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CHAPTER 7

LITHUANIANS IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA: THE DISSOLUTION OF A COMMUNITY

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If the language, the customs and traditions disappear and religion is ignored completely ... then you have no hope of continuing to be a Lithuanian (Alfonas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

This chapter describes the significance of the cultural identity to the Lithuanians resettled in Western Australia at the end of WWII as part of the United Nations sponsored International Refugee Organization (IRO) programme started in 1947. It provides also a brief history of Lithuanian immigration to Australia, in the previous years. The Lithuanian presence in Australia, as well as that of other ethnic groups over the last half of the twentieth century, has contributed the changing the face of Australian society from being a predominantly Anglo-Saxon mono-cultural outpost of the British Empire to become a more complex multicultural society notably tolerant of cultural difference. Although limited in number, the Lithuanian community in Australia gave to the post-WWII Australian economy and culture a substantial and essential contribution in initiating the path for a prosperous economy and cultural development.

The focus of this chapter is on the post-WWII experience as it relates to those key pre-WWII rural traditions, values and beliefs which I have identified in Chapter 6 as the key characteristics of Lithuanian identity. My goal is to present only those traditions, customs, values and beliefs of which immigrant Lithuanians have spoken during the interviews. Interviews, recollections or comments relating to earlier periods are only included in the narratives when they clarify or extend the core material of this chapter. To this end, I have recorded the memories and views of four key periods: the years before they left Lithuania, the period of diaspora and dislocation, the early years after their re-settlement in Western Australia and, finally, the present situation.

In the first period I examined the lives of the Lithuanians before they fled their homeland. This narrative, however, is used only to support the already extant material mentioned above.

In the second period I explored the lives of the Lithuanians as a people of diaspora as manifest through their dislocating experiences in the foreign lands to which they moved in German and Austrian zones from as early as 1940, fleeing the first Soviet occupation, and then as forced labour or conscripts shifted by the Nazis to their cities, or as Lithuanians fleeing the second Soviet occupation.

In the third period I described the *émigrés* early years after their arrival in Western Australia as Displaced Persons (often referred to simply as 'DPs').

Finally, in the fourth period I considered the *émigrés* more recent experiences as an aging group, whose ties with an absent homeland have been affected by memory, time, distance, the need to adapt to a new environment.

Clearly, it would not have been possible for the *émigrés* in their new land to recreate the totality of their previous linguistic experience, or their formal Lithuanian village and rural life, or to persist unchanged with their farming, education and religious practices as some 'transplanted' form of pre-war Lithuania. However, many did find that they were able to reproduce elements of these in their new environment, particularly at a more local and personal level. Thus, whether in an attempt to preserve their language, family traditions, national and religious celebrations or to form community groups and activities that allowed traditional songs, dances and stories to survive, some continuity with appropriate modification occurred.

This chapter describes in what ways and to what extent this modification has and is still occurring in the lives of the Lithuanian immigrants, acknowledging that some traditions, values, beliefs and customs have been maintained, some are on the verge of being lost and some have inevitably been lost. Furthermore, I have also endeavoured to outline the Australian Migration Policy of 1947 as a response to the IRO programme. For an understanding of that policy, I have examined the work of the Australian analysts Egon Kunz (1988) and have obtained relevant statistical data from the Western Australian National Archives and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1946-1953). For the historical review of the pre-war Lithuanian migration I have examined the works of Birškys, Putninš and Salasoo (1986) and Linas Saldukas (2002). (

Earlier Lithuanian Migration to Australia.

From 1830 to 1915, records about the Lithuanians who left their country in search of freedom and fortune outside the borders of the Lithuanian nation-state and to settle in Australia are scarce and mostly based on incidental sources, newspapers published in Lithuania and the United States, and data obtained by oral history. This data, although fragmented, reveals that a certain numbers of Lithuanians settled in Australia some time before the period of the mass-wave migration of the post-WWII period. None of those earlier émigrés, however, have been included in the interviewed sample of the present research.

Most of the Lithuanians who participated in the uprising of 1830-1831 against the Czarist regime were forced to flee the country. They were interned in East Prussia, and later exiled to America or deported to England and Scotland (Eidintas, 2003, p. 21). From there in 1832 they were shipped to New South Wales in Australia. Much later, in 1888, the American newspaper 'Lithuanian Voice', wrote that, of the Lithuanians who had fled to the United States in the 1830s, a few had later moved to Australia and to New Zealand. However, it is only in 1950 in the Melbourne archives, that evidence of the first Lithuanian immigrant was discovered. In 1836 Antanas Lagogenis had obtained the British citizenship and became the first Lithuanian to be naturalized in Australia. The Australian National Archive's records have shown that a group of Lithuanians was living in poor conditions in New South Wales. They became the object of a plea to the Australian Government by the Polish explorer Strzelecki (second cousin of the Lithuanian Duke Radziwill) in the hope of their repatriation. However, no records have been found which describes these early Lithuanians *arrivees*. It is known, however, that in 1841 the Lithuanian-born Varnas family, (father, mother, son and two daughters) came on the ship *Skjold* among a group of 275 settlers from Prussia and settled in Lobental in South Australia. Once again the records on this family ended here (Birškys, 1986, p. 9).

This pattern of scarce or incomplete records appears to be quite common through those years before the First World War (1914-1918). Lithuanians are mentioned for only a brief period of time, after which they virtually disappeared into the main stream population, often taking anglicized names. For most, encounters with other former

compatriots was often purely by accident. In 1914, Jonas Viedrinaitis, an Australian correspondent based in Sydney for the United States newspaper 'Lithuania', gave an account of one such encounter. He recalled that when visiting the Sydney markets to buy seeding potatoes, the stall-holder, hearing his accent, asked if he was Russian. When he discovered that Viedrinaitis was Lithuanian he said that his name was Jonas Mikevičius and that he was a Lithuanian as well. He had come from England in 1887 with his wife and sons and two other men. These two others soon returned to England, while he and his family decided to remain in Australia. Mikevičius added that Viedrinaitis was the first Lithuanian he had met in twenty-three years of living in Australia. At the time of their encounter, Mikevičius was the oldest known Lithuanian in Australia (Birškys, 1986, pp.10-11).

There are a few other accounts of Lithuanian presence in Australia: the brothers Petras and Vincas Karaitis who arrived in Australia in 1911 from Scotland and settled in Sydney; Daukantas, a man who settled in 1913 in Newcastle after acquiring some land; Paulis in Brisbane; and in Cairns where it was discovered the presence of an old Lithuanian man of 83 years of age who, after having sold his poultry farm, was making baskets for his living (Birškys, 1986, pp.10-11).

The very limited migration from Lithuania to Australia in those earlier years can be attributed to the circumstances of the time which have inhibited the settlement of Lithuanians in Australia. For example, Australia's early aversion to group settlement schemes was a significant factor which restricted Lithuanian immigrants settling in Australia before WWII. Colonial and post-federation state and federal governments of the day were reluctant to allow settlement of migrants of non Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. Australia retained aspirations of ethnic homogeneity, for fear of provoking social unrest and retarding immigrant assimilation.

The time and expense involved in travelling to Australia also made the country a less practical destination for Lithuanian migrants, particularly for sojourners. Sojourner migrants, or 'birds of passage' as they are sometimes called, were usually male migrants who engaged in temporary work campaigns abroad. Sojourners were driven to earn quick money then return 'home' with cash in hand to improve their living conditions and their families' livelihoods. Such seasonal migration allowed people not only to make

money, but also showed them how to migrate to foreign countries, should conditions in their homelands ever become untenable politically or economically. As Algirdas recounted:

My parents migrated to America around 1905-1910, with other young men which were keen to leave the country to avoid the military service in the Russian Army which lasted 25 years. My father bribed some officials and he was declared unfitted for the military service. Reports were coming from America that life there was better and full of opportunities so the relatives encouraged my father to go there. It was rather simple, they sent a pre-paid passage by ship it was called ship card. Corruption was ripe everywhere at that time, so it was not difficult to bribe border guards and usually in a small group of four or seven people at night time cross the border and make the way to the port and to embark on the ship, while on the other side in America relatives were waiting (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2006).

However, the back and forth movement characteristic of sojourner migration would have been difficult for early Lithuanian migrants to Australia. The sea voyage to Australia was long, arduous and more expensive than a journey into neighbouring Europe, or across the Atlantic Ocean to North America. Economic considerations compounded the geographic and transport problems that limited early Lithuanian migration to Australia. Colonial and post-federation Australia did not offer migrant sojourners as wide a variety of employment as did the European or North American labour markets of the day. At the time of its federation in 1901, Australia was still a country very much dependent on primary resources for its wealth. While labour was required for agricultural production and mining, early Lithuanian migrants in Australia did not find the same range of work opportunities as were available in Europe and North America. A further factor impeding Lithuanian sojourner migration was the introduction of legislation which prohibited foreign contract labour. The federal Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, one of the most important pieces of legislation introduced in the newly federated Australia nation, not only hindered non Europeans from entering Australia, but prevented the landing in Australia of persons who had obtained a work contract from a labour agent... As a result the labour agent (who was often also the agents for the shipping lines), so influential figure in the early migration pattern to North America, was not as important in the early migration to Australia (Eidintas, 2003, p. 55).

Although the number of Lithuanians who migrated to Australia prior to WWII remained relatively small, their records are more easily traced than those of some other early

settlers, mainly because some of the Lithuanians were still alive at the time of the new post-war migration and could pass their stories on to the newly arrived. Moreover, Australia was now a nation that had begun some years earlier to collect census data. This helped in recovering information about Lithuanians then living in Australia.

According to the 1933 Australian Census, which shows the birth place of Australian residents, 234 people gave their birthplace as Lithuania. Of these, approximately 70-75% had come to Australia during the Czarist period, while only 150 people had migrated from Lithuania after independence in search for a 'better life' and for a spirit of adventure.

In 1933 the gender composition of the 234 Lithuanians immigrants included 154 males and 80 females. This imbalance was even more extreme among the seventy Lithuanians still alive at the time and who had come to Australia before 1918, the ratio in that group being three males to one female (Birškys, Putnins, Salasoo, 1986, pp.13-14).

The 1933 census data also revealed a strong pattern of family life emerging, across the nation with a majority of the adult population being married people and with children, particularly in New South Wales where approximately 60% of the Lithuanians at the time were settled. Many Lithuanians living in Australia became naturalized even though this meant taking British nationality, not Australian. In 1933, of the 234 Lithuanian-born immigrants, 115 had been naturalized. The other 119 were not yet naturalized as they were among the more recent arrivals: sixty-four had arrived since 1928; and thirty-two from 1923 to 1928. Of those Lithuanians who had been living in Australia for more than ten years, only twenty-three had not been naturalized by 1933 (Birškys, Putnins, Salasoo, 1986, pp.13-14).

On October 27, 1929, Lithuanians Jasiumas and Dapkus established in Sydney the Australian Lithuanian Society '*Draugija*' which by 1933 was fully operational. All who considered themselves Lithuanians and who wanted to maintain closer relationships amongst each other and to continue to cultivate national spirit and Lithuanian culture joined this newly created society (Saldukas, 2000, p.138). Social activities were held regularly by the society. A choir was organized to perform regular concerts intended to keep alive the ancient *dainos* and Lithuanian folk songs, and a Lithuanian dancing group performed traditional folk dances. Later, a library was also established featuring books

and periodicals coming directly from Lithuania and the Lithuanian community in the United States.

The society was well organized and active, and brought together the Lithuanians who had migrated to Australia and settled in New South Wales. Lithuanians established themselves with their family in the new country, although the growing pressure of war time suspended the activity of the '*Draugija*', Lithuanians continued to maintain contact, supported each other, and strove to sustain a loyalty towards their homeland, its language and culture.

Voluntary Emigration and Refugee Status: Definitions

In contrast to the voluntary emigration which occurs when economic hardship induces immigrants to move in pursuit of the dream of a 'better life' for themselves and for their family, refugee emigration is created by political and war events. While the socio-economic composition of voluntary immigrants is relatively homogeneous, refugees often leave their homelands as members of diverse social strata, often very different in character, background, politics and religious faith. Moreover, the distinctive political character within each group frequently tends to unite people within sub-groups of similar educational, social or religious background. Few refugee populations thus, are fully homogeneous.

Initially, refugees flee to a country which they perceive to be the first and most-readily-available safe refuge, and not necessarily where they would most prefer to live on a continuing basis. After a relatively short period this country, according to Egon F. Kunz, often becomes for them only "a geographical, spiritual and temporal midway to nowhere" (Kunz, 1988, p. 23). From there for circumstances which affect the refugee's daily life, (as such restriction of personal freedom, on their employment and often by fear of political unrest and retaliation), forces them to move again and to accept offers of permanent settlement elsewhere. This characteristic pattern of refugee movement is in contrast with the pattern typical of voluntary migration which usually has its origins in a deliberate and planned search for a better economic outcome. Refugees, who move again, do so to find themselves a place away from their country of initial asylum in which they have become no longer wanted or are no longer able to live.

Thus, to understand the voluntary immigration pattern, it is necessary to recognise the economic circumstances of the immigrants of the country of origin and also the economic needs of the country of admission. To understand refugee immigrations, one needs to comprehend the political and military events of the period in question; to identify the relevant facts and creating forces, to assess the consequences of these, and then to examine the selective effects of the situation in the country of asylum and the admission criteria applied (Kunz, 1988, pp. 23-24).

In the case of the refugees or Displaced Person of WWII and for the Lithuanians in particular, re-settlements schemes, forced transfers, detention, expulsions and discriminatory policies affected the refugees already shaped by the application of Australia's selection criteria applied to groups admitted into the country.

