



THE JACK JATIS COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Jack Jatis-Juozaitis (1907-1967) received only a brief six-line biography in the **Lietuvių Enciklopedija**, and he is not even mentioned in the **Encyclopedia Lituanica**. But upon closer examination he stands out as an important figure in the history of the Lithuanians of Chicago. For over thirty years a precinct captain of the Chicago Democratic Party and long a clerk of the Cook County court, he represented for many Lithuanian immigrants in southwest Chicago the point of contact with the American system. His papers, now housed in the manuscript section of the University of Illinois at Chicago, offer tantalizing insights into the range of his activity and into the dimensions of the role he played on the interface of immigration and establishment.

Throughout Jatis's career one finds three recurring themes — sports, Lithuania, and politics. As he expressed them, these themes were eminently complementary. Born on October 10, 1907, in Westville, Illinois, Jatis distinguished himself in his youth as a basketball player, and he was considered one of the best Lithuanian athletes in Chicago. He long remained active in sports as an administrator, and he soon added to this his interest in politics. Beginning in 1931 he served as captain of the Democratic Party organization in the 58th precinct of the 13th Ward, near Marquette Park. During World War II, he served in the Pacific, receiving a shrapnel wound at Guadalcanal. After the end of hostilities, he returned to his political activities in Chicago, and in 1949 he became deputy clerk of the Cook County court. In 1955, when Richard Daley ran for mayor of Chicago, Jatis supported him. Jatis subsequently considered running for political office himself, most notably for state senator in 1956 and for alderman in 1962, but he failed to follow through on either occasion.

In the years before World War II, when Lithuanians were considering how best to establish bonds between the potentially powerful but scattered Lithuanian emigration and the Lithuanian homeland, Jatis became convinced that sports represented a unique and rewarding channel for communication and cooperation. His own enthusiasm for sports was deeply rooted, and in 1935, when the Lithuanian government organized a world Lithuanian congress in Kaunas and arranged for athletic events to form a part of this grand gathering, Jatis accompanied the American sports delegation as a part of its administrative leadership. (The head coach of the American Lithuanian group was Eduardas Kriaučiūnas, already then better known to most Americans as Ed "Moose" Krause, a former All-American football player at Notre Dame). That first group of American Lithuanian athletes had an electric effect on sports-minded Lithuanians.

The Americans made a particularly strong impact on the sport of basketball, for which Jatis had a special interest. The American team crushed a Latvian team 49-2 and then a Lithuanian team 35-5. The Lithuanian sports establishment thereupon decided that it had to draw on the American experience for training in the sport. (About the same time Lithuanian soccer officials sent two leading players to Scotland to study that sport.) In 1936 an American Lithuanian named Frank Lubin (Pranas Lubinas) played on the American basketball team that won the Olympic championship in Berlin, and he then went on to Lithuania to help develop the sport there. As a result, in May 1937, with three Chicago Lithuanians in their ranks, the Lithuanian basketball team defeated Italy 23-22 to win the European championship. To be sure, France, acknowledged as the dominant power on the continent up to that time, had not taken part in that tourney, and therefore a shadow hung over the championship. The Lithuanians claimed to dispel that a year later when, on May 22, 1938, before a crowd of 15,000 in the open air stadium in Kaunas, the Lithuanians soundly trounced the French by 36-24. At the Lithuanian Olympiad in 1938 an American Lithuanian team still defeated Lubin's Lithuanian team, but in 1939 the Lithuanians repeated as European champions.

Jatis took part in every stage of this development of Lithuanian basketball. Besides being a member of the American delegation in 1935, he played a major role in hosting a group of Lithuanian athletes who came to visit the United States in the summer of 1937, and the following year he was a member of the selection committee choosing the American Lithuanian athletes to go to the Lithuanian Olympiad. Each of these activities is well documented in his archive. (Boxes, 17, 18, 20)

