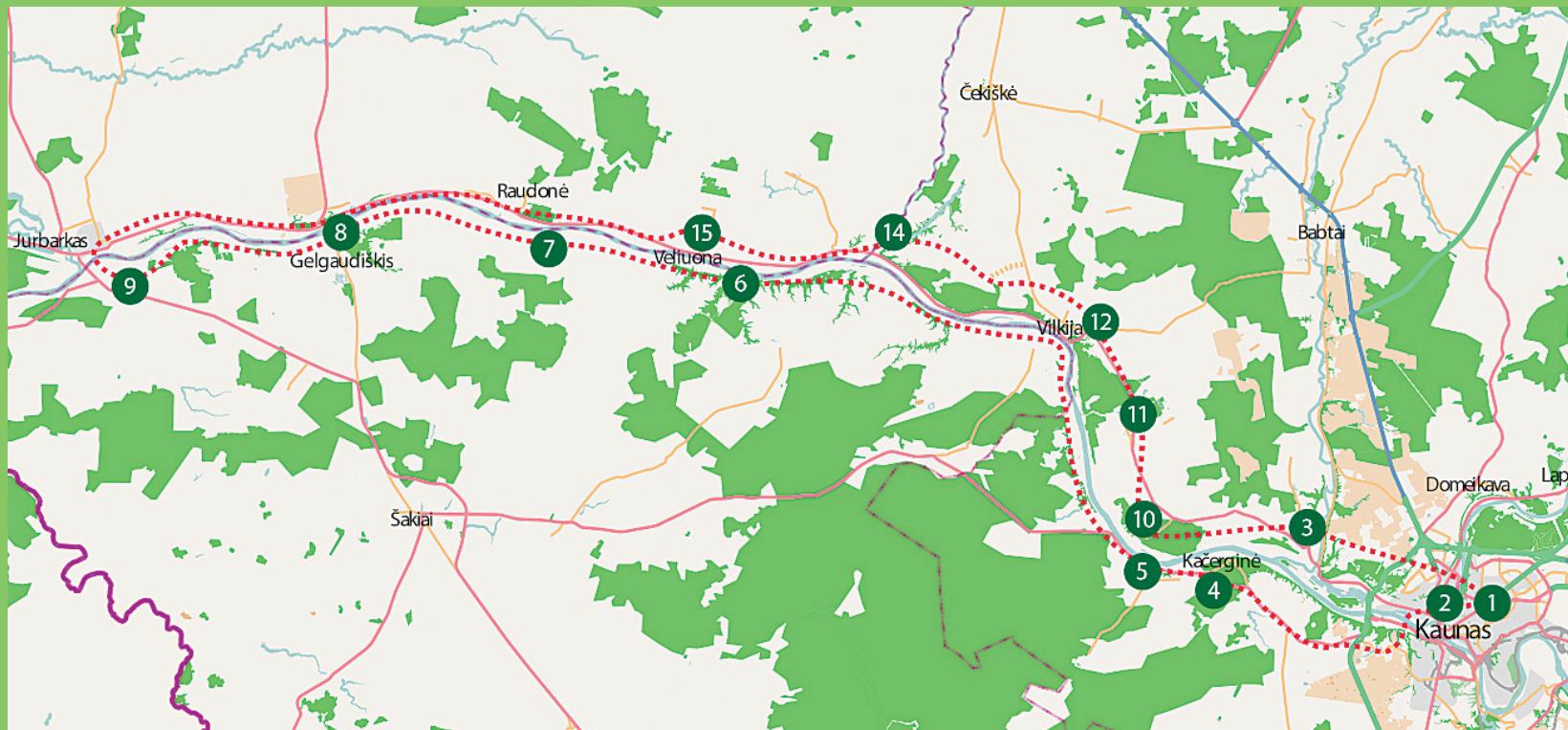


THE ROAD OF THE SAMOGITIAN BAPTISM



A GUIDE
FOR PILGRIMS AND TRAVELERS

MAP OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT BANKS OF NEMUNAS

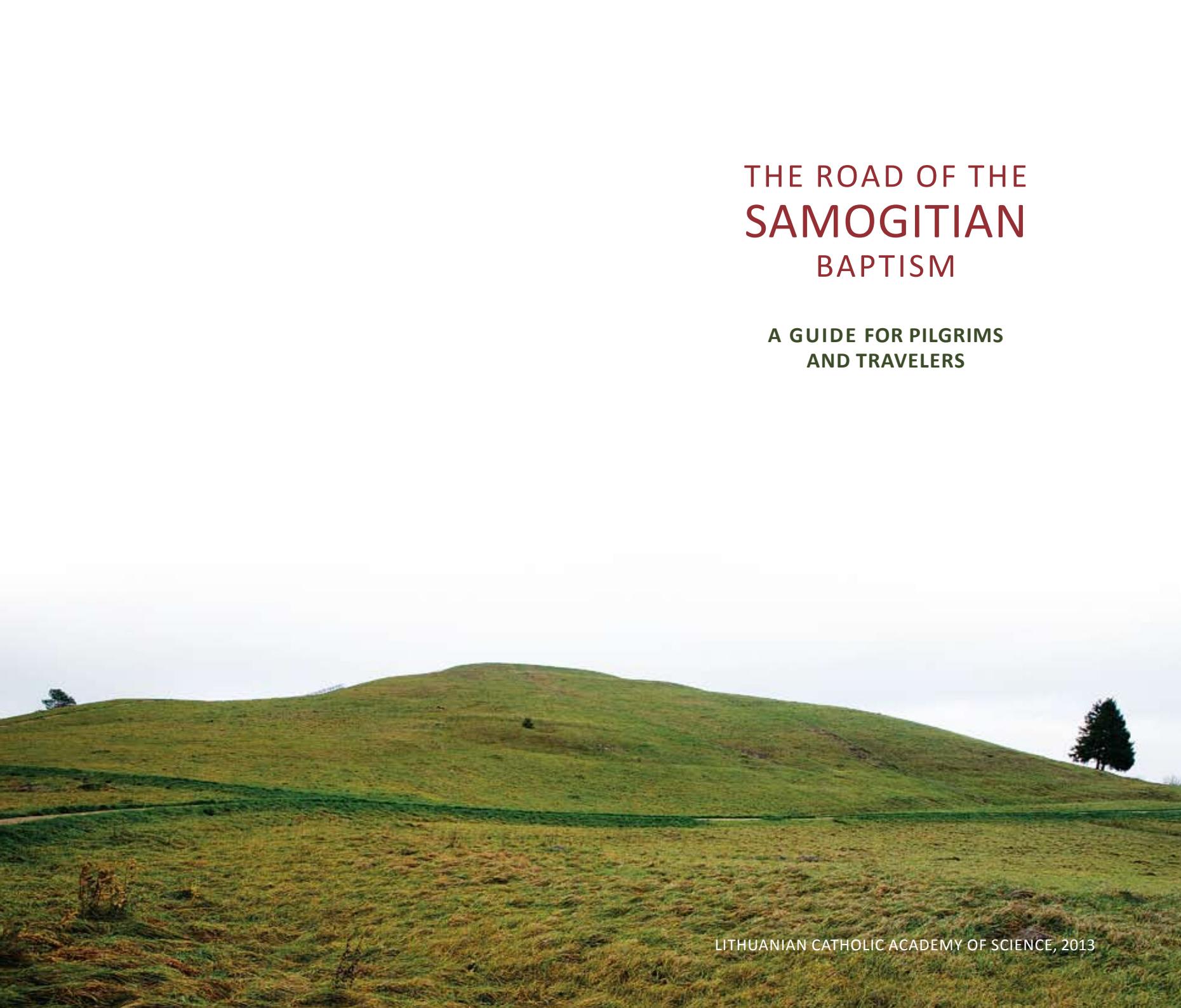


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- 12 Vilkija
- 14 Seredžius
- 15 Veliuona

THE ROAD OF THE
SAMOGITIAN
BAPTISM





THE ROAD OF THE SAMOGITIAN BAPTISM

A GUIDE FOR PILGRIMS
AND TRAVELERS

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Amando servare

**Presenting Guide to the Pilgrimage of the Baptism
of Samogitia to the Hearts and Hands of Dear Readers**

FOREWORD BY THE BISHOP OF TELŠIAI

In autumn 1413, the grace of Baptism reached the last patch of Europe still in the shadows of paganism, the land of Samogitia (Žemaitija). Prior to this date, Duke Vytautas had twice sent priests to preach the gospel of Christ to the Samogitians, the last remaining pagans in Europe, in 1394–1398 and 1411–1413. Those who accepted it were baptised in autumn 1413. Historian Paulius Rabikauskas describes the event thus: “In the late autumn of 1413, two sovereigns, King Vladislovas Jogaila and Grand Duke Vytautas, boarded a small boat in Kaunas and, sailing down the Nemunas and then the Dubysa, reached the depths of Samogitia... The rulers ordered to clear the idolized woods and put out the “sacred” fire. One last time, they explained the truths of Christianity in the language of the land and urged people to accept the faith of their rulers. Thus the Baptism was carried out and several churches were to be built.”¹ And so the gospel words of Jesus, proclaimed to the Apostles, reached the children of Samogitia: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20, ESV)

We will not be mistaken to assume that when Jesus uttered these words, he was looking with the eyes of his soul at our land, the land of the Samogitians, and not only at our forefathers who accepted Baptism in 1413 but later ones too, and also us, their descendants... As we celebrate the 600th anniversary of concluding the evangelisation of Lithuania, i.e., the Baptism of Samogitia, we wish for all the Christians of Samogitia and Lithuania to sense and experience

¹ Paulius Rabikauskas, *Krikščioniškoji Lietuva*, Vilnius: Aidai, 2002, p. 70.

the blissful gaze of Christ directed at us; the gaze that knocks on our hearts and our conscience... May this anniversary reunion with Christ be a stream of living water springing from the rocks of our times and making present the grace of our past Baptism.

We would like to wish that the experience of the Old Testament's chosen nation liberated from Egypt be the experience of our nation today:

When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
Judah became his sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.
The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.

What ails you, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?
O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water. (Psalm 114, ESV)

Despite the pessimistic predictions habitually made for our nation, a brighter future is also possible – but it depends, among other things, on our faithfulness to the God that our ancestors, grandfathers, and parents swore to love and obey when they accepted Baptism.

Between 1411 and 1413, priests from Poland, Bohemia, even Italy and several from Lithuanian lands baptised 26 years before came to prepare the last pagans of Europe to accept Christ. They went to Samogitia upon the invitation and commission of Duke Vytautas. And in autumn 1413, two cousins, the King of Poland, Jogaila and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas, set off towards the land of the Samogitians, prepared and ready for mass Baptism. Their journey down the Nemunas and Dubysa is also a journey of the Gospel and the grace of Baptism towards the souls of our Samogitian

forefathers... We invite today's Samogitian and Lithuanian Christians to take the same trip. To journey along the banks of the rivers Nemunas and Dubysa, and across the Samogitian hills via Šatrija to Varniai, and then towards the great sanctuaries erected in later centuries, the Telšiai and Samogitian Calvary; to reflect on what the Christian faith has given to people in these parts over the last six centuries, to see the signs of religion left in the lands surveyed by the baptists of Lithuania and Samogitia 600 years ago.

We suggest you start this journey of reflection in Kaunas, which was then part of Samogitian lands, rather than the Diocese of Samogitia which was founded a little later, in 1417. Since the Baptism of Lithuania in 1387, Kaunas was part of the Diocese of Vilnius, even though there is no mention of a church built in Kaunas in that year. Historian Rabikauskas, quoting Zenonas Ivinskis, comments on this fact thus: "Curiously, neither Trakai nor Kaunas were included among the new parishes. That might mean that there had already been Catholic churches and chapels in both towns, especially since they often hosted German merchants."² A little later, however, two churches in Kaunas were linked to Vytautas. According to Ivinskis, "Vytautas is credited not only with founding a parish church (now basilica) in Kaunas, but also a Franciscan convent,"³ i.e., the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Vytautas Magnus) Church, built by Vytautas for the Conventual Franciscans after his 1399 tragic defeat by Tatars near the Vorskla River in southern Rus. Edvardas Gudavičius describes the defeat thus: "The defeat of Vorskla proved to be a great lesson for the impatient son of Kęstutis (Vytautas). Historically, this breakthrough resulted in the founding of Kaunas Franciscan church as a gesture of gratitude for preserved life; internally, it taught him self-discipline, something that Vytautas' choleric character had lacked. The newly-acquired trait helped Vytautas, whose head was a restless womb of ideas, structure a long-term strategy for action. Vytautas, gifted as a statesman and strategist, worked daily to learn how to be a diplomat and tactician."⁴ Vytautas needed these skills so he could accomplish one of his greatest goals – to lead Lithuania and her people out of their spiritual and cultural isolation from the Christian Western world, isolation resulting from the delayed Baptism of Lithuania

² Ibid., p. 58.

³ Zenonas Ivinskis, *Lietuvos istorija iki Vytauto Didžiojo mirties*, Vilnius: Mokslo, 1991, p. 376.

⁴ Edvardas Gudavičius, *Lietuvos istorija*, t. 1: *Vilnius nuo seniausių laikų iki 1569 metų*, Vilnius: Lietuvos raštojų sąjungos leidykla, Akademinių skautų sąjūdžio Vydūno fondas Čikagoje, 1999, p. 202.

and Samogitia. Historian Mečislovas Jučas discusses Vytautas' accomplishments in this field thus: "Jogaila carried out the Baptism of Lithuania with the help of Polish priests (not just Polish – JB). Vytautas supported him with foundations to the Cathedral of Vilnius and the parish and monasteries of the first diocese. Judging by his statements, he was greatly concerned about the spiritual Christian life of the Lithuanians and the spread of the Catholic faith in Lithuanian lands. Six days prior to Vytautas' death, Jogaila, who was present at his side, confirmed all of his bestowals to the Church. Vytautas' greatest gifts, however, went to the Diocese of Samogitia. He was the author and patron of the christianisation of Samogitia. The issue of the Baptism of Samogitia was dealt with in the Council of Constance in 1414-1416."⁵

So Vytautas, aware of the ecumenical council to be summoned in Constance in 1414, resolves to start baptising the first group of ready Samogitians in autumn 1413 so he can select sixty men and send them to the Council; for that purpose, he and his cousin Jogaila sail off from the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church, built by him circa 1400, towards the inlands of Samogitia. The results of this trip are not limited to the fact that most of the Samogitians had converted to Christianity by 1417. The results can be seen in the lands of Lithuania and Samogitia even today: the (still) alive Christian faith and two ecclesiastical provinces, of Kaunas and Vilnius, established in 1926 and 1991. It is not only a thing of the past, it is still relevant today. By looking back at the events of 600 years ago, visiting the sites where they happened, we can touch upon the Christian roots of Europe. And that does have some urgency today, relevant as it is not only to the Lithuanians and Samogitians, but to the problems of the Christian Western civilization, the issue of its survival.

To conclude, let me take note of several locations – slightly forgotten but of extreme importance to the maturity of our Christian consciousness – on this pilgrimage along the way of the Samogitian Baptism.

Raudondvaris, where the Nevėžis flows into the Nemunas. Pressed by political developments, the rulers of Lithuania had handed Samogitian lands up to the Nevėžis River to the Teutonic Knights who had no intentions of baptising the local populace any time soon.

On the left bank of the Nemunas River lies Ilguva, where the Bishop

⁵ Mečislovas Jučas, *Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė: Istorijos bruožai*, Vilnius: Nacionalinis muziejus, Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės valdovų rūmai, Lietuvos dailės muziejus, 2010, p. 106.

of Telšiai, the 20th century martyr of faith Vincentas Borisevičius, held month-long spiritual retreat in January 1946. After his first imprisonment by the Soviets, he was released in December 1945 and given a choice – either to become a Soviet security agent and undermine the Catholic Church of Lithuania or to die. He chose the latter option.

Plokščiai – the grave of Elena Klimaitytė († 1944), a virgin martyr and the 20th century witness to faith, in a family tomb of the old parish cemetery.

Gelgaudiškis – in a secret meeting in the parish church vestry, priest Jurgis Matulaitis was elected Superior General of the Congregations of Marians in 1911. Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis remained in the office until his death in 1927.

Kaimelis (Kiduliai) – in the 17-18th centuries, it was the seat of Samogitian bishops exiled from Alsėdžiai and Varniai by the occupying Swedish army: Jonas Jeronimas, Krišpinas Kiršenšteinas and Juozapas Mikalojus Karpis who is buried underneath a former chapel in Kaimelis.

Vilkija boasts an excellent early-20th century neo-Gothic church. Its founder was priest Stanislovas Bačkis, a grand-uncle of the fourth Lithuanian cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis. He is buried in the chuchyard.

Birutkalnis on the bank of the Dubysa by Ariogala (Gélava) is thought to be the gravesite of Birutė (circa 1392), mother to the baptist of Samogitia. Young-generation historian Inga Baranauskienė⁶ has compared data in various sources and concluded that Birutė might have drowned as she was crossing the Nemunas River on her way to see her son Vytautas who, at the time, was hiding from domestic enemies with the Teutonic Knights. Contemporary sources speak of an unnamed duchess who was solemnly buried in Ariogala. Back then, Veliuona was the best-known Nemunas crossing point leading to the lands controlled by the Teutonic Knights. It is but a hypothesis, yet a touching one – what was Vytautas thinking as he was sailing through the gravesite of his Samogitian mother on his way to baptise the Samogitians?

Between Čekiškės and Betygala, there lies the village of Paprieniai, home to professor Pranas Dovydaitis, founder of the Lithuanian Catholic federation *Ateitis* and signatory to the 16 February 1918 Independence Act, where he lived between 1937 and 1941 and

⁶ Inga Baranauskienė, „Vilnius. Nepažintoji Birutė. Lietuvos istorijos puslapis“, in: *Voruta*, 2000 m. rugėjo 30 d., Nr. 35–36 (461–462).

where he was arrested by the occupying forces, deported to a labour camp in the Urals and killed.

Ugioniai – it is here that, according to the local oral history recorded by 19th century historian and ethnographer Liudvikas Jucevičius, Vytautas and Jogaila began baptising the Samogitians after erecting a cross by a spring, a pagan worship site. Even today, the spring, named in the honour of the Mother of God, is said to have healing power. A similar site lies between Ariogala and Čekiškė, in the village of Palazduonis – the 12 springs and the Maironiai spring on the road between Tytuvėnai and Kelmė.

Užventis, Užventis Manor is where Marija Pečkauskaitė-Šatrijos Ragana – a mystic, apostle of charity, author and teacher – used to live and pray in the local parish church at the turn of the 20th century.

Varniai, the central site of the Samogitian Baptism of 1413 and 1417. This is where Vytautas built the first church in Samogitian lands to honour his heavenly patron Saint Alexander in 1413-1414 and the first cathedral of the Samogitian Diocese in 1417.

Rainiai was where, in 1941, retreating Soviet officers murdered nine imprisoned Lithuanian patriots, including Hermengildas Žvirgždinas, a gymnasium student and member of the Catholic federation *Ateitis*, martyr of faith of the 20th century.

Telšiai, the seat of the Diocese of Telšiai which, since 1926, encompasses most of Samogitia. Telšiai Bishop Vincentas Borisevičius, martyr and servant of God, is buried in the cathedral vaults.

Kęstaičiai was where functionaries of the Russian tsar brutally crushed Samogitian Catholics who defended their church from demolition in 1886.

Alsėdžiai, the seat of Samogitian bishops who resided in the estate granted by Vytautas in 1417.

Žemaičių Kalvarija . A sacred site founded by 17th century Bishop of Samogitia Jurgis Tiškevičius (Jerzy Tyszkiewicz), famed for its portrait of Virgin Mary, Queen of Christian Families, and 20 Stations of the Cross. Under the Soviets, they were protected from destruction by sheer effort of the local congregation. Today, this sacred site is the centre of Samogitian piety and religious life.

Let these words from a book of the Christian Scriptures hearten everyone who will set out to journey along the way of the Samogitian Baptism and reflect on how God gave strength to those descended from the last pagans of Europe over the last 600 years:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” (Hebrews 12:1-4, ESV)

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led astray by diverse and strange teachings.” (Hebrews 12: 7-9, ESV)

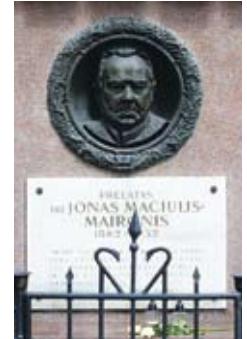
Bear in mind these words from the Scriptures as you walk along the way of the Samogitian Baptism. I wish you a spiritually enriching journey.