The Australian IRO Mass Scheme (Displaced Person Scheme)

We Australians are a young a virile people and our national heart beats strongly, but the body, of which that heart is a motivating force, is a huge land mass, an island continent of some three million square miles with 12,000 miles of coastline. Before a body of such vast dimensions can be operated at full efficiency, its heart must beat strongly and be fed by the extra life-blood which only new citizens can supply (National Archives of Australia (NAA), 1946).

The First Australian Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell's dream of increasing the population of the nation, better able to defend its coastline and prosper economically, eventually came to fruition. In the five decades following WWII, Australia's population increased from 7.5 million in 1947 to 20,387,900 in 2004 (Commonwealth Bureau of Statistic Census of Australia, 2005). This increase was due in large part to immigration, with over four million immigrants settling in Australia since 1945.

There were three main reasons why Australian politicians and bureaucrats accepted large numbers of immigrants in the post-WWII period: to defend the country from any future foreign aggression or communist expansion; to provide labour to spur economic growth; and, finally, to uphold the new racial, social and political integrity of Australia. In addition, there was also the humanitarian element in the acceptance of thousands of war

refugees who could not or would not want to return to their homes in countries occupied by the Soviet Union.

Initially, defence matters outweighed all other considerations in the formulation of the immigration policy. Australia had been faced with the direct threat of a possible Japanese invasion during WWII while Australian soldiers were fighting in Europe. Throughout the course of war, Japanese planes and submarines made numerous reconnaissance trips to Australian cities and launched air raids on Darwin in February 1942. Japanese aggression subsided after the Battle of the Midway forced the tide of war in the Pacific to turn against the Japanese.

Arthur Calwell warned, in a landmark speech to the house of Representatives in August 1945 that Australia must either “populate or perish”, he made it clear that defence was to be an important motivation in post-war immigration planning. In his second ministerial statement Calwell stated:

The call to all Australians is to realize that without adequate numbers this wide brown land may not be held in another clash of arms, and to give their maximum assistance to every effort to expand its economy and assimilate more and more people who will come from overseas to link their fate with our destiny (Kunz, 1988, p. 13).

In order to achieve and maintain a larger population, better prepared to fend off any further aggressors, Calwell proposed a 2% per annum population growth rate. He suggested that half of the increase should come from births while the remainder of the quota was to be met by the immigration of 70,000 people each year. Calwell supported the Government’s immigration policy based on the principle that migrants from the United Kingdom should be given every encouragement and assistance (Kunz, 1988, p. 7). Aside from questions of defence, economic factors also influenced the Australian Government to endorse large-scale immigration to Australia in the post-WWII period. A fall in the Australian birth rate during the years of the Great Depression translated into a labour shortage that plagued industry in the immediate years after the war.

When immigration planning began in 1945 no consideration was initially given to war refugees as potential immigrants. The lack of information about the situation in Europe misled the Australians into identifying European refugees with the extermination camp

survivors, who they believed to be unfit, mentally unstable and unsuitable for Australia's economic and social development. Consequently, Australia avoided Germany and its refugee camps as a possible source of immigrants. When Australia became a signatory to the constitution of the IRO on May 13, 1947, the Australian Prime Minister J.B. Chifley made clear that Australian involvement with the IRO in dealing with the thousands of refugees and displaced persons, "[would be] ... primarily to return them to their homes" (Kunz, 1988, p. 18). By November 1945 there were strong doubts that there would be a sufficient number of British applicants (as England also needed to be re-built) or adequate transport to bring them to Australia.

On June 27, 1947, Arthur Calwell was informed by the British Government that Displaced Persons were available for re-settlement in Australia, and that their shipping would be provided by the IRO. It was agreed that Australia would take an initial quota of 4,000 Displaced Persons in the remaining months of 1947, which would be followed by 12,000 Displaced Persons per year in the following years. This programme, however, did not begin effectively until 1948. Due to the difficult shipping situation, priority was given to the repatriation of Australian servicemen. By that time Calwell, was convinced that a marked recruitment of British immigrants was impossible to achieve, therefore favoured an increase of the non-British element in the intake of immigrants brought to Australia. He believed in its beneficial effects for the country. Indeed, during 1948 the arrival of Displaced Persons fell under the desire target. In following years more than 70,000 Displaced Persons were recruited and transported to Australia (Kunz, 1988. pp. 17-19).

Lithuanians were part of that exodus of war-ravaged survivors. They were seen as necessary for the building of a successful post-war economy and a secure 'Europeanised' nation in a part of the world where Asian people and interests continued to be viewed with alarm and suspicion.

The first IRO vessel carrying Displaced Persons to Australia under the 'Mass Scheme' was the *General Heintzelman* which arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia on November 28, 1947 with 840 passengers, of which 440 were Lithuanians. Their destination was not Fremantle but the Commonwealth-operated Bonegilla Camp in Victoria (Kunz, 1988, pp. 39-42). The numbers which comprised the Lithuanian

diaspora in Australia from 1947 to 1953 were only 9,906 (Kunz, 1988, p. 43). Those registered in the 1953 Australian Census as having been born in Lithuania and then resident in Western Australia numbered only 583. Of these 360 were males and 223 females, including 130 children. Of these, sixty-three were boys and sixty-seven girls (Commonwealth Bureau of Statistic Census of Australia 1954). Among Lithuanian arrivals, 435 were Roman Catholics, seventy-nine Lutherans and the remaining belonged to minor religious denominations (Commonwealth Bureau of Statistic Census of Australia 1954).

In the first three intakes of Lithuanian arrivals from February 12 to March 19, 1949 priority was given to single men and women as per job requirements. It was only from May 21, 1949 to March 5, 1950 that families were admitted to Australia (Birškys, 1986, p. 19). The very smallness of this group presented its own challenge to the ability to find their place in a new environment, while at the same time preserving what they could of their traditions and the life values of their former homeland.

The Built Environment: Communities and Changes

The sense of cultural estrangement and alienation in a new country, (See maps in Appendix 11) of and for which the Lithuanians had had no real knowledge or preparation, is described in the words of Adolfas who remembered his transfer to the reception centre at the Perth suburb of Graylands after his arrival at Western Australia's port city of Fremantle in 1949: "When we arrived in Fremantle they put us on buses and we travelled through Fremantle. I was so surprised ... very funny houses, the chimneys were very high and were like pots ... so poor houses, so poor streets" (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2003).

The Graylands centre was fitted out as a reception facility for Displaced Persons and designed as a temporary accommodation for both single people and married couples with children. Families were accommodated in individual barracks which had to be shared with other families, while single people lived in separate primitive quarters as Adolfas remembered:

We were living in barracks, with no doors or windows ... with flies, they were very dirty, smelling ... we started to clean them immediately ... I

thought when I saw them ... my God where I am ... I wanted to return immediately back to Europe and I thought ... if the sea could open I would walk back to Europe ... I was really upset ... I did not expect a place like this ... in Germany the camp was very good and clean ... We became all sick with skin and eyes infection ... the place was terrible (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2003).

These comments reflected the initial negative impact of Australia, a sentiment echoed by all the other participants to the study throughout the interviews.

As new arrivals in an English speaking nation, the Lithuanians had to negotiate the difficulty of operating on a daily basis in a foreign language, a situation which was eased by their prior experience of living in the refugees' camps where different languages were in use. According to Birutė the language barrier in Western Australia existed only among elderly members of the family, mainly the grandparents.

I didn't find the knowledge of English a big problem as we studied it already in Germany when we were in the camp. People older than me studied English in the high school back home. My father and my mother spoke English, only my grandmother couldn't but we translated for her. We spoke with an accent, of course but we could understand everything quite well (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Despite this assurance, the reception camps in Western Australia used German as the language of major communication during orientation and re-settlement periods. Adolfas maintained that:

The Australian administration of the camp had decided to adopt the German language which most of the Displaced Persons were familiar with after living for at least five years in Germany. During this period Lithuanians attended orientation lectures and survival level teaching in the English language. The camp instructions were given in German language through a Displaced Person selected among the arrivals (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Lithuanians who by and large had always placed importance on the maintenance of their cultural heritage through language, folklore and community recreational activities, once in Graylands started to form a community as most of them knew each other from their time in Germany, or they met on the voyage from Europe to Australia. For a short period in 1949 a dancing folk group was organised. Aldona remembered the first time that the Lithuanians danced in Western Australia soon after their arrival: "The dancing group was only formed by two couples and it was invited to perform Lithuanian folk dances to

St. Joachim School in Victoria Park ... they wore the Lithuanian national costume” (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2003).

When the number of Displaced Persons started to increase, other reception centres were organized at Dunreath Hostel (between Red Hill, a former air force camp not far from the Perth Domestic Airport and the nearby Perth suburb of Belmont), in rural Northam (some 60 miles from Perth), in Cunderdin (a further 30 miles beyond Northam), and at other minor centres. All the Lithuanian émigrés described these reception centres as being far from a suitable place to live in.

Once in Western Australia, most males were sent to work in saw-mills in the forests of the State’s south west, in the cement factories in Rivervale (a suburb of Perth), in the asbestos mine in the remote Wittenoom Gorge, in the wheat-belt, and in other remote areas for the maintenance of railway lines and pipelines (Birškys, Putninš, and Salasoo, 1986, p. 21). Algirdas who arrived in Perth in 1948, during an interview recounted his arrival and allocation of a job:

We arrived before midday in Fremantle, by busses they took us to Grayland we had lunch they show us the barracks. ... During the next few days with other Lithuanians that I met on the ship we formed a group of ten and in a week they sent us to Merredin to work for the maintenance of the water pipeline to Kalgoorlie (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2003).

Single and married women without young children were sent to work as domestics and laundry hands in hospitals, as cook or cleaners in hostels, private homes and most of them remained in the city area. Birutė, a high school student who was fifteen years old in 1948, with feelings of sadness recollected her first job in Perth. “I was a cook hand in a University Hostel kitchen, It was very hard and very hot ... I was young working from 5.00 am. to 2.00 pm. every day of the week, I had to do a lot of washing and cleaning” (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Private accommodation in Perth at this time was scarce. There were no houses available to rent, mainly only rooms or garages. For married couples with children it was particularly difficult to find accommodation. Most landlords were disinclined to allow children. One respondent described the situation as ‘terrible and hopeless’ (Vygantas,

Interview Transcript 2, Perth, 2003). Adolfas had vivid memories of his desperate search for lodging.

My wife and I we found a room in West Perth in a house of Macedonians ... we had to put my wife's two children in St. Joseph's Convent ... after that my daughter was born ... they [the Macedonians] told me to go, they didn't want children. I had to look for a new accommodation and it was very hard ... there were no houses, Perth was very small ... people were making a lot of money. They charge you for the key, you get the house now, and if somebody gave more money, tomorrow you had to go out. It was what we call speculation and I was looking everywhere ... I was working in the hills and I saw a little cottage it was rundown nobody lived there. ... Someone told me that the owner was living not far from there in a little village. I went to see him and I asked if I could rent it, he gave it to me ... I was so happy now I could have all the family together ... I went there with my wife, my daughter, and I went to pick up the other two children ... the cottage was dirty and need some work but for us at least was a proper house (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

In contrary Alfonsas remembered being surprised that after only few months he could find a room.

My wife and I we could not find any accommodation, she had to sleep at the hospital where she was working and I slept at the Catholic School ... I was a gardener there ... finally after not even two months of searching we found a room at the back of an old house. ... We were happy and we stayed there for a year ... we had a child and they [landowners] allowed us to stay ... they were very good ... they were old and they did not have any children ... but others were terrible ... they did not want children (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Due to the shortage of accommodation in Perth, the State Government sent most of the immigrant families to Northam, which soon became a family camp. Women with young children remained in the camp, while the men were sent to work at considerable distances for weeks at a time.

The difficulty of adapting to a completely new physical, economic and social environment, to the hard working conditions and to the shortage of accommodation undermined the stability of the immigrant families, leading to tension, depression, feelings of alienation and in some cases to divorce and separation. Eglė recalled those days with feelings of anxiety and sadness.

When we came to Australia they sent us to Northam. My husband went to work far away in two years I did not see him very much, my little girl did not recognized him ... he was a good man but we started to have a lot of problems

... then he left me ... I was left alone with my daughter ... she was only four years old (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Ona, one of her closest friends who at that time was 28-year-old, added:

I came to Perth with my husband and two children ... my husband left me, he went away to the Eastern States ... he did not contact me ... then I started to look for a good man ... happy to look after my two children ... I was lucky I found one (Ona, *Interview Transcript 1*, Perth, 2003).

Experiences such as these marked the first years in Western Australia for many of the Lithuanians as they struggled to adapt to their new homeland.

All the Displaced Persons within the work age limit had to remain in employment found for them by the Commonwealth for a period of two years from the date of their arrival. At the end of this period the Displaced Persons were granted indefinite residence in Australia. When their two-year work contracts expired and in some cases even before they expired, Lithuanian families started to move out of the camps and search for an affordable house or a block of land to purchase. It was not uncommon in that period for most of the émigrés to work two or more jobs in order to build sufficient savings for housing loan deposit. At first, the majority of the Lithuanians rented a room, lived for a time in a tent or in a garage, or else shared accommodation with relatives or friends, before being able to build a house. This was Aldona's case.

My husband worked five days on the railway and another two days on a farm ... to save the money to come here [to Perth] and buy a block and built a house ... I worked in a pub as well ... a Lithuanian friend was looking after my two children. I was so happy when we bought the land ... it doesn't matter how small ... it wasn't like living in a tent. ... We lived in a garage at the friend's house until we had the money to build our own house, I had two children they were happy to have their own bedroom (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Similar accounts from other participants emphasized the hardship many Lithuanians faced, and the determination they required in re-establishing themselves and their families. This was, according to Audronė, reflected in all aspects of lifestyle, traditions and language and above all in the difficulties experienced in purchasing their first house.

