

# Lithuanian Folksongs in the USA

## Recorded by Elena Bradūnas

### (1972)

Compiled by  
AUSTĖ NAKIENĖ, RŪTA ŽARSKIENĖ

VILNIUS  
2022

## About the 1972–1973 Fieldwork in Pennsylvania

The idea to document the vanishing unique culture of Lithuanian coal miners in Pennsylvania was first proposed by my father, émigré poet Kazys Bradūnas. Working as the editor of the cultural supplement of the American-Lithuanian newspaper *Draugas*, he wrote that the Lithuanian-American churches, schools, Lithuanian cemetery monuments which were already disappearing, should be photographed immediately. It was equally important to record people's memories, lest they also remain undocumented. He suggested that Algimantas Kezys, the renowned photographer and founder of the Lithuanian Photo Archive, could lead such an expedition.

In 1972, A. Kezys made plans for the venture and invited the journalist Vladas Būtėnas to supplement the visual documentary materials with written accounts of local histories and conversations with Lithuanian immigrants or their descendants who still lived there. I asked to be included in the expedition to record and document folklore, especially songs. At that time I was studying for an M.A. degree in Folklore at the University of California and my professors encouraged me to go there to do my fieldwork. The primary patron of the expedition was the long-serving emeritus pastor of the St. George parish of Shenandoah, Monsignor Juozas Karalius. He, together with the current parish pastor, Rev. Juozas Neverauskas welcomed and housed us on the church premises. The parish

served as a base from which we traveled daily to surrounding areas to gather our data. As V. Būtėnas recalls:

We were not office or drawing-room folks but went everywhere where life was brimming and where the past was still breathing. [...] Once we stepped out of the rectories or convents we weren't afraid of swinging by even the grungiest saloons or clubs because we knew that one could hear stories there too. Elena Bradūnas, especially, tried to organize singing sessions and talks in which she shared details about Lithuania's history with the local Lithuanian community. In this way, the locals started to accept us as their own and not as some honored guests who required officiality and respect (PAL, p. 333).

People welcomed us warmly with great hospitality because they appreciated our desire to document the churches, rectories, and schools of the first immigrants, anything that marked a Lithuanian presence there. They were not afraid to disclose the strained relations among their own various factions in the past and were pleased that the histories of the "Lithuanian colonies" will be recorded. The aim of our expedition was to document the history, everyday life, and fate of the Lithuanian immigrants who arrived at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries fleeing conscription into the Tsarist army and a life of hardship in the homeland. Many of them wound up in Pennsylvania where coal miners were needed to fuel America's growing industries. We did not meet many living coal miners. The majority of our informants were elderly women who were in their eighties. They had arrived before World War I when they were

E. Bradūnaitė  
apžiūrinėja senovinę  
namo puošybą  
Maunt Karmelyje. |  
E. Bradūnas  
examines old  
decorative details  
of a house in Mount  
Carmel.  
Fotografavo |  
Photo by  
Algimantas Kezys,  
PAL, p. 104.



around eighteen years old, invited by their brothers who had immigrated earlier and who often arranged marriages between their sisters and their friends. At the time of our visit, these men were already deceased, so it was their widows who recounted the miners' stories and told us of their difficult work. Many of them had never learned English and spoke in a colorful and rich Lithuanian dialect. Those grannies were also the singers whom I recorded.

We also gathered information from the children of those first immigrants who considered themselves to be second-generation Lithuanians. The majority of them had difficulty speaking Lithuanian but, nevertheless, were very proud of their heritage. We often heard them say "I'm Lithuanian and proud of it". They respected their parents and the efforts they had made to settle in a foreign land. The buildings that we visited as well as the hymn books we found in churches, the printed books and newspapers scattered in the attics of abandoned publishing houses, old photographs, as well as church and school records all attested to the love that the first immigrants felt for their homeland, language, and traditions. In 1973 the expedition returned once more to the same area, this time with extra students who joined the group – Raimundas Lapas and my brother, Jurgis Bradūnas. V. Būtėnas described the final expedition thus:

These wonderful Lithuanian students formed a small representational ensemble that captured the hearts of the locals. Their songs, their ease with both the Lithuanian and English languages, their outgoing and vivacious personalities attracted all local people who considered themselves Lithuanian but who had not had

the opportunity to meet such lively Lithuanian youngsters. [...] After a splendid farewell party in the hall of the St. George parish of Shenandoah where Lithuanian songs and conversations resounded almost until morning, we departed back West with material gathered over the course of two years; Rev. A. Kezys had taken around 2000 photographs and colored slides, E. Bradūnas had gathered armfuls of new folklore material, R. Lapas had a box of recordings and archival material fit for a museum, and I had several hundred pages of notes, recordings on magnetic tapes, and countless impressions that would last for many years to come (PAL, p. 333–334).

