor, and in 1966, he was elevated to Apostolic Protonary by the Holy See. In 1967, Monsignor Juras, having retired from his extremely active parish life, moved to the Matulaitis Home in Putnam, Connecticut, desiring to be closer to his Institute of Culture.

Being constantly interested in Lithuanian literature, Monsignor Juras supported and encouraged the writings of several authors. Through his efforts, the following materials were published: Mykolas Vaitkus' memoirs; the poetry of Jonas Aistis, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, and Faustas Kirša; the short stories of Antanas Vaičiulaitis; new editions of Maironis; works of Zenonas Ivinskis and Juozas Vaišnora; the New Testament; volumes of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science; musical scores of Banaitis and Kačinskas, and Šimkus' songs. He also supported artists. He was instrumental in aiding J. Kapočius in publication of the *Lithuanian Encyclopedia*. He himself also wrote and published several books, a play titled "From Light To Truth," and religious matter — "Prophecies About The End of The World." He compiled and published two prayer books. He wrote articles for various periodicals, concentrating upon religious themes. In the New York paper *Amerika*, he had his own column: "Lift Up Your Hearts."

The ALKA, founded by Monsignor Juras, now belongs to everyone. After so many years of careful work, Monsignor decided to turn it over to the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences. The Board of Directors, with Dr. Alfonsas Stankaitis of Connecticut as Chairman, now deals with ALKA affairs. ALKA today includes a Lithuanian library, 140 Lithuanian crosses, 500 pictures, 400 periodicals, and several thousand photographs.

The original ALKA building was built on a .66 acre plot. The building itself was 40 x 60 feet square. At a very early stage, the building was cramped for space, since Monsignor Juras concentrated on cultural riches, especially when he began to wade through materials sent to him by various individuals and organizations from appeals for archival materials; he knew it would soon be ready for expansion. In 1979, a two-story building of 6400 sq. feet was built at a cost of \$100,000. The exterior has been completed, but the interior, unfortunately, still awaits adequate funding.

At this time, ALKA is functioning on two levels - as an archive and a museum. It serves as an archive for histories of Lithuanian parishes. Among the many archival materials housed here, one can find works and collections of Monsignor M. Krupavičius, the Canon M. Vaitkus, and J. O. Sirvydas. There are many periodicals and occasional publications, along with several collections of old newspapers. Rare books are not rare to the archives, for one can find such examples as *Scriptores Prussicarum* in the collection. The holdings also include the archives of the lawyer and former Honorary Lithuanian Consul in Boston, Anthony O. Shallna.

Because the museum is so large, it will now be possible to display several oversize paintings, originally commissioned for the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. These works of Petras Kalpokas, Adomas Smetonas, and Adomas Galdikas picture important events in the history of Lithuania. Among them is A. Smetonas' creation "The Founding of Vilnius University," in which King Steponas Batoras is depicted as presenting the document of the establishment of the University of Vilnius to Church representatives in 1579. On display are several hundred weavings and pictures created out of linen. Among these are tapestries, several of which are the creations of the noted weaver, Mrs. Tamošaitis. There is an abundance of folk-art — crosses, statues of the Weeping Christ, woven belts, folk costumes, works of amber, and Lithuanian-decorated Easter eggs. There are also agricultural implements. One can even find Tumas-Vaižgantas' fur collar!

Various offices, organizations and individuals have reserved space for their archives, among them the Lithuanian Consulate General of New York, the Lithuanian National Fund, and Dr. Jonas Balys' own rich archives of Lithuanian folklore.

The American Lithuanian Cultural Archives informs those interested in Lithuanian civilization — Lithuanians and non-Lithuanians alike — and enables them to become familiar with American-Lithuanian cultural life. At the same time, it is a safe place to preserve materials which otherwise would disappear from our culture and society. Its inception and establishment are certainly a tribute to the unselfish and zealous work of Monsignor Francis M. Juras. It is to his memory Lithuanians turn in thanks for his dedicated work toward the preservation of Lithuania's rich history and culture.