In 1950 we were able to buy a house in Victoria Park [a suburb of Perth], it was on stilts, it was built in 1914, it was a weather-board house ... on top of the hill and we overlooked Perth, Kings Park, and South Perth. ... We had a magnificent view. It was a medinukas (wooden house), my husband worked very hard to fix it up. It was small only two rooms, a kitchen and a big bathroom and a laundry, but

that was just about the right size ... we didn't have children. We lived there for 18 years, then we had to move because we became too old to look after the house, [and] my mother [who] was still living with us wanted to move close to my brother ... to see the grandchildren more often ... we sold the house and came to live in this one it was too big for three people, but [it had] a beautiful big garden ... we spent lot of time in the garden (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The pre-war rural Lithuanian population lived largely in farmsteads built of timber or bricks, according to the different terrain of the Lithuanian regions and to the wealth of the farmers. Those Lithuanians who moved to the urban areas during the years of Independence lived in dwellings which varied in size and location and typically featured a balcony in lieu of a garden, as Audronė described.

We lived in Kaunas in an apartment not far from the centre and we did not have a garden but we had balconies with lots of flowers, my mother loved her balconies, especially in summer there were a lot of flowers (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In Western Australia, the houses in which the émigrés lived were mainly of brick with a tiled roof in contrast to wooden structures in rural Lithuania and were designed in harmony with the Australian landscape and weather conditions. Built on single residential blocks, each house had sufficient space for a garden. In the early years the émigrés required accommodation that was easy to maintain. In most cases, both husband and wife were in the workforce; the time for maintaining the house, garden and looking after the family was limited; and duties were shared by all the members of the family. The contents of the houses were reduced to essentials, as the émigrés typically had in those days only limited money at their disposal, as Aldona confirmed.

My husband and I we worked hard and we were saving a lot to pay off the mortgage of the house ... we bought only the essential ... and a sort of cooler ... we bought it straight away ... it was too hot you could not possibly keep anything ... my husband built all the cupboards, the table for the garden and lots of other piece of furniture for the children ... and also [a] few toys for the boys (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In keeping with the rural Lithuanian traditions of wood carving and needle work, the household furniture was home-built, styled and constructed mostly by the Lithuanian men and decorated with needle work done by the women. Aldona went on to say:

You see this tablecloth I made it I embroidered with my mother, she did a lot of cushions for the chairs and bed and also tea towels and we did a lot of needlework together. I always liked it ... my mother she was very good ... she

taught it also to my daughter and she is also very good she did lots of embroideries when she was a young girl on her clothes ... she loved it (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The household garden in the early 1950s was considered an important addition to the house, as it has been in the pre-war Lithuanian culture. Despite having come originally from families with a rural background, most of the Lithuanian émigrés in Western Australia were educated. They had lived in large cities or country towns during the period of Lithuanian independence and before leaving the country. Typically they worked in academic and government jobs or were pursuing military careers at the time they fled Lithuania. It is possible therefore those farm-related activities were unfamiliar to them. However, these activities reminded them their rural background and their homeland. The garden predominantly served an aesthetic and social purpose rather than a productive one. However, most of the émigré families cultivated small patches of strawberries, maintaining the Lithuanian tradition of being great consumers of berries as noted in Chapter 6. Ona, who lived in a house with a large backyard claimed:

I have always had strawberries in my garden, we used to eat them fresh, my mother used to preserve them, make jam and syrup ... but we did not have enough and we used to go to the market gardeners and buy them ... later we used to go and pick them directly from the market gardeners (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Even today, the aging female émigrés talk about their gardens, their home-made strawberry jam and syrup, their rose bushes and *rūta* (rue) shrubs - the national Lithuanian flower whose presence still symbolizes an unbroken bond with the former homeland. Birutė, describing her passion for gardening recounted:

I always spent a lot of time in the garden, I like my rose bushes and all my pot plants ... I used to do a lot of gardening back home when I was a girl. Then I went to study in Vilnius and I didn't do anymore ... I was study nursing ... I was at the hospital and I used to go home on the farm just for holidays. At the beginning when we came here we were always working ... my husband is an engineer I was working in an hospital I was a nurse, but when we had time we liked to stay in the garden and look after our flowers ... and play with our children (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Of significance are the *inkilai* (birds' nesting boxes) which are still found in most of the émigrés' gardens today. They are placed on trees mainly at the back of their gardens to encourage birds to nest in proximity of the house. As it had been the custom in the former homeland. This significant relationship with nature and its creatures maintained

for the most part by the aging émigrés, attests to the continuing strong influence of nature in their life. Indeed, one of my elderly male respondents asked to finish the interview quite early in the process so that he could go into the garden to feed the waiting crows and magpies. Asked why, Algirdas explained:

I go and feed the birds ... always at this time they are waiting for me ... I always fed the birds back home and I do here. The crows come at five ... for dinner. I go out with some pieces of meat and I feed them ... It is good luck to have birds around your house (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The structure and organization of the built environment of these first generation Lithuanian émigrés reveals how most families strived to maintain traditions, beliefs and values which for them were key characteristics of their rural original culture they hoped to preserve. In doing this they unconsciously believed to preserve their national identity in an alien country and culture. Nevertheless, it is evident that the influence of the dominant culture and the necessity for adaptation to the new environment and life-style created powerful forces for accommodation to the new, and thus retention of many of the preferred 'old ways' was possible only to a degree.

The New Australian-Lithuanian Family: The Role of the Grandparents

The immediate and extended families of most of the Lithuanian émigré community in Western Australia typically were small. Most were limited to an average of two or three children, as the lifestyle, work commitments and financial hardship in the first years of their re-settlement in Western Australia, according to Aldona, precluded the larger sized families that had been the familiar pattern during the pre-war period.

We could not afford more than two children it was too expensive if you want them to go to a proper school and we did not have time. ... My husband and I were both working as we wanted to buy a roof over our heads ... few of us also married late (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 5*, Perth, 2003).

The relatively small size of the extended family at the time of their arrival in Western Australia was the result of the difficulties faced by the Lithuanians when the time came to flee their homeland. Suitable means of transport for the elderly, the very young and the frail was not easily available. Moreover, most of the elderly members of the extended family at the time had not wanted to leave their country and home, their

relatives and friends, and their life's memories. Algirdas who had come originally from the Lithuanian city of Kaunas as a 30-year-old single man recorded:

I left by boat with a friend, this was the only way. ... The Russians had already surrounded part of the city. ... The only escape route was the river ... my family couldn't ... they didn't have transport ... some people were lucky they had horses and carts ... others trucks. I was the only one in my family to escape, my two brothers and my sister they were too young ... my mother wouldn't let them go. ... She could have let my sister come with me she was ten, but she was a girl ... and my mother did not want. She was very strong on this ... I never returned to Lithuania and I have never seen them anymore ... all of them is dead now (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Such breaking up of the family unit in this way depended on the circumstances and profile of the family at the time. Some clearly managed to keep the whole of their family and some of their friendship groups together. Ona, who fled Lithuania with her entire family, recounted during an interview how her father helped a friend's family to flee with them.

We left by truck ... my father had a business and he had a truck. We took another man and his family with us, he worked with my father, they didn't have transport ... their truck was broken. ... When we were leaving we saw this family in this truck that was broken ... they could not live ... my father felt pity for them and he took him and his family with us ... we then became good friends for many years, we are still friends, we were in the camps together ... all my family left, five of us my two brothers, my father, my mother and myself ... we came all to Western Australia (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

For those émigrés who had also been able to bring their parents, the parents played an important role in the new homes, minding the next generation of grandchildren. Typically both the young parents were working and so were unable to look after their children during the day. Alfonsas recollected with a sense of gratitude the help that her mother in law gave to them for many years.

When my wife went to work [my wife's mother] stayed at home with the children ... she helped us [with] cooking, looking after our two children [and] minding the house. She was still young but not young enough to go out and work, she helped us a lot, she used to do everything ... we were very lucky (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

In the new Australian Lithuanian family, working-age members of the family were in employment and their roles within the family were no longer as well defined as they had been in the traditional pre-war Lithuanian culture. Of necessity, their roles had adapted to the new circumstances and lifestyle. The man was still considered to be the head of

the family and the provider, but now the position of the women had changed. The woman was expected to work outside the family for financial reasons, while being expected also to fulfil her traditional role of wife and mother. However, most of the husbands evidently began to share part of the family duties when the wives were working, an arrangement more common in families without the presence of grandparents. The role of the grandparents in the maintenance of the Lithuanian language, traditions and customs within the family as well as in the community was vital. Although limited in number among those granted Displaced Persons status and hence passage to Western Australia in the early 1950s, all of the participants claimed that the grandparents could still conduct their traditional lives within a certain degree of adaptation. For the Lithuanians who had to enter directly into the mainstream of Australian community life the adaptation required was immediate. Aldona maintained:

My husband and I we had to go to work ... we spoke English every day, and we tried to become more familiar with the Australian's way of doing things ... I didn't like but I didn't have any chance, at least when I was at work ... at home was a different story (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

After their initial adaptation to the new climate and available foods, most of the émigré families were able to maintain their traditional eating habits. Grandparents, in particular, helped in the preservation of the rural cooking traditions, as the majority of the respondents reported. Aldona stated that:

At the beginning was hard as we all lived in the bush where we were working ... the food was terrible ... we had a lot of meat and potatoes and carrots and peas, and pumpkin ... but after when we returned to Perth we could have everything that we wanted ... there was plenty food ... and we did a lot of cooking. In my family we followed the old Lithuanian cooking traditions because my mother was alive and lived with us ... she was preparing everything ... my husband and me we were working. ... My mother used to cook kugelis, cepelinas ... when she died I tried to cook like her, but it was impossible (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Food was always abundant and affordable and all the émigrés maintained that they could prepare their traditional dishes, albeit with variation where some traditional ingredients were unavailable. Families could prepare the traditional soups of rye, barley, and beetroot, potato, cabbage salads, pancakes and their usual meat dishes, although now with beef more than pork. In the 1950s and 1960s the Australian diet was based mainly on beef and mutton rather than pork. Audronė recollects the parties that all the participants used to organise to keep in contact.

We always had big parties with plenty food ... I used to cook Lithuanian dishes with potatoes and sausages as my mother used to do back home ... but sometime it was hard to find what you needed ... in Australia you couldn't find a lot of pork meat, only beef ... we were used to eat mainly pork back home ... I cooked a lot of cabbage salads ... everyone liked it ... I still do it now, but I missed the mushroom ... in Lithuania there are so many varieties of them, and I miss also the dark bread. Here in Australia they make the dark bread but it is different, [and they] do not have the same water that we have in Lithuania and the same rye (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

The soils and weather conditions in and around Perth limited the growing of berries and mushrooms, two staples in the rural Lithuanian diet. The émigrés had to adjust to the local conditions and started to cultivate their own strawberries and purchase mushrooms when and where they were available. Ona remembered that:

At the beginning there were not berries here but later you could buy them frozen ... and for the mushroom you had to buy only one or two different kinds but you can still cooked them in the Lithuanian style, in the way that my mother did back home ... I did and I still do for special occasion but now I have became lazy and also my husband cannot eat anymore fatty foods that we used to eat when we were younger ... now I am old and I prefer to eat simple food (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Without exception all the participants in the study claimed that the old eating habits had been still maintained and is still followed among the original émigrés. However, they added that some émigrés have evidently changed their former eating habits for a variety of reasons, including their failing health, the fact that they now live alone or because preparing traditional rural Lithuanian food takes time and energy they no longer have or wish to devote.

Tea, coffee, and milk were on the table with meals daily. Most émigrés agreed that they were able to purchase beer and alcoholic spirits quite readily in Australia. Algirdas explained that the consumption of alcohol among the émigré Lithuanians had become too high and further explained.

The Australians drink a lot and the Lithuanians drink too much and everything, but not so much wine ... we drink a lot of beer and brandy, cognac and vodka ... it is not good but it is a fact ... especially during parties and for celebrate special occasions ... I know some Lithuanians that drunk so much that [they] became alcoholics ... in Lithuania we used to drink, but not much because it was expensive and the farmer had to work everyday also during the weekend he had to look after the animals (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The traditional values attached to family and education that had helped nurture Lithuanian personal and social identity in the period before and during independence can be seen to have given way over time as the émigré Lithuanian families turned their attention, out of necessity, to the more pressing and immediately attainable goals of secure work, accommodation and transport. For many these goals included the best education they could provide for their children as a means of attaining for themselves and their children a secure place in the new society. Indeed, what the Lithuanian émigrés have been able to succeed in is evidenced by the high number of Lithuanians who have attained professional positions, considering the size of the Lithuanian community in Perth. Birutė recorded: “We worked hard ... we wanted to give to our children a proper education and a better life ...better than ours. ... We saved money to send my son to the university ... he is now a lecturer at Sydney University” (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003). While Alfonsas with pride added: “My son is a doctor and my daughter is a lawyer and most of my friends have children that are professionals all of them studied at university” (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Statements such as these were common in most of the interviews and are reflective of attitudes already well established by the time of the diaspora. In the years following independence, for instance, education had assumed special importance for rural Lithuanians. It was considered the only means available to their offspring to ensure a new social status in Independent Lithuania. In Australia the émigrés had to face a similar situation. Regardless of their original status prior to their experience of diaspora, a status which for most had been relatively high because of years of studying and working, the majority were again plunged into situations of deprivation and poverty. Most started their lives in Western Australia at the bottom of the economic and social ladders, renting the cheapest rooms and working long hours in difficult and heavy jobs. Such hardships that often go hand in hand with entrenched lower status were exactly what they most wished to avoid for their children. Thus, they inculcated in them a strong sense of value in education as a secure pathway to success in the professions.