We presented the documented heritage of the Lithuanian communities to the public in a well-illustrated book *Pennsylvanijos angliakasių Lietuva* [Lithuania in the Coal Mines of Pennsylvania] (1977). This large-format album includes many documentary photographs and a thorough account of the history of thirteen Lithuanian parishes. I contributed a chapter with photographs of the people I visited and their autobiographical narratives. From the material recorded in 1972, I compiled a collection of 247 songs (the material gathered later has not been fully processed and remains in my personal archive). I drew on the song recordings and conversations with singers for my M.A. thesis at the University of California (1973), and for further coursework at Indiana University (1975). While visiting Lithuania in 1992, I transferred copies of this material to the Lithuanian Folklore Archives at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (collection LTR 6071 and cassettes LTRF k 1–6). Responding to the public inter-

est, I wrote an article *Liaudies dainos likimas Pensilvanijos kalnuose* [The Fate of the Folk Song in the Mountains of Pennsylvania] for the journal *Liaudies kultūra* [Folk Culture] (1992) which was later reprinted in the compilation *Aš išdainavau visas daineles* [I have sung out all my songs] (1997). I am pleased that the songs and stories I recorded from the old immigrant diaspora are still relevant, and that my collection is once again of interest to folklorists. I hope listeners will enjoy hearing the voices of the immigrants singing their songs brought over from Lithuania more than a century ago. For more information about the songs, please visit the Lithuanian Folklore Archive's website: [archyvas.llti.lt/en/](http://archyvas.llti.lt/en/).

ELENA BRADŪNAS-AGLINSKAS

## **Lithuanian Singing Tradition Preserved in Pennsylvania.**

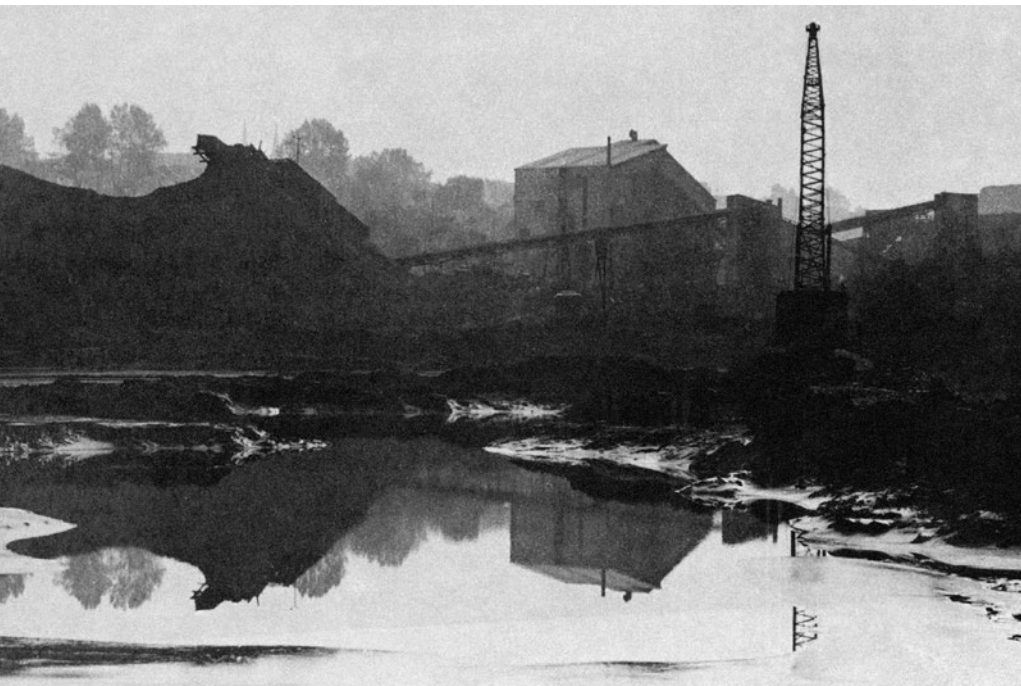
### **Collection by Elena Bradūnas**

This publication contains Lithuanian songs recorded by Elena Bradūnas in 1972 while visiting Lithuanian-Americans in Pennsylvania. She visited several towns where the descendants of coal miners, who had arrived as immigrants in the early 20th century, still maintained Lithuanian communities and spoke Lithuanian. During the expedition, the ethnologist continued the work of Jonas Balys, who had traveled and collected folklore in these settlements from 1949–1951:

I was already familiar with the works of Jonas Balys in America and I had read about and listened to his LP record “Lithuanian Folk Songs in the United States”, so I asked in parishes if there were any elderly immigrants who might know songs. I also recorded conversations occasionally interspersed with pieces of various folklore genres. [...] Apart from the usual folk songs, there were also romances, humorous songs, and some very interesting ones about the experiences of immigrant coal miners (Bradūnaitė-Aglinkienė 1997, p. 62).

Most of the singers were found in and around the town of Shenandoah, which the Lithuanians called *Šenedorius*. In the 19th century, this town not only attracted Lithuanians as an industrial center, where many of them found em-





Anglių kasyklos, kurioje dirbo lietuviai, liekanos Šenandoa. |  
Remains of a coal mine in Shenandoah, where Lithuanians worked.  
Fotografavo | Photo by Algimantas Kezys, PAL, p. 13.

ployment in the coal mines, but it also became a cultural and social center for ethnic community life.<sup>1</sup> In the vicinity of Shenandoah there were 13 other small towns with Lithuanian parishes: “Near the splendid churches, there were halls, schools and clubs with Lithuanian names, heraldry, symbols, and a separate Lithuanian cemetery near each town” (ibid, p. 9). At the time of the expedition, however, life had already changed drastically: the era of the coal mining industry had ended, and the coal mines where the first immigrants had worked were closed down, even though memories about the hard work were still vivid.

According to the Lithuanian Encyclopedia article “Lithuanian-Americans” by Mykolas Biržiška, from the mid-19th century the braver young men, often in an effort to evade the military draft, fled from the then Russian Empire to Prussia, and from there they departed from the port of Hamburg to America. “The first to leave were from southern Lithuania – Liudvinavas, Marijampolė, Vištytis, Simnas, Liubavas”. Almost all the Lithuanians who came to America at that time were enticed by agents and ended up in Pennsylvania to work either in railroad construction or in coal mines. At the beginning of the 20th century, because of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, as well as the 1905 Russian Revolution and the political persecution that followed it, the number of immigrants only grew. Letters, pictures, money, and ‘ship cards’, i.e. paid tickets for a journey by boat, sent from America also encouraged emigration (LE I,

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<sup>1</sup> The first Lithuanian Parish of Shenandoah was established in 1872, and the Lithuanian Catholic church of St. George was built in 1891. Unfortunately, the church building was demolished in 2010.

p. 411–412). Between 1889 and 1914, an estimated 70000 Lithuanians settled in Pennsylvania and contributed to the development of the state's industry (LE I, p. 416). According to Kazys Pakštas, at the beginning of the 20th century, there were about 6250 Lithuanians in Shenandoah, making up about 26 % of the total population, and thus, in fact, a kind of Lithuanian provincial town grew up in Shenandoah, where they were able to create and maintain a Lithuanian environment. Because of this concentration, Shenandoah was called the capital of Lithuanian-America, where one could often hear the Lithuanian language and see Lithuanian names on signboards.

The people seeking a better life and higher wages in the US came from the Lithuanian peasantry, which had just “begun to wake up and start learning”. Statistics show that only one in two Lithuanians who arrived in 1889–1914 were literate: 45 % of men and 59 % of women were illiterate (LE I, p. 434). Those who were literate usually were not educated in schools but had learned to read and write from teachers hired by their parents or the village community. In their new homeland, they also read little, mostly religious and popular literature: fairy tales, dream interpretations, songbooks, newspapers. For this reason, the traditional culture and folklore brought over from Lithuania remained especially important to them. According to E. Bradūnas, “a song was a great respite for coal miners from their hard work (as was alcohol, unfortunately). As long as the older generation of the first immigrants lived, songs resounded naturally at weddings, christenings, outings, and parties. These people sang what they had learned in Lithuania, songs that everyone knew and loved” (Bradūnaitė-Agliniskienė 1997, p. 64).

