

ISSN 1031-3958

Lithuanian Papers

www.lithuanianpapers.com

**ANNUAL JOURNAL OF TUU (TASMANIA UNIVERSITY UNION)
LITHUANIAN STUDIES SOCIETY (Australia)**

Volume 30 – 2016



Winter in Lithuania: And families go skiing.

Donations to: Commonwealth Bank BSB 067102, Account No.00904299

Postal Address: P.O. Box 777, SANDY BAY, Tas. 7006. Australia

E-mail: al.taskunas@gmail.com **Telephone:** + (03) 6225 2505

In USA: A.&D. Polikaitis, 1501, Valeroft, Westlake Village, CA. 91361.

*Lithuanian Papers No.30/2016***CONTENTS**

	Page
Lithuania today and tomorrow <i>Leslie Holmes</i>	3
Should Lithuania defend itself? <i>Algis Kabaila</i>	10
Latest research on early Lithuanian migrants <i>J. Mockūnas</i>	16
As freedom prevails and imagery evolves <i>Adela Marrone</i>	21
The secret of longevity? <i>With photos by Jurgis Maleckas</i>	24
New documentary film: "The land of songs"	27
New book: "The salt to the sea". <i>Al Taškūnas</i>	29
Lietuvybė Down Under <i>Gražina Pranauskas</i>	31
The train to eternity <i>Stasys Jameikis, transl. Regina Share</i>	35



Inkilai = nesting houses for birds (*pictured*), traditionally built by Lithuanians every spring. The practice is nationwide and is encouraged in schools and by youth organisations. A migrating bird who settles in a particular *inkilas* on a Lithuanian location tends to return to the same *inkilas*, year after year. - Photo: LCVA.

Lithuania Today and Tomorrow

Leslie HOLMES

School of Social and Political Sciences,
University of Melbourne

It is now a quarter of a century since the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of fifteen sovereign states in what used to be the Soviet Union. One of these was Lithuania. Together with the two other Baltic States, Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania's trajectory since the collapse of Communism has been very different from that of the twelve other post-Soviet states. The most obvious symbol of this is that the three Baltic States are now firmly part of democratic and market Europe, having been admitted to NATO and the EU in 2004, the Schengen Area in 2007, and the Eurozone (Lithuania in 2015). But let us now focus on the current domestic situation in Lithuania.



The political situation

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's *Democracy Index* - which assesses a country in terms of sixty variables and then classifies it overall as a democracy, a flawed democracy, a hybrid (between democracy and authoritarianism) or authoritarian, Lithuania is a flawed democracy, and ranks number 38 (where number one - Norway - is the most democratic) out of 167 countries assessed in the 2015 index, with an overall score of 7.54 out of a possible maximum of ten.

The sixty variables are grouped under five macro-headings. Lithuania fares very well under two of these, with a score of 9.58 for the electoral process and pluralism (interestingly, Australia's score on this variable is exactly the same!), and 9.71 for civil liberties.



Dalia Grybauskaitė, the President of Lithuania (centre), photographed with children on a municipal playground. – Photo origin unknown.

On the other hand, it scores much less well in terms of political culture (6.25), political participation (6.11) and functioning of government (6.07). If we compare Lithuania's 2015 scores with its 2007 scores (unfortunately, the Democracy Index does not go back earlier), we find that Lithuania has not changed much in almost a decade, having been classified as a flawed democracy with a score of 7.43 in the earlier index. However, if we disaggregate the overall score to its five component parts, we can see where there has been change.



Open markets, as well as normal business houses, are thriving in independent Lithuania. - Photo: LCVA (Lithuanian Central State Archives).

Lithuania's scores on three of the five macro-variables were similar in 2007 to those in 2015; it scored exactly the same in 2007 on electoral process and pluralism (9.58), but somewhat better on functioning of government (6.43) and political participation (6.67). On the other hand, Lithuania's political culture appears to have improved over recent years, since it scored only 5.63 in 2007, while civil liberties have also increased, having been rated at 8.82 in the earlier index.

The economic situation

Lithuania's GDP growth rate had been very impressive (11.1% in 2007) from the time it was admitted to the WTO in 2001 until the Global Financial Crisis struck in 2008, then became negative, but has been positive again since 2010, albeit only weakly so (1.7% in 2015). Nevertheless, its growth rate since the worst of the GFC has averaged 3.3%, compared with an EU average of only 1%. According to the World Bank, GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) in 2014 was an impressive US\$27,686 – compared with only US\$8,696 in 2000, and Australia's 2014 figure of US\$45,926 – so that the Bank classifies Lithuania as a 'high income' economy among non-OECD countries. Unemployment is still relatively high – certainly by Australian standards, at just under 9% in March 2016 – but is well down on its peak of 15.3% in 2010.

Lithuania wants to join the OECD, which in July 2015 adopted a roadmap for the country's accession. But this does not presently include a deadline, since Lithuania needs to meet a number of OECD standards before admission. The first problem area mentioned by the Secretary General of the OECD, Angel Gurría, when he visited Vilnius in March 2016, was productivity.

The social situation

Like virtually all European states, Lithuania has found it difficult to address the substantial increase in the number of irregular migrants in the past couple of years. But the scale of the problem should not be exaggerated in the Lithuanian case. For instance, under EU pressure, it agreed last year to accept just over 1000 Middle Eastern asylum-seekers; Lithuania admitted the first of these in December 2015.

One area in which Lithuania is not performing particularly well is organised crime. According to Europol's *Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2011*, "the rapid expansion in Europe, in the last two years, of the activities of Lithuanian organised crime groups is a notable feature".



There are bikies in Lithuania, too. - Photo: LCVA.

The report referred to the prominence of Lithuanian groups (among others) in the trafficking and distribution of both natural and synthetic illicit drugs and tobacco products. In the same year, Europol identified the future adoption of the Euro as likely to increase the salience of currency counterfeiting in Lithuania. A more recent (October 2015) police report notes that Lithuanian gangs are prominent in vehicle thefts in Western Europe; at that time, 17 Lithuanians were arrested in connection with 'Operation Kasimir' against car theft mounted by German and Lithuanian police forces with support from Europol.



Corruption? – People are asking questions.

Another issue that has been a significant one in Lithuania is corruption; after all, Lithuania was the first country in Europe to impeach its President (and former Prime Minister - Rolandas Paksas) for corruption (2004). However, the fact that it did is a good indication that the country takes the issue seriously. Moreover, Lithuania's corruption situation appears to be improving, if perceptions of businesspeople and country specialists are in line with what is actually happening in the country. Thus Lithuania's scores in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index produced by Transparency International - which are scaled 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) - were 41 in 2000, 48 in 2005, 50 in 2010, 54 in 2012 and 61 in 2015. This represents a marked improvement, and is much better than many other post-communist states, as well as several other EU member-states that were never under Communist control.



Winter horse races in Lithuania. - Photo: LCVA.

Conclusions

On balance, the current situation in Lithuania looks relatively good, certainly by European standards. The country is now fully integrated into democratic Europe, and enjoys the protective shield of NATO. While Russia is as much of a 'riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma' as it was when Churchill made this memorable observation in 1939, making prediction very problematic, it currently appears unlikely that even the opportunist and adventurist Putin would risk invading a NATO member state as he did in Ukraine's Crimea.

Lithuania is also doing well compared with many Central and East European states. For instance, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has not only been described (by US Senator John McCain) as a 'neo-fascist dictator', but has been courting authoritarian Moscow – something Lithuania is never likely to do.