Bishop of Telšiai Jonas Boruta, SJ

26 July 2012, Palanga

KAUNAS CATHEDRAL ①

HISTORY. Just like Vilnius Cathedral stands as a symbol of the Baptism of Lithuania, so is Kaunas Cathedral Basilica a monument to the Baptism of Samogitia. The sacred fountainhead of the christianisation of the Samogitians marks the source from whence Christ's light spread throughout Samogitia with the help of Vytautas Aleksandras, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Jogaila Vladislovas, the King of Poland. Kaunas parish church got its first mention in written sources in 1413, which means that it was founded by Vytautas Magnus during the Samogitian christianisation campaign. Rebuilt numerous times throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, the Gothic church dedicated to the Apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul was rather small at first, composed of the present-day presbytery and a two-story sacristy pressed against its northern wall. The vaulting in the presbytery is Gothic, as are some honeycomb vaults in the sacristy and the choir stall. Amidst changing architectural vogues, the



Fragment of the Maironis mausoleum by sculptor Bernardas Bučas



The Kaunas Cathedral. View from the Townhall Square. The two main sites of the city were next to each other. The Townhall signified the civic life of the city, and what was for a long time the only parish church in Kaunas held the centre of its religious life

church was expanded, with a nave added to the presbytery, but funds were very scarce and it stood unfinished for 120 years. Not until the mid-17th century was the three-nave part of the temple completed and, after raising the middle nave, it acquired a basilica-like shape. It came to be the biggest Gothic structure in Lithuania. The church was often ravaged by fires and wars, it was particularly heavily pillaged by Russians during the mid-17th century wars. In 1771-1784, Stanislaw August Poniatowski, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, granted forty thousand guldens, allowing to thoroughly rebuild the church in the style of late Baroque, installing seven stone altars, a pulpit, organ choir stall, adding the entire sculpture décor. The church's altars, pulpits, and the high altar are decorated with sculptures of apostles as well as a sculpture group depicting Golgotha with a giant crucifix and Mary Magdalene kneeling underneath it in the centre. The high altar was completed and consecrated in

**Inside
the Kaunas
Cathedral**



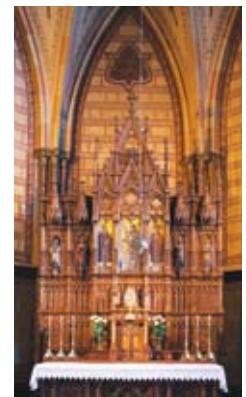
1775 and still stands today. After yet another fire ravaged the church in 1800, it was reconstructed and acquired the appearance it has today.

Between 1808 and 1864, the house of prayer was managed by the Augustinian friars. After the uprising of 1864, the tsarist imperial government moved the seat of

the Samogitian Diocese from Varniai to Kaunas in order to have better control over the bishop who had been rather removed from the centres of political power. Not until 1884 did Pope Leo XIII, urged by Bishop Mečislovas Paliulionis, elevated Kaunas parish church to the status of cathedral – the central church of the diocese. Celebrations of the cathedral status, however, took place only eleven years later. As the diocese was preparing for the celebration, the church was thoroughly renovated, almost all altarpieces were replaced with new paintings by Mykolas Elvyras Andriolis (1836-1892), and the neo-Gothic St John the Baptist Chapel (now, the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, designed by Floryan Wyganowski) was completed between 1893 and 1892 adjoining the southern side of the presbytery. In 1893, the diocese bought and installed a much bigger neo-Gothic organ by a famous organ master.

Today Kaunas Cathedral is a rectangular basilica of unplastered brickwork. The Gothic style still dominates the architecture, but numerous reconstructions have added Renaissance, Baroque, and neo-Gothic features. Inside the church, one's eye is drawn towards a late Baroque ensemble of seven altars and a pulpit (architect Karolis of Skaruliai, sculptor Tomas Podgaiskis) built between 1775 and 1784). The high altar, decorated with a crucifix and sculptures of apostles, stands out in the ensemble. Of particular value is a wooden late 17th century altar of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, complete with paintings. Pieta – Our Lady of Sorrows painting probably dates back to the early 17th century and is particularly revered by the faithful because of the many favours granted to them – as evidenced by votive offerings hung on both sides.

The cathedral's crypt, the chapel, and the churchyard shelter graves of prominent Lithuanian clergymen: Bishops Motiejus Valančius, Mečislovas Leonardas Palilionis, Gasparas Felicijonas Cirtautas, Archbishops Pranciškus Karevičius, Juozapas Skvireckas (reburied here in 1998), monseigneur Luigi Faidutti, advisor of the Apostolic Nunciature, prelate Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis, prelate Adomas Jakštas-Dambrauskas. Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius was laid to rest in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in



The altar of the St. John the Baptist chapel

**Monument to the
Archbishop Juozapas
Jonas Skvireckas.**

Archbishop Skvireckas was not only the first shepherd of the Kaunas Archdiocese, but also a famous biblical scholar who prepared a translation of the Scripture with commentary in six volumes





Fragment of the high altar

Alter of Our Lady of Sorrows

2000. A mausoleum for prelate and poet Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis was built in 1935, three years after his death, at the southern wall of the cathedral. The mausoleum is decorated with a bas-relief image of the poet and inscribed with a verse from his poem:

*Oh how sorry I am for the white-haired old man
Who is standing on the road of eternity
And will no longer rise to the sound of the bells
Nor will have descendants sit in his lap
To hear recollections about the forebears
Nor will utter a word from the coldness of grave!*

Kaunas Cathedral is the seat of the Archbishop, this is where the most important religious (and often national) events of the archdiocese are opened, services are held on Sundays and holidays. Since 2005, Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration is held in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament of Kaunas Cathedral. During the Adoration, believers recite the Liturgy of the Hours, sing, pray in silence, say the Rosary prayers, Rosary of Divine Mercy.



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 8, 9, 10:30 AM, 12, 1:30 PM – for children, 6 PM – for youth
Workdays and Saturdays at 7, 8, 9 AM, 6 PM

ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Every day 6:30 AM to 6 PM (at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament)

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY HOURS

Sundays during Advent at 7:30 AM

LAMENTATIONS

Sundays during Lent at 5:15 PM (at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament)

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Fridays at 5 PM

MAY MASS

Daily throughout May after the 6 PM Mass (at the Blessed Virgin Mary statue)

JUNE MASS

Daily throughout June at 5:30 PM (at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament)

ROSARY MASS

Daily throughout October at 5:30 PM (at the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament)

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Chair of Saint Peter – 22 February (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Our Lady of Sorrows – Friday before Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Saints Peter and Paul – 29 June (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Dedication of the Lateran basilica – 9 November (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Kaunas Cathedral Basilica of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul

1 Vilniaus Street, Kaunas, LT-44281

Phone number (+370 37) 32 40 93



**Granite tombstone
of Cannon Juozas
Tumas-Vaižgantas**

by sculptor Juozas Zikaras

**Kaunas Vytautas
Magnus Church**



KAUNAS VYTAUTAS MAGNUS CHURCH ②

HISTORY. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church of Kaunas, sometimes called Vytautas Magnus Church, is the oldest house of prayer in Kaunas. The Grand Duke built it in gratitude after escaping death in the Battle of the Vorskla River, where the joint Polish-Lithuanian-Teutonic army was beaten by the Mongol-Tatar Hordes in 1399. Vytautas himself was forced to flee the battlefield which marked a failure of the first crusade organized by Lithuanians as well as the end of the state's eastward expansion.

The church was built in 1400 and given to the Franciscans who had a wooden monastery in its vicinity. The church was greatly damaged by the Swedish and Russian armies between 1655 and 1661. After it had been rebuilt, the house of prayer was once more ravaged in the beginning of the 18th century and not until 1712 could it be used for worship again. During the 1831-1832 uprising, the tsar's administration turned the church into a warehouse for the Russian army to stock its food. After the uprising had been crushed, the tsar's administration started a repression campaign against Catholics and in 1845, the

church and the monastery were closed. The monastery was used as a police station and an army garrison chancellery. Between 1850 and 1853, the building was converted into Orthodox Saint Nicholas Church. The monastery was demolished in 1870 and a hospital was built in its place.

After Lithuania became an independent republic, the church was returned to Catholics and managed by the Bishop of Samogitia. Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas spent many active years here.



Built on a river bank, it would often be flooded in spring. During the flood of 1829, for example, the church floor was over 70 centimetres underwater. The greatest flood, though, must have been in 1946. To remember it, a plaque was attached near the main entrance, on the northern wall of the tower, saying: "On 24 March 1946 water rose to 2.9 metres."

CHURCH. The building is a unique monument of the early Gothic style – its composition is unlike anything that could be found throughout the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or neighbouring states. Vytautas Magnus Church is the only cruciform Gothic structure in Lithuania. The transept is formed by massive chapels located on both sides of the nave. The church is a hall structure – its nave and two aisles are covered with one

double-pitched roof, separated only by the lower presbytery with a trihedral apse. The church has very thick walls – 1.6m around the nave and 1.3m in the presbytery and chapels – of veneer masonry: the inner layer of stones covered with brickwork on the outside. Bricks are laid in Gothic bond, alternating headers and stretchers. All façades are decorated with black baked bricks laid in patterns of small crosses and diamonds, and big crosses on the north façade – a sign of the Conventual Franciscan Order.

The church was converted into an Orthodox house of prayer in 1871-1872. Reconstruction work was undertaken between the wars. An early 20th century Italian marble sculpture – the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, previously held at the National Museum and given to the church on 6 May 1929 by Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas – was erected on a granite base between the presbytery and Saint Francis of Assisi Chapel, on the left side of a triumphal arch. In 1991, sculptor Gediminas Jokūbonis made a bronze figure of Vytautas Magnus to be placed inside the church. Visitors can also see the obverse and reverse designs of Vytautas Magnus Medal, by sculptor Petras Rimša, minted for the Grand Duke's 500th anniversary. Saint Anthony of Padua Chapel houses a painting by Petras Kalpokas, commissioned in 1921 for the high altar, showing Vytautas Magnus express gratitude to the Virgin Mary after the Battle of the Vorskla River, a scene from the founding legend of the church. Also in the chapel, stands the granite tombstone of Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, made by Juozas Zikaras in 1934-1936.

Sculpture of Vytautas Magnus
by Gediminas Jokūbonis



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM – for children, 12 PM, 6 PM – for youth

Workdays (except in Mondays) at 6 PM (Thursdays – for youth)

Saturdays at 10 AM, 6 PM

On the second Monday of every month (except in July, August, and September), inner healing services are organized at 5 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August

CONTACTS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Vytautas Magnus) Church

3 Aleksoto Street, Kaunas, LT-44280

Phone number (+370 37) 20 38 54

RAUDONDVARIS ③

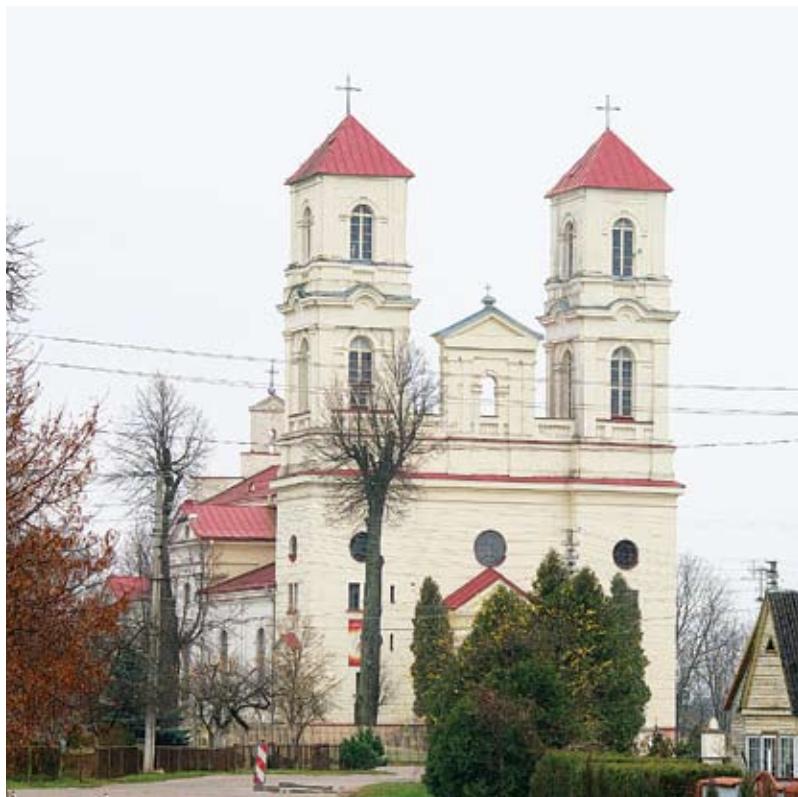
HISTORY. This town of four thousand people is one of seven in Lithuania called Raudondvaris. This one is located in the vicinity of Kaunas. Little is known about the early history of the town, but its geographic situation suggests it must be one of the oldest settlements in Kaunas District. Possibly, it is also the site of 14th century battles with the Teutonic Knights who destroyed Vyrgalė Castle on Virgalė Island in the Nevėžis River estuary. The island itself gradually sank under water.

Raudondvaris has been mentioned since 1615 as a residence of noblemen who built a manor house here. In the 18th century, Raudondvaris was ruled by the Zabiela family and later inherited by the Tiškevičius (Tyszkiewicz).

Palace of the Raudondvaris manor



**Saint Therese
Thérèse of the
Child Jesus
Church in
Raudondvaris**



Count Benediktas Tiškevičius, marshal of Kaunas Governorate, turned Raudondvaris into a true nobleman's residence. He fixed up the manor house, built a number of new neo-Gothic structures (an orangery, barns, stables, etc.), planted a park. It was his house, built from red bricks, that gave the town its name Raudondvaris, meaning "red manor" in Lithuanian. Even though the manor house, often referred to as "castle", does indeed resemble one (it has a tower and arrowslits), it was never intended for defence and its walls could have easily been demolished by contemporary cannons. It was a representational residence of a nobleman – it housed a rich library with collections of maps, paintings, and etchings. Some of the paintings and books from the library were seized by the German army during World War One. Other books and artworks were sold and taken to Poland in 1926. A huge collection of antique books (some of them

true Belarusian and Lithuanian rarities from the 16-18th centuries) was purchased by Fischer, owner of a German bookshop in Kaunas, and presented to Vytautas Magnus University library in 1930 (7,809 volumes). During the interwar republic period, Raudondvaris manor was used as an orphanage managed by the Lithuanian Women's Wardship Committee. The castle was heavily damaged during World War Two, leaving only walls.

Raudondvaris is the birthplace of Juozas Naujalis (1869-1934), a celebrated Lithuanian composer. His house has remained until now, there are three monuments dedicated to him in the town, a museum in the manor.

CHURCH. The first house of worship in Raudondvaris appeared relatively late – a wooden chapel was erected in 1785. Only in the mid-19th century was Raudondvaris made into a parish, meriting a stone house of prayer. The church, designed by Italian architect Cesare Anichini and built in 1857, was consecrated by Bishop Motiejus Valančius, who deposited relics of martyrs Clemence, Vitaly, and Vincent in the high altar. As a matter of fact, the Italian architect, who wandered into Lithuania during the Napoleonic wars, is himself buried in Raudondvaris. A crypt was built underneath a chapel behind the high altar, where the founder of the church Benediktas Tiškevičius (who died in Paris) and other members of the family were laid to rest. Unfortunately, the splendidly decorated church was completely destroyed in 1915 and the ruins were not cleared until 1927. New Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus Church was completed in 1938, a rectangular-outline historicist building with neo-Baroque and neo-Classical features, crowned with two spires. Paintings of the Stations of the Cross, by Aleksandras Sledzinskis, decorate the nave and two aisles, as do Georgio Berti's *Blessed Virgin Mary with Child* and *Death of Saint Joseph*. The side altar contains tombstones by Italian sculptor Luigi Pampaloni for Vanda Tiškevičienė (Vanda Tyszkiewicz), her son Mykolas Tiškevičius (Mykal Tyszkiewicz), her granddaughter-in-law Elžbieta Klara Bancroft-Tiškevičienė (Elizabeth Clara Bancroft-Tyszkiewicz). The church's founder Benediktas Emanuelis Tiškevičius (Benedykt Emanuel Tyszkiewicz) had been buried in the Tiškevičius mausoleum, which was part of the old



**Monument to
Juozas Naujalis**
by Leonas Žuklys



church, but nothing remains of his tombstone, only a pedestal with an inscription. The mausoleum was destroyed as well, so members of the noble family now rest in the churchyard.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 12 PM

Workdays at 7 PM (May to August) or at 6 PM
(September to April)

Tuesdays at 9 AM

ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

First Friday of every month after evening Mass

First Sunday of every month from 10 AM Mass to 12 PM Mass

Sundays after 12 PM Holy Mass

ROSARY PRAYER

Daily before evening Mass, at 5:30 PM

In October, daily after evening Mass at 6 PM

LAMENTATION

Sundays during Lent at 11:40 AM

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Fridays during Lent after evening Mass

Sundays after 12 PM Holy Mass

HOLY MASS IN ROMAINIAI CHAPEL

Sundays at 8:45 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Ascension of the Lord – Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter

Our Lady of Mount Carmel – 16 July (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Saint Rocco – 16 August (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus – 1 October (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus Church

9 Valančiaus Street, Raudondvaris, Kaunas District, LT-54137

Phone number (+370 37) 54 96 12

KAČERGINĖ 4

HISTORY. Kačerginė, a small village or merely 700 people, does not boast a long history. Even though situated near the Hill Fort of Pypliai, the settlement did not develop or enter history before the aftermath of World War One. The western part of the settlement used to be known as Palankiai – after “lankos”, flooded meadows. Its natural beauty, picturesque sights, and fresh pine forest air were perfect for recreation and in 1933, the growing settlement was declared a resort. Easily accessible by steamboats from Kaunas, it soon became a popular destination for outings and picnics. School and university student groups, in particular, liked the spot and had a dance pavilion, game and tennis courts built in the young pine forest. Kačerginė even became the place where students of the Catholic federation *Ateitis* would traditionally have their May outings. Between the wars, the village was much loved by well-known scientists, artists, and writers. Celebrated Lithuanian children's author Pranas Mašiotas (1863-1940) spent his last years, 1938-1940, in Kačerginė, his house still stands at 38 Janonio Street. A park in the village was named after him. Another prominent author Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893-1967) lived – and died – here between 1961

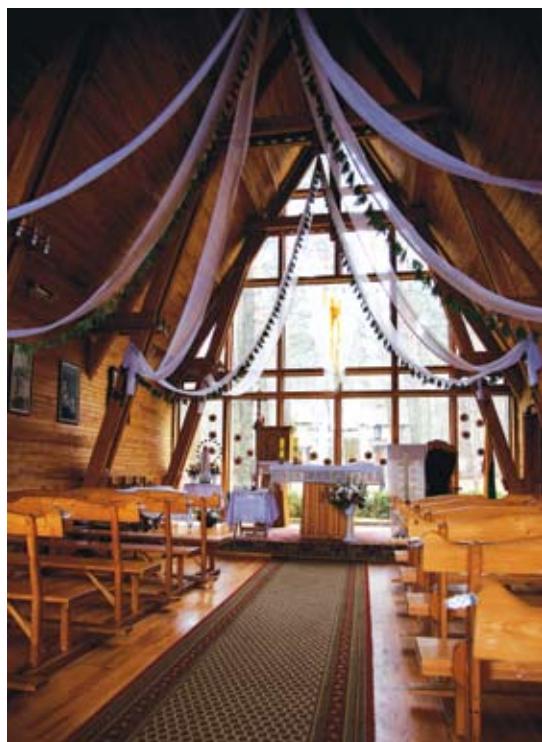
The cross in
the town park
commemorates the
fights for freedom





Monument to the Lithuanian freedom-fighters

Inside the chapel



and 1967, writing his last collections of poems, *Hour of Existence* (*Būties valanda*) and *Window* (*Langas*). The house where he lived now has a memorial exposition celebrating the author's life and there is a monument created by sculptor B. Balansas and erected in 1981. The first professional Lithuanian author, Jonas Biliūnas (1879-1907), also had a house in the village, located at 14 Biliūno Street, but it has not survived. Biliūnas lived here in 1906 and penned one of his best-known short stories, *Brisius' End* (*Brisiaus galas*).

Sculptor Jonas Lukšė built a monument for Lithuanian resistance fighters in Kačerginė in 1994. Nemuno žiedas (Nemunas Ring) car and motorcycle trek is located just outside the village, hosting international racing events. Thus Kačerginė carries on with its traditional role as a place of recreation and entertainment.