Social Life and Hospitality

One of the most difficult experiences reported by the Lithuanian émigrés was the loss of friends and the close relationships they had enjoyed in their homeland. During their first years in Western Australia, many felt homesick, the intensity of which depended often on marital status, and whether they arrived alone or with their family. This loss gave rise to feelings of hostility towards the host country, and to feelings of marginalisation. The extent of such negative response differed according to age, gender, education, socio-economic and marital status, religion and the ability to speak English. This conforms to research carried out by scholars such as Portes and Rumbant on American immigration. In their work *Immigrant America: a Portrait*, they claim, for instance, that in the absence of the support of a family, single people suffer more stress and the new immigrants realised this (Portes and Rumbant, 1990, p. 154).

In their new unfamiliar environment and community, life was different from the one that they had experienced in Lithuania. They had inhabited a familiar and known community and environment with a common language, traditions and shared values, which sustained them throughout their lives. In the attempts to establish their old culture in the new environment and driven by feelings of comradeship which had been nurtured by shared adversity, the war time, the permanence in the Displaced Person camps, the journey to Australia and the time of the labour contract, Lithuanians émigrés who were able to purchase houses in the early 1950s opened them as a meeting place where the Lithuanian culture, language and values could be maintained. The home then came to represent a safe shelter, a place where the émigrés could, without fear or restraint, express their feelings of anxiety and doubt about their future in a country, that most of them considered at best indifferent and at worst hostile. Algirdas conveyed his feelings of despair in these words:

I didn't like to live in Australia, I hate it, but I could not go back ... I did not have the money and I had to work for two years ... I could say this only to other Lithuanians ... all of us were complained about the weather, the jobs ... the Australians did not like us (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Such feelings shared by most of the original émigrés, suggested a widespread and prevalent pessimism about Australia and their likely place in it and an obvious frustration in the face of the difficulties they were experiencing as newly arrived

displaced persons. Their social life in Perth was built around the family and Lithuanian friends met during the permanence in the DPs' camps in Germany or in Western Australia, as it used to be in their homeland. During the early years after arrival, social gatherings were organized regularly, either formally to celebrate family and religious events, or simply spontaneously. Ona remembered one of these meetings at her father's house in North Perth.

My father was the first person to pen his house to everyone ... we had always someone at home ... it was never too late or too early ... there were meetings, dancing practices ... all the time ... and parties. He wanted to keep the Lithuanians together (Ona, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

In the recollection of Vygantas:

We just got together and enjoyed ourselves ... to maintain contact with relatives and Lithuanian friends who were living in the metropolitan or suburban's areas ... it was difficult to see them, especially because we did not have a car at the beginning (Vygantas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

At that time after their arrival most Lithuanian émigrés had insufficient time to make friends outside their own ethnic group. The language for some and the different culture were an obstacle for most. Their social events were held indoors in winter and typically held in the garden in summer. Outdoor parties, however, were not common at first, as the early émigrés were not familiar with the Australian climate and took time to adapt to the new environmental conditions. Ona remembered: "In the beginning I did not like to spend time in the garden ... it was hot, there were flies everywhere, we were not used to them ... we could not even open our mouth ... we had to cover the food" (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

During these early parties, hospitality traditions prevailed. Algirdas recalled that food and beverage was abundant and shared with the guests and friends.

We had always great parties, with lots of food and drinks, we sang, I playing the accordion and we were dancing. ... We were drinking a lot ... spirits ... there were some Lithuanians ... who made their own beer and alcohol, we could not afford it at that time it was too expensive ... we always had a great time ... we also made a lot of jokes (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

He continues to explain the practice of home brewing of beer that was a common feature in the rural culture.

We continued to make our beer until 2004 when the last émigrés who were able to produce it in the traditional way, were deceased, many families were able to make also degtinė [Lithuanian vodka] and brandy (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript, 3*, Perth, 2005).

Home brewing had persisted all those years mainly because the cost of commercial beers and spirits was considered to be too high, much as it had been for them in the pre-war years. Eglė remembered that during these parties Lithuanian émigrés danced and sang old Lithuanian folk songs and partisans' songs, the latter a vivid reminder of their country and the fights for freedom: "We were singing always patriotic songs because we could not possibly forget our country ... simply we could not ... we always became sad ... very sad ... Lithuania was not a free country" (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Weekend and holiday picnics at King's Park, high above the Swan River in central Perth, were mentioned as popular outings by most of the émigrés. This was another attempt to reproduce the familiar culture in the new homeland. They were organized frequently and attendance was high. Most of the émigrés remembered these events fondly, showing photos of participating members of the family and deceased friends or friends who had left Perth for the Eastern States, or for the United States of America. Adolfas remembered one of his friends with feelings of regret: "I had a friend that after few years in Perth went to United States ... his mother and sisters were both living there. They were lucky ... but my friend and his family had to come to Australia at first" (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

For the infirm, elderly or those who did not have their own transport, a bus was often hired to make their participation possible and to encourage their attendance. Ona explained that the last Lithuanian priest had also been able to organize a number of extended excursions, all of which were well attended.

When Father ... took us [to the South of the State] it was a three days trip. We went to Pemberton. We were tired because we were old but I enjoyed it very much ... my husband too ... on the bus we sang, [and] Father ... played the accordion ... he [has] left now and nothing has been done anymore ... nobody wants to organize anything ... we are too old (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Dancing was another traditional entertainment and it was continued from the time Lithuanians first arrived in Perth. The venue was usually a hired hall in West Leederville. Ona maintained that attendance on those evenings was high, especially among the young single people, many of whom were evidently looking for a companion within their own ethnic group, with whom settle down and raise a family.

There were a lot of single men, and couples ... we were all happy ... we danced, talked, met with other Lithuanians that came for the first time. ... You didn't even have to pay much; just few "bobs" to pay the rent for the night ... we had a good time ... I went all the time ... I was married. ... My husband and I we liked to meet the other Lithuanians. We did not have many other occasions, we were just working all the time, and I had already had my first child (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Such events were an important part of their social experience in the early years of their settlement in Perth. Audronė, who at the time was 21 years of age, recalled that during the weekends or evenings many of the adults enjoyed playing *sachmatas* (chess) and *proferansas, romi* and *vežimas* (card games), all of which were traditional Lithuanian table games. "All of us know how to play cards and chess ... we used to play cards on Friday or Saturday night in turn at the house of different families ... we always had a very good time" (Audrone, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Clubs and Organizations

One preoccupation for the gradually increasing number of Lithuanians settling in Perth was the felt need for the establishment of a formal community organization. As the composition of those gatherings at the meetings and in individual houses began to change over time, social divisions and a growing sense of unease based on social, educational and economic differences and backgrounds became apparent. The original composition of the group of Lithuanian émigrés had never been homogeneous from the time of their arrival. Most of them had come from urban centres and had professional, religious and military training. It was this group of people who were the main target of the Soviets, as they were seen as a political and social challenge to the New Order, and it was these who chose to flee the country.

During the interviews I increasingly heard remarks about the so-labelled 'snobbish' behaviour of some émigrés who had become very wealthy and about some of the better

educated Lithuanians who, it was claimed, had a tendency to socialize among themselves. Adolfas remembered: “They [the Lithuanians] started to split in groups, and they ignored you, they didn’t want you ... It was terrible” (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Most of these early privately organized functions were usually limited only to the immediate friends of the host family, a tendency towards increasing exclusivity and social stratification that many saw as an emerging threat to the survival of the community as an integrated and integrating entity. The concern was sufficiently widespread that a *Lietuvių Bendruomene* (Lithuanian Community) was established in 1952 with a president, a vice president, a treasurer and a co-ordinating committee that assisted in the organization of activities attended by virtually all of the Lithuanians who were living in the metropolitan area at the time. The Lithuanian Community in Western Australia was founded in accordance to the instructions of the *Pasauliu Lietuvių Bendruomene* (Lithuanian World Community) established in 1949 in Germany by the *Vyriausiasis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komiteta* or VLIK (Supreme Committee for Liberation of Lithuania). The Liberation Committee was based in Germany. It delivered the Lithuanian Charter in 1943 and the Constitution of the Lithuanian World Community. Both documents pledge to support and unite all Lithuanians outside Lithuania’s border and to promote and maintain Lithuanian culture and language (Eidintas, 2003, pp.195-196). The establishment of a Lithuanian community in Perth was a successful event. The émigrés now felt bound to strongly each other. As Eglė claimed:

At that time all of us were working from the heart. We did things to keep the community together, even if we had financially to pay personally or work hard after our working day ... I cooked a lot and sew a lot, all this after that my children went to bed (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

This view was re-iterated frequently by other original émigrés as they recalled both the informal private gatherings and the organised programmes and events that had developed firstly in private homes and later in more public venues. In time, as the community became more settled, a sporting club, a folk dancing group, a choir, and boy-scout and girl-guide organizations were established, with the common purpose of bringing together the young and the elderly in an attempt to preserve their original Lithuanian traditions culture and values in an alien land.

In 1965 the first Lithuanian sport club *Neris* was organized in Perth, focusing on basketball, the Lithuanian national sport played by the younger male émigrés. A few years later, in 1980, the club was renamed *Tauras*, now also offering golf for the older émigré generation. Training sessions and competitions for both sports were held regularly. Alfonsas stated that: “The team competed in the State’s public competition at the Perry Lakes’ basketball stadium and golf at the Lake Course in Jandakot” (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003). These games were well supported by the Lithuanian community who used them to display their national emblems and express their identity. Birutė added that most of the women spectators wore the national costume and the men carried either the flag of Independent Lithuania or the individual banners of their favoured team.

We were a lot ... we had banners and the flag [Lithuanian] some women even wore the national costume and we really supported our players ... the children also wore the national costumes it was really good (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

By participating in these ways, the émigrés were seeking to convey to the wider audience their sense of national identity as a proud minority within, and as a participating group of, the dominant culture. Attendance at the public competition events was high, especially among the youngest, and lasted for many years. However, as the competitors started to have their own families, as work took on heavier commitments, and as they became more integrated into the wider community, many drifted away from *Tauras* and joined other local clubs or took up other sports not sponsored by *Tauras*. Birutė further explained: “Our boys started to do other sports ... one of my younger sons preferred to do sailing because he loves the sea and he become a member of a sailing club” (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Similar comments from other interviewees suggest clearly the progressive shifting of the new Australian-born Lithuanian generation towards cultural integration. Although *Tauras* is still functioning, only golf continues as a sponsored sport. The older émigrés are encouraged to play in different golf clubs in the Perth area. Ona explained that on Anzac Day: “A golf tournament for the Lithuanian community is traditionally held, and a party at the Lithuanian Community House on the following Sunday after the church service or at the house of one of the players” (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

However, Ona concluded that numbers are decreasing because of death and old age and golf appears to be a fading involvement for most of these now aging original émigrés.

At the beginning we were many. We had a male and a female group and we played separately. We used to play at the Golf Club in City Beach ... we were about twenty women ... but now we are sometimes four if we are lucky. They are all sick, old, some of them died or their husbands are sick and they cannot be left alone for half a day ... everything is finishing (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

These early Lithuanian families had organised a folk dancing group in another attempt to preserve and continue among the younger members their rural folk dancing traditions. Support for folk dancing continued for many years as a core social and community activity for the émigrés. In 1961 a formal dancing group consisting of children aged between twelve and thirteen years was formed under the tutelage of an experienced community elder who was familiar with the folk dancing and singing traditions. Weekly meetings and rehearsals were held at private homes, in the gardens, where the group learnt their first steps of the traditional Lithuanian folk dances, accompanied most of the time by music of the accordion. Ona recounted that:

Every Sunday the children were taken at some different [Lithuanian] houses to practice. At the beginning it was difficult as there was no music ... but then we found Mr ... who played for us the accordion ... it was just perfect (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Formal performances which most of the émigrés attended in support of the group were held regularly in city or suburban halls hired for the occasions. The dancers wore the national costumes which varied in patterns and colours according to the regions of their ancestors' as did most of the Lithuanian spectators and supporters. The first national costumes outside Lithuania were initially made in the German camps and were kept by many of the original émigrés and taken with them when they moved later to Australia. Birutė explained that:

In Germany the costumes were initially made with simple calico material on which were painted the characteristic patterns of the different Lithuanian regions. Later they were woven by Lithuanian women in different camps. I still have mine (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

However, in Western Australia from as early as 1950, most of the Lithuanians émigrés were able to purchase their national costumes from specialist suppliers in Canada.

Although expensive, many were bought, because there had never been any woven in Perth. Birutė continued to explain:

In Perth nobody made the national costumes we could not find what we needed we were also young, some elderly member of the community started to embroidery ... we all know how to make it but you need time and we had to go work (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2006).

Aldona maintained that availability of the national costume clearly helped to rekindle and nurture feelings of pride and national identity, and gave valuable continuity to the culture and consolidation of bonds with the lost homeland.

In those days it was beautiful ... we had a big dancing group and almost everyone was wearing the national costume also the children ... I used to teach and dance a lot and my daughter as well ... we had big performances in different clubs ... folk dancing groups from Eastern States used to come here in Perth to perform ... they were larger groups because they had more Lithuanians over there, but it was good ... I have a lot of photos (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Most informers were noticeably proud of what they had been able to achieve through the consistent encouragement of folk dancing, noting that the younger dancers showed no concern at practising in public even though Lithuanian traditions were alien to most of the dominant culture. Nonetheless, when the children later started to merge into the mainstream of the dominant culture, they tended not to want any longer to participate in the group, presumably wishing not to draw attention to their differences. Ona, a mother of three observed:

When the children started to have non Lithuanian friends, they forgot everything. They did not want to do anything that was Lithuanian anymore. ... They felt ashamed to be different from their friends. ... They wanted to be Australians ... they started to speak like them, eat like them (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The dancing group, which lasted until early 1980s, eventually disbanded and is no longer a feature of community life for any of the Western Australian Lithuanians, old or young.

