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# The Lithuanians of Clev

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CLEVELAND AMERICANIZATION COMMITTEE  
CLEVELAND, 1920

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Cleveland, Ohio

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## Introduction

At a hotel banquet held recently in Cleveland by a group of representative Lithuanians in honor of delegates from the new republic, one of the Lithuanian visitors, after looking the group over, turned to me and said in surprise, "These are almost all Americans, aren't they?" As a matter of fact, nearly everyone of the hundred or more present was born in Lithuania and had come to America at a comparatively recent date. This comment from a fellow countryman was significant. How often is the distinction between "foreigners" and "Americans" overemphasized and exaggerated, and how often the fact that fundamentally all are pretty normal human beings lost sight of.

Few native Americans have better appreciation of the worth of American institutions, representative government, liberty of thought and speech than do these new citizens, whose mother country is struggling for Democracy. Nothing could have been more inspiring, more likely to renew one's faith in the old ideals of America than to hear the constant references, in this meeting for Lithuanian independence, to America's institutions as models to be followed in the new republic struggling into existence. May we always be worthy of such faith!

Lithuanians are forming a valuable element in our country, intellectual, eager for the education that has been denied them in the past, self-respecting, industrious and ambitious, they are helping to form that ideal American who is enriched by the treasures each nationality has brought to our shores.

The following pages will tell what Lithuanians are contributing to the community life of Cleveland.

ALICE P. GANNETT  
Head Resident  
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## The Lithuanians of Cleveland

The territory included under the term Lithuania depends upon the time of which one speaks. In the fifteenth century the kingdom extended from the Baltic Sea at Polangen and the mouth of the Niemen river to the Black Sea, and from the Bug river on the west to the Oka on the east. Gradually the political unit was reduced in size until today without recognized political entity we can speak only of the territory in which live those who use the Lithuanian language. In this sense it now includes the entire province of Kovno, Vilna, the part of Grodno north of the Niemen, Suvalki, Courland and the north-eastern part of eastern Prussia. Closely akin and usually classified with them are the Letts, a people living in Courland, Livonia, Vitebsk, and a remnant of the old Prussians living east of the mouth of the Vistula.

The Lithuanians are a branch of the Indo-European race quite distinct from the Scandinavians, Slavs or Germans by whom they are surrounded. Their language shows a marked similarity to the Sanskrit. From a careful comparison of the pre-historic skulls unearthed in this region with the Lithuanians of today, it would seem that they had been in Western Europe many centuries before the Slavs or Germans migrated from their Asiatic homes. Six hundred years ago the southern Lithuanians came under Prussian domination. In 1569 by the Convention of Lublin the fortunes of the kingdom were inextricably merged with those of Poland. The dual monarchy ostensibly at least, became entirely Polish and Lithuania seemed to have disappeared. It was a bloodless political conquest, but it did not essentially change the genius or aspirations of this freedom-loving people. At the close of the eighteenth century, with the third partition of Poland by its avaricious neighbors, Lithuania passed into the hands of Russia, and to Europeans and Americans became nothing more than a memory. Her government down to the pettiest officers was Russian. Her statutes were abolished; the size of the leasehold of her people was limited to one hundred and sixty acres; lectures and meetings were prohibited; even the language itself was barred and the Russian characters substituted for the Latin. Lithuanian commerce was discouraged and great tracts of country were sold to Russian colonists. The hardest blow of all was the suppression of the press in 1864, so that the people had to rely on what literature could be smuggled in from Germany and America. But such literature did come in, as evidenced by the fact that the Lithuanian provinces have shown a smaller percentage of illiteracy than any other section of the late Russian Empire. It was none the less a tragedy for Lithuania that her youths with literary ambition, the potential leaders of her people, should have to go beyond her boundaries for their education, and afterward, in too many cases, to write in a tongue which their own people could not read.

Every smaller town as well as the larger centres of population, in addition to its Russian garrison, had its Russian Greek Orthodox Church, al-



Lithuanian Girls in National Costume

though the Lithuanians were Roman Catholic. For more than a century (1795—1915) this Russification was systematically carried on, yet in 1919 these people think in terms of the ancient Lithuanian legal codes and retain their language in its purity. Secretly they have preserved a large and various literature and remain consistently Roman Catholic. Panslavism, as far as Lithuania is concerned, has failed.