CHURCH. Like the village itself, the local house of prayer is relatively new. Saint Anne Chapel of Kačerginė is loca-

ted in the centre of the village, in the midst of a picturesque pine forest, its architecture organically woven into the natural landscape. The building is new, from 1998. However, the village's spiritual life first received its due much earlier, during the period between the wars, when Kačerginė underwent its most intense growth. A chapel under the parish of Zapyskis was opened here in 1938. The new chapel would house services on Sundays and important national and religious holidays. Architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis, who lived in Kačerginė before the war, drew designs for a new chapel, more in line with the needs of the rapidly-growing resort town. However, all plans of the parish community were suspended by the onset of World War Two and the Soviet occupation. Under the Soviets, religious life all but ceased in Kačerginė, the faithful were forced to travel to Zapyskis or Kaunas for worship. After 1994, a newly established community of believers resolved to rebuild the Kačerginė Chapel. Four years later, the current chapel was in place.

The building is rectangular in outline, with a high pitched roof. Walls on the sides are wooden, while the front and back façades are all glass. As a result, the interior is not cut off from the environment, there is much light inside and one gets a sense of praying in the woods. A wooden cross is built into the front gable. A modest sacristy adjoins the western side, there is also a frame bell tower with a small bell. A hedge of small firs outlines the churchyard. The chapel's décor is dominated by a stained-glass altar – a rather rare feature in church interiors.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 1 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Kačerginė Chapel

11 Janonio Street, Kačerginė, Kaunas District, LT-53450
Phone number (+370 37) 56 93 70



The St. Anne Chapel of Kačerginė

ZAPYŠKIS ⑤

HISTORY. On the left bank of the Nemunas River, close to the water, there stands the tiny Gothic church of Zapyškis, one of the oldest in Lithuania, lending some of its fame and the name to a nearby town. The settlement had long been known as Panemunė (literally, by the Nemunas River), but circa 1500s-1600s, it was already referred to as Sapiega's Town (Sapiegiskės), and gradually became Zapyškis. The name comes from the noble House of Sapiega (Sapieha), whose member Jonas Sapiega (Jan Sapieha) was given the surrounding lands by the Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander in the early 16th century. In 1655, the town was completely burned down by the Russian army. Following the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1795), the area came under the Prussian rule and, after 1815, it was incorporated into the Russian Empire together with the entire Duchy of Warsaw.

The façade of the old Zapyškis Church

Until the completion of Kaunas Water Power Plant in the 1960s, Zapyškis was vulnerable to frequent flooding. The



The old Zapyškis cemetery

town therefore moved up the valley and the church was left standing alone in an empty field. The town adjoins the Nemunas River. A settlement to the south, on the inclines of the bank, is called Dievogala, while to the southwest lies Kluoniškiai. Both villages are often considered part of Zapyškis (Kluoniškiai is where the modern church of Zapyškis is located as well as a school and the seat of local administration), but strictly speaking, the town is limited to the lower terrace.

The author of the Lithuanian national anthem Vincas Kudirka (1858-1899) often visited the town. Kudirka Stone with an ecological path leading to it stands in Zapyškis in his honour. Small Dievogalos Švento Jono creek (Dievogala Saint John) traverses the town. In the olden days believers would gather here on Saint John to pray and wash ailing body parts with its water. During the Soviet period its stream bed was straightened, it now flows between plots of crop land, parts of it underground and hardly perceptible.

CHURCH. In 1578, the governor of Zapyškis, voivode of Nowagrodek Povilas Jonaitis Sapiega (Pawel Sapieha) built Saint John the Baptist Church in the town, even though legends prevail that the small Church of Zapyškis was built by Grand Duke Vytautas in the place of a former pagan temple. It is a small spire-less Gothic structure of red brickwork. In places, its builders strayed away from principles of Gothic masonry, bricks are laid down haphazardly. Its façades contain almost no unbroken horizontal or vertical lines, no right angles. The church is thought to have been built by local masons. The south and north façades are near-identical. Above the façade wall, the triangular gable plane is broken by three rows of rectangular, arched, and rounded niches. Each row of niches is



Stone commemorates the 500th anniversary of Zapyškis

The apse of the old Zapyškis Church



smaller than the one underneath it, lending the structure lightness and gracefulness and making it optically taller. The presbytery is lower, ending with a three-walled apse. A semicircular arch separates it from the central arch. The church interior used to be decorated with murals. Presbytery buttresses seem more graceful than those of the nave. One painting in the high altar is thought to have magic powers. According to a legend, it came to Zapyškis by the Nemunas River atop an elk head, was fished out of water and hung in the church. As noted in a 1677 visitation act, 165 votive offerings were hung near the painting and services were held for Vytautas Magnus, the Grand Duke of Lithuania who christianised Samogitia.

No services have been held in the church since the early 20th century. A new church further from the river was built in 1908-1913 on the initiative of the parish priest Kazys Valaitis. Retreating Russian troops demolished it

The new Zapyškis Church



in 1915. A smaller church was built on the same foundations in 1939-1942 – a neo-Romanesque, rectangular, hall-shaped structure with one spire and no apse. The interior is divided into a nave and two aisles. The church, like the town itself, was moved to a higher landing to avoid flooding.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 11 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint John the Baptist – 24 June

Transfiguration of the Lord – 6 August (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Saint John the Baptist Church

13 Bažnyčios Street, Zapyškis, Kaunas District, LT-53417
Phone number (+370 37) 56 93 70

ILGUVA ⑥

HISTORY. Near the picturesque Nyka River valley, facing Veliuona and Seredžius, there lies a small village of only two hundred people, Ilguva. The area has been inhabited since the Stone Age, hill forts of Dulinčiškės, Misiūnai, Žuklijai, and others dot the landscape. In the Middle Ages they were part of fortifications against the Teutonic Knights – who were attacking southern Samogitians through the wild fields of Sūduva – but never carried particular strategic importance. Having become near-deserted during wars with the crusaders, Užnemunė (lands behind the Nemunas River) started recovering after the Battle of Grunewald (Žalgiris, 1410) had removed their threat. With growing demand for grain in 16-century Western Europe, new estates and peasant villages sprang



The Ilguva manor building

up in the area. Ilguva is a typical example of such new villages and folwarks set up after the mid-16-century Wallach reform. Until the 18th century, the village went by the name of Panykiai, first mentioned in 1583. But in the mid-1700s, prelate of Medininkai Cathedral Viktoras Talko-Grincevičius Ilguvietis acquired a large estate spanning both sides of the Nemunas and built himself a palace on the elevated bank above the river, where he would only stay in summers. Ilguva village that grew around the manor borrowed its name from the landlord. The estate experienced its golden age at the turn of the 20th century when it was managed by the Mlynarski family. The manor hosted celebrated artists and intellectuals, including painter Mykolas Elvyras Andriolis, pianist



The rectory to which the bishop Vincentas Borisevičius came for retreat



and lyricist Ignacy Paderewski, who later became prime minister of Poland, composers Karolis Šimanovskis and Stasys Šimkus. The house would be visited by famous pianist Artūras Rubinšteinas, Mlynarskis' son-in-law, as well as writer Juozapas Albinas Herbačauskas, painter Kazys Šimonis, historians Jonas Totoraitis and Antanas Tatarė, professor of Saint Petersburg Spiritual Academy Justinas Pranaitis. The house became a venue of concerts, it housed a decent library. In his memoirs, Petras Cvirka relates how he, as a child, was enchanted by the music coming from across the river whenever Emil Mlynarski had guests. The Mlynarskis were patrons of Beatričė Grincevičiutė, blind singer who went on to become a big star. After World War Two, the Soviets nationalized the estate and turned the manor into a retirement house and later a psycho-neurological clinic. One of the patients was General Motiejus Pečiulionis-Miškinis (1888-1960), who died there after having suffered years of Soviet

persecution and forced labour. Stasys Šilingas (1885-1962) was laid to rest in Ilguva cemetery. He had been a prominent figure in the interwar Republic of Lithuania, Presidium Vice-Chairman of the Lithuanian State Council, Minister of Justice, co-author of the 1938 Constitution, and patron of artists. Deported by the Soviets, he only returned to Lithuania in 1961.

CHURCH. Ilguva has a small wooden church, dedicated to the Discovery of the Holy Cross. The first house of worship in the village was built by the elder of Upytė, Pranciškus Grincevičius, in 1765. The parish, however, was established only in the late 18th century. In 1813, a lightning bolt hit the church and it burned to the ground. Nine years later, however, a new house of prayer was consecrated. Its plan is a short but unusually wide rectangle divided into a nave and two aisles by two pairs of columns. High-rising, almost rectangular nave is extended by a presbytery. One double-pitched roof crowns the entire structure. A Baroque-silhouetted spire rises above the roof. The interior décor consists of altars. The high altar is discreetly adorned with Baroque shapes. The church also houses a valuable painting by Francesco Andrioli, *Mary with Child*. Historicists details harmoniously complement the essentially vernacular architecture of the Ilguva Church. A detached wooden three-tier bell tower stands in the churchyard.



Memorial cross in the churchyard

Discovery of the Holy Cross Church in Ilguva.

In the small towns of Lithuania, the churchyards naturally become cemeteries, which creates the communion of the living and the departed, the sense of always having our ancestors near us



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 1 PM

Workdays at 5 PM

Saturdays at 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Discovery of the Holy Cross – 3 May (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Triumph of the Holy Cross – 14 September (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Discovery of the Holy Cross Church

Ilgava, Šakiai District, LT-71201

Phone number (+370 345) 68 336

PLOKŠČIAI 7

HISTORY. Plokščiai is the place of death and eternal rest of virgin martyr Elena Klimaitytė. It is a small village of under 500 people on the left bank of the Nemunas River, notable for its rivulet-street. The settlement's first mention dates back to the 17th century. A manor was built near the village in 1663-1676, when Plokščiai belonged to state treasurer and scribe Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas (Hieronim Kryspin-Kirszensztein). Plokščiai was probably a present for good service from the king. After him, the village was passed on to the Tiškevičius and, in 1795, acquired by the Karp family. Until World War One, the village was known as Blagoslavenstv. According to a legend, the Polish name came into use after a bishop, who was to come to Plokščiai to consecrate a newly-built church, could not cross the flooded Nemunas and therefore gave a blessing to the assembled townsfolk from a distance and immediately left. This "blessing" in Polish gave the village its name.

Plokščiai was made famous by Elena Klimaitytė (1918-1944), a young woman who died defending her virgin virtue in the turbulent post-World War Two years. Raised by a Catholic family, Elena remained faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ until her death. In late afternoon of 17 November 1944, two drunk Soviet soldiers entered the family's home. Seeing there was no one except two young girls – Elena and family maid Antanina – and old parents,

they decided they could drop all civilities and started shooting into holy paintings on the walls. When the soldiers demanded to be fed, Elena went to the kitchen. One soldier followed her and started dragging her towards the parents' bedroom. The girl resisted with all her might, so the soldier hit her in the face with the buttstock of his rifle. Heavily injured, she ran into the corridor and fell. The attacker finished her off with two shots to the head. Meanwhile her parents had run to the village to shout for help. They were also killed. Antanina, the housemaid, was the only one who survived and, after the two soldiers' trial, settled in the Klimaitis family house. In 1889-1899, the Justice of Peace in Plokščiai was Petras Kriauciūnas, the activist of the nationalist movement. During that time, Plokščiai became an important spot for the recovering nation of Lithuania.

CHURCH. The first church in Plokščiai was founded by the landlord of the village, Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas, in 1670. Benediktas Karpis built a new house of prayer in 1784, after the old one burned down. Karpis' church was badly maintained and eventually rotted away. In 1868, on the initiative of priest Tomas Jankauskas and funds provided by Benediktas Tiškevičius (Benedict Tyszkiewicz), the current church was built. The building is of the Latin cross plan, with a tower on the roof apex in the



Elena Klimaitytė's tombstone in the Plokščiai cemetery

Plokščiai Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church





On the way to Šventaduobė

Šventaduobė



front – a lean octagonal spire rising above a rectangular base and topped by a pyramid-shaped roof. A similar octagonal tower stands on the other side of the roof, above a slightly lowered three-walled apse. The church door is decorated with a rhythmical diamond pattern of exceptional beauty. Plokščiai church has an old copper bell, cast in East Prussia in 1573, and several surviving artworks of some value: an 18th century portrait of an unknown priest, a late 19th century crucifix, a wooden crucifix from the early 19th century, two altarpieces, one depicting the Revelation and the other, a portrait of Saint Stephen.

Plokščiai boasts one exceptional object of religious heritage – Šventaduobė (Sacred Pit), located in the Didžiupis River valley and accessible by a pathway lined with wooden sculptures. It is said that a portrait of the Virgin Mary was once discovered in the Nemunas by the village. Even though people put it in the church, the painting kept reappearing in a nearby ravine, so they decided to build a chapel there. The first chapel with a small altar, built in the 19th century, was wooden and soon rotted away. So in the period between the wars, people decided to renew Šventaduobė – they used boulders brought from the fields to build a small altar and a wall. Visitors can have a sip from a fountain that is said to possess healing power. In summer, the place is a venue for various religious and cultural events.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 12 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Holy Trinity – Sunday after Pentecost

Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 12 September (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

32 Bažnyčios Street, Plokščiai, Šakiai District, LT-71483

Phone number (+370 345) 42 793

GELGAUDIŠKIS 8

HISTORY. The town is the site of rebirth of the Marian Order, inspired by Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis. This charming settlement by the Nemunas was first mentioned in written sources in the early 15th century and in 1504, Grand Duke Aleksandras gave Gelgaudiškis to Jonas Sapiega (Jan Sapieha) as part of Skirsnemunė estate. This date is accepted as the founding of the town. However, people had lived here long before, since the 5-10th centuries, and the 15th century saw the founding of Skirsnemunė estate which belonged to Jurgis Gedgaudas. Since the 1500s, the estate changed hands between the Sapiegas, Masalskis, Oziembloviskis, Gelgaujas, Zabielas, Čartoriiskis. Gelgaudiškis was severely damaged during mid-17th century wars and was even taken by the Swedes. After the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the town, along with the rest of Užnemunė, went to the Kingdom of Prussia, but was handed over to Imperial Russia after the Congress of Vienna. In mid-19th century, German nobleman Gustav Keudell (Gustavas Koidelis) built a beautiful manor house in Gelgaudiškis. It is a big palace and one of the most original architectural ensembles in Lithuania, consisting of the palace itself, estate outbuildings, and a park. The palace is a one-storey neo-Classical building, its façades decorated with columns, balustrades, and fine metalwork. Surrounding the palace is an old 5.3-hectare park, one of the biggest of its kind in Lithuania. It is quite intricate in design – strict geometrical forms gradually give way to natural forests on the slopes of the Nemunas valley. The park's structural axis is a promenade lined with four

rows of silver maple trees, traversing the manor house from the south.

The Keudells had a Lutheran church and a parish set up in Gelgaudiškis in 1842. However, Gustav Keudell lost his Russian citizenship in 1875 and, after the tsar banned ownership of land by foreigners in provinces along the borders of the empire in 1887, his son Francis Keudell was forced to sell the estate. It was bought by a company run by Jonas Montvila, Jonas Svida, Aleksandras Balturis, Abdonas Zanas. Soon afterwards, Count Komaras bought upper Gelgaudiškis for 800 roubles while Šemeta bought lower Gelgaudiškis. After World War One, the manor was nationalized and used as an orphanage. Under the Soviets, it was transformed into a boarding school.

Gelgaudiškis Triumph of the Holy Cross Church

CHURCH. The Sapiegas built the first wooden church in Gelgaudiškis in 1578. Kazimieras Ozemblovsksis reconstructed it in the late 17th century and set up a parish.



When this building burned down in 1864, the new neo-Gothic church of Triumph of the Holy Cross was erected in 1868-1884. It is a rectangular red brick structure consisting of a single nave, decorated with one big spire and three smaller ones. The church of Gelgaudiškis has an important place in the history of the Marian Fathers. When father Vincentas Senkus, Superior General of the Marians, passed away on 10 April 1911, there were only two remaining professed members in the Marian community. On 14 July 1911, they convened for an electoral chapter in the sacristy of Gelgaudiškis church – its master at the time was an uncle of Marian priest Pranciškus Būčys. Minutes from the meeting contain the following record: "We, the remaining brothers, professed priests Jurgis Matulevičius, Jonas Totoraitis, and Pranas Būčys, have elected brother Jurgis Matulevičius as the Most Venerable Superior General of the Congregation." Jurgis Matulaitis (1871-1927), a priest and later an archbishop, was reelected in 1923 and retained the office until his death. Blessed Matulaitis worked hard to rebuild and expand the Congregation of Marian Fathers in Lithuania.



Tombstone of Canon
Motiejus Dydinskas

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 9 AM, 12 PM

Workdays at 6 PM (May and June), 5 PM (October)

Other months:

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 9 AM

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6 PM (or 5 PM in November to March)

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August at 9, 10:30 AM and 12 PM

Triumph of the Holy Cross – 14 September (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Triumph of the Holy Cross Church

1 Taikos Street, Gelgaudiškis, Šakiai District, LT-71422

Phone number (+370 345) 55 286

KIDULIAI 9



Sculpture of Michael the Archangel in the churchyard

HISTORY. Kiduliai, a village of some 400 people, lies on the picturesque left bank of the Nemunas River, just opposite Jurbarkas. It incorporates several previously separate villages: Kiduliai, Kurkasé, Judriai, Šiaudiné, and Kaimelis. Kaimelis is the oldest of the lot, mentioned in Peter of Dusburg's Chronicles of the Prussian Land in 1295. It also gets a mention in Grigalius Valavičius' (Grzegorz Wollowicz) 1559 Forest Revision, as King's village and part of Jurbarkas estate.

It is known that Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas, treasurer of the Grand Duchy and scribe of Kaunas Castle, acquired Kiduliai in the late 1600s. In 1685, he built a stone residence for himself in the vicinity. During the Great Northern War, when the Swedes captured the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jonas Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas, Bishop of Samogitia, was staying in his family's estate so he could flee to Prussia if need be. In 1737-1739, the estate was home to another Bishop of Samogitia, Juozapas Mikalojus Karpis. The Tiškevičius family bought it from the Karpis, therefore Bishop Antanas Dominykas Tiškevičius (1692-1762) was also a frequent guest here. After the third partition of the Commonwealth (1795), Sūduva region came under the Prussian rule. Prussia pursued policies of Germanization in the land. Frederick William III of Prussia was staying in Kiduliai in 1807. Beginning in the early 1800s, the name Kiduliai came to refer solely to the old estate, while the new folwerk and village would be called Kaimelis. In 1837, Russia's imperial administration presented Kiduliai to General Ofenberg for his merits in the 1812 Franco-Russian war. This period saw Kiduliai rise and flourish like never before. In 1978, a bridge was built across the Nemunas, connecting Samogitia to Sūduva.

CHURCH. The first chapel in Kiduliai estate was mentioned in 1636. Apparently, at some point it belonged to protestants, because in the late 17th century, Bishop of Samogitia Jonas Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas had the remains of all non-Catholic landlords of Kiduliai removed from it. 29 September 1685 (Saint Michael)

is traditionally taken as the date when the bishop consecrated Kiduliai Chapel. However, Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas had not taken episcopal vows then, meaning that either it was someone else who consecrated the chapel, or the dating is wrong (a record from 1694 refers to the chapel as already consecrated). In 1758, Kiduliai became a separate parish. The church acquired exceptional prominence when the nearby estate was managed by two Bishops of Samogitia, Jonas Jeronimas Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas and Antanas Dominykas Tiškevičius, who would often visit Kiduliai. For instance, on Saint Michael's Day in 1703, Krišpinas-Kiršenšteinas performed Confirmation Sacrament rites for 424 people in the chapel. It has been claimed, mistakenly, that Bishop Juozapas Mikalojus Karpis, landlord of the estate, was also buried here. The Holy Mass would be held in the chapel until 1839, but the building was demolished later in the century and a barn built in its place. Benediktas Tiškevičius, who owned the village, built the current wooden church in 1860. It is a rectangular building with one tower, decorated with seven pinnacles. A stone fence encloses the churchyard which contains a short two-storey bell tower. Inside the church hangs *Saint Rocco* by Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. The



St. Rocco by
M. K. Čiurlionis

St. Michael the Archangel Church in Kiduliai





Inside the St. Michael the Archangel Church in Kiduliai

painting is not typical of Čiurlionis, who hardly ever tackled religious subjects and preferred other techniques to oil. It is possible that the piece was closely modelled on another unknown painting. Some of its features resemble the German realist school from the turn of the 20th century.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 9 and 11 AM

Tuesdays and Fridays at 5 PM (October to April) and at 6 PM (April to October)

Wednesdays and Thursdays at 9 AM

On feast days, holidays, and Spiritual retreat, the Holy Mass is celebrated at 10 AM and 12 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Rocco – 19 August

Saint Michael the Archangel – 30 September

CONTACTS

Saint Michael the Archangel Church

4 Aušros Street, Kaimelis, Šakiai District, LT-71404

Phone number (+370 345) 62 212

KULAUTUVA 10

HISTORY. Kulautuva stretches across a charming valley of pine forests on the right bank of the Nemunas River, very close to Kaunas. The tiny town has a population of about 1,300. It was first mentioned in the chronicle of Wigand of Marburg in 1364. The Teutonic Knights pillaged the village several times. It is believed that the Treaty of Salynas was signed in an island that faces Kulautuva. Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas agreed with Konrad von Jungingen, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, on handing Samogitia to the Order. Afterwards, Kulautuva's name was mentioned in 16th century acts (1593, etc.). It is known that during the 1863 uprising, there were about five thousand insurgents, recruited from across Lithuania, in and around Kulautuva. But the village of a few houses did not develop into anything bigger until the 20th century. Zapyškis Church, one of the oldest Gothic buildings in Lithuania, stands across the river from Kulautuva.