While Lithuania has been performing well in recent years, it currently faces the problems that all EU member-states face – viz., the ramifications of the EU's own identity crisis. The first signs of this became very obvious with the Eurozone economic crisis, but is now deeper, with the EU's inability to devise a convincing long-term solution to the refugee crisis, the simmering Greek economic crisis, the rise of the extreme right (visible most recently in the Austrian presidential elections), and the possibility of Brexit – which many see, unduly pessimistically, as presaging a complete breakdown of the EU.

But in the unlikely event of such an extreme development, it is not clear that Lithuania would suffer in the medium-to-long term. Two of Europe's most successful and affluent states - Norway and Switzerland - are small, and neither is a member of the EU. Admittedly, Norway has its considerable oil reserves, and Switzerland has large, established pharmaceutical and banking industries - while Lithuania produces only a very limited amount of its own oil, and has relatively small pharmaceuticals and banking sectors. But it has developed its service sector considerably in recent years, and has a strong information and communications technology sector.

In addition, a number of global businesses have outsourced some of their activities to Lithuania. There is currently no inherent reason why this process should not continue, giving Lithuania the possibility of as bright a future as most European states. In sum, we can be 'realistically optimistic' about Lithuania's future.

Professor Leslie Holmes is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and Professor Emeritus in the School of Social and Political Sciences in the University of Melbourne.



**Hill of Crosses, a significant landmark in Northern Lithuania.
Pictured: visitors from Australia, Dr Ramutis Zakarevičius and Mrs Ramona Ratas - Zakarevičius.**

Should Lithuania Defend Itself?

Algis KABAILA

Canberra, A.C.T.

Nearly 30 years have passed since Lithuania challenged the Soviet Union and became an independent state. As a Lithuanian, I feel that Lithuania's example encouraged other small countries to break away from the Soviet Union.

For Lithuania it was a "singing revolution", surprisingly a revolution that did not rely on any military action but only on moral imperatives. The path to independence was not easy. Soviet military and security forces used violence to intimidate Lithuanians and economic blockade to cripple Lithuania's ability to form a viable independent state. Soviets failed.

By now, Lithuania has advanced economically, culturally and politically beyond the most hopeful predictions of 30 years ago. It actively supports the great Ukrainian nation which is breaking away from Russia's domination. Russia is trying by all means in its possession to block Ukraine's chosen path to become a full member of Western European nations.



As members of NATO, Lithuanian troops now participate in various duties at home and abroad.

Lithuania is an active member of NATO. It has supported various NATO initiatives, including participation of Lithuanian military units in various NATO missions. It cooperates closely with other states in the region on the shores of the Baltic Sea, notably with its direct neighbour Poland. Lithuania's relations with Poland had a varied history. To strengthen its defences against the threat of Teutonic knights, Poland and Lithuania formed an alliance.



In 1410, in one of the greatest battles of medieval Europe, a joint Lithuanian-Polish force defeated the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Tannenberg. – Picture: from an unidentified 20th century re-enactment.

Eventually the alliance developed into a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, confirmed by a Lublin treaty of July 1, 1569. In 1526 Lithuania controlled a larger territory than Poland, but suffered losses in wars with the emerging grand duchy of Moscow.¹

The aggressive neighbours eventually conquered the Commonwealth and divided its territories amongst themselves in 1795. After WW1, Poland and Lithuania restored their independence as separate states. The relations between the two independent states were complicated. Polish forces captured and kept Lithuania's capital Vilnius.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Lublin#/media/File:Poland_and_Lithuania_in_1526..



Pictured: The interior court of the ancient Lithuanian castle of Trakai. Sadly, memories of the glorious past are of little help today...

The relations between the two countries were not at all good. Any close defence cooperation seemed impossible.

The Soviets occupied the Baltic countries in 1940 and after mock elections created the "free" Soviet Socialist Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and incorporated them completely in to the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Poland became an important ally of the Baltic countries against the potential Soviet-Russian aggression. As NATO members, they all cooperate closely on matters of defence. The Polish air force planes patrol the Baltic air space and are welcomed by Vilnius.

Something that seemed absolutely impossible 25 years ago, is now the accepted reality - Poland and Lithuania are members of European Union and NATO alliance. They are close allies, both politically and militarily. In foreign affairs the two allies have the same objectives of defence against the newly emerging unpredictable and aggression minded Russia.

Curiously, the people of the Baltic and Polish allies have the same aspirations as many Russians - to live in peace and harmony and to enjoy the economic prosperity that flows from friendly cooperation with Europeans. Europe, for

the first time in its history has recognized the principles of harmonious co-existence. The countries have agreed not to use force to change their borders. The border change by force has been the cause of wars and the misery that wars create. Europe became prosperous by saving the huge costs of maintaining large military forces.

It is very tempting to conclude from the foregoing that Lithuania is safe because of political alliances. Unfortunately Russia with its dictatorial governance is very unreliable. It is only a few months ago that Russia was warmly welcomed as an ally in the civil war in Syria. The West would not and could not understand the warnings of the diplomats of the nation states which had experienced aggression from the Soviet Union, now called Russia.



Stalin (*above, centre, in a light coat*) is dead, but his determination to conquer Lithuania, and the other Baltic States, is still alive in present-day Russia.

These warnings are echoed by the Russian intellectuals and journalists: do not trust the Kremlin. It has changed only in appearance. The ideas and aspirations of the USSR to master the world are alive and well in the Kremlin. The long arm of Russia's refurbished security forces have reached Alexander Litvinenko in London ² as well as many prominent journalists in Russia.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Alexander_Litvinenko

Russia did not shy away from using its tools of terror. The secret alliance with the Syrian dictator, whilst claiming to help the alliance against the so-called Islamic State, shows that Putin behaves like a dictator.



The size of Lithuania is similar to Tasmania, yet Lithuania must currently maintain a defence force of its own, because of the constant threat from the East.

Suppose aggressive dictatorial Russia or some other dictatorship managed to somehow by pass Lithuania's alliances and attack Lithuania. Should Lithuania, with its weaker military forces, engage the invaders in a seemingly hopeless war? If we examine the recent history of Lithuania, the answer is clear: *it is imperative for Lithuania to vigorously engage militarily any invader.*

In 1940 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were occupied by the USSR without a military resistance. The governments wanted to spare its people and surrendered to a militarily much stronger USSR. Yet the people that their governments wanted to protect, did not surrender and spent years fighting the Soviet occupants in an incredibly brutal war, in the underground and in partisan warfare.

It is not a widely known fact that the military resistance in Lithuania, the so called "forgotten war", lasted about 5 years after the completion of "official" war of Allies against Nazi Germany (*see picture below*).

Lithuanians paid heavily for the failure of their governments to engage militarily the invaders. The lack of a government sanctioned military resistance, left the freedom fighters alone to battle for years the Soviet invaders.

It also facilitated a Soviet campaign of lies and persecution. An "officially" government sanctioned war could not have been more costly. Should there be an invasion now, Lithuania cannot afford to even contemplate a surrender without a vigorous armed resistance. Freedom is too precious.

Dr Algis Kabaila, is former Honorary Consul of the Republic of Lithuania to the Commonwealth of Australia and former Associate Professor of Civil Engineering at The University of N.S.W.



Some of the Lithuanian men who, after the second occupation of their country by the Soviet Union (in 1944) refused to be conscripted into the Red Army. Instead, they formed Lithuanian military units, lived in the forests and kept fighting against the foreign regime for another 5 years after World War II (or even longer in some locations).