During one interview, I became aware of the existence of a Lithuanian women's choir that had been organized in 1979 but which had lasted only few years. The choir members were Lithuanian female émigrés familiar with the Lithuanian *dainos* (songs). Ramunė explained that they used to sing in duets and in groups at the Lithuanian

Community House during the Sunday community gatherings. Although it was evidently very satisfying for its singers and popular for a time among the older members of the community, it evidently never became a vehicle for involvement of the younger generations. “We were only few women, but we enjoyed the singing. ... Some could not sing but they tried. ... The younger [ones] could not join in; they did not know enough the language” (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003). Again, the choir was an attempt by the émigrés to maintain, for the younger members, their old folk song tradition.

In 1983 a building was finally purchased in Mill Point Road (South Perth) by the Lithuanian community to establish a *Bendruomenes Namai* (Lithuanian Community House). See Appendix 13 Photographs. It soon became the centre for all community activities. Once a month, after Sunday Mass, the community would hold formal functions at the House to benefit the Lithuanians of Catholic and Lutheran religious backgrounds. Spouses who had different ethnic backgrounds could also join with the Lithuanian community in the House activities, for the commemoration and celebration of National days and important historical events, as well as traditional Lithuanian religious festivities and social events such as Names’ days, birthdays, weddings and *šermenys* (funeral wake).

The Community House, until recently, was a place where people could eat traditional Lithuanian food, cooked and presented in the traditional Lithuanian ways by the older female émigrés. Ramunė remembered:

We used to prepare traditional Lithuanian meals for more than one hundred people ... I cooked potatoes and cabbage salads, all the time with meatloaf, and cakes ... everyone was helping and cooking, cakes were always donated ... they were good Lithuanian cakes (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The émigrés and their families on these occasions could sing and dance traditional Lithuanian folk songs and wear their national costumes. These songs and dances also served to nurture feelings of ‘Lithuanian-ness’ in both participants and spectators. Attendance at the functions was generally high, and typically included the Lithuanian Catholic priest who attended as an integral and vital member of the community.

Australian political and religious authorities were also invited to take part in celebrations of Lithuanian National days and their participation presumably reinforced, among the émigrés, the feeling of belonging to the Australian community. Alfonsas explained that: “During these functions, the émigrés took the opportunity to remind the audience through official speeches that Lithuania was then still an unwilling member of the Soviet Union” (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In keeping with this belief, Lithuanian representatives have also performed at political events such as at the annual Captive Nations Week observances. The attendance at these events was constantly high with active participation by all members of the community at least until the middle to late 1990s, by which time the aging members of the community, already reduced in numbers, became increasingly unable to attend community gatherings, and it was evident that the Australian-born Lithuanian generation had started to grow distant from their original kinship. Balys concluded:

If we are lucky now only thirty or forty people are coming regularly at the Lithuanian Community House ... the others are dead or they don't come anymore ... they are sick or they do not drive anymore. ... The younger don't come, they are Australians they don't know the language and we are too old for them (Balys, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

The Lithuanian Language: the Fight for its Survival

I am realistic about [the] Lithuanian language. My children are living in this country in which they are going to stay. They have their jobs here. Their children and they will be living here for the rest of their life ... so there is no need for me to worry about the language of my ancestors (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Speaking of the desire among the Lithuanian community to keep alive their native tongue in the new land, Alfonsas observed that:

Especially lucky were the children that lived with their grandparents ... they had to speak [to them] only Lithuanian ... most of the grandparents couldn't speak any other language than Lithuanian ... my mother lived with us, she didn't know how to speak any other language but Lithuanian ... so my two children had to speak only Lithuanian with her ... she spent most of the time with them (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Although most of the Lithuanian children in the early years of settlement, and in the early stages of their lives, were exposed at home to the Lithuanian language on a daily basis,

once they began attending the local Australian schools they naturally started to speak English. For many of the adult immigrants, this marked the point at which they first perceived that the language of their country, one of the key markers of their national identity, was under threat. Ramunė recalled:

My children spoke Lithuanian until they went to school, then they learnt English. They had English friends and they didn't want to speak Lithuanian anymore with us, I was upset but I couldn't do anything ... at the beginning I pretended that I did not understand English and I did not speak with them in English ... but then I gave up otherwise they could not speak with me ... neither in Lithuanian nor English. ... It was hard and also for my husband, but he did not see the children as often as I did. ... It was a struggle (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Comments such as this, echoed by the majority of the émigrés, expressed the common view that the language was fading away. Younger parents among the group eventually became objects of criticism from the older members of the community because of their inability or unwillingness to preserve the Lithuanian mother tongue as a valued priority in the family. Ona, an 82-year-old mother of two, in similar vein recalled:

The old members of the Lithuanian community didn't have any clue of what was going on in my family ... it was easier when the grandparents lived together. My children didn't want to speak with me anymore in Lithuanian. ... They only wanted to speak English and they started to speak only between themselves. ... If I didn't speak English I was left out. ... One day I said to them that I could not speak English and I did not understand it ... my daughter said "come on mum I heard you to speak English with the neighbours ... you can speak and understand it do the same with us (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Alfonas, father of two, remembered:

Children that did not speak English at school ... [They] were bullied by their school mates, and therefore they [the parents] allowed and encouraged the use of the English language all the time ... the children also were expecting the parents to speak English as they did not want their family to be different from the others ... I remember ... when my boy went to school and there was a parents' night and we had to go to the school, my son asked us ... please don't speak Lithuanian there, speak English, so that we can be like everybody else ... so my wife and me we did, but we were very unhappy ... we did just for the children. We did not have any choice. When a young child, your son, puts on you such demand, we had to do it ... and also other Lithuanian that I know they did it as well (Alfonas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Thus, when the parents started to speak English to their children at home, they did so for the most part out of the belief that their children would be disadvantaged in a monolingual society. However, most respondents were aware at the same time that this inevitably

contributed directly to the progressive undermining of the future of the Lithuanian language. Some respondents observed that the erosion of the Lithuanian language had started even earlier, when they were still in Germany during 1944, and indeed earlier still among those who had left Lithuania in 1941. For this latter group, who had settled in Germany for eight or nine years before being able to emigrate to Australia, both their own language and the language of their children had already been corrupted by the German language. Algirdas, who was nine years old when his family left Lithuania for Germany in 1941, admitted:

I could [still] speak Lithuania but I [soon became] more fluent in German as I attended school there ... and my youngest brothers, they didn't speak Lithuanian well at all. [For most of the young Lithuanians] the Lithuanian language was already mixed when we were in Germany. ... It was half Lithuanian and half German (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In 1969, almost twenty years after the arrival of the first Lithuanian Displaced Persons in Western Australia, a Sunday school in which the Lithuanian language was taught was organised in Perth by the émigrés. The school lasted until 1972, when it had to close because enrolments had fallen below the level required for the approval of government funding support. Parents who had supported the Sunday school clearly resented the Australian Government's decision to withdraw funding. Alfonsas recollected with bitterness:

The group was too small, and too expensive ... it wouldn't have been that expensive, because the government spent money in lot of unnecessary activities. The maintenance of the Lithuanian language was better when they were in the German DP camps, where the schools taught the subject in the Lithuanian language. ... Here [in Western Australia] nothing has ever been done to preserve minority languages ... to keep the Lithuanian language alive ... in Perth, it is impossible ... the Lithuanian community in Perth is very small ... in the Eastern States where they have weekend schools ... where they teach to the children ... to write, read and speak ... and the number of Lithuanian families is bigger ... they can better foster the Lithuanian language among the children (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In all these ways and with the passage of time, all respondents have reported that the language slowly and inexorably started to disappear. Today the Lithuanian language is still spoken among the most senior citizens in the Lithuanian community, but for most of their children who can still speak and understand some words of this language; it remains essentially just a memory of their early childhood. Many of my respondents reported that their Australian-born grandchildren, although aware that their grandparents

sometimes spoke a language different from English, seldom showed any interest in the language of their ancestors or a desire to learn it. Ramunė reported:

When my grandchildren came to visit me and my husband, they enjoy the food that I prepare and they like pancakes very much ... but when they heard my husband and me speak Lithuanian they ask me to speak English ... they know only one or two words, sudieu [goodbye] and ačiu [thank you] ... that's all, but we are happy the same ... at least we can hear some Lithuanian words (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Although there are more grandparents in the Lithuanian community today than there were in the early 1950s, Alfonsas declared with some bitterness:

The language cannot be maintained among the grandchildren as their parents' generation, some of whom were born in Australia, put aside the language of their ancestors to become part of the new Australian society. ... Our children didn't want to speak Lithuanian because the Australians did not like it. ... In this country you had to speak only English. ... Now it is different; everybody can speak what they like. ... But in the past it was different. ... If you go to the shopping centres here, not far from us, they speak all languages – you can hear them: Italian, Chinese, and Greek all languages. ... But for us now it is too late (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

It is evident that some of the first-generation offspring of the original Displaced Persons married members of other ethnic origins and that this contributed to a further break away from the language. Ona stated:

My daughter married an English man, and my two boys married an Italian and an Australian girl. ... They can speak only English with them and with the children. ... When they came here for Kucios we all speak English. ... We cannot possibly speak another language. ... My five grandchildren they speak only English, the only Lithuanian word that they know is 'ačiu' [thank you] (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

In the attempt to maintain the Lithuanian language among the younger generation, in 1975 the first edition of the Lithuanian-language newsletter *Žinutė* (the news) was published in Perth (see Appendix 12 Newspaper and Newsletters) through the inspiration of the late Mr Victoras Skrolys (Interview, Perth, 2003). It was a monthly edition and soon became the voice of the Lithuanian Community, which believed that producing and showing the news in their own language and to do with matters of particular interest to the Lithuanian people, would provide an important extra focus for community life. *Žinutė* continued to be published and distributed until 1999, when the aging Lithuanian Community was unable to continue to support this evidently very significant initiative. Algirdas stated that the initiative had lasted for 23 years,

although its readership had declined as the group capable of reading in Lithuanian diminished.

Our president, who was in charge of the newsletter for many years, he is too old now ... he has no more energy ... and also there are not many Lithuanians left in the community who can read it (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

For many years, this monthly publication, supported financially by members of the Lithuanian community, had clearly given to the original émigrés a sense of pride and national identity. It was distributed in the first week of each month and by 1982 had attained a distribution of 120 copies (Steckis, 1984, p. 352). It consisted of four pages and covered events of Lithuanian historical and political past. In addition, the publication provided information about social gatherings and religious celebrations of the Lithuanian community in Western Australia and articles about family and religious customs and traditions of Lithuanian culture. Although *Žinutė* was only a newsletter, Algirdas claimed that throughout its stories, photos, and advertisements, it did succeed for a significant time in maintaining an unbroken link between the past and the present for the émigrés in Western Australia.

I always read *Žinutė*, since its start. It was good to know what was happening in the community and also to know something about your country. When I left Lithuania I was too young I didn't know a lot about Lithuania ... it is a pity that now we don't have it anymore (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

In 1976, one year after he had established the community newsletter, Victor Skrolys went on to establish a Lithuanian-language radio programme, with the help of a group of young Lithuanian students. Initially, the programme was broadcast for 30 minutes, once a week on Tuesday evenings. It was later moved to Sunday afternoons at 5.00 pm. As with the newsletter, this second initiative was aimed at maintaining the language, the culture and folk music, as an enduring bond with the homeland.

Originally developed for transmission in the Lithuanian language, the radio programme was broadcast from 1995 both in Lithuanian and in English, as increasing numbers of listeners among the children and grandchildren who wanted to listen to the programme were unable to understand the Lithuanian language sufficiently. As such, the programme was adapted to the changing needs of the community and was still in operation in 2007 and continued to be supported financially by its listeners. Unlike *Žinutė*, the now

discontinued community newsletter, the radio programme was not dependent on its audience having a working knowledge of the written Lithuanian language.

In 1985 to further promote the maintenance of the Lithuanian language and culture a circulation library was established at the Lithuanian Community House. The books, mainly in the Lithuanian language, were donated by émigrés who had brought them from Germany when they first migrated. This free service was aimed at maintaining knowledge of the Lithuanian culture, history, politics and language among those members of the community who had not had direct personal exposure to the traditional Lithuanian culture. The library was open to the public on Sundays during the regular monthly functions at the Community House. The service was still operating in 2007 although, according to the respondents, only few people were by then borrowing the books. Vygas, the original organizer of the library, acknowledged:

The younger do not have a sufficient knowledge of the language ... they can only say few words, they cannot read ... and they are not interested to learn about a country who does not appeal to them ... we are old and we know about our country (Vygas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Again, concern about the seemingly relentless erosion of the Lithuanian culture and language was expressed in this statement and echoed by those of others.

The Influence of the Catholic Church in the Life of the *Emigrés*

It was the church that keep us together we were living everywhere but most of us found the way at least twice a month to go to the church on Sunday (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The Catholic Church was traditionally a major unifying force in Catholic immigrant communities. It succeeded in the early 1950s in bringing and holding together the new Lithuanian community in Western Australia. It negotiated the psychological, social and economic difficulties which all new immigrant groups experienced. For isolated and minority immigrant groups, the Church was a unifying point of security and identity, a link between their past and their present. This was especially so for the intensely Catholic Lithuanians.

Although the seven Catholic Lithuanian priests who had arrived in Australia in the early 1950s had been posted to the Eastern States, where Lithuanian communities were larger than that in Western Australia, the Catholic practices and the community offered by the local Catholic Church in Western Australia were of major significance in maintaining the émigrés' sense of identity and helping them to negotiate a new and strange culture (Birškys, et al., 1986, p. 24).