The village underwent the most radical phase of growth in the period between the wars, when Kaunas was the temporary capital of the Republic of Lithuania. Renovation works started in the 1930s and, in 1933, Kulautuva was granted the resort town status. Lieutenant Colonel Vytautas Augustauskas is credited with ushering in the change – he had a reconstruction plan prepared, white acacias and lime trees planted along Kulautuva's roads, a new pond dug. The entire Kaunas elite would come to spend summers in Kulautuva.

In 1930, nuns settled in the town, building a private chapel in 1931. The following year, it was moved to another location and opened to the public. The chapel was expanded in 1940. It was part of Raudondvaris parish until Kulautuva was made a separate one. Until 1987, its parish priest was Juozapas Frainas (born in 1911), whom the Soviets had exiled after World War Two.

Kulautuva merited a mention in the 10th issue of *The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church* in 1974. *The Chronicle* relates the story of Stasė Jasiūnaitė, a teacher in Kulautuva Secondary School between 1956 and 1957. She was spotted wearing a necklace with a cross and admitted that she was religious. Not only was she fired from the school – she could not get a job anywhere else. Only in 1959, when Jasiūnaitė wrote an official letter to Nikita Khrushchev, Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, did the authorities sign an order to give Jasiūnaitė a job. However, she was not allowed to work as a teacher. She is buried in Kulautuva cemetery, her grave marked by a carved oak sculpture of Jesus Christ.

Between 1993 and 1996, the so-called five treasures of Kulautuva were unearthed. They contain almost seven hundred kilograms of silver from the Middle Ages, mostly jewellery.

The Jesuit Gymnasium House for Spiritual Exercises operates in Kulautuva. Once a year, each class in the gymnasium must go there as part of the curriculum. Pupils



The Kulautuva Church. Historical photograph

are encouraged to reflect on things beyond their daily existence, take a closer look at their lives, strengthen their connection to God, thus furthering their own personal development as well as building the school community. The house also organizes Spiritual Exercises for the society at large.

CHURCH. Kulautuva Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary church was built in 1932 and, until 1940, bore the name of Kulautuva Liberation of Saint Peter Church – the parish still does. It was a wooden building, of vernacular architecture, rectangular in plan, with a single spire. A 1934 Madonna sculpture used to stand in the churched yard since 1956, but after the Independence it was decided to move it to its original site in the town. In 2012, the church and its bell tower were ravaged by a fire.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS.

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 9 and 10:30 AM

Workdays at 5 PM (September to April) or 6 PM (May to August)

Held at the Kulautuva Culture Centre (Akacijų al. 32, Kulautuva, LT-53486).

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anthony of Padua – 13 June

Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 12 September

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary –

8 December

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Liberation of Saint Peter Church Parish

Phone number (+370 37) 54 33 44

PAŠTUVA 11

HISTORY. Today, this tiny village of under 200 people near Kaunas is much liked by the city folk for outings and picnics. Small though it is, the village boasts a long history: the first mention in written sources dates back to 1292, when German crusaders were invading Paštuva lands. According to Wigand of Marburg's chronicle, Paštuva castle was located on an island in the Nemunas. It is believed that it could have been the castle of Salynas. In 1364, the German chronicler put in a mention of

Tombstones of Ignotas Karpis and the Vailokaitis brothers





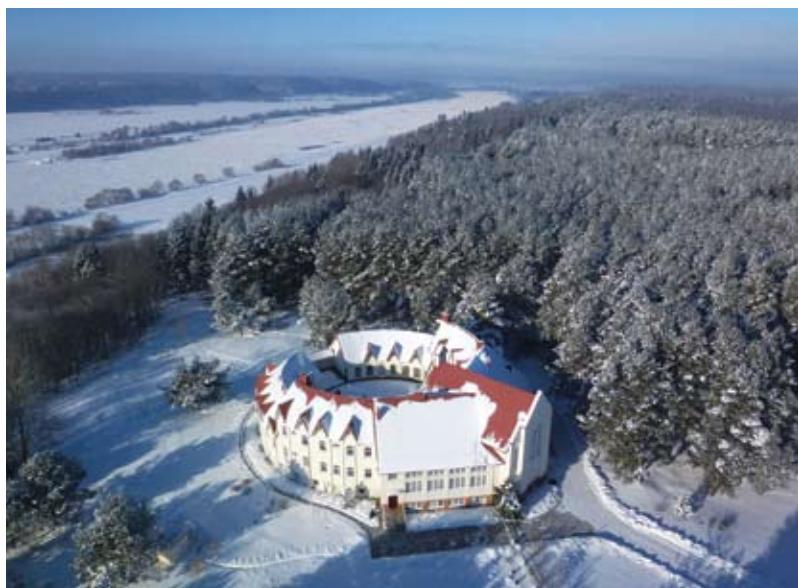
The apse of the
Paštuva Convent
Chapel

Paštuva land (*terra Pastowen* in Latin). So the area was chronicled much earlier than the adjoining settlements of Vilkija and Raudondvaris. Despite frequent attacks by the Teutonic Knights, it was a densely populated area at the time. At the same time, however, it was one of the hardest-hit regions in Samogitia throughout the 14th century. Paštuva estate is mentioned in 1575, ruled by the House of Karpis since 1738 (their central seat was in Joniškėlis).

The biggest celebrity of Paštuva is a tumulus-like grave of Ignotas Karpis (Ignacy Karp, 1780-1809), one of the most renowned landlords of Paštuva, near the village church. Karpis was an energetic statesman of the crumbling Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, best known for freeing around seven thousand serfs in his will – a step inspired by readings of the philosophers of Western Europe. All the freed peasants were pardoned their debts and even given thirty Dutch talers to start their own farms. Adam Mickiewicz (Adomas Mickevičius) describes Karpis' deed in his epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*.

Nearby are the graves of brothers Jonas (1886-1944) and Juozas (1880-1953) Vailokaitis. Juozas was a priest, chairman of the Litas issuing commission, member of

The Paštuva
Convent



the First and Second Constituent Seimas. After returning from Soviet exile, he served in Paštuva church and was reburied in the local cemetery in 1993. His brother Jonas Vailokaitis was an economist and financier, he died in Germany in 1944. In 2007, his remains were brought back to Lithuania and laid to rest near his brother's. Both were prominent figures in the economic life of the interwar Republic, often called the richest men in the country. They would give up to 15 percent of their profits to charity, particularly to support poor students.

CHURCH. From the 17th century until 1842, Paštuva was managed by the Benedictine Sisters from Kaunas. This was probably when the village had its first house of worship. The wooden church of Saint Barbara appeared in 1923. It was a rectangular building of vernacular architecture, with one spire and a five-walled apse adjoining a sacristy. In 2012, the church was set on fire and burned to the ground. However, there still remains a two-storey wooden bell tower, a carved wooden cross, and a cemetery.

Since 1994, the village houses women's Saint Joseph and Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus Convent which belongs to the Discalced Carmelites, a branch of the Carmelite Order. Parts of the monastery are enclosed and inaccessible to laypeople. Behind the old parsonage, on the edge of a pine forest, springs the Saint John's fountain, often visited by pilgrims and people from Kaunas.



The church belltower



Flowers at the spot of
the altar

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 12 PM

Held at the Paštuva Convent chapel.

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Our Lady of Consolation – on the last Sunday of August
Saint Francis of Assisi – 4 October

Saint Barbara – 4 December

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Phone number (+370 37) 54 33 44

VILKJIA ⑫

HISTORY. Vilkija has been mentioned since 1364 (as *Wilkenbethe*, though other sources give a later date, 1426), so it is one of the oldest settlements on the right bank of the Nemunas River. Today, it has a population of some 2,500 people. It is a peculiar town situated on hills,



Panoramic view of Vilkija

unique in its structure in the region. Vilkija Castle, also known as Paštuvė Castle, used to stand on Jaučakiai hill fort – or Gallows hill fort – in present-day Jaučakiai village but was torn down in 1369. Duke Vytautas mentions Vilkija in his 1430 letter to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. Gdansk merchants' documents refer to Vilkija checkpoint – the first Lithuanian customs point by the Nemunas River. Land and water trade routes between Vilnius and Koenigsberg used to cross Vilkija – intensified commercial links with Western Europe in the 16th century gave a significant boost to the town's growth.

In 1792, Stanislaw August Poniatowski conferred city rights on Vilkija and gave it a coat of arms, but in the middle of that year, as Russian-supported opponents of new cities were gaining ground in the land, Vilkija's self-government was revoked. It could have been reinstated during Tadas Kosciuška's (Tadeusz Kościuszko) uprising, since there is a reference to municipal officials from 1794. Citizens of the town battled with the new

Russian administration over self-government rights until the 1820s, but all in vain.

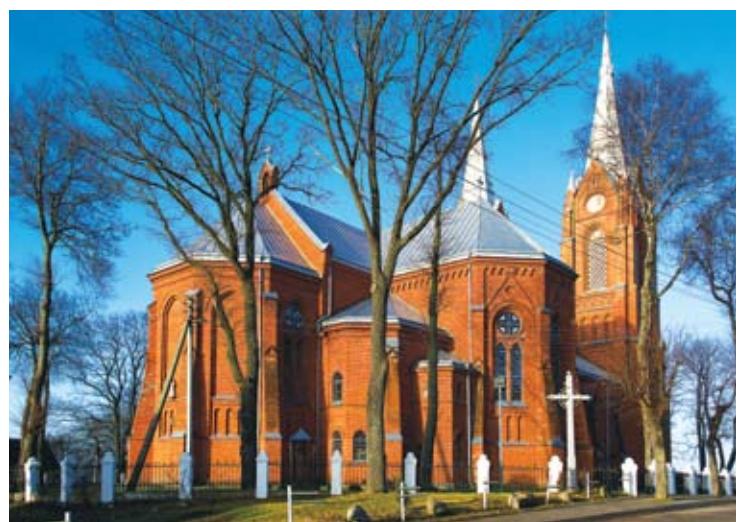
Priest Antanas Juška (1819-1880), an ardent collector and researcher of the Lithuanian folklore, was vicar in Vilkija between 1862 and 1864. There are three 19th century stone column shrines by unknown folk artists in Vilkija's old cemetery. The old Jewish cemetery also survives. In 1992, commemorating the 200th anniversary of Vilkija's Magdeburg rights, the town erected a column shrine for Saint Joseph. The town also boasts the only ferry across the Nemunas – Vilkynė.

CHURCH. It is believed that Vilkija had a small church or chapel as early as the 15th century. In 1542, a new wooden church, Holy Trinity, rose on the river bank, becoming the centre of a parish. Visitator Tarquinius Pecculus, who saw Vilkija church in 1579, noted that it was in need of urgent repairs – the roof was leaky, liturgical vestments were old and worn out, books were badly kept, cemetery wild and poorly maintained. In 1721, the church burned down but was rebuilt soon afterwards. The same happened again in 1730 or 1731 when it was struck by a lightning. In the wake of yet another fire in 1892, it was decided to build a church of stone. The initiative came from priest Stanislovas Bačkis, grand-uncle of Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis. He was laid to rest in



Monument to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Vilkija Church

St. George Church in Vilkija





Tombstone of Father Stanislovas Bačkis

the churchyard. The red-brick neo-Gothic Saint George church, gracing the landscape with its double-spired silhouette, was finished in 1908. The two towers are octagonal, with tall acoustic openings and even taller pyramid-shaped roofs. The cruciform building has a nave and two aisles, its interior decorated with 19th century altarpieces *Crucifixion of Jesus* and *The Holy Family*. The church also has an organ made by a famous Lithuanian master, Jonas Garalevičius.

In 1915, retreating Russian troops made plans to blow up several churches by the Nemunas River. Raudondvaris church suffered, as did the spires of Seredžius church. However, as a popular legend goes, when the soldiers sent for the job came to Vilkija, parish priest Stanislovas Bačkis gave them so generous a reception that left them in no shape to carry out the task.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 12 PM
Tuesdays to Fridays at 5 PM
Saturdays at 9 or 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Joseph – 19 March
Saint George – 23 April
Saint Anne – 26 July

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint George Church

19 Bažnyčios Street, Vilkija, Kaunas District, LT-54227
Phone number (+370 37) 55 62 57

ARREST SITE OF PRIEST ANTANAS MACKEVIČIUS 13

HISTORY. Priest Antanas Mackevičius (Antoni Mazkiewicz) (1828-1863) deserves a place among the most prominent actors of the 1863 uprising in Lithuania, while

some even call him its spiritual leader. Though he lived a short life, his contribution to defending ideals of freedom and Christianity was great.

Mackevičius was born in what is today Kelmė District, in the village of Morkiai. His parents belonged to petty nobility, so the young man had to rely on his own wits and the grace of God rather than his family's fortune. He studied in Vilnius Gymnasium, then in the University of Kiev. Inspired by the 1848 wave of revolutions as well as stories about the free times of the Commonwealth and the 1831 uprising – still very much alive in the cultural memory of the nobility – young Antanas committed to ideas of equality and resolved to change the deplorable situation of peasants under serfhood. In order to be closer to the people and educate them in the spirit of devoutness and freedom, Mackevičius dropped out of the university in Kiev and, in 1850, enrolled in a seminary in Varniai. He graduated three years later and was appointed a vicar in Krekenava and later a parish priest in Paberžė. Mackevičius distinguished himself as a very dedicated cleric – he readily communicated with his parishioners, often visited the sick, traveled to parish villages, gave vivid and inspiring sermons.

In 1862, in Kėdainiai, Mackevičius met with Zigmantas Sierakauskas (Zygmunt Sierakowski) and Konstantinas Kalinauskas (Konstanty Kalinowski) to discuss their actions. On 20 April, the priest read out a manifesto to the congregation of the Paberžė church, urging everyone who was not indifferent to Lithuania's future to join the uprising, fight for civil rights, for a right to work lands of their own. He explained his own determination thus: "Love of the nation and its happiness was the reason and goal of over a decade-long revolutionary work."

The priest assembled a rebel squad of some 300 men. More and more peasants joined in, several months later the squad was 500-strong. Mackevičius' leadership was characterized by an excellent grasp of guerilla tactics.

The insurgents fought bravely, but their numbers were no match for their opponents'. 140 thousand soldiers of the Russian army were sent against 15 thousand insurgents armed with scythes and hunting rifles. Even though the brave rebels scored several victories at the begin-



Father Antanas Mackevičius

ning, gaining control over much of Lithuanian lands, the key cities remained in the hands of the imperial army. On 13 May 1863, the Russian tsar sent Mikhail Muravyov to crush the uprising. Muravyov was ready to use ruthless methods to that end, but Mackevičius and his comrades-in-arms were not scared. Vilkija, Šiluva, Tytuvėnai, Krakės, Josvainiai, Pumpėnai, Šilalė, Tverai, Rietavas – these places would send reports to Saint Petersburg about sighting men led by the former priest of Paberžė.

On 26 November 1863, Mackevičius' rebel squad fought the last battle in Lekešiai village, near Vilkija. Well-armed imperial troops easily defeated the insurgents and injured their leader. He went into hiding around Vilkija, but was arrested on 17 December and put into Kaunas prison (the building now houses the Maironis Memorial House Museum). He refused to give away other insurgents to his interrogators or collaborate with the tsar's government, so Muravyov sentenced him to death. Mackevičius was hanged on 28 December 1863 in Kaunas.

Historians have often raised the issue of the Catholic Church's role in the uprising. The example of priest Mackevičius alone bears witness to the fact that the clergy supported it and some even joined the rebel ranks. Bishop of Samogitia Motiejus Valančius secretly supported insurgents as well, meeting with them regularly. Bishop of Vilnius Adomas Stanislovas Krasinskis, too, sympathised with the aims of the uprising. In 1863, Muravyov had him arrested and exiled from Lithuania. Over two and a half hundred priests took part in the uprising, some of them died, the rest were arrested and exiled to remote regions of Russia. Even those released from prison were transferred to secluded parishes.

SEREDŽIUS 14

HISTORY. Seredžius, today a town of under one thousand people, used to be an important defence point, part of the so-called league of Nemunas castles that defended the Grand Duchy from German crusaders' attacks. Two remaining hill forts stand witness to the military past of the town: Palemonas hill fort, former site of 13-14th century Pieštuvė Castle, and Polocėliai hill fort, where crusaders had their fortifications in the 15th century. Pieštuvė Castle has been mentioned in chronicles since the 14th century, sieged by the Teutonic Knights many times, and destroyed in 1363. After ending wars with the crusaders and opening grain trade routes with Western Europe,

the town began to grow. Until the devastating wars of the 17th century, it was an important trade point, home to many merchants and artisans.

The Grand Duke of Lithuania gave Seredžius to the Sapiega family and it was one of the biggest private estates in Samogitia until the end of the 18th century. A mound on the right bank of the Nemunas-Dubysa confluence still contains remains of stone structures. The building was rectangular in plan, with two towers. The ruins might once have been Sapiega's representational palace, Miežirečė manor. A water canal used to separate the palace from the town, while the rivers Dubysa and Nemunas would shelter it from the east and the south. The name of Miežiréčė, however, did not stick to the town and the estate itself gradually came to be called Seredžius. In the 19th century, the noble Burba family built gorgeous Belvederis palace on a hill overlooking the Nemunas, to the west of Seredžius. The counts sympathised with the Lithuanian national movement in the early 20th century. Between 1905 and 1914, composer Stasys Šimkus, a native of Seredžius, and other patriotically-inclined Lithuanians used to throw parties, complete with theatre and choir performances, in Belvederis estate barn.

St. John the Baptist Church in Seredžius.

Like in many towns of Lithuania, the church stands on the highest point of the surroundings and can be seen from afar





The altar of the
St. John the Baptist
Church

Inside the St. John
the Baptist Church

CHURCH. The town already had a house of worship in 1579, when it was mentioned in Tarquinius Peculus' visitation. Apparently, the town had been touched by the Reformation at the time and the local priest had a wife. The church that is more familiar to historians was built by Mikalojus Sapiega (Mikolaj Sapieha), Voivode of Novagrudek and master of Seredžius, who gave a new benefice to the church in 1635, obliging the local parish priest to establish a school and hire a teacher. The church was reconstructed and expanded in the late 17th century, but by the early 1800s, the building had fallen into disuse and decay. In 1829, rising waters of the Nemunas and Dubysa washed away the slope and the wooden temple crumbled. The town began building a new wooden church further up the hill that same year. This church burned down in 1907, so it was decided to build a new one, this time of stone, a year later. Construction works dragged on and the church was not finished before 1913. It was seriously damaged during World War One, lost both of its spires. Saint John the Baptist Church is historicist neo-Renaissance building of rectangular outline, hall-shaped, ending in a five-walled apse. The interior space is divided into a nave and two aisles. The façade is slightly overworked with decorative pilasters, window and door mouldings, and cartouches. Pilasters also punctuate the side walls that have huge arched windows of tiny latticed



round- and rectangular-shaped lights. Seredžius church holds many valuable pieces of religious art and liturgy. The façade sports two wooden 19th century sculptures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist. A fine column chapel used to grace the foot of Palemonas Hill, by the Pieštuvė Rivulet. It was later shortened, its wooden sculptures rotted away and the column chapel disappeared in decay.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM

Saturdays at 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Casimir – 4 March

Saint John the Baptist – 24 June

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 8 September

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint John the Baptist Church

13 Cvirkos Street, Seredžius, Jurbarkas District, LT-74423

Phone number (+370 447) 42 238

VELIUONA 15

HISTORY. Veliuona, one of the oldest settlements by the Nemunas River, is also one of the first parishes of the Samogitian Diocese, set up by Grand Duke Vytautas back in 1421. Its unique 17th century church is another testimony to the town's old history. Situated on elevated banks of the Nemunas, Veliuona, now a small town of some 800 people, used to be one of the key castles in a line of defence against the Teutonic Knights attacking the Grand Duchy from across the river. Two adjacent hill forts testify to that fact. According to German chronicler Peter of Dusburg, Samogitians built a strong castle, Junigeda, on this spot in 1291. Since 1315, the castle and the area around it came to be known as Veliuona. According to

**Monument to
Vytautas Magnus**
by Apolinaras Šimkūnas



legends, it was here that the Germans used a shotgun for the first time and injured the Grand Duke Gediminas. He is said to be buried in one of the hill forts, where a monument now stands in his honour. It is hardly anything more than a myth made up to lend fame to the small town.