Latest Research on Early Lithuanian Migrants

Jonas MOCKŪNAS

Canberra

www.earlylithuaniansinaustralia.blogspot.com.au

Most historical studies of Australian Lithuanians have focussed on the wave of post-World War Two immigrants who arrived as Dis-placed Persons (DPs) from Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s. That is not at all surprising, given that this relatively small number of people [around 10,000] made a disproportionately large, and positive, impact on their receiving society. More recent arrivals – those who have settled in Australia after Lithuania regained its independence in 1990 – are now also starting to present their own migration stories³. In contrast, relatively little has been published about the immigrants who settled here before the arrival of the first DPs in 1947.



Lithuanians and their guests at Independence Day celebrations. Sydney, 1934.

Image source: *Metraštis* (1961).

Fortunately, some historical material on these earlier arrivals has been collected and is in the public domain: Jurgis Reigys was the first to compile an Australia-wide overview of earlier migrants for the Australian Lithuanian Community's *Metraštis* (1961)⁴; and Luda Popenhagen's *Australian Lithuanians* (2012), also commissioned by the Australian Lithuanian Community, contains the first extended discussion of early Lithuanian immigrants to be published

³ For example: Pranauskas, G, *Torn: The story of a Lithuanian Migrant*, PhD Thesis, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2014, see <http://vuir.vu.edu.au/29676/>

⁴ Reigys, J, 'Senieji Australijos Lietuviai', in JA Jūragis (ed) *Australijos Lietuvių Metraštis*, Mintis Pty Ltd., Sydney, 1961, 7-19.

in English⁵. Published memoirs and family histories have added to our knowledge of these immigrants: for example, Anna Baužė's record of her family's migration to Australia and the social and community lives of Lithuanians in Sydney during the 1930s⁶; and a family history of William and Margaret Delade (Vincas and Magdalena Dailidė) who migrated from Scotland to New South Wales in the late 1920s⁷. The stories in each of these works have many threads in common with the DP narrative, but also bring out a number of new themes⁸.

Pictured, right: John Wedrien (Jonas Vedrinaitis), c1913. Born in Kudirkos Naumiestis around 1885, he emigrated to Manchester, England, near the end of the 19th century where he entered the tailoring trade. He later moved to Scotland and arrived in Australia in 1913 with his wife Eva. Vedrinaitis was the first president of the Australian Lithuanian Society, formed in 1929 in Sydney. - Image source: Metraštis (1961).



⁵ Popenhagen, L, *Australian Lithuanians*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2012, 8-26.

⁶ Baužė, A, *A Lithuanian in Australia: memories of my life* (edited by Robert Bauze), Sydney, 2002.

⁷ Staib, R and R, *Tėvynės: the homeland: family history of Margaret & William Delade; born – Magdalena Dekerie & Vincentas Dailidė*, self-published, Sydney, 2013, see <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/6327856>

⁸ This is not an exhaustive listing of published research. Other authors include Antanas Krausas who wrote a series of articles for *Mūsų Pastogė* in the 1950s; Betty and Antanas Birskys who contributed to *The Baltic Peoples in Australia: Lithuanians, Latvians Estonians*, AE Press, Melbourne, 1986; and Stephen N Murphy whose thesis *Lithuanian ANZACs: A study in identity* contributed towards his BA Hons at the University of Tasmania in 2013.

The story of Jacob Bloch, born Simonas Jankelis Blochas to a Jewish family in Plungė in 1898, is but one example. Bloch established a dance shoe business in Sydney in the 1930s; the company is now run by his 3rd generation descendants who operate 15 retail outlets in Australia as well as stores in London and Paris. There is also the story of Charles Grining: he was born in Memel (Klaipėda) in 1837, most likely in a German family, and settled on the isolated and rugged west coast of Tasmania. Around the start of the twentieth century his family established the Gordon River tourist cruise operation, now known as World Heritage Cruises and operated by his 6th generation descendants.

These histories suggest that earlier migrants from Lithuania included people who were not lacking in ability or ambition. They also point to the diversity of the earlier immigrants who, in addition to ethnic Lithuanians, also included Jews, Germans and Poles, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Protestants. As a further illustration of that diversity, of the more than 40 Lithuanian-born men so far identified by Elena Govor⁹ as enlisting in the First AIF in World War One, no more than a third appear to have been ethnic Lithuanians, around a third were Jews, and the remainder had probably Slavic or Germanic heritage.



Charles Oscar Zander, c1914. Born in Vilnius in 1885, he had worked as a seaman and lived in England before arriving in Australia in 1911. Zander was the first native of Lithuania to enlist in the AIF (August 1914. at Adelaide). He was killed on the Western Front in 1916.

Image <http://russiananzacs.elena.id.au/>

While most DPs came to Australia from Europe, the earlier Lithuanian-born migrants arrived here from a broad range of intermediate destinations and with a range of world experiences: as well as continental Europe, they came from England, Scotland, the USA, South Africa, and Asia. Perhaps one of the more unusual starting points for migrations to Australia was China. Prior to

⁹ <http://russiananzacs.net/>

the Russian revolution of 1917, China had been a migration corridor from the Russian empire to Australia. Even in the 1930s there were an estimated 1,000 Lithuanians residing in eastern China, including perhaps 350 in the city of Harbin and 150 in Shanghai¹⁰; some of these people made their way to Australia.



Alexander (Ksaveras) and Ellen Skierys, pictured at left with their children Alex and Nelly, in Sydney c1918. Born in Marijam-polė in 1882, Alexander emigrated to the United Kingdom around 1899 where he established himself as a tailor. He arrived in Australia in 1911 and married Ellen Petraitis in 1916. He was one of the founders of the Australian Lithuanian Society in 1929. - Image courtesy of Rosemary Mitchell.

The earlier immigrants were much less numerous than their DP successors. The 1933 Australian Census was the first to record Lithuania as a place of birth; at the time 235 people stated that they were Lithuanian-born.

In contrast the Lithuanian historian Adolfas Šapoka wrote in 1936 that there were around 2,000 Lithuanians in Australia and neighbouring countries¹¹. A more realistic figure is likely to be somewhere between these two extremes. Despite their small numbers, the early immigrants established some community structures. The Australian Lithuanian Society operated in Sydney from 1929 with over 100 members in the 1930s; Antanas Baužė, the Society's President 1933-36 and 1940-50, played a central role not only in transitioning

¹⁰ <http://www.balticasia.lt/straipsniai/istorija/lietuviai-kinijoje-xix-1940-m/>

¹¹ Šapoka, A (ed), *Lietuvos Istorija*, Patria, Fellbach/Wurtemberg (Germany), 1950, 664.

the Society into the post-war Australian Lithuanian Community but also in the establishment of the Community's weekly newspaper *Mūsų Pastogė*¹².

Possibly a third of the members of Broken Hill's Jewish community - which numbered over 200 in the 1920s and 1930s - were either born in Lithuania or were their descendants¹³. Many of these immigrants contributed to Broken Hill's commercial development. E.C.Phillule (Piliulis), who had established himself as a successful businessman in Brisbane, had 'great ambitions' for Brisbane's Lithuanian community in the 1930s which included the construction of a club/community centre¹⁴.

Some of these histories have been published on the blog *Early Lithuanians in Australia* which is an ongoing project in collaboration with the Australian Lithuanian Community Archives. A database begun by Daina Pocius of the Archives now has over 500 names of early Lithuanian immigrants; however, there is still a rich heritage of pre-1947 stories to be collected and added to the accumulated legacies of Lithuanians in Australia. If you have any information or material to share, please contact me on jmockunas@gmail.com

Jonas Mockūnas, MPubPol (ANU), is a former public servant who publishes the Early Lithuanians in Australia blog.