The first Sunday Mass celebrated specifically for the Lithuanian émigrés was held in Perth on February 16, 1950, at St. Patrick's Church in West Perth (now demolished). It was celebrated in Latin by an Irish priest. Services led by Irish priests for the Lithuanians, although not held every Sunday because of the limited number of priests available, were attended by the great majority of émigrés and their offspring living in the central and outer suburban areas of Perth. For most of them, the Church was perceived as the traditional focus of cultural and social activity as well as the centre of their religious life and thus a valuable link to their pre-war rural Catholic upbringing and tradition. Attendance at the Sunday service was considered essential for the maintenance of their religious practices and beliefs. For most, their religious commitment was an integral part of their daily and community life, both for spiritual nourishment and as a key way to strengthen the feeling of national identity. Regular church attendance was almost the only available organised opportunity to socialize and to keep in contact with other members of the community. The number of people attending Church increased when the period of the initial work contract expired and increasing numbers of migrant families returned to Perth. Ramunė described Sunday Mass from her memories:

It was a beautiful day, all of us were there ... with our families, grandparents and children ... it was just beautiful. ... The church was full of people, the children, the grandparents, the parents, all well dress and happy to be there ... we sang our religious songs and that lifted our hearts, everybody was there (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

This description is echoed in other interviews signifying again the evident desire among these uprooted immigrants to keep alive where possible their former ties between religious and family traditions. Over time, the English-speaking priests were progressively replaced by Lithuanian priests. Moreover, in 1959 the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth assigned St. Francis's Church in Windsor Street, East Perth, to the Lithuanian community. It remains to this day officially the current Lithuanian Church,

although the migrant chaplain priest is no longer a Lithuanian. See Appendix 13 Photographs. From 1962 and up to the time when the last Lithuanian priest left in 1999, regular services and important Church and family liturgical celebrations such as christenings, weddings and funerals were held in the Lithuanian language, a concession that had been approved officially by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) when the mother tongues in most countries replaced the traditional Latin of the Catholic Mass.

The majority of the respondents maintained that most Lithuanian children in the early days attended Church with their families and participated actively in the celebrations.

Eglė described one Sunday mass at the Lithuanian church.

The boys came regularly to the church, with their family ... the parents were holding their little hands, ... and some of them were altar boys, they helped with the Mass ... it was just beautiful. They sang and recited the prayers in Lithuanian ... they were very nice ... we had a beautiful family ... three boys, father, mother and grandmother. They all came every Sunday to the church. All well dressed, clean, very nice ... they were Lithuanians, truly, truly Lithuanians. The boys were all altar boys. They pray, they sang (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Continuing the religious celebration of Lithuanian National holidays, according to their specific traditions, these Lithuanians émigrés underlined further their distinct national heritage, their sense of belonging to a particular community and the expression of patriotic sentiments. Vygantas recounted:

We used to celebrate our national days, and the priest was with us, among us ... he was like one of us ... he was very good ... during the Captive Nations' Week the priest during the sermon supported us. ... and came with us at Kings' Park to march. We had flags ... we were many, and the women were wearing the national costume (Vygantas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2004).

The clergy became an important reference point and locus of engagement for the Lithuanian community, providing spiritual leadership as well as participating in the social life of the community. From the interview accounts, it is clear that the majority of Lithuanian migrants in the first decades of their settlement in Perth preferred to turn to their Church and their priests for advice and advocacy rather than to unfamiliar Australian Government Departments. As Audronė recollected:

When my brother died in Fremantle ... he was crossing the road and a car run over him ... all the family was very upset and my mother wanted me to go to the priest and ask him to help us with the papers for the police report and with the Department of Social Welfare ... we didn't know what to do, he was the only

man in the family, he had a young Latvian wife and two children ... my father was dead and I wasn't married yet ... he spoke English and for us it was more difficult ... we were all women ... he helped us and it makes my mother happy because she did not speak English very well (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Indeed priests in the pre-WWII rural Lithuanian culture were accepted and looked up to as highly educated and especially knowledgeable members of the community and were the spiritual and social leaders of the congregation. Alfonsas explained the priest's position in the rural community in these words:

I remember from my early days that the highest honour [for a family] was if a son was sent to a seminary and became a priest. The family was regarded as being high up. At that time the priest had a very high standing in the community ... families that had a son that was a priest were honoured and received a lot of gifts from the village community. ... Priests for us were like saints. Every body just respected them, nobody contradicted them [the priests] ... what did they say was correct all the time ... nobody dare to say something against them ... they lived in the village and they helped the people ... they were not perfect because they are human being, but they were all right for us they were for all the people not only for the rich like some of them do now (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The Catholic Church then was able to provide a point of unity and sense of continuing national identity for the émigrés while they sought to establish themselves during their early years in Western Australia. However, its influence in this regard lessened in later years after it had become apparent that the hoped-for possibility of a return to a free, Western-aligned Lithuania would not be achievable for most Lithuanians in Western Australia and many began to act instead in ways which would ensure a successful assimilation into the mainstream Australian culture. Such adjustment, however, was seldom without emotional pain. The feelings of anxiety and regret felt by many are expressed in the words of Eglė who declared: "For the next five years we all hoped that ... we would go back to our country ... we all hoped. Then five years passed and nothing happened. There was no hope then, no hope to go back" (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

At this point, it had become clear that out of necessity their long-term future would be in Australia. Most Lithuanians began the process consciously and deliberately of merging themselves and their families into the mainstream Australian life and started to attain achievements consistent with mainstream Australian values. As with all migrant

communities, so it was with the Lithuanians who came to Perth. Emotionally, socially and financially, some émigrés achieved more than others, the more successful and integrated families becoming gradually and progressively less emotionally dependent upon earlier deep and sustaining minority group involvement. As more and more families and their children found their way independently in the mainstream community, the initial strong homogeneity and intense interdependency of the group which had been determined by common social and political circumstances only lasted for the early period of re-settlement. Eglè, as did most of the other participants, discovered with sadness that:

After five years everybody started to look [at] things in a different way ... I am in a higher position, my husband earns more money than yours ... I have a bigger wage, I have now a very good job, I have a bigger car ... you have always the same dress ... and you were excluded if you did not have money. ... There was a nice lady that she was very religious and she used to come to the church with her daughter, but she was poor because the husband died in an accident. ... She could not afford every Sunday a new dress as many women did ... and one day Mrs ... said to her to buy now a new dress, she did not say anything but the daughter say to the mother go to another church ... and we never saw them anymore (Eglè, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

All of the *émigrés* expressed the same view in various ways, illustrating the gradual and inevitable erosion of social cohesion among the émigrés' community as a whole.

From 1950 to 1955 most of the families in the Lithuanian community in Perth had achieved the degree of financial security and economic well-being represented by the purchase of a house and car. It was common for most working Lithuanians to have more than one job, or to be working overtime, in order to meet their expanding financial commitments. Even in these still early stages of their settlement in Australia the necessity was to establish themselves and their families economically in a new country. Often this meant undertaking work shunned by other Australians, which in turn clearly inhibited their ability to continue attending mass on a regular basis and to maintain the same intensity of contact with other members of the Lithuanian community. For most Lithuanians, therefore, regular religious attendance gradually and inevitably became of secondary importance as their main efforts were directed towards establishing themselves in the new country. In the recollection of Aldona:

My husband and I we were both working ... we had to build a house. We had very little time to go to the church, we used to live far from the church ... we still tried to go once a month and bring the children. ... My husband had two jobs ... on Sunday he used to work I couldn't go to the church with two small children

by myself ... sometimes I was working also on Sunday in a hotel and my husband had to look after our two children, we did not live close to the church we were in Midland (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

On the other hand, Alfonsas stated a somewhat contrary view, with some bitterness:

It is not the time to think about culture and social, if your conditions force you to look after work, and money ... to get money to feed the family and to send the children to school. ... My wife and I we worked hard to buy the house but to give also a future to our two children ... my daughter is a lawyer and my son is an engineer, they have a good position as well my grandchildren ... we made sacrifices but they are all right and we now have what we need ... but we always find the way to go to the church (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The drift away from the church, and consequently from the community, was even more evident for those families and extended families in which the original émigrés had entered into mixed marriages. As Ona stated:

Lithuanians are almost all Catholics ... but when the men married a woman of different nationalities they went ... where the wife was going ... with the same friends and at the same church ... the husband and wife are together ... they [the men] worked hard ... did not have a lot of time ... [they] went home, had to do some work at home, in the garden, had to help the wife and also there were the children to help ... to take them somewhere as well (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

However, in contrast, Ramunė claimed:

We have Lithuanians that still now are attending the church every Sunday and their wives are not Lithuanians. ... Occasionally also the wives are coming especially when we have the function after church at the Lithuanian Community House (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

From the interviews it is clear that continuing regular church attendance by parents and children was also highest when the children were young and that for most family's attendance has progressively declined.

Once children began school and especially during secondary schooling, they became involved in sport, started to socialize with other children outside their own community and gradually came to spend less time with their family at home. Alfonsas, father of two, reported:

My children were encouraged from us to go to the church, but they became involved in sports. ... On Sunday I became the taxi driver of my son and another twenty children. ... In Lithuania all the extra activities for the children were on Saturday or Sunday after mass. Here, sport is mainly on Sunday. I remember to

take my oldest son to play on Saturday, but later became also Sunday a sport day. My daughter, played the organ in the church for quite a few years, but then didn't anymore because she had to study during the period of the exams and she also wanted to do something with her Australian friends (Alfonasas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

This recount clearly conveys the emerging image of the traditional Lithuanian family, in which the roles of both the parents and their children had adapted progressively to the new circumstances and lifestyle.

According to most of the respondent, the new generations of Australian-born Lithuanian children drifted away from the church largely because the church was unable to maintain or develop among the younger members, any activities or initiatives that would encourage them to attend church and thereby reinforce their religious beliefs and Lithuanian identity. This perceived lack of commitment by the priests to engage and preserve traditional religious values among the younger generation remains a source of resentment among the most senior members of the Lithuanian community. As Alfonasas and his wife Milka in a joint interview explained, their feelings were typical of others of their generation:

We didn't have Lithuanian priests who were caring for our children ... they were not interested ... we saw him [the priest] on Sunday only and then after the mass [he simply] went home ... the priests that we had, they were useless ... good only for themselves (Alfonasas and Milka, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

This new image of the priest is far from the status and respect obtained by the priests in pre-WWII rural Lithuania, the passing of which is remembered with regret by many of the original *émigrés*. Alfonasas reported:

There was a klebonas (parish priest) who was attached to my school ... he was all right. He organized excursions during summer holidays for us children and we travelled every day ... from one parish to a big farm and then back to the presbytery ... there we were fed properly. That was a memorable time for me. We used to do long walk and we had gatherings of boys and girls very big ... we were over [one] hundred ... we sang and played and we spent happy time (Alfonasas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

These views illustrate the high expectation and needs placed on their priests by the early Lithuanian *émigrés*. Expectations which the prevailing cultural circumstances in pre-war Lithuania enabled them to satisfy, but that could not be realised equivalently in the vastly different conditions of life in the predominantly protestant, secular and Anglo-

Celtic Australia. In the Australia of the late 1940s and 1950s the policy and assumption of assimilation and cultural forgetfulness had been accepted more or less uncritically by all in the political and wider community. While around 80% of Lithuanians traditionally had been Roman Catholic (Birškys, 1986, p. 23), the proportion of Roman Catholics was somewhat lower among the Lithuanian *émigrés* in Perth. This may be because those with a greater geographic attachment and religious closeness to Germany, and able to establish a German family member, were more inclined to see Germany as a place of refuge during the 1940s occupations of Lithuania. For those Lithuanians who came to Perth, the religious differences between Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic Lithuanians tended to weaken community togetherness as significant numbers of the group would not meet each other at church on Sundays and other opportunities did not arise in the absence of alternative established meeting facilities.

In the early years, the relatively small Lithuanian community in Western Australia was dispersed all over the State on work contracts. Economics, the tyranny of distance, and lack of time all made frequent contact extremely difficult. Adolfas who was living on the hills with his family, recounted during an interview:

We lived too far from East Perth ... we couldn't go to the church ... the train was only once a day ... we had five children. We also lived far from the railway station. We [could only] had to go down to Midland. We [therefore] didn't go to the church for long time. It was too much we had also work to do. We did not have time for socialize. We went back to the church when I bought the car (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Even though the Lithuanian community is today highly reduced in numbers and though most of its remaining aging population is unable to attend church for health and practical reasons, most of the surviving original *émigrés* still consider themselves and their children to be religious. Audronė illustrated this as follows:

Religion is a personal choice ... and they [the Lithuanians] can make it, regardless to the environment and the possibilities to attend the church, and have contacts with the priests. I don't go to the church anymore I am too old and I do not drive anymore ... my daughter has her family I cannot impose on her to come with me at the church ... I pray at home, I recite the rosary and I pray everyday (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Ramunė summed up the feelings of most of my participants.

Everything is gone ... [but] religion isn't. That is personal. People make decisions for themselves ... I don't go anymore to the church, but I have a small

cross, I have candles, I pray by myself. My friends ... do the same ... if you want to pray you can pray in your house, in your garden everywhere ... you do not need to go to the church what you need is religion (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Thus, for the remaining group of the original *émigrés* who began their lives in pre-WWII Lithuania, religion clearly seems to have remained, some fifty years later, a strong element of identification with their national identity.