The first generation of newcomers was known as “greenhorns”, i.e. soft-skinned, green, and inexperienced. One of the “greenhorns” encountered in 1972, Petras Zataveckas, born in 1903 in Krikštėnai, Kriokialaukis parish, spoke about his arrival in the USA and his first impressions of the mines:

I was eleven years old when I came to America. Boy, was that a difficult time! [...] They were pretty good at fixing up our birth dates so that we'd be pulled out of school and sent to the mines to work. You had to be sixteen to work. Our parents didn't know how old we were. So they thought – might as well let them be sixteen, that way they will be able to work. [...] I was twelve years old the first time I went to the mines. It was so cold down there that I was shivering. I shook from fear as well. It was dark everywhere, pitch black. Sometimes there would be an explosion beneath the mountain and everything would shake, and rats would come running out of all the holes. We children used to try to catch and kill them. That was our only game. When I worked in the mines, I barely saw the sun. I would descend early in the morning, and return home only after dark. I got fifty cents for the week (PAL, p. 196).

It was common for children to work in the mines, they would bring miners their lunch, sort through the coal, and some even descended into the mines. This was usually the case when parents were not concerned with their children's future, thinking that it was more important to earn money than to get educated, or if the parents died in the mines due to an accident and no one was left to feed the family. The émigré author Liudas Dovydenas depicted workers deep under-

ground after an explosion in his short story *Žmogus ir žiurkės* [*Man and the Rats*], probably based on stories he had heard. In the story, several Lithuanians and an Irishman wait patiently to be rescued, fearing that they might run out of air or be overwhelmed by the slowly rising water (Dovydenas 1989, p. 120-130). These miners are then found and brought out safely, but there had been cases where others died. In time, the adverse working conditions took a toll on the miners' health:

Immigrant men in their fifties started “dying like bees”. Black lung disease was cutting them off one by one. Sometimes several coffins were taken out of the church each day. The sons returned as war veterans. Women, sisters, and wives urged the men to go elsewhere, to look for healthier jobs. Mines began to close or to change the technologies of coal extraction. This left mostly women in the towns. Younger women worked in sewing factories and looked after their mothers. The population declined significantly. For example, in Shenendoah which had 30000 inhabitants in the 1920s, by 1972 there were only 7000 left. The life of the Lithuanian colonies also changed and faded in the cultural and social sense. The second generation of immigrants, renouncing the traditions of their parents, rapidly assimilated (Bradūnaitė-Agliniskienė 1997, p. 64-65).

Author Liudas Dovydenas noticed a similar tendency: in the past Lithuanians used to meet at weddings, but in the 1950s and 1960s, they met more often at funerals. The short story *Tai toks ir gyvenimas žmogaus* [*Such is the Life of a Man*] depicts the funeral of Petras Trakimas who never became rich and always longed for his homeland. Those who gather at his funeral remember not only



Prelatas Juozas Karalius Šv. Jurgio lietuvių kapinėse Šenandoa. |  
Monsignor Juozas Karalius in the St. George Lithuanian cemetery of Shenandoah.  
Fotografavo | Photo by Algimantas Kezys, PAL, p. 17.

the deceased but also their own youth and the paths of their lives (Dovydenas 1989, p. 131–149). The story shows that the Lithuanian community, which had its own church, gathered there for Lithuanian services, had fun in Lithuanian saloons, shopped in Lithuanian stores, and maintained close social ties, was beginning to unravel. Their children no longer tried to meet all their daily and cultural needs among their own but instead sought to integrate into the wider local society by adopting the American way of life.

The songs of Lithuanians in Pennsylvania that Elena Bradūnas recorded in 1972 comprise a small but unique collection that captures the entire repertoire of the immigrants: songs brought from their homeland as well as those written in the new land, reflecting the peculiarities of American life. It was well worth the trip to this Lithuanian settlement as many variants of folk songs, recorded from the first and second-generation immigrants, enriched the overall array of Lithuanian folk songs. Since many of the contributors came from Suvalkija (southwestern Lithuania), their songs added to the coffer of this specific ethnographic region.

The ethnologist recorded only one male immigrant of the first generation, Petras Zataveckas, who had worked as a coal miner. In his youth, he was a good singer, but in his old age he had respiratory problems, and therefore sang only a few songs. Most of the songs were sung by two first-generation immigrant women, coal miners' widows, Pranė Pikūnienė and Anelė Ramylienė, who lived in Shenandoah and were cousins. Both spoke only Lithuanian and never learned English and both were from the Suvalkija region. Pikūnienė (who had a great