¹² Reigys op.cit., pp 11-18.

¹³ Rutland, SD, Mann, L, and Price M (eds), *Jews of the Outback; The Centenary of the Broken Hill Synagogue 1910-2010*, Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne, 2010.

¹⁴ Popenhagen op. cit., pp 24-25.

As Freedom Prevails and Imagery Evolves

Adela MARRONE

Hobart

As Lithuanians around the world have this year commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Lithuania's Bloody Sunday (13 January, 1991), we pause to reflect on the bravery of the thousands of men, women, and children who fought in unity to protect Lithuanian autonomy and identity.

As a young arts student, Nerijus Treinys already had a taste of the bitterness of conflict after being called away from his tertiary studies for compulsory national service in the Russian Army. Young Nerijus returned to Lithuania in 1989 – and an uprising was already simmering. In 1990 Nerijus was invited to volunteer for the newly revived Lithuanian Rifleman's Union known as *Šauliai*.

In January 1991 the *Šauliai* volunteers were mobilised to deal with the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday. Nerijus was assigned to watch over and protect the symbol of Lithuanian independence, the tri-coloured flag, atop the iconic and treasured Gediminas Castle against the swarming Soviets.



* In January, 1991, young Nerijus (right), then aged 21, was given the task of guarding the symbolic flag on Gedimino tower. - Photo: *Veidas*.

The 21-year-old Nerijus, just like his father and partisan great uncle, was a patriot to the bone. From the castle top, Nerijus and his compatriots guarded the flag as the aftermath of Bloody Sunday unfolded.

On January 17th, 1991, the Voluntary National Defence Service (Lithuanian acronym SKAT) was formed and Nerijus was enlisted to design their new emblem. He continued his post in defence of the flag while completing his arts training and commencing an enduring career in art and design.



“Bloody Sunday”: January 13, 1991 in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania

As freedom approached, more secrets emerged, and Nerijus’ father Jonas literally “dug up” the past, entrusting to him a Lithuanian army pistol that he himself had hidden from the Soviets since 1946. Nerijus completed the remainder of his post on Gediminas Castle with this treasured heirloom in hand.

1991-1992 were amongst Nerijus’ most prolific years – a newly independent Lithuania with a newly formed volunteer army needed all new emblems, badges, uniform patches, medals, logos, trophies and certificates. Wide-eyed and newly married, Nerijus continued this work for three years. In this time he struck a partnership with American Lithuanian Henry Gaidys, whose knowledge and private collection of historical Lithuanian military memorabilia remains invaluable to Nerijus and the nation.

Eventually Nerijus moved on to an architect design position in a bank, a teaching role for the Čiurlionis school of art and, eventually, as a private contractor. He and his childhood sweetheart, who stood beside him and

thousands of others in front of parliament in the early hours of Bloody Sunday, travelled the country, designing for various organisations across Lithuania. Chances are, if you have been to Lithuania in the last 25 years, that you have seen his designs – the police force, fire brigade, border security, state security, aviation institute, banks, and sporting clubs have all used his designs. In 2011 he designed the European Basketball Championship medal when a free Lithuania proudly hosted this event.

The list goes on and Nerijus continues to consult and provide designs for a wide variety of film productions. If you are lucky, you might even see him amongst the troops as an extra in Lithuanian war films. He most recently worked for the BBC production of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

Nerijus, now a wise and eternally inquisitive 46-year-old (*pictured, right*), and his wife remain proud Lithuanians living in Vilnius with their two talented children. Freedom prevails and the symbols and imagery of a nation evolve – and Nerijus to this day reflects on his journey to help ground and centre him in difficult times. He carries a sense of calm, gifted to him by his late father Jonas, that no matter what challenges we face, resolution and opportunity will follow.



Dr Adela Marrone, BBSoc. (Hons), DClinPsych (LaTrobe), A.Mus.A., is a Clinical Psychologist living and working in Tasmania. She has written the above article in memory of her late uncle and godfather Jonas Treinys. Images from Veidas magazine have been provided courtesy Nerijus Treinys.

The Secret of Longevity?

With photos by Jurgis MALECKAS

Stasys Eimutis (*pictured, right*) is a popular and dearly loved senior member of the Lithuanian Community in Melbourne, Australia. Earlier this year, he celebrated his 100th birthday. The occasion called for a party and a concert in the Lithuanian House, North Melbourne, as shown on these pages.



One question was on everyone's lips at the birthday party: "What is the secret of Stasys' longevity?" Some thought, they knew; but nobody seemed to be game to ask the centenarian personally.

As a fair guess, Eimutis would probably say: *If you wish to reach the age of three digits, you must learn to play kanklės and then keep playing the instrument often or, better still, daily.*

Kanklės is a Lithuanian string instrument of ancient origin. (It is shown in the centre of the picture below, on the bearded gentleman's lap). *Kanklės* is played by plucking the strings, either with the fingers of the right hand or a plectrum. The strings are stretched over a flat soundbox. Similar musical instruments also exist in the Baltic neighbourhood countries: *kokles* in Latvia, *kaneles* in Estonia.



Stasys Eimutis has popularized *kanklės* in Melbourne for a long time – maybe 30 years, or maybe closer to 40 years (nobody is sure). Unable to buy the instrument in Australia, Eimutis did not despair – he started building *kanklės* himself. We are told that, at the last count, he had authored 34 *kanklės*.

Next, Eimutis taught people to play *kanklės* and formed an ensemble that grew and varied with time.



Lithuanian *kanklės* have a long history. The instrument is frequently referred to in Lithuanian folklore. The first written mention is found in a translation of the Psalms (1625) by Jonas Bretkūnas, followed by Lepner, Donelaitis and many others.

The original soundboard was carved from a single piece of wood. The modern versions have a soundboard about 5.5 cm thick. The bottom of the soundbox is now made from willow, birch, elm or juniper. The top is usually made from a thin piece of spruce which is decorated with carvings of flowers or stars.

The most ancient versions of *kanklės* had only five strings, tuned to the Dorian scale (range d to a). In the 1930s, Justinas Strimaitis extended the range to 22 higher notes and 21 lower ones. After further modifications in 1954, *kanklės* acquired an even greater musical range of four octaves.



Pictured: **Crowning the prince of Lithuanian folk music: Stasys Eimutis (right) receives recognition for his great musical achievements in Melbourne. Note the traditional Lithuanian sash on his left shoulder, woven especially for this happy occasion. Some sharp-sighted readers may also notice that the inscription on the sash is upside down. This, of course, is intentional and has a secret meaning. The first reader to identify the secret correctly will receive a prize. All guesswork submissions are to be E-mailed to al.taskunas@gmail.com**

(Advertisement)

The Sydney Lithuanian Information Centre (SLIC) offers free, easy to follow,
LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE LESSONS on their website.

Type in your browser www.slic.org.au and follow the prompts!

New Documentary Film: *Land of Songs*

Lithuanian Folk Singers at Los Angeles European Union Film Festival

After sold-out premieres in New York, Chicago, Northern California and Vilnius, *Land of Songs*, the award-winning documentary about Lithuanian folk singers, had its Californian premiere at the American Cinematheque's European Union Film Festival *Starring Europe: New Films from the EU*. The film screened in Los Angeles on Monday May 16, 2016, and Director Aldona Watts was present for audience discussion after the screening. On this occasion, *Land of Songs* was presented as a documentary double feature, together with award-winning Bulgarian film *The Last Black Sea Pirates*.