Survival of Family Customs and Traditions

Customs, traditions and what people do is natural in their own country and nobody takes any particular notice about what you do. Here [in Australia] if you were to do what you were doing in Lithuania probably you would be laughed at (Algirdas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

For the rural Lithuanian population the most important avenue for preserving the material and spiritual values which form the key components of the pre-WWII Lithuanian culture was through the family, as it was the family that had continued to create them and hand them down from generation to generation. When the Lithuanians arrived in Australia from 1948 to 1953 they brought their culture and values with them. However, for the participants in the study who had been living in Lithuanian urban areas during the pre-war period, the traditions and customs were mainly maintained on occasions of religious and family celebration, or through gatherings with elderly members of their family living in rural areas where they could preserve their traditions on a daily basis. Alfonsas recollected:

We lived in Kaunas ... only during summer or Christmas holidays I used to go to the farm where my grandparents and uncles lived ... my grandmother used to make the bread ... my mother never did ... she used to buy it at the market ... we lived in the city ... the life was different (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Similar recollections, found in many of my other interview records, inferred that the ethnic Lithuanian population living in the cities had maintained their original rural culture only to a degree, as they had to accommodate the day-to-day demands of living in a new environment, in daily contact with a new reality. Ramunė remembered:

My family lived in Vilnius, for *Kūčios* we had guests, friends of my father who were lawyers and mainly Jewish ... my father and my mother they used to play

the piano and sang Christmas carol and Lithuanian folk songs ... we had a big Christmas tree (Ramunė, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Moreover, those Lithuanian *émigrés* of German background who had been allowed to leave Lithuania for Germany as early as 1940, also brought with them to Western Australia their traditions, values and beliefs, albeit already diluted by the German culture of their daily life. Vygantas, who left Kaunas with his family in June 1940, described his life in Germany in these words:

We went to Poznan in Poland, now occupied by the German Army ... we changed our surname ... [to] ... my father started to work for a photo company ... I went to the University in Berlin, in summer I worked in an ammunition factory ... my brothers went to school and joined the Hitler Youth it was compulsory ... later at the end of the war we went to a refugee camp ... in this camps they accepted only Lithuanians ... we were Lithuanians (Vygantas, *Interview Transcript 2*, Perth, 2003).

Another circumstance which diluted the maintenance of Lithuanian traditions in Perth was the presence among the arrivals of a high number of Lithuanian men who, rather than remain single, married out of their ethnic group. Ona claimed:

With mixed marriages, most of the Lithuanians drifted away from the rest of the community and with them the traditions and the Lithuanian language, they had to speak only English all the time at home and with their children (Ona, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003)

In Western Australia, childbirth occurred at the local hospital, usually with members of the close family and friends being able to visit the mother and the newborn baby.

However, work commitments and distance, combined with lack of easy transport, often made it difficult for friends and relatives to visit the hospital to pay their respects to the mother and the baby. Aldona recalled the time of the birth of her first daughter:

When my first child was born, only my mother my father and my husband came and visited me at the hospital. ... My friends could not come they were all working and some of them lived far away and they did not have any transport (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

This suggests clearly how even the simplest of traditional practices often had to change because of the new circumstances or established local expectations.

Christenings usually occurred during the first five months after birth, in most cases in accordance with the Roman Catholic Rite. The Sacrament of Baptism was administered

by the Lithuanian priest in the local parish church of the child's parents in the presence of the godparents and a few guests. The godparents were in most cases the grandparents or, in their absence, relatives or close Lithuanian friends or, sometimes in later years, Australian friends. In Australia the choice of the godparents for the young émigré parents of the child differed from the Lithuanian tradition in which the godparents were typically younger relatives who would be expected to take over the responsibility for the child in case of the death of the parents. This was not possible in Western Australia as the extended family was limited in numbers and in some cases absent altogether and because other émigrés in the community were often not known sufficiently well for them to be entrusted with such an important life commitment. Aldona explained further:

My father and my mother were the godparents of my first child ... only later ... but when I had my twins boys ... the godparents were our Australian neighbours ... they were very good friends, we became very close friends and still we are ... I did not have Lithuanian godparents as I did not know anybody well enough...in the community (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

In the early years, the children continued to be baptized with both Christian and old pagan Lithuanian names, as had been the Lithuanian tradition. As Eglè stated: "All my children were baptized with Christian and Lithuanian old pagan names ... and so [were] the children of the families that I know" (Eglè, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

However, it is evident that adherence to the custom soon began to fade, as parents recognised the disadvantages that their children might face at school if they had to use the traditional Lithuanian names. As Alfonsas affirmed:

Our children had only Christian names as it was easier for the Australians to pronounce them especially for the children at school ... a Lithuanian family who gave to their boys as a first name a Lithuanian name, then they found out that it was never pronounced properly and they [children at school] started to call the boys with a different name (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Christenings were typically followed by a big party at the house of the child's parents. Members of the family and close Lithuanian friends were all invited, as traditions demanded. As Eglè, mother of three, remembered: "The guests were all expecting a big party, and you needed a lot of money and time for having some sort of savings" (Eglè, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Although the Australian-born children were baptized with the names of Christian saints, most of the émigré families soon moved towards celebrating birthdays in place of the Names Day celebrations that had been the custom among the rural Lithuanian population. Adolfas recollected:

We celebrated Name's Day back home ... only for the first birthday we had a big celebration. The last Name Day celebration I had it was in Vilnius ... the next day ... we left for Germany ... it was the first of July, 1944 we had a big party at the nursing school where I was studying ... there were students, doctors and nurses...my mother had sent a turkey and a big cake ... the following day with another girl will leave Vilnius we went home and my family was waiting ... we all left ... you could hear in distance the fighting of the Red Army that was trying to occupy Vilnius ... I did not even to finish to eat the cake (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

According to most of the participants in the study, the Name Day's celebration ceased to be celebrated in Western Australia when the parents and grandparents died, as it was only that generation that had wanted to continue the celebrating of their Name's Day. Alfonsas as an 88-year-old recalled:

For the celebrations of my Name's Day, we had always big parties at my house ... we had a lunch and there were more than twelve people, all Lithuanian friends and the Lithuanian priest ... he also was named after my saint. We had a very good time ... I still celebrated it but now there are only with few friends left (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

His wife Milka went on to add:

In the past I used to do a lot of cooking, for the parties ... I cooked a cake and meat and soup ... as my mother used to do back home. I also cooked *kugelis* (traditional Lithuanian dish) and I still do. ... Everyone loved my cooking. Now, I only prepare a nice lunch, we are old and my husband does not want to eat too much (Alfonsas and Milka, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

However, it was not only after the émigré families moved to Australia that birthday celebrations had begun to replace the traditional Names Day celebrations. The tradition of birthday parties had already been taken up by many of the émigrés while they were in Germany. Nevertheless it is clear that adaptation to new circumstances was always the primary impetus for change. Vygantas claimed: "Name's Days celebration was not even maintained when the Lithuanians were in the camps in Germany ... in Germany we started already to celebrate the birthday that was a German tradition" (Vygantas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003). Once in Western Australia it was presumably also fairly natural for most of the émigré families to continue celebrating birthdays, as this

was a common practice in their new homeland. However, Alfonsas, with some evident bitterness, concluded: “We became Australians ... we make a birthday cake and put some candles and just sing happy birthday” (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

First Communion and Confirmations were organized through the Catholic Primary Schools attended by most of the Lithuanian children and took place at the time of the local Bishop’s annually scheduled visit to the school and parish. However, Ona reported that her three children had the rare distinction of being the only ones in the entire Lithuanian community to have been confirmed by a visiting Lithuanian Bishop from the United States. As she recalled with evident pride:

When the Lithuanian Bishop ... arrived in Perth I was able to organize the Confirmation for my three children in the Lithuanian Church ... I think my children were the only one ... they were beautiful ... I was very proud ... The church was full(Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Given the deeply religious Catholic heritage of these early Lithuanian *émigrés*, it can be assumed that the continued popular celebration of these two sacraments would have helped to keep the *émigrés* together, reinforce their ties with the church and strengthen their sense of national identity.

Weddings were another significant cultural event that served to bring relatives and members of the Lithuanian community together. Celebrated on Saturdays and mostly in accordance with the Roman Catholic Rite, they were usually held in the local Parish church of the bride or groom. The celebrant was normally the Lithuanian priest who, for the occasion, was permitted to preside over the celebration in the chosen parish. Relatives and close Lithuanian friends were invited to participate in the celebration, which was then typically followed by a party at the house of the bride. In keeping with the tradition, the bride would wear a long white dress which in most cases would have been sewn by the bride. The groom would wear his best suit, usually grey in colour. Ona described her wedding dress in these words:

I made my wedding dress ... my mother helped me to sew it. It was too expensive to buy it. We could not afford it ... but it was just beautiful. ... All of my friends made their own wedding dress; it was too expensive nobody could afford it. ... All Lithuanian women know to sew ... in Lithuania girls were taught how to sew since they had to prepare their dowry (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

A small branch of rue, the national Lithuanian flower, was typically pinned onto the bride's veil or somewhere on the dress, symbolizing her virginal status. On occasions, the man would also pin a small branch of rue on his jacket, again in keeping with the old traditions. Ona, who married in Perth, recalled how other rituals had been observed as part of the home gathering, immediately after the Church celebration:

After the religious ceremony everyone was invited to my parents' house. ... At my wedding there were many people. ... For the occasion we emptied the biggest room of the house and we filled in with many people as possible ... my mother presented to my husband and me the bread, salt and a glass of wine on the threshold of the house (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The presentation to the newlyweds of the glass of wine, bread and salt, which had been an essential element of the Lithuanian culture, was a tradition continued typically where both parents (or, at the very least, the mother) of the bride were Lithuanians, as it was the custom for the parents of the bride to present them. Aldona, recalling her daughter's wedding, claimed: "When my daughter ... married, at the reception I waited [on]the couple with a tray with a glass of wine, bread and salt ... I couldn't do it for my two boys ... they married Australian and Italian girls" (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Funerals were mainly celebrated according to the Roman Catholic Rite at the Lithuanian church by a Lithuanian priest. However, funeral traditions were perhaps the ones that underwent the most adaptation to the new context. The Western Australian climate, and its attendant health regulations, clearly precluded the old Lithuanian custom of keeping the body of the deceased in the family at home for three days following the death. In the old country, this practice had allowed relatives and friends to pay their respects to the deceased and the deceased's family. Birutė remembered the funeral of her mother with these words:

My real mother died very young ... I suspected [that it was from a complication of] childbirth, but I was too young. ... Nobody told me. ... She was brought at home ... where she lied on a wooden plank for three days, to permit the relatives to come and see her. They were living in distant farms [and] needed time to arrive at the village where we lived (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The existence of funeral parlours in Australia was welcomed by the majority of the *émigrés*, all of whom readily agreed that keeping the body of the deceased at home would have been a terrible experience in the Australian climate, especially in summer.

Moreover the practice had already been abandoned in their homeland for the Lithuanian summer, particularly in the cities. Ona, recalling the death of her Lithuanian husband in Perth, stated:

When my husband died, he was at home ... he was taken away straight away, then ... I went to the Funeral Parlour for the rosary with my children and other Lithuanians, and the funeral was at the Lithuanian church with the Lithuanian priests I had the *šermenys* at home ... we did not have many people because my husband did not mixed with the Lithuanians in Perth (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The old tradition of taking photos of family members alongside the open coffin was also soon discarded in Australia, as it was no longer considered appropriate, especially by the new Australian-born generations. Adolfas claimed: “I didn’t take any photos when my wife died ... my children wouldn’t allow me ... they said to me that we were in Australia now” (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

However, the *šermenys*, the traditional reception following the burial, has been maintained as a gathering of all those who had attended the funeral. This reception was held either at Lithuanian Community House or at the house of the deceased, or more recently a restaurant. Audronė recalled: “When my husband died I organized a *šermenys* ... there were a lot of people ... it was [held] at the Lithuanian House” (Audronė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth 2003). *Šermenys* is another significant community event and gave further opportunity to the aging émigrés to socialize. Not every funeral, however, included this tradition: among the oldest émigrés were many who had no children to organize the event for them. It is noteworthy that the traditional Lithuanian *gedulas* period of mourning was mentioned only by one of my respondents, suggesting that it is one tradition that was not brought with the émigrés to Perth. Alfonsas explained:

The *gedulas* was never observed here in Australia, I do not remember anyone doing anything like man wearing a black band around his arm in sign of grief and respect towards the deceased as my father did when my mother died back home (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Religious Celebrations

While many of the Lithuanian family traditions had to be adjusted to the new lifestyle and environment, the religious calendar traditions have been extensively preserved.

During the interviews, almost all of them were mentioned by one or more of the participants to the study, the most commonly retained being the celebrations of *Kūčios* (Christmas Eve meal) and *Velikos* (Easter day). Importantly, even the Lithuanian children who married out of the community still enjoy them, presumably because they view them as a pleasant way to spend time with the extended family at times also celebrated by the wider Australian community and which were designated in Australia as national holidays.

A variety of reasons was provided by the participants in the study to the questions examining the failure to maintain the celebrations of *Kaledos* (Christmas Day), *Uzgavenes* (Shrove Tuesday), *Didzioji Savaite* (Holy Week), *Sekmines* (Pentecost), *Zolines* (Feast of the Assumption), and *Jonines* (Feast of St John). Most of the émigrés ascribed the dilution of observance to apathy or lack of interest of other members of the community, or to the loss of religious values. This in part was due to a different lifestyle or environment, which did not encourage the maintenance of such traditions. Ona, who had lived and was raised on a farm, stated in sadness:

In Australia we did not do anything right from the beginning ... we could not ... we only go to the church, listened to the mass and go home and that's it so they [the Lithuanians] have never organized anything (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth 2003).