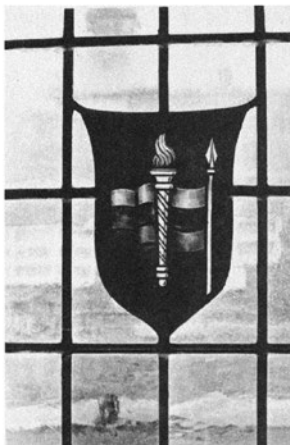
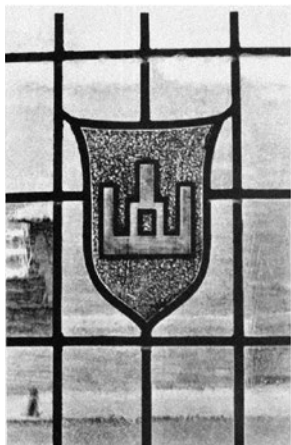
memory and a good voice) usually remembered one or another song and sang the lead, while Ramylienė sang harmony. Sometimes Ona Kalėdienė would join them. They were delightful grannies who often interacted with their relatives and neighbors, and who kept the Lithuanian language and singing tradition alive.

Another immigrant who had not forgotten the songs was Petronė Jurgšenienė, who said that Lithuanian songs are very beautiful and that they are always playing in her head, especially in the evenings, before falling asleep. Elena Bradūnas also visited two women who lived in a home for the elderly. Antanina Kisielienė, a native of Dzūkija (southern Lithuania) sang beautiful old songs and said that songs were her greatest love. Katarina Stankevičienė also joined in, even though she was not in the best of health. Kornelija Kizevičiūtė, a nun who nursed the elderly, also recalled the songs she had learned in her youth.

Eugenijus Kalėda, a member of the younger generation, was an excellent singer. He had a songbook in which he wrote down songs he had heard from his mother, and also beautiful songs that he collected from other sources: various books and Lithuanian records. The participants of the expedition were very pleased to meet him at an outdoor gathering in Shenandoah:

Elena Bradūnas, our fellow traveler who collected folklore, would not leave the side of Eugenijus Kalėda, because she was interested in the rare Lithuanian songs coming from the lips of this Shenandoah man. Having difficulty with walking since his childhood, Eugenijus Kalėda learned hundreds of old songs from his mother, an immigrant from Lithuania, and continued to learn new ones from various songbooks and other sources. While other kids played and fooled around,





Lietuviški simboliai  
Šv. Jurgio bažnyčios  
durų vitražuose  
Šenandoa. |  
Lithuanian  
symbols in stained  
glass doors of St.  
George Church  
in Shenandoah.  
Fotografavo |  
Photo by  
Algimantas Kezys,  
PAL, p. 41.

Eugenijus would sit with his mother and listen to her songs. This treasury of songs remained in his memory. He always starts singing wherever Lithuanian gatherings are held. He speaks Lithuanian eagerly, beautifully, and correctly. He gathers friends around him. He is surprisingly welcoming and warm in his modest house (PAL, p. 55).

This man, who had worked as a tailor, was very passionate about the poetic world of Lithuanian songs and explained that he likes the sorrowful songs about homesickness, love, and separation. The relationships and experiences between people in the songs seemed to mirror his own personal experience. Another second-generation immigrant, Marija Pranskaitytė-Pieri, also appreciated folk songs and cherished Lithuanian culture. She took part in all of the Lithuanian events: she was a teacher of Lithuanian songs and dances, an organizer of Lithuanian gatherings (“picnics”) in the park, a church decorator, and a coordinator of parish activities. All these activities gave her great satisfaction and joy.

In 1972, the participants of the expedition used to inspect the churches in the later-established Lithuanian communities. They would climb up to the organ to see if there were any Lithuanian hymn books, as a way to gauge whether there were still parishioners singing and praying in Lithuanian. However, for E. Bradūnas, the most important thing was how Lithuanian identity was maintained in families, and she later explained that she paid special attention to “the family conversations around the dinner table”. In her opinion, communication in one’s mother tongue creates a warm and close emotional bond among family

members. Sincere, open discussions not only about everyday life but also about education and culture help the children of immigrants to expand their mother tongue vocabulary, which encourages them to better understand and continue the ethnic culture fostered by their parents and the generations before them. Emphasizing the importance of preserving the mother tongue, the ethnologist cites her father, the poet Kazys Bradūnas's saying: "Without language, there is no creativity, without creativity, there is no culture, and without culture, there is no nation" (Bradūnas-Agliniskas 2018, p. 5).