Land of Songs had previously enjoyed its U.S. Premiere in New York during the Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History, where Watts received the Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award Honorable Mention. The film had its world premiere at the Vilnius International Film Festival in Lithuania, featuring special performances by renowned singer and music historian Veronika Povilionienė along with the film's characters, the Ethnographic Ensemble of Puvociai (*pictured below*). The Vilnius presentation was received with praise and extensive media coverage.

Land of Songs has also screened to sold-out theatres at the 19th Chicago European Union Film Festival at the Gene Siskel Film Center and Stanford University's 2015 Baltic Film Series.



About the Film: "Inspired by their grandmother's vivid accounts of her Second World War-era childhood, first-time sibling filmmakers Aldona (director) and Julian Watts (cinematographer) travel to Lithuania with family.

They arrive in *Dainava*, a region known as the "Land of Songs," where they meet a sprightly group of women who have kept their village's ancient folk-singing tradition vibrant and essential through decades of war, occupation, and youth flight.

When the filmmakers return years later, only five of the grandmothers are still alive. *Land of Songs* is a tender, humorous, poetic record of the lives of these remarkable women and an eloquent testament to heritage—and to the universal language of folk music. The film is in Lithuanian, with English subtitles.

About the Director: Aldona Watts is an award-winning filmmaker working in the Bay Area and New York. Her directorial debut, feature documentary "Land of Songs" (2015), premiered with the Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, receiving the Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award Honorable Mention. *Land of Songs* is currently screening internationally, and at various venues in the United States of America.

Aldona is an organizer at Her Girl Friday, a Brooklyn-based collective that produces events for female journalists and nonfiction storytellers. She has produced audio documentaries on topics involving gender, music, and culture, and hosted a punk radio show that broadcasted in New York City and northern Europe.

Official website: <http://www.landofsongs.com>

Contact: Aldona Watts (415) 531-1183 E-mail: landofsongsfilm@gmail.com

NEW BOOK:**Salt to the Sea****AI TAŠKŪNAS****Editor, *Lithuanian Papers***

What was the deadliest calamity in maritime history? Was it the sinking of the *Titanic* (1912), with the loss of up to 1,517 lives? Or was it perhaps the *Lusitania* (1915), with 1,198 persons dead?

Neither. The biggest tragedy was the destruction of *Wilhelm Gustloff* by Soviet submarine *S-13*, in the Baltic Sea on January 30, 1945. It has been reliably estimated that 9,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed. About 5,000 were children.

The disaster occurred during Operation Hannibal, the largest sea evacuation in modern history, when over two million people were successfully evacuated ahead of the advancing Russian armies.

The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was not the only sea vessel destroyed during the evacuation. The following further facts are now known:

‘SS *General von Steuben* was also sunk by the submarine *S-13*, claiming the lives of 4,000. The sinking of the *MV Goya* claimed the lives of 6,500 passengers. The ships *Thielbek* and *Cap Arcona* were carrying Jewish prisoners from concentration camps. The ships were bombed and sunk by British RAF planes, killing over 7,000’.¹⁵

It is estimated that in the year 1945 alone, over 25,000 people lost their lives in the Baltic Sea. For months, bodies drifted ashore in various locations, haunting the coastline and its residents.

If you have not heard of the above war crimes, do not worry: many others in the West have no knowledge of them, either. The perpetrators have been very efficient at hushing them up, for the past 60 years or so. The various war crimes tribunals have looked the other way when it came to the atrocities committed by the Soviets. And the Western media have invariably chosen to remain dead silent, whenever it came to revealing the undeserved sufferings of the Baltic people.

¹⁵ Ruta SEPETYŠ, *Salt to the sea*. New York: Philomel Books, 2016, p.381.

Contemporary historical fiction writer Ruta Sepetys has now lifted the veil on this shocking maritime casualty of World War II, in her latest novel, *Salt to the sea*. Sepetys is a best-selling and award-winning author based in Nashville, Tennessee. She has mastered the art of combining an invented story with a historically correct background. In *Salt to the sea*, she introduces us to four fictional teenagers of four different nationalities (Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish, German/East Prussian). Their paths converge, as they and thousands of other desperate refugees flock to the Baltic coast, in the midst of a Soviet advance. The four teenagers vie for passage aboard the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a ship that promises safety and freedom. Yet not all promises can be kept...

Early reviews of *Salt to the sea* have praised it as “one of the most powerful books...and a thriller you will not put down,”¹⁶ while another critic commented, “Never have I felt so transported to a time or place than when reading *Salt to the Sea*. Sepetys ensures that the *Wilhelm Gustloff* will no longer remain in the shadowy depths of the Baltic Sea. Hauntingly real”.¹⁷

For all Lithuanians, young and old, *Salt to the sea* should be compulsory reading. It may well bring tears to the readers’ eyes; but the book will also fill a grim gap in their historical knowledge of what their own nation has gone through. The truth has been hidden from them far too long.

A more extensive review of Salt of the Sea will be published in next year’s issue of Lithuanian Papers.

(Advertisement)

Read more books about the recent history of Lithuania:

CHILDREN OF SIBERIA, The memoirs of exiled children who survived Siberia. Compiled by I. Kurtinaitytė-Aras and V.Zavadskis.. Published in Kaunas by Naujasis lankas, 2013. Hard cover, 327 pages. **\$24.95.**

SONG IN SIBERIA, by Nijolė Sadūnaitė. The inspiring story of a Lithuanian woman who stood up to the Soviet judges and later looked after the most disadvantaged in Siberia. Publ.Sutton S.: ACN, 1988. P/back, 148 pp. **\$15.00.**

FROZEN INFERNO. An eyewitness account of exiled women’s suffering and tragic deaths in icy Siberia. Repr. by TUULSS in Hobart, 2016. 16 pp. **Free.**

All above are available from TUU Lithuanian Studies Society, PO Box 777, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7006; or may be ordered by E-mail: al.taskunas@gmail.com

Postage is included in the above prices.

¹⁶ Margaret Neville, The King’s English Bookshop.

¹⁷ Clara Martin, Lemuria Bookstore.

***Lietuvybė* Down Under**

Gražina PRANAUSKAS

Melbourne

The word *lietuvybė* is difficult to translate, because it has somewhat different meanings for different people. *Lietuvybė* may be seen by some as the sum total of everything Lithuanian, including the nation's culture, traditions and language. Others believe that *lietuvybė* is, first and foremost, a measure of a person's ability to speak Lithuanian. There are quite a few other variations on this theme, as well. Algimantas Taškūnas (ed.) *Lithuanian Papers* no. 26, 2012

The meaning of *lietuvybė* has shifted for me in recent years. When I arrived in Australia in 1989 and was becoming part of the Lithuanian community here, I had no doubt that the most important aspect of *lietuvybė* was the ability to communicate in the Lithuanian language. But I soon discovered that confining *lietuvybė* to language excludes many people of Lithuanian descent – like my husband Peter – who do not have a command of the language but passionately identify as Lithuanian. I have had to rethink what it is that makes people like him proud of being Lithuanian. What makes him become emotional when listening to Lithuanian singing. Content when eating Lithuanian food. What drives him to place Lithuanian ornaments around the house. Plaster our car with Lithuanian stickers – even when he is not sure of the exact meaning of the words.

Although belonging to a later generation of Lithuanian migrants to Australia, I have for a long time been fascinated by the post-war refugee generation's understanding of *lietuvybė*. When I arrived in Australia, I knew virtually nothing about them – and why they were regarded as traitors of the Soviet Union by the Soviet-era propaganda. I set myself the task of listening to the stories, not only of the surviving refugees and their struggle to preserve a 'pure' Lithuanian identity free from foreign influence, but also of their descendants who (like my husband) may not have retained the language, and more recent arrivals who (like me) grew up in the Soviet era. What I have learnt is that each of us has our own concept of *lietuvybė*, but that we also share two important characteristics in common: we all identify as Lithuanian, and we all live outside the homeland.

