

Volume 56, No.4 - Winter 2010
Editor of this issue: M. G. Slavėnas

Book Review:

Marius K. Gražulis, *Lithuanians in Michigan*. Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 2009.

Reviewed by R. Kriauciūnas

This book is one in the series *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan*, which examines the state's rich multicultural heritage. Other publications in the series treat the Albanians, Amish, Arabs, Asian Indians, Belgians, Chaldeans, Copts, Cornish, Dutch, Finns, French-Canadians, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Irish, Italians, Jews, Latinos, Latvians, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, Poles, Scandinavians, Scots, South Slavs, and Yankees. The editors of the series believe that *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan* will enhance the understanding of the unique contributions that diverse and often unrecognized communities have made to Michigan's history and culture.

The book consists of an introduction, ten chapters, and a conclusion. It contains five sidebars, two appendices, notes, references, and an index. It also features fourteen photographs and two maps. The contents of the book are succinctly summarized on the back cover. There we learn that, despite their small numbers, Lithuanian immigrants have come to work in and made an economic impact on all of Michigan's major industries. They succeeded in forming ethnic communities in every region of Michigan. The author explores the history of Lithuanian immigration and emphasizes the efforts of Lithuanian communities to preserve their identity against the pressures of assimilation.

The conceptual bond for the book appears to be the concept of immigration waves. Gražulis sees a pattern which he describes as follows: "Just as the last wave of Lithuanian organization and culture is in decline, the new wave of immigrants (except for the fourth wave of immigration) reinvigorates the Lithuanian community." (p. 2) The first wave covers the years between 1870 and about 1914, the beginning of World War I. The second wave lasted from about 1918 – the year of Lithuania's declaration of independence – to 1940, which marked the loss of its independence to the Soviet invasion and occupation. The third wave spans the period right after World War II to the mid-1950s. The fourth wave, covered in less than a page, consists of immigrants who left Soviet-occupied Lithuania between 1953 and the reestablishment of independence in 1991. The fifth wave began in March 1990 and is still in process. The immigrants of the first, second, and fifth waves are characterized as primarily economic and those of the third, post-World- War-Two wave, as political. The third wave émigrés viewed the fourth-wave arrivals with suspicion since there was a prevailing perception among them that "nobody got out of the USSR without having 'political connections,' meaning 'ties to the Soviet secret police, the KGB.'" (p. 63) The actual number of fourth-wave immigrants settling in Michigan is unknown. My guess is that there were fewer than half-a-dozen.

The book provides an overview of the history of immigration to the US in general and Michigan in particular. For the first two waves, the main attraction was the automobile industry in the Detroit area and the furniture industry in the Grand Rapids area. An interesting little-known fact was the establishment of a Lithuanian farming colony known as Naujoji Lietuva (New Lithuania) in Lake and Mason counties in Michigan's lower Peninsula, around Scottville, just East of Ludington. The "Lithuanianized" villages in this area were Irons, Custer, Bachelor, Fountain, Peacock, and Free Soil. One publication claims that 360 Lithuanian farms were established. "The Lithuanian immigrant exactly fit the mold of the unskilled labor needed for mining, lumbering, and factory work. Agrarian values gave Lithuanians the work ethic needed to toil on one particular job for ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week." (p. 14)

The book covers religion, culture, education, politics and sports. The third wave receives special attention. In contrast to the first two waves, the third wave consisted of political refugees who, having fled Lithuania in advance of a second Soviet occupation and oppression, were for the most part educated and professional. Their primary aim was to restore Lithuania's independence and to return. Thus, Lithuanian culture and values had to be preserved. A number of these efforts are described in detail: the Lithuanian Youth Camp, *Dainava*, the Scout camp Rakas, the Lithuanian Saturday schools in the Detroit area and in Grand Rapids, the folk dance and folk song groups, the Catholic Youth organizations *Ateitininkai*,

Lithuanian Scouts, the Lithuanian-American Community *Bendruomenė*, and so forth. Special hopeful attention is given to the Lithuanians presently in Union Pier, at the Southern tip of Lake Michigan.

Looking at the future of Lithuanians in Michigan, the author is cautiously pessimistic. In his view, “the survival of the Lithuanian parish is equal to the survival of the Lithuanian community.” (p. 78) He sees the ethnic parishes as a dying breed: most new arrivals from Lithuania have not joined existing parishes. His conclusion is conditional and is best summarized in his own words: “As long as new Lithuanian immigrants arrive in Michigan to replenish the assimilated or deceased and make a positive impact, especially in the religious sphere, then the Lithuanian community will survive in Michigan.” (p. 79)

Also included in this book and affecting its value as a reliable source of information are claims and assertions that are undocumented and unsubstantiated. One example is the statement that Dr. Adolfas Damušis “...was put in Stutthof concentration camp and his execution was scheduled when Allied forces liberated him.” (p. 48) This is incorrect – even though Dr. Damušis was arrested by the Gestapo and did serve some time in a German prison. On p. 76, the author states without proper references that in 1953 the Lithuanian communities in Michigan had forty-one Lithuanian priests and that this number had dropped to twenty-six by 1979. Having resided in Michigan for over forty years, I knew most, if not all, Lithuanian priests personally, and the number is less than a dozen. A curious story lacking sources but presented as fact pertains to Lithuania’s recent two-term president, Valdas Adamkus, and his connection to Juozas Bachunas, the one-time owner of a Lithuanian resort in Sodus, Michigan, known as Tabor Farm. According to Gražulis, Bachunas died in 1967 and left Tabor Farm to Adamkus. Therefore, Gražulis claims Adamkus’s presidency was enabled by Michigan real estate: “Later Adamkus sold the resort, making millions of dollars. The profit was part of what allowed Mr. Adamkus to return to Lithuania and make a successful bid for the presidency in 1998. In a sense, a piece of Michigan real estate enabled a third-wave Lithuanian immigrant to move to Lithuania, run a nationwide campaign, and become its president” (p. 67-68). Surprisingly, Gražulis does not bother to provide information of how he obtained this remarkable news. He makes no mention of having consulted Adamkus’s autobiography (*Likimo vardas Lietuva*. Kaunas: 1998). There Valdas Adamkus describes in some detail how he and his wife Alma bought Tabor Farm from Juozas Bachunas in 1961, owned and administered the resort for twenty-five years, and sold it with considerable difficulty first in 1983 and finally in 1995 at a reduced price. So much for accuracy.

Marius K. Gražulis is a history and government teacher at Negaunee High School. He grew up in the suburbs of Detroit and graduated from the Detroit area Lithuanian Saturday School *Žiburys* in 1984. He graduated from Kalamazoo College and received his teaching certificate from Eastern Michigan University. The biographical sketch notes that he lives in the Upper Peninsula with his wife and children, far from any Lithuanian colony, but subscribes to and reads the Lithuanian daily newspaper *Draugas*, published in Chicago.

R. Kriaučiūnas