For E. Bradūnas, a second-generation immigrant, Lithuania was also like a fairy-tale country – never actually seen, but known only from her parents' stories and books, from old photographs and folk songs. The Bradūnas family reluctantly left occupied Lithuania in 1944, lived for a while in a war refugee camp in Germany (where Elena was born), and then moved to the USA in 1949. It was only decades later, when Lithuania regained its independence in 1990, that the family returned to their beloved homeland. In the same year, a retrospective collection of poems by the poet Kazys Bradūnas, *Prie vieno stalo* [Together at One Table], was published, to favorable reviews. Soon after that, Elena contacted Lithuania's researchers and gave her manuscript and cassettes recorded in Pennsylvania to the Lithuanian Folklore Archive at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. In 1994, Lithuanian folklorists Kostas Aleksynas and Živilė Ramoškaitė took an interest in this collection and selected a handful of songs from Pennsylvania that appeared in the third volume of *Tautosakos darbai* [Folklore Studies] (TD III (X)).

This publication contains 40 songs and sound recordings from the collection of E. Bradūnas (some songs are the same as those in the 1994 publication, however, others are published for the first time). It supplements the previous publication of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore titled “Lithuanian Folk Songs in America, Recorded by Jonas Balys (1949–1951)”, which also presents folklore that was preserved far from the homeland.<sup>2</sup> Such songs are probably the most interesting for researchers, providing information about the immigrants’ journey to the USA and their efforts to adapt to life there. They are included at the beginning of this publication (No. 3–10). These songs usually express a longing for their homeland and relatives, a desire to contact them and see them. The traditional image of a bird carrying news is common in these songs: a falcon or a pigeon is asked to be a “messenger”, to convey greetings and wishes to loved ones.<sup>3</sup> As E. Bradūnas wrote, “the inability to return, the longing for the homeland, was a source of constant sorrow. That heartache was what kept the songs alive in their minds and hearts” (Bradūnaitė-Agliniskienė 1997, p. 65). Several songs of literary origin were also sung, telling long, dramatic stories. These include a song attributed to the poet Jonas Mykolas Burkus about a young boy’s decision to leave his homeland, a heart-rending farewell to all that

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<sup>2</sup> *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje, įrašytos Jono Balio (1949–1951) / Lithuanian Folksongs in America Recorded by Jonas Balys (1949–1951)*. Compiled by Austė Nakienė and Rūta Žarskienė (booklet + CD). Vilnius, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> For more about these and other motifs of immigrant songs see the article (Nakienė, Žarskienė 2019).

is dear, a long boat journey, the fright of finding oneself in the vastness of the ocean, and, finally, his successful arrival in New York (No. 3). The ballad by Jonas Žilnius is also noteworthy.<sup>4</sup> It is about a coal miner and his wife who wanted to earn money and soon return to their homeland, but unfortunately never did, and after an accident were buried in a foreign land (No. 8). One of the most popular songs was *Leiskit į tėvynę* [Let me go to my homeland], based on the words of the poet Juozas Šnapštys-Margalis (unfortunately, due to its poor quality, the recording of this song could not be included in the CD).

Those who immigrated at the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th centuries to seek a better life did not see themselves as “citizens of the world” and did not live in an “imagined community”. They were people of an earlier era who were very attached to their places of residence in the homeland, to the Lithuanian landscape, as well as to their family members and all their relatives (LE I, p. 462). When they left, many would take a handful of native soil with them, which they kept safe until death, with a request to put it in their coffin at their funeral.<sup>5</sup> Once across the Atlantic, they felt like orphans, having cut all ties. Ac-

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<sup>4</sup> The works of the immigrant priest, poet and public figure are published in: Žilnius Jonas. *Dainų pynės*. Edited by Jonas Šlekys. Vilnius: Vaga, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> “The Lithuanian farmer is so attached to his land which provides for him, that he considers the land to be sacred, prays to it, kisses it, and fights for it because it is his greatest treasure. He has sacrificed his blood and life many times to defend it. When he is torn from his land, he feels like an uprooted tree, which quickly wilts. When emigrating from their country, many bring a bundle of their native soil, which they request to be included in their coffins when they die” (Balys 1966, p. 15).

Lietuvių klubo  
iškaba Pitstono  
miestelyje. |  
Sign of the  
Lithuanian Club  
in Pittston town.  
Fotografavo |  
Photo by  
Algimantas Kezys,  
PAL, p. 259.



cording to the singer E. Kalėda, the song “Motherless from childhood, I’m used to suffering hardships” (No. 25) was often heard among the immigrants, as well as other songs complaining about hard work and poverty (No. 24, 26). These songs came to mind when one wanted to comfort oneself. Singing Lithuanian songs expressing sadness, longing, and other feelings with the words in the mother tongue, traditional poetic devices, and well-known melodies was like music therapy. The mood of soothing, healing singing is also conveyed by one of the more picturesque sayings heard during the expedition:

When the singer started singing a song I knew, I tried to sing along with her, but the old woman said: “No, no, dear daughter, – you’re singing it wrong – too fast. You have to sing it in such a way so that the setting sun would pause and wait for you to finish the song...” (Bradūnaitė-Agliniskienė 2018, p. 4).

These words reflect a common agrarian custom that after a day’s hard work one should relax in silence or with song. By slowing the pace of a song one could better appreciate the lyrics and seemingly stop time, prolong the closure of the day, and feel the human connection to nature.

As can be seen from E. Bradūnas’s collection, the coal miners liked not only sad songs but also happy ones. There are many feast songs sung at various family celebrations, as well as humorous songs making fun of oneself and others (No. 17–21). They were sung when people gathered to ‘have a good time,’ i.e. to sit around a table laden with food and drink, to chat and enjoy themselves. It was often noted that American-Lithuanians were more cheerful than their compa-

triotis back home; they allowed themselves to be easily distracted and did not succumb to gloomy moods. They were also braver, more open, not afraid to say what they think. Listening to the recordings one gets a sense that American-Lithuanians had no qualms about conversing with a song-collecting stranger, or knowing that their songs and conversations were being recorded. The coal miners of Pennsylvania were ordinary people, without a sophisticated artistic taste. They were most fond of entertaining programs featuring famous singers of those times (Mikas Petrauskas, Jonas Būtėnas, etc.), with narrative interludes between songs. Many would buy a gramophone and listen to the voices of their favorite singers on 78 RPM records. By listening to these records, Lithuanian folk songs could be learned not by reading musical notes, but in an old-fashioned way – by ear. In this way, the records certainly helped to preserve the singing tradition for a longer time.<sup>6</sup>

As everywhere and at all times, there were many songs about human relationships and love. Although the singers were already elderly, they all felt young at heart, singing about what moved them most in their youth. One of the songs sung by E. Kalėda is a lyrical romance, which also refers to a phenomenon of

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<sup>6</sup> As Danutė Petrauskaitė writes, “the most accessible means of music education and popularization of Lithuanian authors’ music was through records. [...] Already by 1920, about 200 records were produced in the USA, and from 1920 to 1940 – around 700. Although at that time records were quite expensive, costing 75 cents each, i.e. almost a full day’s wage (the weekly wage of an ordinary worker was 5 dollars), most Lithuanians, especially those who did not know how to read sheet music, who did not participate in musical activities, or even those who were illiterate, bought them” (Petrauskaitė 2009, p.713).



modern times – love that is kindled if the admirer is wealthy, and if he is not able to ‘shower his beloved with gold’, then comes the rapid cooling down and break-up (No. 33). The repertoire of the singer Pranė Pikūnienė was the most varied and rich. She sang a medley of old wedding songs reflecting the traditional image of a girl, but also a feminist song about girls being conscripted into the army (No. 21), which reflects a more modern understanding of gender roles. The singer did not devalue religion and knew old Catholic hymns of the 19th century (No. 40), but she was partly sympathetic to non-believers, explaining her perception of the world as follows:

This is how I understand God – nature, which is all-knowing. Trees, flowers, berries – nobody plants them, God grows them. Everything that is necessary – fire, air – this is our God. My whole life I thank Him for my health, but everything else we do ourselves, He just “helps us out” (PAL, p. 198).

The singer did not lecture that it was “wrong” to think one way or the other, she was clear that people’s views can differ and that there is no need to be angry over it.