What I have come to appreciate more and more since 1989 is that living in the diaspora poses a continuing challenge in terms of maintaining an authentic concept of *lietuvybė* unsupported by the implicit affirmation that comes with living in the homeland. Ironically, I hardly use Lithuanian today, as I work in an English speaking environment—even my research into the Australian-Lithuanian community's national and cultural identity is written in English. Initially, the language shift worried me. But now I feel a sense of pride that I am able, even in a miniscule way, to contribute to the maintenance of *lietuvybė* by stepping outside the Australian-Lithuanian community in order to promote it to current and future generations of Australians.

Much of what I have learnt about *lietuvybė* is based on interviews I conducted with community members in Sydney, Adelaide, Geelong, Hobart and Melbourne from February to October 1998 for a BA Honours thesis, and from questionnaire returns and interviews with leaders and members of the different Australian-Lithuanian organisations in the same cities from October 1999 to January 2000 for an MA thesis. As part of my MA thesis, in order to investigate differences in attitudes and behaviour between post-war Lithuanians, their descendants, and more recent Lithuanian migrants, I considered gathering data by representative sampling.

This was a difficult task as I had no means of contacting all Lithuanians in Australia. Community lists were incomplete and out of date. Selecting Lithuanian surnames from telephone directories was deemed to be unreliable because of the possibility of surname changes due to either preference or marriage.

Having few other options, in October 1999–January 2000, using the outdated community registry as a guide, I distributed a questionnaire to the leaders of the different Australian-Lithuanian organisations in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Geelong and Hobart. The leaders of these groups passed the questionnaire on to their members.

Also, I distributed my questionnaire to more recently-arrived Lithuanians who I either personally knew or found out about through word of mouth. Thus, the immediate post-war arrivals and descendants sampled here are primarily drawn from the population of Lithuanians who, to a greater or lesser degree, participate in the Australian-Lithuanian community, though some non-

participants have been included to give a fuller picture. The sample is not representative of all persons of Lithuanian descent living in Australia. However, in relation to the immediate post-war migrants and their descendants, my interest is mainly in ethnicity maintenance or the 'preservation', rather than the loss, of 'Lithuanianness'.

A survey of community participants is therefore appropriate and consistent with the overall aim of this study. However, the more recent arrivals surveyed are more diverse. As I am interested in the experiences and attitudes of the newer arrivals irrespective of their local Lithuanian community participation status, I have sought to obtain a wider variety of respondents within this group than would be possible from relying on community organisation lists alone.

Of 396 questionnaires distributed, 172 completed questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 43 per cent. Of those who responded, 53 per cent were post-war migrants, 26 per cent recent migrants, and 19 per cent were descendants of post-war migrants, and 2 per cent did not specify their year of arrival in Australia.

After the questionnaire results were analysed, a subsample was selected for more in-depth interviews – the purpose being to gain a richer qualitative picture of the thoughts and experiences of Lithuanians in Australia. I did this by contacting 82 randomly selected questionnaire respondents. Between April–July 2000 open-ended face-to-face interviews took place in Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. Some of these interviews were further followed by the telephone conversations. Interviews with participants in Geelong, Hobart and Canberra were conducted by post. Participants who were not available for face-to-face or telephone interviews were sent interview questions, which were returned by either email or post. Some of them were further contacted by telephone for extended discussion about their answers.

The numbers of participants were: 42 post-war Lithuanians, 23 recent-arrivals and 17 descendants of post-war Lithuanians. Although all interviewees gave their written permission to use information from their interviews, some of them felt uncomfortable about revealing their names.

For this reason, names have been replaced by letters and numbers, with the first letter identifying interviewees which group interviewees belong to as

follows: P (post-war migrant), R (recent migrant), and D (descendant of post-war migrant). Individuals within each sub-group are identified by numbers. Thus, P1 is the unique identifier of one of the respondents within the post-war migrant group.

While the above samples might not be a statistically accurate reflection of the total Lithuanian community, a diverse range of respondents (gender, different ages, various geographical locations, educational background etc.) have been surveyed and interviewed. While all the important demographic subgroups might not be represented exactly in the proportions in which they are found in the community, I can confidently assert that all the major subgroups are represented and have been given a voice.

My previous research informs my forthcoming book *'Lietuvybė down under: constructing Lithuanian identity in Australia'*. The book is not intended to be the last word on what *lietuvybė* has meant to succeeding generations of Australian-Lithuanians, but Chapters 1-5 aim at a cross-section of the community in terms of gender, date of arrival, age, geographical spread and educational background.

Chapter 6 is different. It steps away from the voices of others and gives expression to my own voice. It is not the researcher voice of Chapters 1-5. It is my novelist voice, with extracts from my PhD novel *'Torn: the story of a Lithuanian migrant'*. Its inclusion acknowledges that analysis can capture only so much. In this respect, it is telling that when Australian-Lithuanians talk about *lietuvybė*, their talk is not analytical and objective, but descriptive and personal. So, too, is Chapter 6, which is intended to pay homage to *all* the stories told—and stories yet-to-be-told—by countless members of the Lithuanian community in Australia.

Gražina Pranauskas, Ph.D. (Victoria University) is a researcher and writer on identity, belonging and nostalgia.

The Train to Eternity

Stasys JAMEIKIS

English translation by Regina SHARE

Starting on June 13-14, 1941, the Soviet administration deported thousands of Lithuanians to Siberia and to similar remote places; and replaced them with Russian colonists. A train load of 1,505 Lithuanian men from Naujoji Vilnia was among the people destined for deportation: their train left for the icy Archangel region of Northern Russia on January 17, 1941. Thirteen years later, only eleven men returned home.

One of these 11 survivors, Stasys Jameikis, decided to write down his experiences. It took him 20 years to complete his meticulously researched book. It was published, in Lithuanian, in 2003 and the second edition appeared in 2014. For reasons unknown to us, the book was boycotted by some major bookshops in Lithuania. Nevertheless, these and other hitches were overcome, and the Lithuanian language edition of the documentary volume is now completely sold out.

Last year, the Lithuanian Studies Society at the University of Tasmania (the publishers of this Internet journal) undertook to have Stasys Jameikis's book translated into English. The giant task has since been completed, and the Society is now looking for a suitable publisher, in Australia or abroad.

The English title of the book is: The Train to Eternity. A few excerpts are reprinted below.

As I stepped into my railway wagon, it was obvious that this vehicle had only recently been used to transport pigs and had not been cleaned out. Already aboard was a crowd of families with children of all ages, even babies. There was no seating, so people sat on their bundled possessions or on the floor. I found myself a small space and settled down. I saw no one I knew. Other wagons like ours were lined up on all the Naujoji Vilnia railway tracks except one track which, from time to time, allowed trains from the direction of Kaunas to whistle past.

It was June 17, 1941. The final and hurried rearrangement of our convoy seemed to me like the Last Judgment Day in the Bible. Weeping and gnashing of teeth accompanied the separation of men and women into separate carriages; some children were separated from their parents; mothers wailed, children screamed, men moaned. Profanities flooded from the guards who were supposed to keep order, the clank of coupling and uncoupling wagons

punctuated the air... All these produced a continuous din. Everything was done at breakneck speed, so that there was no time for us to place our things or food reserves to where they belonged. Men ended up with women's and children's clothing as well as their food, and vice versa.