Most participants acknowledged that *Kūčios*, had to be adapted somewhat to the new lifestyle out of necessity, but this had not prevented its retention. The old tradition of the *Kūčios* meal based on twelve dishes with no meat and fat and no consumption of alcohol has been maintained at large by the émigrés. Ona described the meal in these words:

Every year we had *Kūčios* with my family at my place ... I prepared only fish dishes to share with the family. I try to prepare the meal as my mother did back home ... and when she was alive and living with us in Perth. She prepared it ... I was working ... before was always at my place but now in turn we do at the house of my children that are all married. I prepare part of the meal now (Ona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

In contrast Birutė recalled:

I was working in a pub, I never had time to prepare a proper meal for my family and I did not think about the setting of the table ... I used to have *Kūčios* dinner with my family, my husband and my two children, but I was very tired after having work all day and with a such hot weather ... I used to prepare a quick meal with fish and salad and then we all went to bed (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

From the variety of responses given by male participants in the study, this tradition appears to have been lost only after a Lithuanian wife died. Adolfas remembered the meal in these words:

We used to have a big meal when my wife was alive. She liked to cook and we had five children ... now she is dead ... my children married Australians, they do not celebrate it ... the Australians they do not know our traditions. ... They invited me only for *Kaledos* (Christmas Day) and we have just an ordinary meal ... meat, fish ... and salads (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The *ploktele* (a thin wafer), traditionally made by nuns in Lithuania and shared among members of the family during the *Kūčios* meal was not available when the *émigrés* first arrived in Perth. However, later it became easy to obtain them directly through the help of relatives still living in Lithuania, although that supply chain eventually dried up for many of the *émigrés* as their original contacts died. Alfonsas explained:

When my mother was alive she always sent us *ploktele* in a mail envelope ... now, that she is dead my sister is not very religious I do not ask her ... sometimes I have them from other Lithuanian families ... they are lucky they still received Ploktele from their family back home. ... When the last Lithuanian priest was here, somehow he was able to give us some *ploktele* ... I think he had [obtained] from the Polish nuns here in Perth, they made them. ... It is also a Polish tradition. ... But now we do not have them anymore (Alfonsas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The traditional placing of the hay under the tablecloth for the traditional meal was never maintained in Perth, either because it was difficult to find the hay easily or because it was no longer seen as being important. Aldona remembered:

In this house I tried once. It was first of all for the glasses ... the glasses wouldn't stand on the table straight they would fall all over because it was uneven ... because we had also so much food and dishes and because it takes up to much room ... it was very hard , very difficult (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Although *Kūčios* is still celebrated at the traditional time of Christmas Eve, some of the older *émigrés* do continue to celebrate it together on the Sunday before Christmas at the Lithuanian Community House. Aldona reported:

On Sunday after Mass we go to the Lithuanian Community House and all of us we celebrate *Kūčios* ... everybody bring their own food, and we share it with the other, last year we were about forty people and few children with the parents came later ... we have our Christmas tree and we have also a lottery we really enjoyed this time. ... It is sad that each year some of us is missing ... but we still do it (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The once popular community celebration of Midnight Mass, according to participants in the study, was soon discontinued in the early years after arrival in Perth, as most émigrés were living far from a church, often with young children to look after, and no transport.

Adolfas, father of five recollected:

We did not have a car and we were living far away close to Midland ... we had five children and we could not possibly go to Midnight mass. Not even in Midland, we could not leave the children alone at night (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

However, a Christmas tree was always present in each Lithuanian family with children. Adolfas added: "I have always prepared a tree for my children, they were so happy I used to put the presents under it ... the children liked" (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003). This tradition, which had started in Germany according to most of the émigrés, was easy to maintain in Perth as it was a tradition common also among the majority of the wider Australian population at the time.

The hot Perth summer climate and the easy all year round availability of foods of all kinds were the principal factors that inhibited maintenance of much of the Lithuanian Christmas day traditions. Eglė recalled:

For the first, second and third Christmas that I spent in Western Australia I cried all the time ... I missed the snow, the ice, I used to do ice-skating, ... I miss my friend and family. ... The Australians for Christmas go to the beach it is terribly hot ... I did not like it and I still do not like the weather (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 3*, Perth, 2003).

Aldona remembered the old time back home with sadness:

After the Mass, back at home [Lithuania] we used to have a nice lunch that my mother had prepared the week before it was special, there was a lot of unusual food ... prepared just for Christmas ... but here ... it is too hot the children did not want to eat and stay at home ... just go to the beach ... here we can eat what we want all the time ... we do not have to wait Christmas (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

All of the respondents confirmed during interviews that the festive celebration of *Užgavenės* (Shrove Tuesday) on the eve of Ash Wednesday was not continued once they arrived in Perth. The old tradition of making pancakes to be shared with friends, wearing costumes and masks, and making jokes was not longer practicable as the new circumstances and life style were not conducive. Aldona claimed:

We were all working, we did not have the time to go and visit friends during the week ... it was too difficult ... we could not dress our children with costume and mask, people will laughed at them. ... Here in Perth, nobody was interested in doing anything to maintain such traditions ... we lived in a big city and we were working ... how then you could go dress up with masks in the streets ... they [the Australians] would think that you were mad ... it was just not possible (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Didzioji Savaite (Holy Week) period, which was considered by the pre-WWII rural Lithuanian population the most important and significant of the year, was maintained according to all of the respondents, albeit more at the level of individual family practice than as a community-wide event. For the most part it was only on Palm Sunday and Easter Day and the end of the Holy Week that were celebrated formally in services at the Lithuanian church. During the week, most people were working and attending to the needs of their families. In a combined interview, Alfonsas and Milka reported:

During the Holy week my wife was working and my children were very small, we did not have anybody to help us ... I used to come home in the afternoon and my wife used to go to work as soon as I returned home. It was hard to do something apart from work and look after the family. We never went to church on Good Friday, because both of us were doing something at home ... we take advantage of being at home with our children ... [the wife continued] when I was in Lithuania I used to go all day on Friday to the church with my mother and other girls of my age and other women ... we prayed, in front of the cross which was covered in purple ... but here, no we only went to church for Palm Sunday and *Velykos* (Easter Day) ... here it was all different we didn't feel it (Alfonsas and Milka, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Almost all *émigrés* and their families attended the *Verbo Sekmadieni* (Palm Sunday Mass) at the Lithuanian church and brought with them, to be blessed, a branch of a palm or of an olive tree. Adolfas remembered:

When we first arrived for Palm Sunday, the church was full, we were all there, with some greenery, if you didn't have the palm or a branch of olive tree people brought a small branch of *rūta* [rue] our national flower (Adolfas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Today this tradition, celebrated also by the wider Australian Catholic community in their parishes, is still maintained among the senior *émigrés* despite their decrease in numbers.

The *pasnikas* (fasting) is strictly observed by most of the Catholic Lithuanian population as the core of the *Dydysis Penktadienis* (Good Friday) preparation for Easter. Alfonsas

maintained that among the old Lithuanian *émigrés* in Perth, as a sign of devotion and respect, penance in the form of abstinence is still observed.

I have never eaten or drink anything on Good Friday ... in all my life. My parents did this back home ... and my brothers and I we did the same. ... Here in Perth, also my wife does not eat and drink anything for all day ... I do not drink even a sip of water (Alfonasas, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The traditional *Didysis Seštadienis* (Holy Saturday) celebration from which people could take home blessed pieces of coal and water was never maintained in Perth, at least according to Birutė. The practice was not available in the early years because there was no Lithuanian church or Lithuanian priest and it was never re-activated even after the first Lithuanian priest arrival. “I supposed it could have been done, if somebody had had the bright idea ... nobody thought about it. ... The lifestyle here was and it is different ... we cannot do what our parents did” (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Margučiu (decorated Easter eggs), a key features of the traditional *Velykos* (Easter Day) celebrations, are still a matter of interest among the young children whom, although they mostly ignore the religious significance, enjoy the ritual of the egg cracking. Aldona, grandmother of five, recalled:

All my grandchildren have always enjoyed playing with *margučiu*. Obviously they did not know their religious meaning but they enjoyed to go around and tried to crack the eggs of the others ... my grandson ... he is always the first to enter in the house and ask for the eggs (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Margučiu are given to the guests at Easter lunch. They are decorated with different colours and patterns and as with the old tradition, are considered to bring good health, good luck and happiness. Today they are still prepared mostly by the grandparents. However, Birutė claimed that a competition for the children for the best decorated egg is held each year on the Sunday before Easter at the Lithuanian Community House in a continuing effort to keep alive the Lithuanian tradition.

Every year many children are coming ... they like to paint the eggs. ... Last year there were not many children came but it was still nice. We are all old people and we like to see young people to continue to maintain somehow our traditions (Birutė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

The attendance at the Resurrection Mass, (Easter mass) remains high in Perth as most of the children and the grandchildren would typically attend the service and then join their

parents at home for Easter lunch. The meal is substantial as it is a festive meal. However, as most of the respondents indicated, the ready availability of a wide variety of foods throughout the year meant that no particular dishes are prepared for the occasion. Eglė declared:

For Easter, I have prepared always a good meal, but nothing special, we have pork, salads and some Lithuanian cakes that my daughter in law that is Australian likes very much ... I used to cook a lot before ... when we first came to Australia ... there was also my mother and my father with us ... now, my husband is sick and he cannot eat fat ... my children do not want to eat too much ... things have being changed (Eglė, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Easter in Australia typically is a time of beautiful weather and offers one of the last opportunities before winter for the grandchildren to go on family holidays. Therefore, not all of the émigrés' children were able to spend Easter Day each year with their parents, as Aldona explained.

Last year my daughter went on holiday with her family down south. I was not upset ... She is a working mother and she needed an holidays with her family ... she went to visit some friends ... my husband and I we went to church and then we return home ... we had a light lunch and later we went at my brother's house and we celebrate Easter with his family and one of my son who came over with his family (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Velines (All Soul's Day) in honour of deceased members of the family and community is still strictly observed by the old émigrés. After Sunday Mass they gather at Karrakatta Cemetery to visit the grave of the most recently deceased émigré. They recite the rosary and the litanies at the graveside of the émigré and then they disperse to visit the graves of their own deceased family members and other friends. Aldona recollected:

Since we arrived in Perth we always went to Karakatta to pray ... there were a lot of Lithuanian that died without anybody here in Perth ... especially men ... before we were younger and we used to go and visit each grave ... but now we go only to visit the last one that died during the year ... some of us cannot walk for long distance ... at the beginning the graves of the émigrés were all together close to each other, so one could go and visit all of them ... now they are scattered all over the cemetery (Aldona, *Interview Transcript 4*, Perth, 2003).

Aldona further added that the custom of decorating the graves of deceased family members with flowers is still widely practised, as is the decoration of graves of deceased community members who have no living relatives in Perth.

Concluding Summary

Lithuanian *émigrés* who came to Perth by virtue of the Australian Government's participation in the post-WWII International Refugee Organization (IRO) Programme of 1947, experienced particular culturally-based problems in settling in the new homeland. The usual difficulties of re-settling in an alien environment were compounded by the loss of their social networks and status, and the difficulties in maintaining their language and traditional customs, values and beliefs that were so much a part of the Lithuanian identity. Since the early days of their arrival in Perth, Lithuanian *émigrés* established social networks, which helped single people and the most vulnerable members of their community to adapt to their new life style and environment. In the process, they tried to preserve their Lithuanian family traditions, religious practices and language key core markers of their Lithuanian identity.

Inevitably, the new life-style, environment and time modified these traditions, values and beliefs to the extent that some of them have been lost, discarded or on the verge of being lost. Most of the participants in the study claimed that Lithuanian traditions associated with the forests and fields, husbandry and seasons of their native land, were the first to be lost, in the absence of close connection with a familiar or similar environment.

Family traditions survived better in the early days after arrival, as they were known and valued by most of the *émigrés*. The presence, although limited, of elderly members of the family, guaranteed their continuity within the family and community. In those first years, the senior *émigrés* could still conduct their traditional life, albeit with some adaptation. Young Lithuanians, forced to interact directly with mainstream Australian society through work and daily life needs, were obliged to adjust more quickly.

In this situation family traditions began to be modified or discarded according to the needs and lifestyle of the new Lithuanian-Australian family. Typically, the continuity of family traditions became difficult when Lithuanian male immigrants married out of their ethnic group. Customarily the traditions were handed down from generation to generation by the female members of the family. However, most of the *émigrés* who lived in urban areas during the pre-war period were already less inclined to retain some

of these traditions which could be only maintained in a rural environment. The cities and the new urban life-style prevented this. Furthermore, for *émigrés* who lived for a time in Germany or in the German camps before their re-settlement in Perth, some of these family traditions were either diluted or completely lost because they had adapted to the new German environment, culture and language.

One can conclude that most of the pre-WWII Lithuanian family traditions in Perth were maintained without modification by a limited number of *émigrés*' families while the senior members of the family were still alive. Most of the elderly members of the family were still living in rural area at the time they fled the country. Over time, the traditions were modified to adapt to the new environment and today few survive.

Similarly, one of the most powerful identity core markers of Lithuanian culture, the language, according to this research, is on the verge of being lost. Today the language is only spoken by the few remaining original *émigrés*. The interviewees all recognized the vital role of grandparents and their efforts to promote the Lithuanian language among the new Australian-Lithuanian generation. Nevertheless, the language remains threatened. Australian-Lithuanian children having attended school and merged into the mainstream culture, started to speak English, and refused to continue to speak Lithuanian within the family. Today, few can still speak and understand some words of their parents' language and for many it remains essentially just a memory of their childhood.

The Roman Catholic religion was an important factor in the *émigrés*' lives in the early years of their re-settlement. It was perceived by the Catholic Lithuanians as a link between their past and their present and provided a sense of identity and community. Its influence diminished as the *émigrés* families merged into mainstream Australian life. For most of the *émigrés* regular religious attendance became of secondary importance. This was even more so in extended families where children had intermarried. Today, the senior Catholic *émigrés* still attend church and those who are unable to take part in regular church practices, for health and practical reasons, still consider themselves to be religious. One can conclude that some fifty years later, religion seems to have remained a strong element of Lithuanian identification among the original *émigrés* whose life was shaped by the experiences of pre-WWII Lithuania. Although the original *émigrés* who

are still alive hold on to their religious values, most of their descendants attend church at Easter and Christmas time only. Like language and traditions, the religious connection may indeed die with the last of the original *émigrés*.

A column profiling in summary form the cultural characteristics of the group is presented in the multi column table, column 2. See in Appendix 3.

Four non-identifying but directly grounded composite narratives intended to convey a sense of people who made up the present-day Australian sample are contained in Appendix 10 – 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4.

The next chapter presents a detailed account of the pre-WWII Lithuanian culture of the present day sample in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia.