

# bridges



december 2004

LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

## BRIDGES

Lithuanian American News Journal  
USPS 017131 – Published 10 times per year  
(Jan./Feb. and Jul./Aug. combined).

Address of publication is:

**LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,**  
1927 West Blvd.,  
Racine, WI 53403

BRIDGES is the official publication of the  
**Lithuanian American Community, Inc.,**  
PO BOX 33464

Washington, DC 20033-3464

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THE INFORMATION CENTER FOR  
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Collects and provides information from  
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**LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,**  
*Ramas Pliura*  
1927 West Boulevard  
Racine, WI 53403

Subscription rate is \$18.00 annually  
(US Mail serviced subscribers).

Subscriptions to other addresses are  
(US \$28.00), payable in advance (US funds).  
Periodicals postage paid at Racine, WI;  
and additional locations.

Contact us on the Internet at:  
**www.javlb.org**

Postmaster: Send any address correction  
and/or changes to

**LAC, Inc./BRIDGES,**  
1927 West Boulevard  
Racine, WI 53403

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\* Cover Illustrations by Sestet Mercedes SSC. from the booklet "ROZINIS".

\* Christmas Illustrations by A. Korsakate-Sutkuviene from the book "Our Parents Home".



# Christmas Eve

December... the very first month of the winter. All the leaves have already fallen off the trees and now it looks sad. Cold weather

bites your nose outside. Then it starts to snow. It is most beautiful when you see only a little bit of snow on the ground in the woods. You see little rabbits hopping around, going to their home, to their families, where you know you are so safe, you feel loved, and you know how everybody needs you by their side. This happens not only to rabbits, but also to all the people in the world. Christmas is the time when all families come together. It is time for peace, forgiveness and love. It is the best time to say "I'm sorry" and also for the words "I love you".

The last Christmas that I spent with my family was so special... I didn't know yet that soon I would have to leave all these people who were always by my side, all these people full of love. On December 24th, the day of Christmas Eve, as every year, my father goes out to get the Christmas tree. While he is out, my mother and I have time to get ready the food for our supper. There always has to be 12 dishes on a table including the holy bread from church. My father also goes to the church for holy bread. We have a little deal in our family: my father takes care of the Christmas tree and holy bread, my mother and I are taking care of the food. It is always so exiting to get ready. There are so many things to do and you have only one day to do them all. I have to clean and decorate the house, to find the best place for the Christmas tree and to help my mommy in the kitchen. The biggest part of the food is salads and fish because you cannot eat meat this evening. The favorite thing that I like to do is to make cranberry jelly drink and to prepare one special dish. They are called Kuciukai. They are small pieces of baked bread with a lot of poppy seeds in them. All those bread pieces are in poppy-milk. It is like soup. And it is so tasty. When all the dishes are ready, I have to prepare the table, put a white table cloth and some hay underneath it. It's a tradition to put a little cross and a candle on the table. Then we put all the dishes on the table. When father comes back home with the Christmas tree, we are usually done with food and we can start decorating the

tree. We take out all the colorful little toys and garlands. My father puts the top on the Christmas tree after the tree is decorated. Then, all my family gathers around; my grandmother and grandfather, my mother and father, my cat and me. We settle down around the Christmas table, and my mother starts the prayer. After the prayer we all share the holy bread and start having supper.

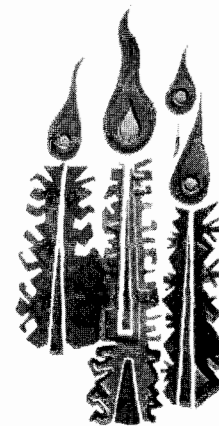
Afterwards, the best part of Christmas: time to give presents. Doing this you express your love and yourself. All my family members get something, even my cat. Then we just sit together listening to Christmas carols and sharing memories of good times. Remembering all the other Christmas Eves that we spent together, willing that it's going to happen next year, willing that we all going to sit together by the same table again.

This will be our first Christmas Eve in America and I have brought my memories with me.

I want to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

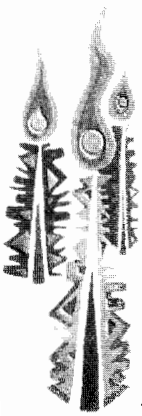
Linksmu Sv. Kaledu  
ir  
Laimingu Naujuju Metu!

*Akvile Dudonyte lives in Philadelphia and is a high school sophomore. She is also a member of St. Andrew's Lithuanian choir, "Laisves".*



"Kuciu Vakaras" — "The Day and Evening Before Christmas"

# Christmas in Lithuania Folklore and Tradition



George Soros, the American millionaire and philanthropist for emerging Europe, supported and encouraged, among a great many other endeavors, the reform and expansion of education and ethnic culture. The "Open Lithuania Fund", which he supported, produced a book in 1996 called "Lietuviu Folkloro Chrestomatija" (Lithuanian Folklore Reading-book), an amalgam of stories, folk music, traditions and vignettes collected over many years by scores of Lithuanian ethnographers and volunteers. The following is from that source, collected in 1887 in Simkaiciu kaima, and is titled:

## "Kuciu Vakaras" — "The Day and Evening Before Christmas"

The day before Christmas was celebrated in Zemaitija with great ceremony. People took great care about the kinds of work they would undertake that day, and what they would avoid. They believed that day had a powerful effect over all of the coming year, over hard work and easy, good luck and bad, life and death. They did their best to influence fate by comporting themselves in an exemplary way.

One took care to avoid lending anything to a neighbor, as one's luck for the entire year could be lent along with the item.

That day, if a chance visitor happened to be a man alone, they said, "Now all our ewes will bear only males, and we will have no females at all!" And if the chance visitor was a woman alone, they said, "Now look, all our ewes will bear only females." (Obviously, lone visitors should stay home, and only couples should undertake to visit anyone on that day!)

If a person weaves footwear for himself that day, from hemp or flaxen fibers, his ewes will bear speckled lambs.

And if one twists thread or spins that day, their flax and hemp will not grow well in the coming year.

If one sews embroidery, or sews a patch on clothing, then their flax will be ruined at the root.

Housewives should not feed their chickens all that day, so that during the coming summer, they would not dig in the gardens, and cause no damage to vegetables.

If it snows that day, with big flakes, that would be a great blessing for bees, and honey will be abundant and cheap. But if there is no snow, nor any rain, then they say the summer will be too dry for the bees and honey will be expensive.

That day, beekeepers do their best to give at least a spoonful of honey to all the poor, hoping thereby that their bees will multiply, and they will always have plenty of honey.

Each farmer does his best that day to split and store up as

much firewood as possible, and to store at least three days' worth of fodder for his livestock. They say that if one has enough to carry one through these holidays, then he will always have enough throughout the coming year.

And the entire family gathers on the evening of Kucios, the "gaspadorius" (head of the household) having first bathed, washed his hair and dressed in his church-going clothes, and all other family members having done the same after him.

The table is covered with a thick layer of straw, and then spread with a clean white cloth. The farmer brings in all his horses' halters and stows them under the table, at the end closest to the stove, because they say that this helps to prevent sickness, accidents and bad luck.

As the family, dressed in their Sunday clothes, seat themselves at the table, the "gaspadorius" makes certain that any poor person who is nearby, or any poor relation who lives in some small corner of the house, is invited to join them at the table, because all, great or small, must celebrate Kucios together.

If the "kisielius" (cranberry pudding) isn't very presentable, and cracks or separates on top, the "gaspadine" (housewife) is disappointed, and fears it may be a sign that the family fabric will "crack" or separate during the coming year. But if the top is smooth and nicely finished, everyone is pleased that all will stay the same.

The Kucios meal is eaten in silence; no one speaks unless the "gaspadorius" addresses them. Everyone turns around and tries to see his own shadow, afraid that it will have no head. If that happens, they know they are fated to die in the coming year.

The "gaspadorius" and "gaspadine" share an apple, each eating one half, so that their household will be successful during the coming year.

When the meal is finished and everyone leaves the table, then the young girls and lads hurry outside and listen to hear from which direction the dogs can be heard barking. Well, from that direction, with the coming autumn, the girls can expect their cavaliers to arrive. And the single young men will know where to find the maiden of their choice.

Later that evening, they all go outside and each grabs a stick from the woodpile. Returning to the house, they match the length of their sticks, one with the other, and those that match well, signify perhaps a romantic pairing next year. And if one is left out, with no matching partner at all, the unlucky fellow feels as though fate has dealt him a blow, and is left the butt of everyone's jokes.

*Gloria Kivytaitė O'Brien is a frequent contributor to Bridges.*

## Treasures Among Us



# St. George Church

## Shenandoah, PA

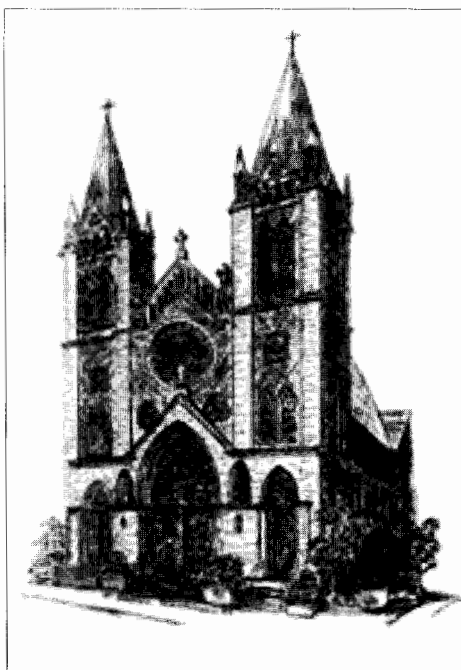
*"I call upon Lithuanian to stand by Lithuanian,  
And living heart by living heart,  
That, unperishing in the midnight dark  
They might arise to live and flourish in the morn!"*  
Bernardas Brazdionis, *Chronicle of the Catholic  
Church in Lithuania No.79* September 8, 1988

John E. Usalis

There are many reasons why Saint George Lithuanian Catholic Church has lasted 100 years: its members' faith, determination, zeal, ethnic pride and maybe even a little bit of stubbornness thrown in for good measure. Whatever the case, the church, with the oldest Lithuanian parish in the United States as its lifeblood, has existed through a century of joys and sorrows, births and deaths, fire and water damage, renovations, graduations, marriages and ordinations.

Lithuanians first arrived in Shenandoah in 1869. With the increasing Lithuanian population in the area, and the need to have a Lithuanian speaking priest to care for the spiritual needs of the ethnic group, the first Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church in America was built: St Casimir Church. The year was 1872 and the first Lithuanian pastor was Rev. Andrew Strupinkas who spoke both Lithuanian and Polish. He is buried in the Old St. George Cemetery.

During a legal search of archdiocesan and civil records, an "error" was found. The church had been registered in the office of the Recorder of Deeds in Philadelphia as a Polish Church instead of Lithuanian. Many Lithuanians left St. Casimir Church to build a new church when the second pastor was appointed who could only speak Polish. After much opposition to build a new Lithuanian



Church, permission was finally granted in 1889.

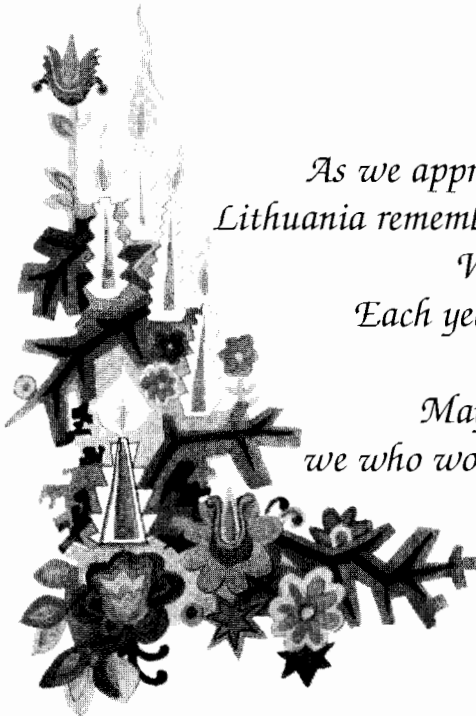
On Sunday, October 25, 1891, it must have seemed that the entire population of the area came out to gather and witness the laying of the cornerstone of St. George Church. Over 5,000 came to Shenandoah to observe the beginnings of the "new" Lithuanian Church. On May 12, 1894, the church was blessed, and within a short period

of time, the parish could boast a membership of 1,200 families. The growth of the parish soon taxed the size of the church and another Lithuanian Church was proposed. However, alterations and renovations to St. George Church started in 1901. Another addition to the general improvement to the church in 1907 was ten large bells, weighing a total of almost six tons.

A fire in the early morning hours of March 1, 1938, caused extensive damage to the church, with firemen having to battle fatigue, frigid temperatures, and the structure of the church itself. The damage was found to be extensive, with estimates reaching \$35,000.

After a leaking roof had caused extensive damage to the interior walls of the church in the early 1980's, plans for specific repairs were expanded to include an overall renovation to the entire interior and portions of the exterior. Parishioners donated more than the cost of the repairs and improvements and it has always remained debt free. In addition, the parish has five cemeteries. The parish has been blessed with a richness in vocations. The Lithuanian heritage of St. George Church has been preserved throughout the century of its existence; mostly through the great pride its parishioners have for those that came before, and the indomitable will that has kept

*Continues to page 19*



*Greetings*  
*from*  
*Mrs. Grazina Landsbergis*  
*and*  
*Lithuanian Orphan Care*

*As we approach this holy season of Christmas, the children of Lithuania remember their friends and benefactors from far away America.*

*We are very dependent on your good will.*

*Each year you provide the children with Christmas gifts through your generosity.*

*May God reward you for your good works, and we who work with the children offer you our sincere gratitude.*

*Grazina Landsbergis*  
*Lithuanian Orphan Care Committee*  
*Vilnius, Lithuania*

*St. George Church Continues from page 11*

the Nation of Lithuania alive through all of the many attempts to extinguish its national identity.

Sources:  
 John E. Usalis

100th Anniversary Booklet (1991)  
 St. George Parish

Editor's Note: It is with sadness that I must tell you that St. George's pastor of nineteen years (Lithuanian background) has been reassigned to minister to two smaller parishes in the same area. St. George Church, with its rich history, magnificent architecture and contributions to the area, has been reduced to one Saturday Mass that cannot accommodate the number of faithful parishioners. Two Sunday Masses were eliminated by the new pastor.

I am the granddaughter of coal miners in northeastern Pennsylvania and I grew up in that beautiful area. I am very familiar with the sacrifices these early immigrants made to build their churches and preserve their Catholic faith. I well remember the miners in their ill fitting Sunday suits attending Mass as well as the elderly women walk-

ing long distances with flowers from their gardens to be placed on the altar. In the other hand were the precious coins for the collection wrapped tightly in their freshly laundered handkerchiefs.

We are all aware of the struggle of our people in Lithuania from the time of the Russian czars, the Nazi regime, and through communism to keep their faith: beatings, deportations, and even loss of lives. And yet I have to wonder if there are more ominous storm clouds gathering over St. George Church. It has been financially stable, well maintained, and the largest parish in Shenandoah. Will the oldest Lithuanian community have its heart and soul torn from it? St. George celebrated its 100th anniversary at the same time Lithuania celebrated its restoration of independence in 1991. It reminds me of the song, "Is That All there Is?" I certainly hope not. Again, read the words of Bernardas Brazdionis and ask yourself if there is anything you can do to help these parishioners save St. George Parish and Church:

"I call upon Lithuanian to stand by Lithuanian,  
 And living heart by living heart,  
 That, unperishing in the midnight dark  
 They might arise to live and flourish in the morn!"

# The Lithuanian 1863-1864 Insurrection

This year marks the 140th anniversary of the Polish-Lithuanian Insurrection of 1863-1864. During these years, Poles and Lithuanians rose up in revolt against the forced incorporation of their homeland into the Czarist Russian Empire. No where was the fighting more bloody, fierce, or prolonged than in Lithuania. Oddly enough the two most descriptive records of the Lithuanian struggle were preserved by an Austrian and a Pole. The Austrian, Arthur Grottger, produced a series of drawings of events and an anonymous Pole a detailed written account of his joining Reverend Antanas Mackevicius' (Mackiewicz) Lithuanian rebels fighting in Samogitia.

Aside from art works of universal value, there sometimes appear drawings and photographs that have great significance to an individual or nation. Arthur Grottger's drawings had that significance to the Polish and Lithuanian nations. His first two series of drawings, entitled "Warsaw I" and "Warsaw II", were produced before the outbreak of the 1863 insurrection upon receipt of the first reports of street demonstrations and clashes with Czarist police. Two months after the outbreak of the insurrection, Grottger traveled to Lvov while in an advanced stage of tuberculosis. He hoped to observe first hand the fight for freedom, but his friends convinced him of his unrealistic desire. Grottger's drawings were made following detailed discussions with individuals involved in the insurrection.

Grottger then started a new series of drawings, entitled "Polonia" which was widely circulated before the final suppression of the insurrection in 1865. His last two series, entitled "Lithuania" and "War", were likewise

completed before the last partisan units were suppressed in Augustove, Sandomierz, and Samogitia. Grottger's heroes in the last two series are Lithuanian guerillas fighting and dying for their homeland. He meticulously drew his romantic guerillas in native hunting jackets and ammunition belts. Every picture is a blend of faith, a desire for liberty, and love of country.

Grottger's drawings became widely familiar to both Pole and Lithuanian alike and precious symbols of the insurrection. Looking at his drawings became a ritual in the same manner as listening to Adam Mickiewicz's poems about Lithuania. The artist died a few months after completing his last series at thirty years of age, yet his name will be forever linked with the Lithuanian struggle for freedom. Grottger's drawings have since been converted to paintings which are now displayed in museums around the world. Several paintings based on Grottger's Lithuania series are displayed with this article for our readers' appreciation.

Though his name has been lost to history, an anonymous Pole's account of his hazards encountered in joining the Lithuanian rebel "Order of Combatants for Independence" confirms the accuracy of Grottger's drawing. The following abridged passages are extracted from an original account published in the Polish newspaper *Niepodleglose* (Independence), on August 23, 1863, and more recently in English in Dr. Constantine R. Jurgela's *History of the Lithuanian Nation* (1948). One wonders if he would have been willing to make the sacrifice required of these heroes.

"...Do you have a family? Write them to weep for you – no one

departs from our ranks on a leave unless into a grave. You will never see them again! Tell me, brother, have you made peace with God and men, because I do not want to mislead you. You are marching to meet death. Tell me without superfluous words, are you prepared to die at any moment for your country? Think it over; there is time yet to retreat. I will facilitate your return back across the Nemunas – service in your country is easier...

"There shone on his face, when he said that, the peaceful resignation typical of the Lord's martyrs. I felt instinctively that these were no mere words – this was his faith and with faith alone can one enlist in the "Order of Combatants for Independence". In spite of myself, a battle went on inside me. My vision was troubled with the fleeting scenes of my childhood, the beloved figures of my family and friends, our home in Praga, and my old reveries of a peaceful and busy future. Alongside these visions, in recrimination of my conscience, I saw the noble figures of our martyrs, the terrible recollection of the murders committed by Muscovy... With tears flooding my eyes, I looked up at the figure of the crucified Savior. In a quiet prayer I bid farewell to everything dear to my heart. Turning to my host, I spoke in quiet voice – Brother, I am ready. I believe you. Swear and let's go...

"In less than half an hour we heard from the far side of the clearing the soft murmur of the rustling branches and careful foot-falls, accompanied the characteristic hooting sound that was to serve as our password. The old man answered. Shortly thereafter we saw several figures move into the open from behind the trees, evidently the vanguards. All men were dressed in long grey coats

reaching to the knees and tied with a leather belt. All sported four cornered caps, carried double-barreled shotguns in hands, and hatchets thrust under their belts. Each man carried a fairly bulky sack of crude linen and a hunting horn.

“...Finally emerged the Reverend Mackevicius, the detachment’s leader, dressed in a priest’s frock with tucked-in tails, a sword at his side and a pistol thrust under his belt. He came in a circle of a group of young officers wearing fur caps – this was evidently his whole staff. All marched on foot. There was not one horse in the camp, no food reserve, except the foodstuff carried by each in his linen bag.

“...My guide spoke to the leader and introduced me, relating all of my past. Finally he added “Leader, this is, it seems, a robust Mazur. During this conversation, I was able to observe closely the face of Father Mackevicius. His face was sun-burned, features clear cut, a long

dark beard, thick eyebrows, a wrinkled face composing one sullen whole, full of energy and power that command respect.

“...The officer bowed and led me to my squad, already seated around a log fire... Our squad was made up of four peasants from Ignatavas, three burghers from Panevezys, a son of a well – to-do gentleman from Siauliai, a teacher from Kaunas, and myself... I learned that all of the attacks are executed at night, while the days are spent in resting, unless the Muscovites are sitting hard on our necks. Tonight they covered more than 20 American miles and therefore intended to rest all day in the clearing.

“The sun had come up, when there was an echo of a horn and an order was shouted – The Prayer!.... It was an inspiring sight of these several hundred men, tried in battle, kneeling with bared heads. In front of us, before a Crucifix and the picture of Our Lady on the detachment’s

banner, knelt Father Mackevicius and intoned....Around us was the pristine native forest – our forest. Above us was God and our future.”

Space precludes printing a detailed account of the many heroes and brave deeds preformed during the Lithuanian insurrection of 1863-1864. History documents that the Russian Army employed 144,786 soldiers plus Cossacks in the suppression of the Lithuanian insurrection alone. These rebels never compromised their ideals. They fought, died, and when captured, chose Siberia rather than to submit to the oppressor.

Reverend Mackevicius was eventually captured, and unrepentant, was hung by the Russians. A fitting closure to this article can be taken from the final Latin phrase uttered by another Lithuanian insurrectionist leader, Louis Nabrut, while dying in this native forest, “How sweet it is to die for one’s homeland...”

*Continues from page 12*

become a parish project that shared in the mission of the angels on the first Christmas night in Bethlehem... proclaiming the message of Christ’s birth to the world.

I watched during the holiday season as mothers stood with their young children by the manger, explaining to them the story of Christ’s birth. Busy city buses, rushing to stay on schedule, braked as passengers looked with awe at the beautiful Christmas manger. But the best comment came in January from a young man who was passing by while we were outside dismantling the manger. “Ya takin it down?” he asked in a sad tone, “its so nice ta look at, I was hoping you’d keep it up all year!”

All of us need to help in the effort to keep Christ in our Christmas celebrations. Our world needs to know that the Prince of Peace was born for us...

**“O Come, let us adore Him!”**

Rev. Peter Burkauskas

Father Peter Burkauskas is the pastor of St. Casimir and St. Andrew Churches in Philadelphia.