And in this way, on that morning of June 17, did the men and women, with or without their children, depart from Naujoji Vilnia, often with just what they stood up in. With no change of clothing and little food, we set out on our journey to Siberia. How long would it take? A week? Two? No one knew.

It was my fate to remain in "pig wagon No.16", with 62 others, squashed in, like sardines in a can. There was no seating. So, the options were either to stand or to sit on the floor between the feet of those who were standing. Even then we had to take turns. On one wall there was a grating of about 15cm X 3cm for ventilation, and at the other end, a wooden trough. This was our "toilet".

* * *

On the fifth day, just past Podporodzhye, we became aware of an unaccustomed noise. It was different from the monotonous rhythm of the train wheels on the railway tracks. This sound came from the other wagons and we soon identified it as people battering the walls with their hands. Some of our men climbed up to the grating and made out what those people were shouting. "Water! We are dying of thirst!" they cried in Russian. We had to show our solidarity, so we took off our shoes, pounded our walls with them and joined in with the chanting.

We learned later that the whole train was doing the same. The guards could not have failed to hear us all. Nevertheless, it took them another two or three hours to call a halt. Just past Petrozavodsk, in the Karelian forests, we stopped, stretched out on the tracks either side of a sharp turn – presumably so that we couldn't see how many wagons formed our convoy!

They opened the wagons at random, not all at once or in any orderly sequence. People were allowed to get out and drink from the pools of standing water lying between the embankment and the tracks. It wasn't really water, but a foul-smelling, coffee-coloured liquid typical of Karelian marshes. It was teeming with large and small living things – frogspawn, big fat tadpoles and frogs, and all kinds of water bugs that we had never set eyes on before in Lithuania. And yet, a few feet away, growing thickly in mossy mounds, were

shiny heaps of luscious cranberries. They were big, red and juicy – but out of our reach.

Alas, the few minutes we were allowed at the puddles didn't give us a chance to strain the brown 'water'. No sooner were we out of the wagon than the guards yelled, "Back aboard! Fast!" So, whoever was lucky enough to have a handkerchief, whether clean or soiled, used it to get the larger filth out, strained the stuff and swallowed it down. You who have never experienced such thirst as tormented us for five days in those humid, crowded, sun-baked wagons, you will never understand.

The humane thing to do would have been to stop at any of the various stations and get us some clean water, fit to drink. But no, in their minds, we were but a cargo of dregs, barely human, or perhaps even lower. I can still recall the actual suffering of that thirst. I am not ashamed to admit that we slurped up that 'water' greedily, straining what was alive and what was not, through our teeth.

We appreciated the chance to get a little time in the fresh air. We were also grateful to have been allowed to scoop up some of that "live' water in a bucket and take it back into our wagon. Just being the cargo in a pig transport did not make us pigs, so we made sure we thanked the guards for their... kindness.

But what we would never forgive them for, was something else that we had never before seen, heard or read about in books. What happened in this very spot in the marshes showed us how deep their contempt for us really was. What we saw stunned us, shocked us to the core, and left us an indelible memory destined to remain with us all to the end of our days.

In the final moments, as our group of 63 men was being shoved back aboard, we saw two human bodies being removed from the wagon next to ours. It was the one where the cries of "We are dying!" had come from earlier. With not the slightest appearance of shame or attempt at ceremony, the guards swung the two bodies by their hands and feet out over the water in the ditches and onto the embankment running alongside the railway line. One of the corpses landed face down in the water, the other on top of the mound. His head was back, so his eyes directed their gaze at us, as though begging "Don't leave me behind, please!" His eyes seemed to burn into us and, for all we knew, those eyes may still have had life in them.

To this very day, those eyes revisit me when I recall that day - eyes that were surrounded by the wild shining red cranberries, like drops of heart's blood.

We were obviously the last to be loaded after the "water stop" because as soon as our doors were boarded up, the train moved on. There were no more stops until we reached our final destination, which turned out to be Medvezhyegorsk. We travelled this leg of our journey in a deathly silence of exhaustion. But that silence was only our outward appearance. No one gave expression to the clamour of distress and worry about our ultimate fate. We kept all that to ourselves.

* * *

Karelia. Nine kilometres from the station, on the shores of Lake Onega, lay our concentration camp. At the camp gates they searched us very thoroughly and confiscated anything of any value at all – that is, all money, rings, watches, any rust-proof metal and knives. Even photographs were taken.

We were then herded into the camp, formed into groups of 100, and assigned to the barracks.¹⁸ Inside these barn-like structures were two tiers of bare, resin-smelling pine boards lining the walls all round. This was where we were to sleep.

By the morning of the fourth day, we were lined up in rows and marched out of the camp to work near Lake Onega. There we found huge mountains of logs, 3 – 6 metres long and very thick. These were the gold of the Karelian forests. Although they were just cut and not dried, you could see that they would provide the highest quality building material.



Typical Russian "barracks".

¹⁸ In this text, the term *barracks* refers to one building which housed prisoners. A number of such buildings (and others) made up a camp..

Of primary significance for us slaves, was that the logs were also extremely heavy. Our task was to drag them out from the piles they where they had fallen, and then take them down to the lake on our shoulders. There they had to be sorted according to their length, rolled down to the water's edge and bound together with wire. They would then be pulled out onto the water and sent floating off raft-like, some said, even as far as Petrozavodsk.

The work we now had to do was slave labour, and a shock. [*Everything had to be done by hand. There were no machines or decent tools*]. The men who carried the logs all day, returned with blistered hands and the beginnings of callouses on their shoulders. Standing at the guardhouse waiting to be checked in, our men of learning tried to put our case to those in charge. We were not criminals sentenced to penal servitude, they protested, nor had we been convicted of anything at all. Such work as we had just done was nothing but brutal exploitation, an outrage. [*Their protests were ignored*].

We were perplexed by something else, as well. Someone had been snooping in our belongings at night, while we were asleep, and now some food and other items were missing. The explanation from our barracks boss was an unlikely one. He said that friends of ours had come and taken back what they claimed was theirs, saying that they had only given them to us for safekeeping for the duration of the journey. He did not know them and would not be able to recognise them again. Well, friends or strangers, it made no difference. The barracks boss had clearly helped them steal from us. We stood as much chance of getting anything back as trying to catch the wind in nets, as the saying goes.

* * *

Just then, the war broke out (*between Germany and the Soviet Union*)... We fell to speculating and wondering what lay in store for us, how long we would be kept there, if anyone would come to rescue us. The majority opinion tended to the view that the Russians would not be able to hold out the Germans, that the Soviet Union would crumble, and that we would be home before too long. The prevailing mood was extremely positive. These were the few hours we spent entertaining bright hopes for the future, hopes that we thought held a great deal of promise.

*Instead, the prisoners were transferred to another concentration camp. At first, they travelled in a huge barge. Next, they were forced to continue **on foot**, for another 612 kilometres - and at a running pace.*

Our group was divided into two columns and ordered to set out at a run. Each left at a different time and went in different directions. We ran and ran and ran. We followed a winding route until we reached a wide road. The days were scorching hot, so it was our good fortune that we ran mostly at night when it was cooler.

After a few days of travelling at speed, our possessions became too burdensome for many of the men. They began to drop things here and there. At some distance behind us, came the procession of horse-drawn carts. The guards deliberately never offered to carry anything for anyone, because they collected the dropped things for themselves as they came across them. These men, in whose care we were supposed to be, profited greatly from this practice. They got our warmer clothing, bedding and other belongings of family members who had been hurriedly transferred to other carriages back in Naujoji Vilnia..