The castle had been torn down many times before Vytautas Magnus rebuilt it in stone in the 15th century.



Veliuona
manor

A monument built by Apolinaras Šimkūnas in 1930 now stands to honour him opposite the church. Next to the monument, there is a mythological stone with a footprint. According to a legend, when the townsfolk were building the church, the devil came and stole one stone, but the Virgin Mary took it back and returned to the construction site. Since then, the stone bears a mark left by Mary's foot.

After the Battle of Grünwald (Žalgiris, 1410), Veliuona profited greatly from intensive grain trade along the Nemunas, providing for the town's gradual growth. A 19th century grain warehouse still stands on a hillside, commemorating the town's merchant past. In 1443, Veliuona was granted Magdeburg Rights of self-governing. The rights were reaffirmed in the early 16th century. Along with them, the town was given a coat of arms: a golden bream with red fins and three silver teeth against blue background. In 1560, the king's Wallach reform reached Veliuona. However, the linear town plan was not transformed into a rectangle, as the reform demanded, which had more to do with natural factors than the town's right to self-government.

In the 10th century, Veliuona estate belonged to the Zaleskis family that undertook major reconstructions of

the residence. A new wooden manor house was built in Classicist style, surrounded by a newly-planted park.

CHURCH. It is likely that the first church in Veliuona was built at the outset of the Samogitian christianisation, in 1416-1417, but that it was torn down during the Samogitian revolt in 1418. So the official founding of the church is taken to be 1421. Tarquinius Peculus, writing in 1579, notes that the town has a school – making Veliuona home to one of the oldest education institutions in Lithuania. In 1636-1644, Albrechtas Stanislovas Radvila (Albrecht Stanislaw Radziwill) built a new stone temple that was consecrated by Bishop Jurgis Tiškevičius (Jerzy Tyszkiewicz). This Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church has survived until now almost unchanged. It is a Renaissance building, with Gothic elements, of rectangular



Assumption of
the Virgin Mary
Church in Veliuona

lar plan, hall-shaped with one tower. The interior space is divided into a vaulted nave and two aisles, with seven impressive altars. The high altar is decorated with Renaissance wood carvings, side paneling, sculptures, light columns. Centrepieces of the décor are early-20th century paintings by Petras Kalpokas. Another outstanding piece is the unfinished *Saint Joseph* by Italian Michael Elviro Andriolli, who painted it in 1864 after escaping from a prison where he was put for having participated in the 1863 uprising. A copy of Vytautas Magnus portrait from Nesvyžius, painted by Motiejus Bučinskis in 1860, hangs in the presbytery, next to the sacristy door. A Latin inscription on its frame says that Aleksandras Vytautas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, built Veliuona church. Parish priest Pranciškus Matulaitis is buried in the churchyard.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 12 PM

Workdays at 9 AM

Saturdays at 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) – 7th Sunday after Easter

Saints Peter and Paul – 29 June (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August

CONTACTS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

Veliuona, Jurbarkas District, LT-74442

Phone number (+370 447) 42 619

GĖLUVA. BIRUTKALNIS ⑯

HISTORY. Gėluva, a town of some 500 people, is most famous for its hill fort, also known as Birutkalnis. It stands on the southeastern side of the town and is encircled by the Dubysa and Gėluva rivers. According to a legend, after her husband Kęstutis was killed and her son Vytautas escaped his cousin Jogaila's captivity, Duchess Birutė was crossing the Nemunas and was confronted by servants of the Grand Duke Jogaila, who was at war with Vytautas at the time. A struggle ensued and Birutė drowned. Her body was so-



leminly buried atop a hill which has come to be called **Birutkalnis** – Birutė's hill.

Birutė's popularity only grew after her death. Without much exaggeration, she could be called the most celebrated woman of medieval Lithuania, even one of its symbols. Wife to Duke Kęstutis, mother to Vytautas Magnus, her memory is kept alive by the hill by the Dubysa River. It is possibly just a myth, but what is known is that Gėluva hill fort used to be the site for Ariogala Castle, burned down by German crusaders in 1382. Archaeologists have also discovered graves from the 5-6th and 10-17th centuries in the southwestern part of the hill.

CHURCH. Today, Gėluva does not have a house of prayer, but chronicles from the 17th century speak of a protestant church. In the mid-1800s, there was a Catholic chapel in Gėluva, but it had vanished by the end of the century.

ARIOGALA ⑰

HISTORY. By the old highroad of Samogitia, on the left bank of the Dubysa River, there lies one of the oldest settlements in Lithuania, Ariogala. First mentioned in written sources in 1253, when King Mindaugas handed

Eregalle medietatem to the Livonian Order, it has constantly featured in Teutonic campaign descriptions since the late 13th century. A wooden castle in Ariogala was mentioned in the 1300s, but it was sieged and burned down by crusaders in 1382. It is thought that the castle was located on the same spot where a Lutheran church and cemetery used to stand until the mid-20th century. There is a high hill fort, encircled by the Dubysa and its small tributary, Taurupis. More hill forts dot the surrounding landscape that used to be part of a defence line. In Vytautas' times and later, Ariogala was a royal estate. Since the 16th century, it is mentioned as a town; in 1640, King Wladyslaw IV Vasa (Vladislovas IV) conferred city rights with markets and market days. In 1792, King Stanislaw August Poniatowski granted Magdeburg Rights to the town, presenting it with a coat of arms – two crossed swords against a red shield, signifying the citizens' resolution to fight for their freedom. However, since the summer of the same year, amidst political turmoil in the Commonwealth, the town's self-government began to

St. Michael the Archangel Church in Ariogala



weaken and, in 1795, was abolished, as was the state that had granted it. Between 1861 and 1950, Ariogala was the administrative centre of a volost. In 1847, a Lutheran church was built (torn down in 1944).

After World War Two, the Catholics of Ariogala were forced to fight for their rights to worship. Juozas Stan-

kevičius, administrator of Kaunas Archdiocese, notes in his memoirs how, in the 1950s, when he was conferring the Sacrament of Confirmation on children, the Soviet administration would do everything to prevent parents from allowing their offspring to go to church. Once, to distract the faithful, the authorities sent a famous theatre company to perform on that day. Five roubles were automatically deducted from farmworkers' wages for the performance and they had to sign attendance sheets. Parents, however, did not succumb to either carrots or sticks and brought many kids to Ariogala – Stankevičius conferred Confirmation on 1,776 people.

A native of Ariogala was philosopher Stasys Šalkauskis (1886-1941), a celebrated Catholic intellectual, public figure, active member in the Lithuanian Catholic federation Ateitis, inspirer for an entire generation of believers, their tutor and role model.

CHURCH. In 1416, Grand Duke Vytautas ordered to built the first wooden Catholic church in Ariogala, as part of his campaign to christianise Samogitia. The church ran a parish school since 1560. King Sigismund Vasa (Zigmantas Vaza) issued an order to Ciwun of Ariogala Sebastijonas Kęstertas to finish the construction of Ariogala Church which, apparently, had been erected several years before but stood roofless and was beginning to rot. The church, not unlike many other woo-



Stasys Šalkauskis



Spring near Ariogala. The numerous springs that are considered holy both bear witness of the old faith and commemorate the baptismal water that brought new life to Samogitia.



Cross next to the Ariogala spring by sculptor Vytautas Lažinskis

The Columns of Gediminas by Vytautas Lažinskis

den buildings, suffered many fires. The current stone church was built in 1926-1939, under priest Antanas Simanavičius and using funds donated by the parishioners, and consecrated as Saint Michael the Archangel Church in 1939 by Archbishop Juozapas Skvireckas. The three-nave basilica bears features of neo-Classicism and neo-Baroque, is rectangular in plan, with two spires. The church, designed by Swiss architect Peyer, was built on foundations of a previous house of prayer that had burnt down in 1915. The central nave rises above the adjoining aisles, walls and the façade are of brickwork, the two towers plastered. After 1930, the high altar from Kaunas Saint Nicholas Church was moved to Ariogala.



Its old ornamentation is gilded, wooden sculptures are framed by gorgeous 17th century carved wings.

There is a source springing from the steep slopes of the Dubysa valley several kilometres west of Ariogala, right by the Samogitian highroad. Its water is believed to possess healing powers. Also on the slope is Vytautas Lažinskis' cross and a monument in the form of Gediminas Columns. On the other side of the spring, by the ruins of the old Dubysa bridge, there is an observation platform overlooking the fast-flowing river.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM and 12 PM

Tuesdays to Fridays at 5 PM

Saturdays at 11 AM and 5 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Ascension of the Lord – Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter

Saint Anthony – 13 June

Saint Michael the Archangel – 29 September

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint Michael the Archangel Church

Ariogala, Raseiniai District, LT-60261

Phone number (+370 428) 50 367

PALAZDUONYS 18

HISTORY. The small village of Palazduonys, famed for its holy springs, lies at the road between Vilkija and Seredžius. Just outside the village, there stand the so-called hills of Palazduonys which, according to legends, served as a pagan place of worship and even had a big temple. That, however, is highly unlikely – monumental architecture only came to Samogitia, and the rest of Lithuania, with Christianity, which introduced the land to cultural forms of the Western European civilization.

Twelve sources spring from a hollow just outside the village. Most of them are hardly perceptible, almost completely dry, but several are very watery. The springs join into one small rivulet which



Masonry chapel and the well in the hollow of the twelve springs



then flows into the Lazduona River. A well has been built above the biggest sources and a small stone chapel decorated with sculptures of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. A small wooden cross hangs on a fir just next to it. Written sources first mention the source in 1935, referring to Prisgintas well. People believed, and still do, that it had healing powers and was particularly good for one's eyes. Local elderly people say that worship in this place is even older and a chapel stood here back in the 19th century. The site is linked to the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. People going to feasts in Čekiškė or Seredžius used to make a stop at Palazduonys springs to wash their ailing parts of the body.

Gate to the hollow of the twelve springs



Under the Soviets, the chapel was torn down, leaving no traces of worship. However, people continued to come and take water from the springs.

There are many legends about the origins of the place. According to one of them, once upon a time, the "Holy Lady" was traveling the world and stopped by Palazduonys springs to have a rest before continuing on to Šiluva. And since then, the village has a chapel and Šiluva celebrates its famed feasts.

ČEKIŠKĖ 19

HISTORY. Twelve kilometres south of Ariogala, by the road to Vilkija, there lies Čekiškė, a small Samogitian town of some 800 people stretched on the banks of two small rivers, Beržupis and Lašiša. Sources speak of Šedvydžiai estate that stood near present-day Čekiškė in the 15th century, but records of any reliability about the town do not appear before the early 17th century. In 1620, landlord Jurgis Gedgaudas Mackevičius set up a school on his estate. A little later, in 1626, he built a stone church and a parish seat which soon took over the village and the entire estate. Čekiškė's street network grew from a linear village in the 18th century – short narrow alleys branching off from the main street.

Statue of the Blessed Virgin near the churchyard fence



The Holy Trinity Church in Čekiškė





**Chapel column
in the churchyard of
Čekiškė in memory of
Pranas Dovydaitis**

In Paprieniai, near Čekiškė, Pranas Dovydaitis had his country house. Dovydaitis, signatory to the 1918 Independence Act, can be called one of Lithuania's founding fathers and a significant contributor to the Lithuanian Catholic thought.

CHURCH. A 17th century stone church burned down in 1799. In its stead, the town built the much bigger Church of Holy Trinity in 1821. Its old bell tower survives to this day. Local parish priest used to manage a hospital-shelter since the 19th century. The church was reconstructed in 1935 and remains almost unchanged until now. It is a neo-Classical basilica with wings on its sides and a tower. The outline is cruciform, a massive spire dominates the façade and another one rises above the crossing. The interior consists of the central nave and two aisles. The churchyard is fenced with a stone wall, with metalwork gate. In a detached wooden bell tower, there is the grave of Pijus Žiugžda (1909-1989) who was parish priest in Juodaičiai for fifteen years. A column chapel was erected next to it in 1996 to honour Independence Act signatory Dovydaitis. The church houses a Baroque metal cross from 1732, a brass bell from 1709, 19th century wooden sculptures.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 12 PM
Tuesdays to Fridays at 6 PM
Wednesdays at 9 AM
Saturdays at 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anthony of Padua – 13 June
Our Lady of Mount Carmel – 16 July
Saint Simon and Saint Jude – 18 October
All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Holy Trinity Church
Čekiškė, Kaunas District, LT-54273
Phone number (+370 37) 56 02 64

PAPRIENIAI. PROF. PRANAS DOVYDAITIS' COUNTRY HOUSE ²⁰

HISTORY. Pranas Dovydaitis (1886-1942), one of the founding fathers of the Republic of Lithuania and an ardent educator of the nation, had a country house and 20 hectares of land in Paprieniai, near Čekiškė. The professor settled here in 1937 when, two decades after the declaration of independence, the young Republic was firmly on its feet and awarded signatories of the 1918 Independence Act with plots of land. Dovydaitis bought some more land and was planning to set up a model farm. After he lost his tenure in the Theology-Philosophy Faculty in July 1940, Dovydaitis moved to the farm and worked there until his arrest by the Soviets. On 7 May 2000, Pope John Paul II announced a list of new martyrs to be inscribed into the martyrology of the 20th century. Pranas Dovydaitis was among the 114 names read out in Rome.

Professor at Vytautas Magnus University, scholar and encyclopaedist, deputy editor of the Lithuanian Encyclopaedia (1931-1940), signatory to the 1918 Independence Act, founder of the Catholic federation *Ateitis* – Dovydaitis was all that and more. The eldest son in a family of fifteen children, Dovydaitis was accepted into Veiveriai teachers' seminary, but was expelled after a strike in 1905. He studied for exams on his own and, in 1908, entered Moscow University.

In 1913, he was invited to come to Vilnius to work as an editor of *Viltis*, after frictions had emerged between the paper's publishers and its chief editor Antanas Smetona. This change in the editorial office marked a larger divergence of two social strands: the Catholics (Christian Democrats) and the *viltininkai* (who would later become known as the Nationalists). Elected into the Council of Lithuania by Vilnius Conference, Dovydaitis put his signature under the Independence Act on 16 February 1918. He was also one of the founders of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party. After Mykolas Šleževičius, Prime Minister in the second government, resigned from his office, Dovydaitis headed the third Cabinet between 12 March and 12 April 1919. His government entered his-



Pranas Dovydaitis

**Monument marks the
place of the country
house where Pranas
Dovydaitis lived**





Remains of the
Pranas Dovydaitis
country house

tory as the shortest one, lasting only one month. When the Council of Lithuania elected Smetona the president of the Republic in April, Dovydaitis presented his letter of resignation on that same day. He decided to retire from politics altogether and dedicated all his time to teaching and scholarship.

Pranas Dovydaitis authored about one hundred articles and monographs on religion, philosophy, culture, history, ethics, pedagogy, and hagiography. His work at the Catholic federation *Ateitis* as well as critical lectures brought him in disfavour of the nationalist government, he was arrested in 1932 and spent one and a half months in prison. In 1941, Dovydaitis was arrested by the Soviet administration and taken to a concentration camp in the Urals. The exile did not make him lose his hope and Dovydaitis continued inspiring courage in others. In summer

1942, he was moved to Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) prison, where he was interrogated and, on 4th of November, sentenced to death. The location of Dovydaitis' grave is unknown. In 2007, a cenotaph was unveiled in Vilnius Rasų Cemetery to honour signatories Pranas Dovydaitis, Kazimieras Bizauskas, and Vladas Mironas.

UGIONIAI 21

HISTORY. A rumour spread in 1657 that the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared near a spring in Ugoniai and that the spring's water acquired healing power. Since then, the small village on the left bank of the Dubysa River – today the population is only 400 people – has become an attraction to pilgrims. Ugoniai was first mentioned in written sources in 1597, in Ariogala Court Acts. Legends speak of the old history of the village – a pagan place of worship with an altar for the eternal fire. And in the



Ugioniai
spring

thick forest on the left bank of the river, there sprang a source whose water was used in pagan rites. One legend even alleges that it was in Ugioniai that Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas and King of Poland Jogaila inaugurated Samogitia's christianisation campaign by tearing down a pagan altar. However, such legends have little base in reality.



The Ugioniai chapel built on one of the holy springs



The altar of the Ugioniai Chapel

The origin of Ugioniai is associated with the sacred spring. On 18 November 1657, someone saw the Mother of God levitating above the spring. Crowds of pilgrims started pouring in, people believed that washing their eyes with its water could heal them. They also thought prayers in this place would give them grace and help of the Virgin Mary. A wooden chapel was built on the site in 1883, encapsulating the spring. A statue of Our Lady of Lourdes stood on the lid of the well. The spring itself was encircled with stones and iron lattice. Dean of Veliuona and Vilkija parish priest Noviskis wrote in the 19th century that there was no other place in the entire deanery that had so many holy paintings, springs, and sacred objects as Ugioniai. True, Bishop Motiejus Valančius was more sceptical about the spring and the pilgrims – he thought that some of them healed simply because cold water was good for sore eyes. Nevertheless, Ugioniai is an important point of pilgrimage, visited by Lord's grace on many occasions.

The Feast of Assumption, known as Žolinė in Lithuanian, is a particularly solemn holiday in Ugioniai, having received episcopal recognition in 1792. Pilgrims are used to saying the following prayer: "Glory to you, Queen of Heaven, who appeared above the spring, worshipped in Ugioniai, near the fast-flowing river of Dubysa, everyone prays to you..."

CHURCH. The first house of worship in Ugioniai village was a Calvinist church built in 1611. The villagers, led by Betygala parish priest, built a wooden Catholic chapel circa 1650. When it crumbled, landlord of Ugioniai estate Marcelinas Dirda built a new wooden church in 1784.

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Ugioniai



This one burned down in 1831. A new church was constructed in 1836–1858, this time using boulders and burnt bricks. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church is an example of vernacular Classicism featuring historicist elements. The building is rectangular, has a portico and a small spire on the roof. Framings around doors and windows are plastered and whitewashed, as is the cornice underneath the roof.

The high altar contains a portrait of the Virgin Mary that used to be kept by the spring. Another altarpiece, *Mary with Child Jesus*, is thought to have been presented to the church by Count Tiškevičius in the late 19th century. A low iron fence encircles the churchyard.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 1 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) – 7th Sunday after Easter at 2 PM

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August at 2 PM

CONTACTS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

Ugioniai, Raseiniai District, LT-60207

Phone number (+370 428) 43 440

BETYGALA 22

HISTORY. The town of Betygala is to be found halfway between Ariogala and Tytuvėnai, on the left bank of the Dubysa River, near the small rivulet of Vieviržė. According to a legend, Duke Palemonas and his men were swimming up the Dubysa and, somewhere by Ariogala, started wondering: "Is there an end?" ("Ar yra galas?") A little further up the river, he finally saw it, "But there is an end." ("Bet yra galas.") This might not be the most accurate explanation of the origins of Betygala's name, but it reminds how old the town is. In 1253, the Pope of Rome confirmed an act signed by King Mindaugas whereby he gave half of Betygala land to the Livonian Order. The village was mentioned in the crusaders' chronicles of



Vytautas Magnus monument by sculptor Petras Aleksandravičius

wars with Lithuanians in 1384 and 1386. During the 13-14th century wars with the Order, Samogitians had one of their key fortifications here. Even today, one can see a steep-sloped hill fort half-encircled by the Vaškutė River valley. Pentagonal Jankovski chapel, built in 1860-1866, now stands on top of the hill fort. The settlement started growing in 1516, when it was granted commerce privileges – the first inns opened in the town then, too. During the Great Northern War, in 1706, a battle with the Swedes took place near Betygala, the town was left ravaged. Between 1708 and 1711, Betygala lost its entire population to plague. The townsfolk were active participants in the 1863 uprising.