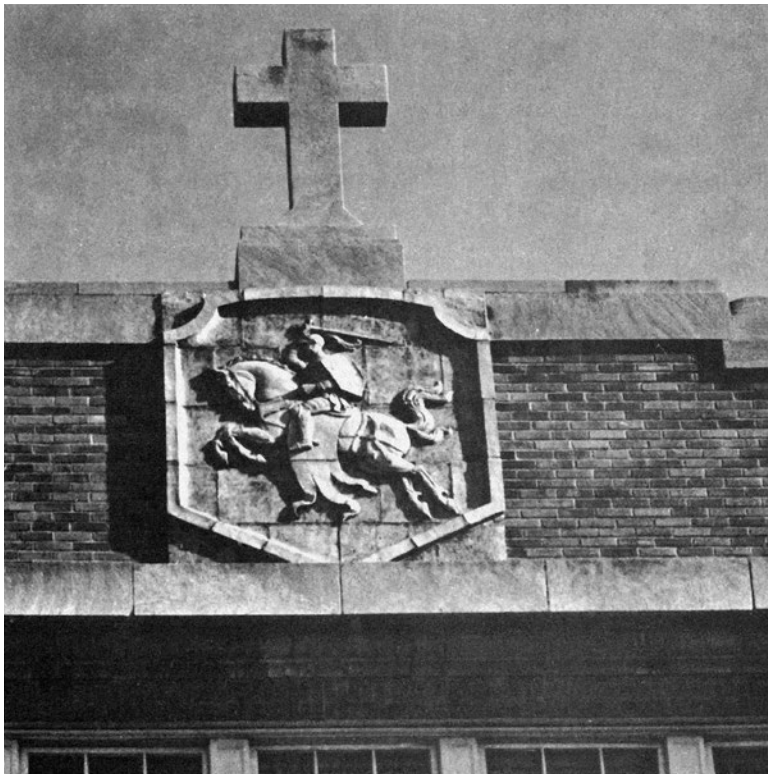
Lithuanians who went to America lived in a free country, they did not have to endure political and ideological oppression, so they were more self-confident, they willingly joined social and cultural associations, and they regularly participated in various activities. Just like the Irish, who celebrated St. Patrick’s Day every year, they began to commemorate St. Casimir, the patron saint of Lithuania, on March 4th. They also held large celebrations on the Feast of

Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption on August 15. They became generous donors, supporting Lithuanian political and social initiatives, various cultural causes (the Lithuanian Association in America collected patriotic pennies and allocated them for book publishing and scholarships (LE I, p. 466)). Many people sent their hard-earned money to their relatives in Lithuania. Particularly many donations were collected in 1914–1918, during the First World War, to support the families of those who died in the war, especially war orphans. The immigrants also supported the struggle for the independence of Lithuania in 1918–1920: “the workers laid hundreds of dollars on the altar of their homeland” (LE I, p. 480). The second and third-generation immigrants were equally active. Although they could hardly speak Lithuanian and communicated better in English,<sup>7</sup> they remained sincerely concerned about Lithuanian affairs, and celebrated Lithuania's Independence Day – February 16th – with joy.

In her articles, E. Bradūnas also described the singing tradition of the later wave of refugees who arrived in the US after World War II. These Lithuanians came from an urban background, often with university degrees. Nevertheless, when they sat down at a table to feast, they also turned to song. However, the Lithuanian songs that united them were already different from those of Pennsylvania coal miners' widows (Bradūnas-Aglinskas, 2006). Seeing the efforts of refugees in the second half of the 20th century to preserve the Lithuanian way of life, the ethnologist once again realized that “identity is not passed on by

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<sup>7</sup> Jeronimas, the son of singer P. Jurgšėnienė, joked: “We know how to speak ‘Oxford’ Lithuanian here” (PAL, p. 204), i.e. a mixture of two languages.



Vytis, puošiantis Maunt Karmelio lietuviškos mokyklos rūmus. |  
Coat of arms adorning the Lithuanian School of Mount Carmel.  
Fotografavo | Photo by Algimantas Kezys, PAL, p. 99.

genes”, but is only preserved if it is consciously nurtured. If Lithuanian books are valued in the parents’ home, traditional festivals are celebrated and national food is prepared, then the children do not forget their origins and do not distance themselves from the Lithuanian community. Jonas Zdanys, a bilingual writer from the USA, said it beautifully: “At one time, we Lithuanian children also wanted to give up everything, to become Americans, to forget our culture, which was more important than bread to our parents. But we remained Lithuanians and did not even change our names” (*Egzodika* 2019, p. 112).

The history of Lithuanian immigrants in the USA, as well as the songs collected by E. Bradūnas, were of interest to the Boston folklore ensemble *Sodauto*, which prepared a concert program *Ten, kur anglių kalnai stėri* [There Where the Coal Mountains Stand] (available on a CD recorded in 2004). In Lithuania, the Vilnius folklore ensemble *Dijūta* cooperates with the ethnologist and organizes programs of immigrant songs. A CD with songs of immigrants recorded by Jonas Balys was published in 2017, and a joint program “Song in the Life and Family of Kazys Bradūnas”, dedicated to the poet’s centenary, was prepared together with E. Bradūnas the same year. Elena’s stories about preserving Lithuanian identity told at concerts, lectures, and meetings, do not leave anyone untouched, because they are not just mere words. Her advice to young people eager to see the world is based on long-term observations of cultural and social life in the diaspora and on her personal experience.