Turning to the postwar years, one finds Jatis more involved in the politics of the Lithuanian community than in its sports. He was very active in the Knights of Lithuania and in the Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce. He was one of the organizers

and first commanders of the Don Varnas American Legion Post. Jatis spent many years, first as president, then as member of the executive board of the Lithuanian Democratic League of Cook County. Since these were among the most important social and political organizations within the Lithuanian community, the materials covering this aspect of Jatis's activities offer an excellent picture of the thrust and intensity of his efforts on behalf of Chicago Lithuanians. Memoranda, meeting announcements, lists of key figures in the Lithuanian community, financial records, correspondence — the material is varied and plentiful. (Boxes 4-11)

In 1955 when Richard Daley, then the chief clerk of Cook County court, decided to challenge the incumbent mayor, Martin Kennelly, Jatis, the deputy clerk of the court, was there by Daley's side. On January 15, 1955, *Naujienos* quoted Jatis as saying that Kennelly should be replaced by an "energetic and good man." Jatis's precinct, one finds, voted 78 for Daley and 49 for Kennelly in the primary. On the other hand, Jatis's voting records show that in 1952 Adlai Stevenson won this precinct against Dwight Eisenhower by 175 to 160, while four years later Eisenhower carried off a 338-167 majority. (Box 10)

The prospective researcher will find a wealth of material in Jatis's precinct lists, which recorded the eligible voters, house by house and apartment by apartment, within his territory. Such lists will obviously be useful for anyone wanting to reconstruct the make-up of the neighborhood at any given time or even wanting just to look up a relative. Further testifying to Jatis's role in the assimilation of Lithuanian immigrants are a number of copies of citizenship applications, bearing such revealing and useful information as birth places and explanations of changes of name — e.g., "imposed upon me by some clerk at the superior court." (Box 10, oversized supplement, Supplement: boxes 1-2)

Other items of interest include photographs, some personal, but most dealing with Lithuanian groups and Chicago political figures, the most prominent being Mayor Daley. (Boxes 15, 16) Jatis was an avid newspaper clipper, and as a result there is an enormous number of clippings on subjects of interest to him: Lithuanian sports, Chicago Lithuanian politics, the Knights of Lithuania, Chicago Lithuanian community events. (Boxes, 2, 3, 9, 10, 19) Especially moving is his file on Darius and Girėnas, the two bold flyers who attempted in 1933 to take their plane from Chicago to Lithuania only to end in disaster. The collection also includes a small number of popular books in Lithuanian, single issues of periodicals such as **Lillian us**, as well as extended runs of **Vytis** (1929-1932, 1938-1943, and scattered issues) and **Jaunimas** (complete, 1936-1942).

Since **Jaunimas** (Youth) is not listed in Kantautas's bibliography of Lithuanian publications, this interesting publication merits a few words here. Established in the fall of 1936 as a bi-weekly English and Lithuanian newspaper, it appealed to Lithuanian students and printed articles in either language, offering a running account of events both in Chicago and in Lithuania. Dr. Jonas Poška edited the paper; Jatis was its chief sports writer. The newspaper took an informal approach to any subject of interest — Tom Mix, it declared was definitely not a Lithuanian — but it also carried significant news with thoughtful commentary. In 1940 **Jaunimas** became both the English voice of the Lithuanian Council of Canada and a supplement to the newspaper **Naujienos**. It ceased publication in 1942, when Poška answered the call to the colors in World War II.

Unfortunately Jatis's materials on sports, Lithuania, and politics are not matched by documentation on his personal life. There is no record of his war service, little information about his family. A few personal photographs, some newspaper clippings, a stray letter or two of personal note — very little to flesh out this interesting man. As revealed by this collection, Jatis can be viewed only in his public life — his involvement in sports, his varied activities in Chicago's Lithuanian community, and his role in the Cook County Democratic Party.

The Jatis collection, consisting of 26 archive boxes extending 17 linear feet, is housed in the manuscript section of the Library at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Mr. John R. Jatis, his son, donated the materials to the University in 1970, and he donated supplementary materials in 1972. A brief guide listing the contents of the boxes is available to researchers. Several other collections in the manuscript section contain additional materials on Lithuania and on the Chicago Lithuanian community. They offer a useful complement to the Jatis collection and include the following: The Immigrants Protective League, the Edgar Jonas collection, the Century of Progress collection, and the Barratt O'Hara and Edmund Kasper Jarecki collection.

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