In 1928, when Lithuania was marking the 10th anniversary of independence, the Cross of the Nation with two crossbeams was erected in the town's main square. In 1950, Soviet authorities ordered the cross removed and thrown into the Dubysa. Quite accidentally, passing women saw the floating cross, fished it out, and brought to the church where it was kept hidden for many years. It was decided to return the cross to its original place in 1989. Today, the town has a population of only 500 people and the only sign of its past significance is a monument to Grand Duke Vytautas (built in 1931 and preserved throughout the Soviet occupation). Pasandravys estate used to lie eight kilometres northeast of Betygala, by the Sandrava rivulet. This is where poet prelate Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis was born in 1862.

Monument for the victims of the Soviet and Nazi occupations

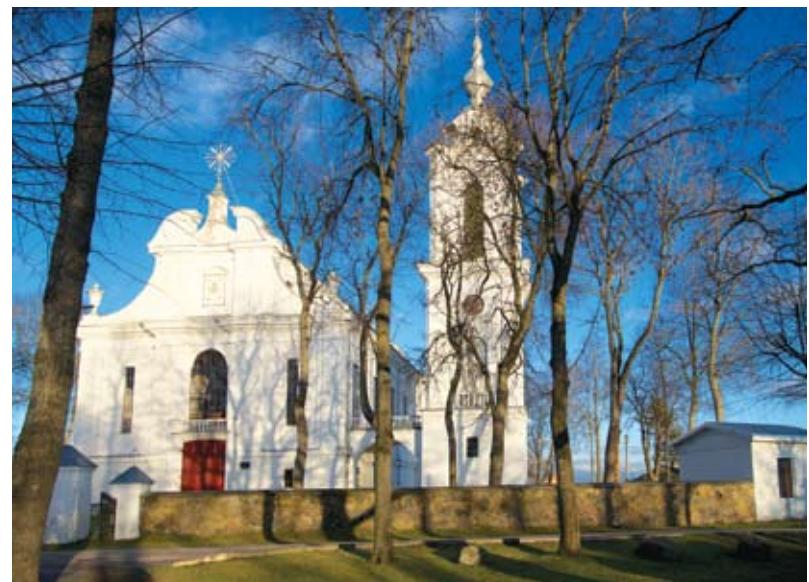


CHURCH. The first wooden Roman Catholic church in Betygala was erected during the Samogitian Baptism campaign, in 1416. It was renovated in the mid-1500s and once more in the late 1600s. In the 16th century, the entire town of Betygala was given to the parish priest. There is a record of a parish school from 1579. The estate was handed over to the Chapter of the Diocese of Samogitia in 1638 where it remained until 1842.

Between 1592 and 1609, the parish priest of Betygala was Mikalojus Daukša, translator of the first Lithuanian-language books published in the Grand Duchy (he translated Ledesma's *Catechism* and the famous Wujek's *Postile*, penned a foreword for its Lithuanian edition). Not far from the church, by the Vieviržė rivulet, grows an oak tree planted to honour him (perhaps even by himself). Bishop Valančius, in his *Diocese of*



Chapel in the cemetery



Samogitia, has this to say about Betygala church: "The property belongs to the prelate Dean, the land is good, no forests, the parish is average."

St. Nicholas Church in Betygala

After a fire, parish priest Anupras Šrēderis and the parishioners built a new wooden house of prayer in 1851. In this church, the priest read out the insurgents' manifesto

in 1863, for which he was exiled to Nerchinsk. Parish priest Pranas Janulaitis and his parishioners built a new temple in 1930, consecrated as Saint Nicholas Church by Archbishop Juozapas Skvireckas two years later. This church still stands today.

The church is in the neo-Baroque style, with Classicist elements. Flat pilasters on the façade and side walls support a wide bare cornice. Its white plastered walls give the church a modest outwardly appearance. Its pediment billows with concave parapets and convex volutes on both sides of the central spire with a radiating cross. A tall triumphal arch separates the apse from the central nave. Rectangular pillars with wide cornices mark out two aisles. Sculptor Bronius Pundzius designed the high altar in the style of modernized Baroque. Plain, barely ornamented surfaces dominate the church interior. A three-tier bell tower stands detached from the church. Its height matches the church. As is characteristic of Baroque, bell tower openings vary in shape: arched, rounded, and narrower arches let through the sound of the bells. An open one-arch balustraded gallery connects the church to the bell tower.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

To the southwest of Betygala, there springs a source from the Lełykas rivulet valley. People say that water in Saint John's (Gaivutis) spring is alive, that it gives energy and health. Betygala cemetery has a chapel, called the Hill Fort Chapel, which was renovated in 1938 and renamed the Gates of Dawn Chapel.

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 7:30, 11 AM

Tuesdays to Fridays at 6 PM, except in October (5 PM) and May to June (7 PM)

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July at 2 PM

Saint Nicholas – 6 December at 11 AM

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint Nicholas Church

2 Dubysos Street, Betygala, Raseiniai District, LT-60209

Phone number (+370 428) 43 440

BERNOTAI. PASANDRAVYS 23

HISTORY. Two small villages right next to one another, Bernotai and Pasandrvys, are the birthplace of the poet Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis (1862-1932). Circa 1860, the Astrauskas family, successors to the Pasandrvys estate, handed its management and the resulting income to farmer Aleksandras Mačiulis (the poet's father) for four years as a way of paying off their debts. Mačiulis left the running of his own farm in Bernotai to a relative and moved with his family to Pasandrvys. On 2 November 1862, the family was graced with a son Jonas, the future poet who would come to occupy a central place in the Lithuanian literary canon. The Mačiulis family lived in Pasandrvys until 1865, when they moved back to Bernotai.

Even though Maironis' father could barely read, he encouraged his son's interest in letters. Jonas Mačiulis graduated from Kaunas Gymnasium and, following his parents' wishes, chose to be a priest. He began writing in gymnasium. His 1895 collection of poems, *Voices of Spring (Pavasario balsai)*, is one of the defining volumes in the Lithuanian literature.

The poet also took active part in public life. Between 1909 and 1932, he was rector and professor at Kaunas Theological Seminary. In Kaunas University, he was head of the Moral Theology Department.

Bernotai and Pasandrvys are now living monuments to Maironis' life and writing. In 1987, on the poet's 125th anniversary, a new pathway was opened, connecting the



Monument to the author of *Pavasario balsai*



Sandrava rivulet



The remains of Maironis' native home in Pasandrvys

two houses in Bernotai and Pasandravys where he used to live. One hundred and twenty-five oak trees were planted along both sides of the path, giving it the name Maironis Oak Path. New trees are planted every five years, as part of Maironis' anniversary celebrations. Great many outstanding Lithuanians have planted their oaks



Commemorative signs in Maironis' homestead



on Maironis Path, including author Juozas Aputis, poets Sigitas Geda, Marcelijus Martinaitis, literary critic Vanda Zaborskaitė, as well as Maironis' relatives. A beautiful cross was erected in his parents' house in 1989. The old one, which stood there in Maironis' own lifetime, rotted away back in 1912. His surviving relatives planted four lime trees to make the house look more like it used to in Maironis' youth.

Crosses and column chapels, carved during the 1991 folk artists' creative camp, were given as presents to the

Cross in the yard of the poet's parents



villages and now line their pathways. On one edge of the garden, visitors can still find a narrow path leading to the Luknė River where the poet would often promenade in his youth.

An old water well with a sweep and an enormous stone lining can be found in the estate territory, also foundations of a former residential house. The manor itself burned down during World War One. Each year, Pasandravys museum holds memorial events on the last weekend of May.

Maironis' homestead in Bernotai

ŽAIGINYS 24

HISTORY. Žaiginys, a small town of under four hundred, spans both sides of the Sandrava River. Written records of the settlement begin in the mid-1600s, when the area was already part of an estate. An inventory from 1664 shows that the town contained an old manor house, a brewery, a mill, and a church. Žaiginys estate belonged to the Kerdiejus family, but later went to the Romeris, the Nagurskis. Laurynas Nagurskis, who was childless, obliged his brother Jokūbas Nagurskis to build a Franciscan monastery in Žaiginys. The friars settled here in 1764. However, the Bishop of Samogitia protested that the convent be built and the friars live in

Žaiginys. The conflict was so fierce that it even caught the attention of the Roman Curia. Only after provincial superior Feliksas Taujanskas was appointed bishop, was the case settled in favour of the Franciscans. It was a



Žaiginys
manor

small convent with six friars, who nevertheless prided themselves on their library of 156 books. When the friars were reconstructing the convent in 1821, they set up a school that was attended by fourteen boys: nine sons of the nobility and five peasants. The wave of repressions unleashed by the Russian administration after the 1831 uprising hit monasteries, too. Many were closed down, including the Franciscan convent of Žaiginys.

St. Anthony
of Padua Church
in Žaiginys

CHURCH. The first wooden church in Žaiginys was mentioned in the 1664 inventory – it was named after Saint Anne. The inventory notes it had been reconstructed,



The belltower

was rather big in size and contained two altars. When the Franciscans settled here, they built Saint Anthony of Padua Church in their convent in 1770 and a chapel in Legečiai village in 1790. Even though the convent was shut down after the uprising, the authorities allowed for the church to remain open. It went up in flames in 1915, during World War One. Rebuilding works started right away, without waiting for the end of the war, and a new wooden church opened its door in 1917. Its shape reminds of a big residential house. It is a rectangular building with a three-sided apse and no spires. Inside, graceful columns separate the nave from two aisles. There are three altars. The churchyard is walled off by a stone fence and includes a rather modest bell tower.

Statue of the
Blessed Virgin
Mary in the
churchyard

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 12 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anthony of Padua – 13 June
Transfiguration of the Lord – 6 August
Saint Francis of Assisi – 4 October

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint Anthony of Padua Church
Žaiginys, Raseiniai District, LT-60445
Phone number (+370 428) 43 190



ŠILUVA 25

HISTORY. First homesteads appeared in Šiluva in the 15th century. Landlord of a local estate, Petras Simonas Gedgaudas, built Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary church in 1457. His father Jurgis Gedgaudas and elder brother Albertas Manvydas were companions of Vytautas Magnus, the Grand Duke's confidants and close friends, while Manvydas' first spouse Julijona was sister to Vy-



Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica in Šiluva

tatas' wife Ona. Manvydas was the elder and voivode of Vilnius, a member of Vytautas' political delegations. Apparently, the founder of the church procured the titular feast from Rome, it soon became very popular. Šiluva church must be one of the first houses of worship in Lithuania consecrated to Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The church's celebrity – and particularly that of its titular feast (8 September) – spread fast and wide. Soon, the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary feast (also called *Šilinė* in Lithuanian) became very popular and pilgrims would come from Lithuania as well as neighbouring Prussia.

In the 16th century, the Zavišas, landlords of the town, converted to Protestantism. They expropriated the church's land and built a Protestant house of prayer. According to popular history, in 1569, the last parish priest

of Šiluva gathered all treasures and documents, sealed them in a tin box, and buried it somewhere underground. The *Šilinė* feast tradition was discontinued.

In 1608, a group of young shepherds wandered into the church land and saw a woman standing on a big stone with a baby in her arms, crying. One of the shepherds ran to Calvinist catechist Mikalojus Fiera. The latter summoned Saliamonas Gracijus, a rector at a Calvinist seminary, and both went to the stone where they also witnessed the crying Virgin. They addressed her: "Why are you crying, girl?" She replied: "I am crying because before, my son was worshipped in this place and now people plough and sow here." Upon these words she disappeared. News about the manifestation of Mary quickly spread throughout the parish.

This Marian apparition of 1608 – and discovery of the founding documents of the previous church – helped the Catholic community win a long and intense court battle against the protestants. In 1623-1624, the Catholics of Šiluva built a small wooden church on the same spot where the previous one used to stand.

The current Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church was built and consecrated on 8 September 1786. An image of *The Blessed Virgin Mary and Child*, famed for its graces,



Fragment of the decorations of the Šiluva Basilica

High altar of the Šiluva Basilica



The Mother of God of Šiluva painting.
It has been honoured with the title of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick



Monument to Blessed Pope John Paul II
by sculptor
Czesław Dźwigaj



was crowned with diadems sent by Pope Pius VI. The hall church was built in late Baroque style, rectangular in outline, with two towers and a three-sided apse. Its walls are of red brickwork with white plasterings on the towers and around windows.

In the run-up to the 300th anniversary of the 1608 Marian apparition, the parish decided to build a new chapel on the spot where Mary appeared to the shepherds. Architect Antanas Vivulskis (Antoni Wiwulski) drew designs for the chapel. A cornerstone was laid in 1912 and consecrated by prelate Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis. The onset of World War One interrupted construction works and the chapel was not finished until 1924. It was consecrated on 8 September of that year. The chapel is of rectangular outline, historicist in style, has a massive tower in the centre and four smaller spires in each of the corners. Interior works lasted throughout the period of the First

Republic (1918-1940) and were secretly continued under the Soviet occupation. The works concluded only after Lithuania regained independence, in 1999, when a second stone statue of an angel was put at the entrance.

On the last Sunday of every August, before the great *Šilinė* feast, two processions of pilgrims head towards Šiluva: one from the Dubysa valley and one from Tytuvėnai. Another tradition is a three-day pilgrimage from the Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai to *Šilinė* feast, led by the Bishop Ordinary of the Lithuanian army. During the feast, pilgrims pray for various intentions, hold catechesis, conferences, spiritual and cultural events. Šiluva has a pilgrimage centre – John Paul II House which, upon prior arrangement, offers accommodation.



Statue of an angel near the church by sculptor Robertas Antinis



Apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel in Šiluva
by architect
Antanas Vivulskis



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica

Sundays at 8, 10 AM, 1 PM

Workdays at 12 PM (or 6 PM in October)

Saturdays at 10 AM (or 6 PM in October)

On the 13 of every month – 9, 10 AM

7-15 September – 10 AM, 12, 6 PM

HOLY MASS

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel

Mondays to Saturdays at 6 PM in summer (no service in winter)

On 13 of every month at 8, 10 AM

7-15 September – 8, 9 AM

ROSARY PRAYER

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica

Sundays at 2 PM

Before evening Mass

On the 13th of every month at 10 AM

PROCESSION TO ŠILUVA

Last Sunday of August and during Šilinės

DAYS OF THE AILING

Last Friday of every month, Holy Mass at 12 PM.

Last Friday of every month April to September:

1 to 5 PM Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

5 PM Rosary prayer

6 PM Holy Mass

7 PM Inner Healing Mass and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

OPENING HOURS OF THE BASILICA AND THE CHAPEL

May to October 8 AM to 8 PM

November to April 8 AM to 3 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 31 May (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Sacred Heart of Jesus – third Sunday after Pentecost (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 7-15 September

CONTACTS

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica

2 Jurgaičio Street, Šiluva, Raseiniai District, LT-60432

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel

2 Jono Pauliaus II Street, Šiluva, Raseiniai District, LT-60432

Phone number (+370 428) 43 190

LYDUVĖNAI 26

HISTORY. The small village of Lyduvėnai, of only one hundred people, is located in the magnificent Dubysa valley. Across the valley runs the biggest and highest railway bridge in Lithuania. Three hill forts stand in guard just outside the village – Barsukalnis, Kaukuriš, and Danutė Hill. If you looked from a castle that used to stand on the latter hill, you could see the castles of Veliuona, Ariogala, and others. The fort hills are lined up every five to eight hundred metres and used to work as a coordinated system which, in turn, was part of the Nemunas defence line. According to legends, when men left for war, women in Lyduvėnai would barricade themselves in the castle and cry – their tears would flow down the castle walls. And this was the origin of the Lyduvėlė rivulet which flows until now and does not dry out even in summer.

Reliable historical sources do not mention Lyduvėnai before the 15th century, in reference to Lyduvėnai or Padubysis estate that once belonged to the House of Chodkevičius, then passed to the Radziminkas, the Šemetas (Szemiot), and the Stankevičius (Stankiewicz). The village grew most intensively in the 17th century. During the 1831 uprising, the master of Lyduvėnai estate was Ezekielis Stanevičius (Ezekiel Staniewicz), marszalek of Raseiniai. The Russian authorities confiscated his property as a punishment for his involvement in the uprising and gave it to Jewish families to settle. The estate disintegrated and a Jewish colony grew in its stead. Before World War Two, over half of the population of Lyduvėnai was Jewish – the Holocaust left the village irreparably scarred.

Despite the strong Jewish presence, people of Lyduvėnai have always liked building crosses and chapels. One of the most im-

pressive examples is a cross erected in 1991 to mark Lithuania's regained independence. A column chapel (by R. Ramanauskas) was put outside the village school in 1998, on the occasion of the 440th anniversary of the village and the 175th anniversary of the school. Other worthwhile sites around Lyduvénai include a monument for Lithuanian deportees who perished in Siberia, which stands in Kalniškiai village, and the Dubenuotasis Stone, a mythological object bearing a footprint left by an evil spirit. In Plaušinai forest, there grows the Gražusis (Beautiful) Oak.

Godlaukis village boasts a 1922 column chapel with sculptures of the Crucifix, Saint John Nepomucene, the Blessed Virgin Mary with Child.

CHURCH. In the late 16th century, the Catholic church of Lyduvénai was passed to the protestant community,

Saint Apostles Peter and Paul Church in Lyduvénai



occasioning its first mention in written documents. In 1613, the same church was seemingly Catholic again. Construction of a new house of prayer, in stone, began in the early 1700s, but dragged on for lack of funds and was not finished until 1761. The village had a parish school since the mid-19th century. The current church of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul is a mixture of late Baroque and Classicist architecture. The front of the façade bears a

massive rectangular three-tier tower with differently-shaped openings. It was added only in 1907. Pilasters punctuate the church walls while the front tower is sectioned by cornices. Vaults in the presbytery are decorated with small plafonds and rosettes. The churchyard is walled with a stone fence and houses a cemetery. Lyduvénai church guards several old objects of liturgy: a 17th century antependium embroidered with silk and metal filaments, a 19th century cope, a wooden 19th century Crucifix.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anthony of Padua – 13 June

Saints Peter and Paul – 29 June

Our Lady of Mount Carmel – 16 July

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint Apostles Peter and Paul

Lyduvénai, Raseiniai district, LT-60417

Phone number (+370 428) 46 142

Column chapel in Maironai



MAIRONIAI ²⁷

HISTORY. Even though a rather small village, of under 500 people, Maironai prides itself on its exceptional name. Previously called Saudininkai, in 1932 the village decided to change its name as a tribute to the great poet, Maironis.

It is a relatively young settlement, even though the area has been inhabited for a long time, as evidenced by two nearby hill forts, Kubiliai and Šeduviškė. 18th century documents refer to Saudininkai estate but there remains little data about it. In 1927, under the land reform, lands of Saudininkai estate, owned at the time by Ona Chruščiovienė, were distributed among peasants. A new villa-

ge grew in the area and it was called Maironiai. However, there is no direct relation between it and the famous poet. Instead, the area was home to Anupras Jancevičius (1797-1836), an insurgent and one of the 1831 uprising leaders. Born into a family of insignificant Samogitian nobles, Jancevičius studied in Kražiai and Vilnius. When the uprising was crushed, he fled to France where he passed away soon afterwards, leaving his written memoires, a document of some value.

A few kilometres from Maironiai church, in the beautiful Dubysa valley, stands Maironiai chapel. Inside is a huge stone bearing imprints of some sort. Old people say they are marks left by a child's foot, staff, and knee. The stone was found in this place about 170 years ago – a peasant built a chapel around it with a sculpture of the Virgin Mary. He was inspired by a vision – Mary herself ap-



Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Maironiai

ared to him and instructed to build a chapel. There is a spring nearby that is said to possess healing powers. The chapel has been rebuilt several times. It is now a compact red brickwork structure with an altar within. People used to come here from around the area, sometimes as far as 100 kilometres. Under the Soviets, there were plans to tear down the chapel and build a highway. The plan was carried through only in part – a highway does pass near the chapel, but a mound shelters it from sight.

CHURCH. Wooden Maironiai Blessed Virgin Mary Church was constructed in the last quarter of the 18th century and rebuilt many times since, yet it has retained its original outline and forms characteristic of the old Samogitian vernacular architecture. Simplicity, moderation, and functionality dominate on the outside and inside alike.

The wooden structure stands on stone foundations, rectangular in shape, ending with a three-wall apse. Distinctive features of vernacular architecture fit well with discrete late-Baroque and Classicist elements. Pilasters accentuate its side walls and mock segmented arches run around its windows. The church was mainly financed by Saudininkai landlord Ksaveras Stanevičius, but better-off peasants contributed too – as was quite usual in Samogitia, where peasantry retained relative liberty compared to the rest of Lithuania.

The interior of the church consists of a single nave covered with slightly inflected wooden ceiling. Three embellished Baroque altars stand by the walls – there was but one in the 19th century. The side altars were brought from the former church of Kražiai Benedictine Convent after 1893, some objects could have been taken from Kražiai Jesuit Church. Even though the altars represent different periods, they peculiarly fit with one another and the high altar. The latter is contemporaneous with the church and contains a cased painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The painting once adorned the high altar of Kražiai Benedictine Church, according to a 1667 visitation act. The Virgin Mary of Maironiai is a loose copy of Our Lady of Trakai, painted on a wood panel sometime in the late 1700s or early 1800s, fitted with a contemporaneous frame. At the top of the altar hangs a painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, done in the late 1700s or early 1800s by a less skilled artist.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10:30 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Blessed Virgin Mary Church

Maironiai, Kelmė District, LT-86203

Phone number (+370 427) 44 140

PAGRYŽUVYS 28



Pagryžuvys hill fort

HISTORY. Pagryžuvys village, by the tiny Gryžuva River, is where an important Jesuit novitiate used to operate between the two World Wars. Among its pupils was Paulius Rabikauskas (1920-1998), a renowned church historian, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Pagryžuvys hill fort on the left riverside indicates that people have lived here since very old times. The mound is sometimes called Calvin Hill, because local legends speak of a Calvinist church that used to stand here in the 17th century, but God had it swallowed by the hill. It is said that even now endless corridors meander underground and ghosts come out to scare people at night. Historical sources from the 16th century mention an estate on the right bank of the Gryžuva River. In the late 18th century, Pagryžuvys estate belonged to the noble Šemeta family, but later passed to the Pčeciševskis. Jeronimas Pšeciševskis had a manor built in 1858. Unfortunately, in retaliation for his support to the 1863 uprising,



Pagryžuvys manor

the Russian tsar's government exiled him to Tomsk Guberniya and gave the manor to a Russian tenant.

The Historicist palace was designed by architect Fulgetas Rimaila and still stands today, albeit with significant modifications. The structure bears much resemblance to Classicist and Baroque palaces. It was originally a single-storey building, but a second floor was added in the 20th century. In 1878, Izidorius Romeris bought Pagryžuvys estate. Five landlords, all from the Romeris family, have managed the manor since. They have planted an English

park around the house, spanning across two terraces: the upper terrace, near the palace, and the lower terrace by the Blikė brook. The complex was severely damaged during World War One – at one point, the front line cut right through the estate. Under the first Republic, the estate was nationalized as part of the 1922 land reform and its lands distributed to peasants, while the manor house went to the Jesuit Order.

When they arrived, the Jesuits found the palace crumbling from neglect, so they launched reconstruction works immediately. The first stage of reconstruction concluded in September 1929, with the opening of the novitiate. The institution had six clergy novices (including one priest), four novice brothers, and six postulants. The idea was to have young Jesuits acquire firm foundations of their monastic formation at home before sending them off for further studies abroad. The German Jesuit tradition of rational and efficient estate management helped turn neglected Pagryžuvys into a thriving enterprise with a big orchard. In 1930, the Jesuits installed an electricity generator in the basement underneath the chapel, built water pipes. The Jesuits were an exemplary community in the First Republic. Moreover, Pagryžuvys novitiate was famous for strict but efficient training and excellent scholarship in philosophy.

In 1940, when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union, Pagryžuvys was taken away from the Jesuits.

Park around
Pagryžuvys
manor



Provincial Benediktas Andriuška instructed the novices to return to their families, while the seminarians were put up in the attic of Kaunas Jesuit Church, where they could go on with their work. In 1944, as the front was approaching, the young pupils of Pagryžuvys Jesuit House were sent to Western Europe. The Soviet authorities closed down the convent in 1948. After the war, in 1951, the house was converted to a tuberculosis clinic. The park was left abandoned, the entire place was radically transformed. However, the traces left by the Jesuits – who worked and spread enlightenment from this cosy spot in Samogitia – are still perceptible today.

KELMĖ 29 31

HISTORY. The area around present-day Kelmė has been inhabited since time immemorial, but it was particularly densely populated in the first century AD, as evidenced



Panorama of
Kelmė manor

by tumuli and hill forts in and around Kelmė. In the 13th century, the town had a castle – Teutonic chronicles from 1294 refer to it as *Kymel*, probably deriving from *kelmy-né*, a stumpy place.

Grand Dukes of Lithuania owned a famed estate in Kelmė. From the 16th century until World War One, it was managed by the Gruževskis (Gruzewscy) family. They were Protestants and built a Calvinist church in Kelmė. Their manor house has been rebuilt many times, but it underwent the most extensive reconstruction at the

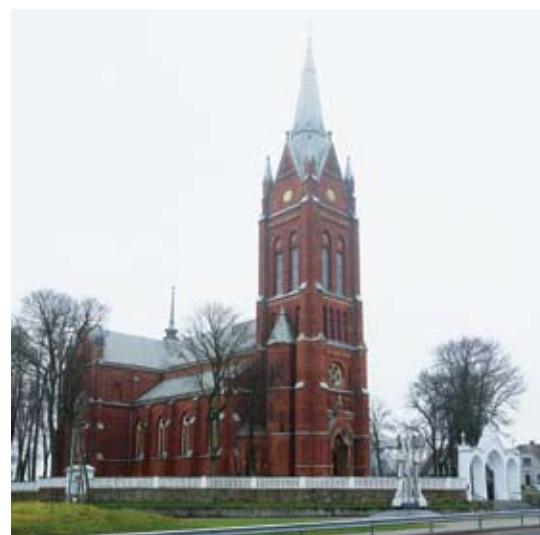
end of the 19th century, acquiring its current shape. The gates date back to 1668, reconstructed in the 1700s. The ground floor used to house a stairway and prison cells for serfs. A library and a narrow open arcade for an orchestra was situated on the upper floor. The library contained some five thousand volumes, including an extensive archive of the Gruževskis family that was handed over to Aušra Museum in Šiauliai in 1941 and, a decade later, ended up in the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. The rest of the archive is kept in the National Martynas Mažvydas Library and Kaunas State Archive.

People from Kelmė and surrounding lands took active part in resistance fights against the Russian rule in the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1831, rebels led by Karolis Jautakis managed to take control of Kelmė and drive Russians out. Since the town was an important point on a trade route, over half of its 19th century population was Jewish. About 10 thousand people live in Kelmė today.

The town is also home to a number of outstanding personalities: author Icchokas Meras, theatre director Rimas Tuminas; Vladas Putvinskis-Putvys (1873-1929) is buried in the local cemetery. Coming from a Polish-speaking noble family, he made a conscious decision to be a Lithuanian and resolved to learn to speak Lithuanian. In 1919, Putvys and his friends founded the Lithuanian Riflemen's



Tombstone of Cannon
Nikodemas Česna



Assumption of the
Virgin Mary Church
in Kelmė

Union, becoming its first leader. The last words he uttered to Doctor Parčevskis was: "Doctor! My ailment is not physical, I am ill because I cannot work for the idea of the nation..."

CHURCH. The important role that Kelmė played in the Middle Ages is best exemplified by the fact that it was here that, in 1416, Vytautas Magnus built one of the first Christian temples in Samogitia – the wooden Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church. A second church was built in 1484. There is no information about why it had to be done so soon – the first church most probably burned down. In 1503, amidst the Reformation, the Catholic church of Kelmė was taken over by the protestants. In 1609, however, a court ruled that the house of prayer be returned to the Catholics. It was the first church reclaimed from the protestants in Samogitia. In 1613, it burned down and was not rebuilt until the end of the century. In 1901, the old wooden church was torn down and a new one rose just before World War One, a neo-Gothic cruciform building of red brickwork. The high-rising spire can be seen from afar and is divided into four sections. The interior is divided into the central nave and two aisles; the high altar, dominated by a crucifixion sculpture group, was brought from France. In general, the church is decorated modestly, with perceptible echoes of neo-Classicism. The churchyard is fenced by a stone wall with arched gates.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 8, 10 AM, 12 PM
Workdays 8 AM and 6 PM
Saturdays 10 AM and 6 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July 10 AM, procession to Verpena Church after Holy Mass
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August
Saint Augustine – last Sunday of August at 2 PM (in Jukniškės Chapel)

CONTACTS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

20 Dariaus ir Girėno Street, Kelmė, LT-86125
Phone number (+370 427) 61 185
Priest's office open on workdays 8 AM to 12 PM and 4 PM to 6 PM

VERPENA 30

HISTORY. Verpena, a village of about 150 people, was first mentioned in the 16th century, as an estate managed by the Elder of Mogilev, Stanislovas Skiezgaila, from whom it was inherited by the Šemeta family. Liudvika, daughter of the last landlord of Verpena Mykolas Šemeta (Mikal Szemiot), married Marszalek of Slonim Kazimieras Valavičius (Casimir Vollowicz). In 1760, Liudvika and Kazimieras passed the estate onto Marcijonas Gruževskis and Joana Gruževskienė (Gruzewscy).

CHURCH. The first chapel in Verpena was built and endowed by Mykolas Šemeta in 1723. The Valavičius family, who bought the estate from him in 1760, pledged to build a shelter and, if need be, rebuild the chapel, supply new liturgic accessories, and pay a yearly allowance for the priest servicing the chapel. The Gruževskis kept



St. Anne Church
in Verpena

their pledge, though it is not known whether they built a shelter or not. In 1775, Marcijonas Gruževskis erected a new church, a small wooden house without the spire that it has today. A simple open bell tower was built in the churchyard, facing the main façade, raised on six poles.

It is not entirely clear whether the new church was built on the site where the previous one used to stand, yet a reference to a stone basement underneath the new chapel could suggest it was the same spot. Verpena church underwent many reconstructions throughout the 19th century. The front tower could have been added in 1811. Another major reconstruction was done in 1877.

Under the Soviets, Verpena church was not used for worship but instead converted to a warehouse to store grain. This left the building in a lamentable condition, almost nothing remains of the original interior. In 1991, there was an initiative to have the building moved to Rumšiškės Ethnographic Museum, but the local community resisted it and the church stayed in its place. After Lithuania regained independence, the house of worship could be revived again. Verpena church was consecrated again on 30 July 1995.

Even though Samogitia is rich in wooden ecclesiastic architecture, Verpena's Saint Anne Church is distinctive in its simplicity and consonance of its forms. It is of a narrow elongated rectangular plan with a three-wall apse at its western end and a tower at the eastern wall. The walls are built of trimmed fir and pine logs. A steep rafter-supported roof covered with wood shingles lends the church gracefulness as do two cupola-shaped spires. Rectangular windows punctuate the walls covered with vertically arranged wooden planking. The front of the tower is decorated with a small crucifix in a shallow arch-shaped niche. A spire with a metal cross crowns its four-slope roof. The church's interior is modest and functional.

It is a single-nave space with a sacristy behind the altar and a choir supported by six pillars. Instead of three altars that used to stand in the church, there is now only one, sporting a late 18th century crucifix. Its former altarpiece, Częstochowa Mother of God portrait, did not survive. Nor did paintings of Saint Anne and Saint Anthony of Padua or two late-Baroque confessionals.

Verpena church used to be serviced by priests from Kelmė. In the late 1700s, services would be held only once every three weeks and later once a week. Of particular solemnity was the celebration of Saint Anne's feast. During the first quarter of the 20th century, while the new church of Kelmė was under construction, Verpena chapel would attract believers from around the area.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

No regular service

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July at 12 PM (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Phone number (+370 427) 61 185

VAIGUVA 32

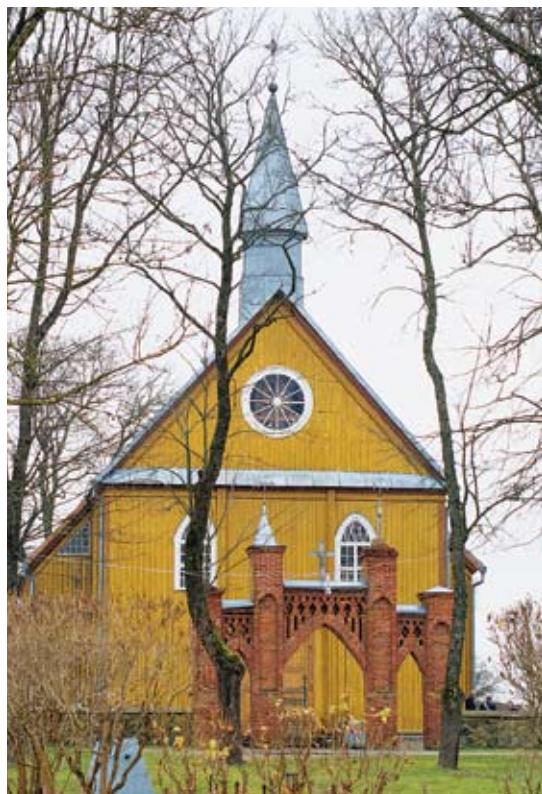
HISTORY. Vaiguva, a town of about 500 people, is located near the Knituva rivulet. The oldest records of the settlement go back to the second half of the 1400s, when relatively small Vaiguva estate was run by a powerful Samogitian family, the Kęstgailas. Research suggests, however, that the area has been inhabited since the Neolithic era or the Bronze Age. A village neighbouring the estate has been mentioned since the 18th century. Over the years, Vaiguva estate passed the hands of the Jomantas, Tiškevičius, Gruževskis, Sirevičius, Songailas, and other noble families. Referred to by local people as Vaiga estate, it was once owned by the famous Šiukšta family. Older residents of the village claim that the last owner was a woman named Bobenskaitė. At the turn of the last century, Stasys Steponas Hulevičius, a writer involved in the secret Lithuanian-language press business, and his brother Vladislovas Hulevičius, a medical doctor, lived on the estate. In 1908, "Vilniaus aušra", a society for education, opened a library in Vaiguva where people could read Lithuanian-language newspapers. In 1925, under the land reform law, the estate was nationalized and its lands distributed among small and mid-sized farms. The central piece of the estate was acquired by the Sisters of Divine Providence Convent. In 1948, however, the Soviet authorities closed down the convent and nationalized the property. The manor was turned into a shelter. After a fire in the 1970s, hardly anything remains of the buildings. Only a still perceptible walkway and an old oak tree marks the spot of the former manor house.

CHURCH. Early history of Vaiguva church is obscure enough. Part of the estate was given to the separate Altaria of Kražiai in the 16th century. It was then that the priest of Kražiai was probably able to

build the first chapel in Vaiguva. In the second half of the 16th century, protestants took control of Vaiguva estate and the village. Efforts by Bishop of Samogitia Merkelis Geišas helped Catholics reclaim Vaiguva.

The first properly recorded church in Vaiguva was built in 1719 and, sixty years later, it became the centre of a parish. In 1803, a new wooden temple was built in the village and consecrated one year later by Bishop Juozapas Arnulfas Giedraitis as the Church of Saint John the Baptist. Parish priest Kazimieras Žeimovičius had it reconstructed in 1877 – the building was made larger with new elements of décor added to it. Three pairs of pillars, connected by arches, now divide the interior space into the central nave and two aisles. The wooden building is rectangular in plan, has one tower and bears characteristic features of vernacular architecture. The churchyard is fenced by a stone wall and has an original

St. John the Baptist Church in Vaiguva



early 19th century bell tower. Three altars inside the church are decorated with neo-Gothic carvings. The high altar is the most ornate of the three. Sculptures of Saint Paul and Saint Peter stand on its sides and an early 20th century Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary statue in the middle; a painting depicting Divine Providence hangs above the sculptures. The two other neo-Gothic altars are more modest but similar in style. A painting in the left altar depicts Saint John the Baptist, after whom the church is named; above, a picture of Apostles Saint Simon and Saint Jude. The right altar sports a portrait of Saint Joseph with Child Jesus and another one of Saint Casimir. A bell in the belfry was cast in Koenigsberg in 1788.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 11 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint John the Baptist – 24 June

Divine Providence – last Sunday of August

CONTACTS

Saint John the Baptist Church

Vaiguva, Kelmė District, LT-86404

Phone number (+370 427) 67 849

UŽVENTIS ③④

HISTORY. The small town of Užventis is a veritable stronghold of Lithuanian women writers. This is where author Julija Beniuševičiūtė-Žymantienė (better known by her pen name Žemaitė, 1845-1921), a seminal figure in the Lithuanian national revival, lived and wrote her works, as well as Marija Pečkauskaitė (Šatrijos Ragana, 1877-1930). Moreover, Povilas Višinskis (1875-1906), a famous journalist and editor, was born near Užventis.

The town is situated on the bank of the Venta River. Archaeological excavations confirm that people settled here in the Neolithic era; there are also burial sites from the Iron Age. 15th century records speak of Užventis estate that belonged to the Grand Duke of Lithuania but was entrusted to the management



Folk museum
in Užventis

of the elders of Samogitia. In 1527, King Sigismund the Old took Užventis into his own charge and appointed bailiffs to run the estate; the Elder of Samogitia was only left with the judiciary powers. In 1701, the village was ravaged amidst the Great Northern War, many of its buildings, including the church, burned down.

In 1891, the Pečkauskas family moved into Užventis manor. Povilas Višinskis was hired to tutor their daughter Marija Pečkauskaitė. He should therefore be credited with nurturing the talent of the future writer better known as Šatrijos Ragana, instilling the spirit of conscious patriotism into her as well as another author Žemaitė. Višinskis encouraged the girl to write in Lithuanian rather than Polish, the language spoken among the gentry at the time. Having began her career as a writer in Užventis manor, Marija Pečkauskaitė later described her experiences in a short story that has become a centrepiece of her oeuvre, *In the Old Manor (Sename dvare)*. In the First Republic of Lithuania, she became known not only as a writer, but also as a pedagogue, a social activist, and an organizer of charities. Marija Pečkauskaitė-Šatrijos Ragana died on 14 July 1930. She was laid to rest in Židikai cemetery. During the burial ceremony, her confessor uttered the following words: "Today we are burying a saint..."

The local cemetery also houses the grave of 1918 Independence Act signatory Jonas Smilgevičius (1870-1942).



Monument to
Jonas Smilgevičius
by sculptor Vidas
Cikana and son

Several clashes between Russian troops and insurgents of the 1863 uprising took place near Užventis.

CHURCH. Matas Vainius, treasurer of the Grand Duchy and the appointed bailiff of Užventis estate, built a church in the very beginning of the 1600s or perhaps even in the end of the 1500s. In 1637, the old building underwent major reconstruction and was consecrated as the Church of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Matthew.

After the 1701 fire, the new wooden church of Saint Mary Magdalene rose in its place. Between 1825 and 1835, parish priest Jurgis Tvarijonavičius, helped by generous support of sponsors like Duke Druckis-Liubeckis and local parishioners, commissioned extensive repairs to the wooden church. He had five altars installed as well as wooden arches to support organ choirs. The main entrance and gable windows are arch-shaped. An ornate cast iron cross crowns the round roof of the main tower. A wooden bell tower stands opposite the church.

The building acquired its present shape in 1882. Today, Saint Mary Magdalene Church is a wooden cruciform structure with a double-pitched roof and a massive cupola-shaped spire. The high altar was designed in the late 19th century, in ornate Historicist style, decorated with a newly-commissioned portrait of Saint Mary Mag-

St. Mary Magdalene
Church in Užventis



dalene and a painting depicting Saint Stanislaus in the upper section. Some details in the altar are discernibly neo-Classictist and neo-Baroque. It is possible that cer-



Belltower of
the St. Mary
Magdalene
Church

tain elements – like ornamental carvings in the shape of acanthus leaves – were reused from an older Baroque altar. The lower section contains three pairs of columns, one of them carved in a particularly intricate manner. Carved angel heads in the frieze above the columns lends vivacity to the altar and marks off its two sections. The Saint Mary Magdalene portrait covers a niche in the high altar that contains a sculpture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Another painting covering the niche depicts the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – it was done in the mid-20th century by a much less skilled hand. Both side altars in the presbytery are more modest and newer than the high altar. The church also houses two 18th century paintings of Saint George and Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 11 AM

Mondays to Saturdays at 8:15 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Sacred Heart of Jesus – third Sunday after Pentecost

Our Lady of Mount Carmel – 16 July

Saint Mary Magdalene – 22 July

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Saint Mary Magdalene Church

8 Statybininkų Street, Užventis, Kelmė District, LT-86349

Phone number (+370 427) 57 384

ŠATRIJA HILL ⑤

HISTORY. Šatrija is the most picturesque and second-highest hill in Samogitia, peaking at 227 metres above sea level. Meandering at its foot is the Šatrija rivulet that flows into the Venta. The hill is located three kilometres southeast of Luokė town. It is a sacred hill overlooking a magnificent landscape. It is said that, on a clear day, one can see fifteen church spires from atop Šatrija. The hill is rather steep-sloped with a seemingly chopped-off crest which is slightly hollow in the middle. The name Šatrija is thought to derive from the burning of *šatrai*, dry twigs. A small village, Pašatrija, is located near the hill.