To vary the monotony of each day, our guards sometimes had fun with us. One of their favourite amusements was to make us go straight on through a large pool of water rather than around it. As we waded in, they would shout, "Get down!" We were forbidden to fall out of our formations, and had been warned that we would be shot as runaways if we did. So, there was nothing for it but to advance on hands and knees through the water as the guards let loose a barrage of crossfire above our heads. The next command was "Lower!" The bullets would whistle just over our heads at a lower trajectory, and force us to crawl along the bottom. Then we would hear, "Stand up!" When we stood up in all our muddy glory, the guards would roar with laughter.

It was not only extreme fatigue that we suffered. Most of us had the sort of footwear which had rubbed our feet till they bled. On softer surfaces we ran barefoot; on harder ones we took to wrapping our feet in towels or scarves. Some even tore the soles from their shoes and tied them onto their feet for protection. Those men who still had warm coats, cut the sleeves off and wrapped them round their feet.

Our commander was unpredictable and volatile. When he flared up, he could curse for half an hour without using the same swear word twice. Every

outburst would end with *“Matj, matj, matj, boga matj!”* (“Mother, mother, mother of God!”). Or he would suddenly give the order, “Faster, faster!” and we would have to run under the blazing sun while he fired shots over our heads.

It was heart-stopping for some in our company. The first one to fall in the dust of the road was, as I recall, a little old man, Professor Arbačiauskas; next was the former head of the Railway Board, a stout, grey-haired man by the name of Šatas; then Stalioraitis from Klaipėda. There were others but I did not know them and cannot give their names.

Our running procession was not permitted to stop when these men succumbed. The line just had to go round them and keep moving with not so much as a backward glance. If the wagons stopped at all, they soon caught us up, but of the fallen there was a trace. We assumed that they met the same fate as those who had been abandoned earlier, near the Karelian.

* * *

Our trial. It was not until the second half of April, 1942¹⁹, that I received my summons – at midnight, of course, as was their habit. I was taken to a room and seated on a stool fixed to the floor. In front of me sat a man at a writing desk. He was not much older than me so I guessed he was doing this to avoid war front duty.

They suspected me of belonging to a group of men preparing to escape and join the Germans. He mentioned many Lithuanian names (some of which I truly did not know) and a few Russian ones. The questions were specific and repeated: Did I know such and such? Was I friends with this one or that one? This litany was repeated several nights in a row. Notes were always taken, sometimes on a blank sheet of paper, and sometimes on a partially printed page.

I do not remember if, at the end of it all, I signed the interrogator’s pages of notes, or not. I certainly had no understanding of what the interrogator had written. If he had ordered me to, it is quite possible that I did sign, simply out of fear...

¹⁹ This means that the author was not charged with any offence, real or concocted, for 10 months after his arrest.

May 2, 1942 was a memorable day... Through the gaping doors of the isolation unit, as if out of the darkness of a dragon's maw, came ten of my fellow Lithuanians one after the other. They were: Linartas (whom they treated as the leader of our group), Merkelis, Mickevičius, Maziliauskas, Rėklaitis, Dailydė, Blochas, Vinča, Stasiūnas, Vilimas, Jameikis.

We were ushered into the hall and saw, seated at a table covered by a red cloth, three army officers who constituted a military field tribunal. To support the case against us, they had brought in witnesses to swear that preparations for the breakout really had been underway. Most of them were Russians we had never laid eyes on, before that very day in the hall.

But the principal witnesses were Gužas and Kovalčiuk, the two who had always had a hand in our troubles. They had, for example, testified against Jonas Masiliūnas and Jankus, who had been brought up on just the same trumped up charges some time earlier in the 4th OLP, found guilty and executed.



Stasys Jameikis: Before his deportation (1941), left, and after release from his last concentration camp (1954), right.



Their testimony was so fraudulent, absurd and incredible as to be downright laughable. It caused us to smile and made even the members of the tribunal actually laugh out loud. It was not a due court process. It was pure theatre.

The accused were each allowed a final word. Each denied the charges as best as they could. My single statement was "The only crime I am guilty of, is being a Lithuanian!" Blochas spoke last of all and made the strongest point. He said, "How could I, a Jew, seek to join the Germans when it is the Germans

who are shooting Jews?" We were certain that this logic was enough to clear him. (*Sadly, this was not the case*).

The military district tribunal's final decision was delivered on May 22, 1942. Judgement #449 contained the tribunal's verdict that "in the name of the USSR, and with reference to RTFSR BK 319 & 320, ten of the accused were found guilty, and the tribunal decreed that they were to receive the highest penalty under this act - execution by shooting."

The result of that monstrously fabricated case was going to be the deaths of ten more good Lithuanian men. Why not eleven? Because there was one exception - me (*Jameikis, this book's author*). I was not to be executed but was sentenced to serve ten years in camp imprisonment, with five years without rights. Perhaps...the fact that I was the youngest and least active of the group, disposed the tribunal to spare me from the same fate as the others.

When the chairman asked, "Do you all understand the verdict?" Blochas responded. He tried yet again to make them understand that it was an absurd mistake to charge a Jew with intent to defect to the Germans. The tribunal did not wait to hear him out. They left the hall before he had finished speaking.

The head guard who escorted us back to the central isolation cell, handed us over to another officer in the entrance porch. "This one", he said pompously, pushing me to the front of the rest of the group, "is for the general quarters. These ten," he shouted with a smugness he did not bother to hide, "to the death cell."

This was yet another dagger to the hearts of the hapless, condemned men.

Donations to help with the publication of this book in English, may be mailed (by cheque or money order) to TUU Lithuanian Studies Society, PO Box 777, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7006, Australia. Donations may also be sent by bank transfer (direct debit) account with the Commonwealth Bank, BSB 067102, Account 00904299.

We thank our supporters in advance.

Lithuanian Papers

ANNUAL JOURNAL OF THE TUU (TASMANIA UNIVERSITY UNION)
LITHUANIAN STUDIES SOCIETY

Volume 30 – 2016

www.lithuanianpapers.com

EDITOR: Algimantas P. TAŠKŪNAS, OAM, PhD, MEdAdmin, BA, BCom

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Vince J. TAŠKŪNAS, BA, MPRIA, MAICD.

TECHNICAL EDITOR: James SPENCER

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS ADDRESS:

Post Office Box 777, SANDY BAY, TAS. 7006 (Australia).

Phone (03) 6225 2505. E-mail: al.taskunas@gmail.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Free.

DONATIONS

are thankfully accepted at PO Box 777, Sandy Bay, Tas.7006 (Australia)
or by bank transfer (“direct debit”) to: BSB 067102, Account No. 00904299.

LITHUANIAN PAPERS journal is published annually by the Lithuanian Studies Society at the University of Tasmania (TUULSS).

TUULSS (The Lithuanian Studies Society) is a non-profit society devoted to making people aware of Lithuania and its heritage. The Society encourages graduate research, at the University of Tasmania and elsewhere, on all topics linked with Lithuania. All communications to: the addresses shown above.

PRODUCED and PUBLISHED in Australia.

CONTRIBUTIONS are normally assessed by independent referees before publication. The **VIEWS** expressed in this journal, unless otherwise stated, are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editors or the publishers.

Advertising

The publishers of LITHUANIAN PAPERS welcome ethical advertising and reserve the right to refuse any advertisement, without having to give the reasons for such refusal.

ADVERTISING RATES - on application.

CONTACT: Al Taškūnas, Editor. Ph. (03) 6225 2505

E-mail: al.taskunas@gmail.com