But two social classes have existed in Lithuania, the large land holders and the peasants. The former have ever betrayed the latter, first to Poland, then to Russia, somewhat in later years to Germany. The anxiety of the nobles to protect their vested interests made them careful to mold their attitude to accord with the prevailing winds of political fortune. The peasants who bore the weight of the support of the local and the Russian government, whose children could not be sent to outside schools for education, felt most the burden of Russian oppression and strangely enough remained most characteristically Lithuanian. The national consciousness for four centuries was but smouldering in the breast of her peasant people.

In the light of these facts it is not strange that the stream of Lithuanian emigration has grown steadily in volume. We find them in Poland, the Ukraine, in Great Britain, South Africa, and New Zealand. The Canadian Northwest has many colonies of them. But the Mecca of this oppressed people has been the American Republic. It symbolized all they did not have. Strangely enough, the earliest recorded immigrants from Lithuania came with Kosciuszko in 1777 to fight for America's independence, purchasing for America what they could not have at home.

From 1868, however, they began to come in numbers, settling in the anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania. Large colonies are still found in the vicinity of Pottsville, Shenandoah, Hazelton, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton. From these centres they have found their way in increasing numbers to all the larger eastern and middle western cities. Only a few have penetrated to the far west or to the south.

In Chicago alone there are 80,000 in ten large parishes; in greater New York half that number, and many in Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore and Detroit, where they are workers in factories of all sorts, tailors and merchants, with a few professional men.

The Bureau of Immigration has classified Lithuanians separately only since 1899. Before this time they were designated as Russians or Poles, so that it is hard to determine their numbers. In the four years following the separate classification we know that 252,594 Lithuanians had landed in America and only 19,171 had departed; so that the estimate of three quarters of a million which was made before the Lithuanian Convention in New York in 1918, is probably conservative.

**Distribution in Cleveland.**

The earliest Lithuanian settler in Cleveland came in 1871 direct from Lithuania. Mr. F. Freimonas was by necessity an industrial worker, but a decade later bought his farm and left the city to work upon it. By 1900 there were perhaps one thousand of his countrymen in the city, the majority of whom were recruited from the mining sections of New York and Pennsylvania. Rapidly they distributed themselves through Cleveland's varied industries, and although sixty-seven per cent were male, and only thirty-



Map of Lithuania

three per cent female, the bankers and loan agents estimate that the names of from eighteen to twenty per cent are on the city's tax duplicate as property owners.

Between 1904 and 1915 many young men came to escape military service in the Russian army. Passports were difficult to obtain, and the emigrant was forced to the expedient of stealing away.

In 1915 a careful parochial survey discovered the presence in Cleveland of more than 10,000 Lithuanians. Since then, owing to the immigration from Pittston, DuBois, and the suburbs of Pittsburg, Penna., their numbers have increased to over 12,000.

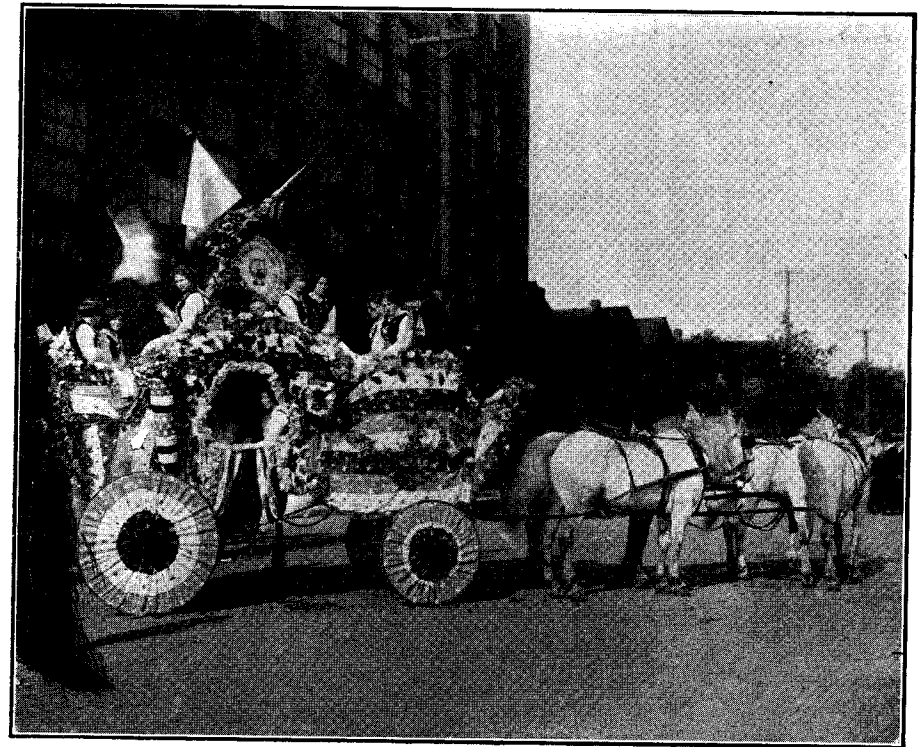
Until 1912 there was but one colony, centering about East 21st street and Oregon Ave. During the past seven years, however with increasing prosperity they have scattered thinly over the entire territory between East 17th and 71st streets from Lakeside Ave. to Payne Ave. Small groups of families are found also on Jefferson and Starkweather Aves. and a few in Lindale and Collinwood.

#### Occupation.

The large majority of the people are factory workers, employed for the most part by the Otis Steel Co., Parish and Bingham Co., Hydraulic Pressed Steel, Cleveland Twist Drill, the Cuyahoga Branch of the American Steel and Wire Mills, the White Motor, and in the repair shops of the Lake Shore Railroad. The Lithuanian workmen on the whole are skilled mechanics, with a large proportion in the molders, machinist, and carpentering trades. Like the Finns, many of the men are tailoring craftsmen, both for the custom trade in such shops as Tidd, the tailor's, and as operatives in the Printz-Biederman, H. Black, Korach's, the Clothcraft shops and other garment factories.

Not a few have developed creditable businesses. Mr. T. Neura, a Lithuanian carpenter who started in a small way as a grocer in Cleveland twelve years ago, now has a wholesale meat and grocery at Hamilton Ave. and 20th street, and a chain of five retail grocery stores in various sections of the city. The R. D. Zitkus dry goods store, 2012 St. Clair Ave., which does a \$25,000 business, was established six years ago; that of Mr. K. Varakojis on Professor Ave. at about the same time. Mr. Decker has been conducting a furniture and hardware business of creditable proportions at St. Clair Ave. and 24th street, and in the past two years A. Simkunas has built up a large dry goods business at 1001 East 79th street. Mr. M. Povilauskas four years ago bought and has since operated the Cedar Theatre on Cedar Ave. and East 71st street, besides which there are six confectioneries and other smaller places of business, conducted by Lithuanians.

In banking interests Mr. A. B. Bartoszewicz is the recognized leader. In 1895 Mr. Bartoszewicz opened a barber shop in the colony. Eight years later he became a saloon keeper and in 1904 began a foreign exchange, brokerage and steamship agency. The latter was the beginning of the St. Clair Ave. Savings and Loan Company at 2006 St. Clair Ave. which incorporated in 1914. For the past two years the constituency of his business has been prevalingly Polish and Hungarian. Keen to the eastward movement of the Lithuanian population, Mr. Bartoszewicz this year opened a branch bank on Superior Ave. and 79th street. He was also the prime mover in the Cleveland



A Float in the Lithuanian Patriotic Celebration, 1914

Lithuanian Building and Loan Association—a joint stock company incorporated for \$100,000, which under the management of Mr. S. Zaborskis had been doing a \$300,000 banking business at St. Clair Ave and 20th Street. One year ago this Association also moved its office to the new centre of Lithuanian population at 68th street and Superior Ave. It loans at the minimum percentage mainly to Lithuanians who are desirous of buying real estate or building homes.

There are three co-operative business enterprises recently entered upon by the Lithuanians of Cleveland. The first is known as local branch No. 12 of the Lithuanian Development Corporation, a national organization with headquarters in New York City which was incorporated in 1916 for \$1,000,000 for the purpose of building up industries in America and Lithuania and establishing better trade relations between the two countries. Each member of the local organization is a stockholder in the company, and each local is an agency for foreign exchange, and the sale of steamship tickets, as well as the importation and export of goods.

The second has been called the Biruta Bakers Cooperative Company. It was incorporated in 1917 for \$15,000 through the efforts of Mr. A. Kranauskas among Lithuanians only, for the purpose of making all kinds of breads and fancy pastry. A lot was purchased at East 47th street and Superior Ave. where a building is in process of construction.