In his treatise *Diocese of Samogitia*, Bishop Motiejus Valančius notes that a temple that used to stand on top of Šatrija hill was one of the four principal sites of pagan worship. Grand Duke Vytautas and King Jogaila came and put out the sacred fire themselves during their 1413 Samogitian Baptism campaign. Moreover, the first Bishop

Šatrija Hill. Some historical sources mention that one of the most important events of the Samogitian Baptism happened at its foot



of Samogitia, Motiejus of Trakai, resided in Luokė. In the Middle Ages, there were attempts to rename the hill as Saint Joseph Mountain, but it did not stick.

The first archaeological excavations on the hill started in 1835. The discovered objects date back to the second half of the first millennium and the beginning of the second. Among the finds are cremated remains, burial urns, amber and glass jewellery, stone hatchets. A wooden castle stood atop the hill in the 14th century while the area at the foot of the hill was inhabited as early as the 2nd century BC. Latest excavations were done in 2009, unearthing a number of interesting finds.

A wealth of legends surround the hill. According to one, it has long been a gathering place for all the witches of Samogitia. In the olden days, a church stood on this spot, but the witches buried it under earth. When the church decayed, it left a cavity in the hill – soil sunk and left a hollow on the crest.

According to another legend, once upon a time, a giant was once travelling across Samogitia and he had pockets full of earth. He sat down to repose and dozed off. As he was sleeping, mice came near him and ate through his pockets searching for treats. The giant woke up and was furious: "Oh you, wicked ones, I will smack you with a *šatra!*" The mice ran away and the mound that was formed by earth from the giant's pockets came to be known as Šatrija. Unsurprisingly, Šatrija features prominently in Lithuanian literature and art, inspiring generations of artists. Writer Marija Pečkauskaitė even chose a pen name after the place – Šatrijos Ragana or the Witch of Šatrija.



Independence
Monument in the
Town Square of
Luokė

LUOKĖ 36

HISTORY. A few kilometres from Šatrija hill, near the small Vaidis River, lies Luokė. Unlike many other Samogitian towns, it did not develop in the vicinity of a castle but rather on a crossing of several important trade routes. This factor explains the radial plan of the town stretching along the main highways. Merchants would make their way to a market in Luokesa since the 15th

century. The town is somewhat removed from water, so fires were a constant nuisance. Luokė prospered until the mid-17th century, when wars with Sweden put an end to its celebrated fairs (held four times a year) and markets. The town had its own weight unit – the *Luokė measure* – attesting to the town's importance in trade. However, despite the intense trade, Luokė did not grow into a big town and today has a population of only 800.

What lent most fame to Luokė was Tadas Blinda. The legendary 19th century outlaw, often dubbed Lithuania's Robin Hood, coordinated his forays into neighbouring counties from Bivainė forest just outside the town. He was captured and executed in Luokė in 1877. Blinda was buried in the local cemetery and someone even brought a small tombstone. The Pine of Blinda still grows in the forest, itself a subject of many legends.

CHURCH. Luokė All Saints Church is one of the eight oldest temples in Samogitia, founded by Vytautas Magnus in 1416. In 1587, when the diocese was divided into three deaneries, Luokė became the centre of one of them. Afterwards, when the diocese got divided again, the dean's seat was moved to Medininkai. During the Samogitian uprising, the first Bishop of Samogitia, Motiejus, advised by Vytautas, temporarily moved his seat from Medininkai to Luokė. As the Reformation swept



Sculpture of Immaculate
Conception in the
churchyard



All Saints Church
in Luokė

over Samogitia, Luokė parish was left without a priest and the local church was closed. The parish was not reinstated until the times of Bishop Merkeliš Giedraitis (1576-1609). Bishop Motiejus Valančius notes that local peasants in the late 17th century engaged in witchcraft and sorcery – several of them were tried by the nobles' court in 1696. One woman, mother of the canon of Medininkai, was burnt at a stake for witchcraft in 1702.

In 1774, Bishop Jonas Lopacinskas commissioned a new wooden church to be built in place of the old one. It was probably the third church in Luokė and still stands today. It is an ancient and interesting piece of wooden vernacular architecture, cruciform in outline, with one spire. The churchyard is fenced by a stone wall, there are two old column chapels. One of them was made in 1902 of stone and wood, decorated with figures of Saint Rocco and an angel. The second column chapel is a wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Grace.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 1 PM
Workdays at 5 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary – first Sunday of July
All Saints – 1 November

CONTACTS

All Saints Church

5 Telšiai Street, Luokė, Telšiai District, LT-88236
Phone number (+370 444) 43 186

BIRŽUVĖNAI 37

HISTORY. It is one of the oldest toponyms in Samogitia. *Birsine*, along with several other settlements, was first mentioned in a letter by Bishop of Courland, dated 5 April 1253, in reference to partitioning of lands in southern Courland. The village is best known for an estate that was first referenced in written sources in the 14th century. For a long time, it was a royal estate, but it passed into private hands in the 17th century. It was a rather large possession,

yet Biržuvėnai never grew into a big settlement as the territory has always been rather sparsely populated. In 1667, Vladislovas Vaina sold the estate to Mykolas Gorskis. The latter family came to Lithuania from Masuria before 1588 and its members were loyal subjects of the Grand Duchy, often entrusted with responsible posts in the state. The Gorskis family, with their many possessions in Samogitia, enjoyed considerable political and economic power. They decided to make Biržuvėnai one of the key seats of the family and considerably developed the estate throughout their long reign (1667 to 1940). Over a span of several centuries, the Gorskis built a residential manor and many outbuildings. In 1909, they dammed the Virvyčia river and built a cardboard plant and a sawmill. A park was planted around the manor house in 1907, with artificial ponds and over forty varieties of plants.

Ona Gorskiénė, the last landlady of the family, left Biržuvėnai in the wake of the first Soviet occupation and fled to Austria. The new authorities used the house as administrative offices of a collective farm and later transformed it into a residential building. After the Independence, it was decided to restore the manor.

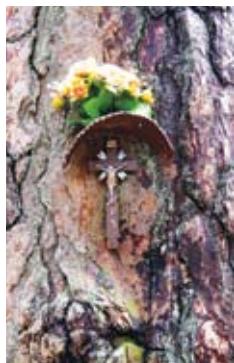
The house is a one-storey building with a mezzanine



Grave of Adomas and Liudvikas Gorskis

Restored Biržuvėnai manor





Laumės péda (Fairy's Footprint) spring, venerated by the folk

and a colonnade porch. Windows have original 18th century shutters and there is a loggia facing the park. Pitched shingle roof is almost twice the height of the walls. Two tile stoves used to stand inside, one bearing the Vaina and Gorskis coat of arms, with the date 1759, the other inscribed with the initials of Mykolas Gorskis, Castellan of Samogitia who reconstructed the house, and the date 1767. Other stoves and fireplaces covered with white ornamented tiles were built later. The porch leads directly to a spacious antechamber and representational rooms placed around it. Two chimney rooms are located in the middle of the manor, as is characteristic of Samogitian residential houses. The antechamber ceiling is decorated with the Gorskis and Vaina coats of arms and Baroque ornaments. An oil painting, *Zuzana Bathing*, used to cover the ceiling in the small parlour. Another ceiling painting, *The Life of Man*, has not survived.

In 2004, a fire ravaged the house, destroying some of its authentic décor. Nothing remained of the roof and the rooms in the middle; one of the big chimney collapsed, the original stove with the Vaina coat of arms was completely destroyed. The EU funding helped rebuild the manor in 2008.

Biržuvėnai is also famed for its magic springs, so-called *Laumės péda*. According to legends, once upon a time, a *laumė* – magic creature of the Baltic pagan mythology – left a footprint in the grotto, thus the name. Another legend speaks of a big stone, also bearing a *laumė*'s footprint. The Gorskis family, landlords of Biržuvėnai

estate, were patrons of the place. They planted a tree alley connecting the manor to *Laumės péda*. People have always gathered around the Holy Pine, growing near the spring, to ask for protection and health. The spring water, too, is believed to have healing powers and to bring back youth and health. In the olden days, people would come to wash their eyes and to bring some holy water home. It was an important site of vernacular worship.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

CONTACTS

Biržuvėnai Manor

4 Dvaro Street, Biržuvėnai, Telšiai District, LT-88239
Phone number (+370 699) 88 229

JANAPOLĖ 38

HISTORY. Up until the end of the 18th century, this small town of under five hundred used to be known as Viržuvėnai. According to a legend, there was so much fish in nearby Lake Biržulis that its water looked like it was boiling (*vir žuvis* in Samogitian). In the 18th century, the village came to be called Janapolė (Jonas' town) in honour of Bishop Jonas Lopacinskis (1708-1778) who founded the local church and moved his residence here.

The area has been inhabited since the Mesolithic era. After the christianisation of Samogitia, in 1421, Vytautas Magnus gave Viržuvėnai as a present to the Bishop of Samogitia. The bishops owned it until the 19th century, when it was nationalized. An episcopal estate was formed in the 17th century, but the town's golden age was under Jonas Lopacinskis, who was Bishop of Samogitia between 1762 and 1778. He moved his seat from Alsėdžiai to Viržuvėnai and erected a wooden manor. He also had a road built between Varniai and Viržuvėnai – the bishop thus tried to bring his residence closer to the cathedral in Varniai and the seminary. The main buildings of the estate were reconstructed at that time, a gorgeous park planted around the manor, the town's

Stone commemorating the founding of the Janapolė town (1370-2005)





Belltower of the
St. Michael the Archangel
Church in Janapolė

infrastructure was considerably developed. Many prominent figures from the Samogitian society frequented the manor. In 1776, Lopacinskis built the first wooden church in the town, consecrated to Saint Michael the Archangel. After the bishop's death, the episcopal residence was moved back to Alsėdžiai and Viržuvėnai lost much of its importance. By the mid-19th century, the manor was in ruins, the park completely neglected and reclaimed by wilderness.

The town and its people took active part in the 1831 uprising.

CHURCH. Little is known of the old Janapolė church – its very existence is in doubt. Much better documented is Bishop Lopacinskis' church of Saint Michael the Archangel. The exact date of its opening is not known, it could have been between 1763 and 1776. Well-kept log books and visitation acts suggest that it must have already been built by 1775. That same year, Bishop Lopacinskis endowed the church with lands and a monetary foundation. It was probably at that time that the area was renamed Janapolė.

In 1815, Bishop Juozapas Arnulfas Giedraitis had the church rebuilt; the last reconstruction works were carried out in 1887 on the church's spire and the bell tower. The building is a rectangular hall with a five-walled



St. Michael
the Archangel Church
in Janapolė

apse and a very steep roof. Within, a Baroque high altar is richly adorned with sculptures and carvings. A painting of Saint John the Baptist was once its centrepiece and the titular Saint Michael the Archangel used to hang above it. However, only the latter remains in its place; the centrepiece was replaced in the late 19th century by a metal-plated portrait of Our Lady from Częstochowa.

The churchyard is encircled by a stone wall with an impressive early 20th century gate and contains a rather big cemetery as well as a massive wooden two-tier bell tower.



Fragment of the façade
of the church

Janapolė cemetery



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 11 AM
Workdays at 9 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

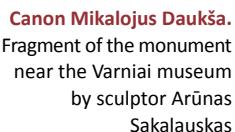
Saint Michael the Archangel – 29 September

CONTACTS

Saint Michael the Archangel Church
28 Viržuvėnų Street, Janapolė, Telšiai District, LT-88267
Phone number (+370 444) 44 596

**Bishop Merkeliš Giedraitis.**

Fragment of the monument near the Varniai museum by sculptor Arūnas Sakalauskas

**Canon Mikalojus Daukša.**

Fragment of the monument near the Varniai museum by sculptor Arūnas Sakalauskas

VARNIAI. SAINT ALEXANDER CHURCH ⑨

HISTORY. Varniai is the central scene of the Samogitian Baptism campaign, a long-time seat of Medininkai Diocese. It was here that Vytautas built Samogitia's first church in 1413-1414, dedicating it to his patron Saint Alexander, and the first Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in 1417. Until the second half of the 16th century, the town was known as Medininkai, but later the name of Varniai caught on, coming from the small Varnelė River flowing across it. In the 13-14th centuries, the area was rather densely populated, so it would often have to fend against attacks of the German crusaders. Vytautas Magnus, who came to Samogitia in 1417 for an intensive three-month christianisation campaign, consecrated a corner stone for the cathedral and founded a chapter of six canons. In a letter written by the Bishop of Lvov and the Bishop of Vilnius to the Council of Constance regarding the Baptism of Samogitia, they inform that Grand Duke Vytautas, who came to Medininkai, to a place called Varniai, designated it as the seat of a new diocese which was to be called Medininkai Diocese.

In the 16th century, Varniai became one of the central strongholds of Lithuanian culture, for Samogitia as well as the entire Grand Duchy. Bishop Merkeliš Giedraitis (1536-1609) brought together the brightest minds of his time in Varniai. Luminaries like Mikalojus Daukša and Maciej Stryjkowski were canons of Varniai Cathedral. Two and a half centuries later, the ideas of faith and national revival culminated in a movement started by Bishop Motiejus Valančius. His diplomatic skill and charisma helped draw the peasantry into the resistance against anti-Catholic and anti-Lithuanian policies of the Russian tsar. When in the wake of the 1863 uprising the Russian imperial government banned press in Latin characters, Varniai was one of the hubs of underground publishing and distribution.

Citizens of Varniai and landlords of surrounding estates were particularly active participants in the 1831 uprising. Some members of the clergy and nobility felt severe repercussions for their involvement. In 1832, the autho-

rities ordered to close down Saint Rocco Monastery set up a century before.

Varniai was granted Magdeburg Rights several times, but this did not help it develop into a major urban centre. After the 1863 uprising, the diocese seat was moved to Kaunas, closer to the tsarist power centres, and Varniai remained an insignificant provincial town.

CHURCH. The first church in Varniai was built by Vytautas Magnus, who dedicated it to his patron Saint Alexander (Alexander was Vytautas' Christian name). It became one of the first parish churches in Samogitia. A new and bigger building for the church rose in 1764; another major restoration was done in 1804. When the episcopal seat was moved out of the town in 1864, Saint



Chapel in the churchyard

St. Alexander Church in Varniai





Altar of the
St. Alexander
Church in
Varniai

Alexander church became Old Varniai parish church. Its congregation were Catholics who lived on the left bank of the Varnelė River. In 1949, the church was turned into a warehouse and then a store. It was returned to Catholics in 1991.

The church is a wooden building of rectangular outline with one tower. Its décor combines features of late Baroque and vernacular architecture. Even though the interior was ravaged under the Soviets, it has been largely restored.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Workdays at 6 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Alexander – 24 February

Saint Rocco – 16 August

CONTACTS

Saint Alexander Church

10 Vytauto Street / 1, Varniai, Telšiai District, LT-88320

Phone number (+370 444) 47 573

VARNIAI. CATHEDRAL 40

HISTORY. Having launched Samogitia's christianisation campaign, Grand Duke Vytautas at once took up founding the central episcopal church, the Cathedral of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul. However, the house of new worship was destroyed by Samogitians themselves who rose against the Duke's authority. The church was rebuilt in 1421. In the beginning of the following century, plans were made to erect a new stone cathedral. However, works were interrupted by the onslaught of the Reformation – as a result, wooden walls rose abo-

Varniai Cathedral





Inside the Varniai Cathedral

ve stone foundations. The church suffered from fires many times, the last one ravaging it in 1680. It was then decided to erect a stone structure which was finished eleven years later and still stands today. The main sponsor was Bishop Kazimieras Pacas. When the episcopal seat was moved to Kaunas following the 1863 uprising, the cathedral was rebranded as New Varniai parish church.

The style of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul Cathedral is mature Baroque with echoes of Classicist strictness and austerity. The building is a three-nave basilica with a transept, two chapels, and two towers in the front façade. There are as many as twelve altars inside. The high altar stands out among them for its rich carvings and a silver tabernacle brought from Brussels. A new altar was consecrated in 2008 to mark the 600th anniversary of the Samogitian Baptism.

Its relief altarpieces by Petras Repšys show *The Baptism of Samogitia*, *Farewell of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome*, and *The Founding of Medininkai Cathedral*. Despite the numerous fires, the cathedral still has the old canons' chairs that once seated Petras Roizijus, Mikalojus Daukša, and Motiejus Stryjkowski. There are two sacristies; a room above one of them houses the episcopal archive. Catacombs underneath the cathedral shelters graves of the Bishops of Samogitia. Coffins with the remains of bishops Juozapas Arnulfas Giedraitis and Simonas Giedraitis are held in the crypt facing the high altar.

The pulpit and four small wooden figures adorning it were made by another artisan than the high altar, yet they fit together perfectly. Just like the altar is designed to take up the entire space in the apse and dominate



Memorial altar in the Varniai Cathedral by architect Gražina Pajarskaite



Fragments of the antepedium of the Varniai Cathedral altar: Apostles Peter and Paul saying goodbyes before their martyrdom (above); symbolic composition of the Samogitian Baptism (below); by artist Petras Repšys





**Venerable painting
of the Mother of God
in the side altar of the
cathedral**

the west side of the interior, so does the pulpit stand out and command the space around it. The sculptures represent the four Fathers of the Church: Saints Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose.

The organ of Varniai Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral is an authentic Baroque instrument with neo-Classical fittings. Its history closely relates to that of the Giedraitis family. Bishops of this family were the ones who presented the cathedral with its first organ and then funded its restoration following a fire in the 1800s. One can see the Giedraitis family coat of arms in the upper section of the instrument. The cathedral also keeps a valuable episcopal throne – a piece dating back to the times of Bishop Valančius.

Varniai Cathedral is a pantheon of sorts. It is believed that about ten bishops of Samogitia are laid to rest in its vaults, including Merkeliš Giedraitis and founder of the cathedral Bishop Kazimieras Pacas.

A special Episcopal Memorial Plaque, by Albertas Gurskas and Petras Repšys, was unveiled in Varniai Cathedral for the big anniversary of 2000. The white granite plaque bears the coat of arms of the Diocese of Samogitia and names of all the forty bishops who headed it since its founding in Varniai until abolishment in Kaunas.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

**The seat of the
Samogitian Bishops in
the Varniai Cathedral**



HOLY MASS

Sundays at 9, 11 AM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saints Peter and Paul – 29 June

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 8 September

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 8 December

CONTACTS

Saints Peter and Paul Church (formerly cathedral)

4 Valančiaus Street, Varniai,
Telšiai District, LT-88319

Phone number (+370 444) 47 573

VARNIAI. SEMINARY ①

HISTORY. The Seminary of Varniai has been one of Samogitia's centres of enlightenment for many centuries. It is believed that the hill where the Samogitian Bishopric Museum now stands was once a pagan worship site. It also housed a big cemetery until the 17th century and was the site of the first two Medininkai cathedrals.

The founding of Varniai (or Samogitian) Seminary dates back to 1623, when Bishop Stanislovas Kiška built the first wooden premises to house the institution and sent two Jesuit priests from Kražiai College to Varniai. After that, the school moved back and forth between Kražiai and Varniai several times, until, in 1770, Bishop Jonas Dominykas Lopacinskis built a new stone house for the seminary in the style of late Baroque. It housed



**Former seminary
in Varniai.**

Currently Museum
of the Samogitian
Diocese

about fifty pupils in the first year; later, Varniai Seminary would have some hundred students at any given point. Under Bishop Valančius, 333 young men were ordained to priesthood over twelve years in Varniai. Three students would be sent to St. Petersburg Spiritual

Academy each year, as an extension of a previous tradition of sending seminarians to study in Vilnius Academy. Many outstanding teachers and national luminaries were graduates of Varniai Seminary.

After a failed uprising in 1864, the intellectual centre of Varniai was broken apart – the Bishop was moved to Kaunas and the seminary closed down. The huge seminary palace was given to a regiment of Don Cossacks charged with keeping order in the region. As the building was adapted to barracks, its interior outline was completely changed, much of its original décor lost. The Cossack regiment remained in Varniai until 1905, when a revolution triggered a wave of liberal reforms throughout the Russian Empire. After Lithuania gained independence in 1918, the palace retained its use as military barracks. Following the coup of 1926, the building was used as a detention camp – its inmates would be allowed to return to their farms in summer but where asked to come back for winter. Under the Soviets, the seminary building housed educational institutions.

Later, independence from the Soviet Union permitted a renewed interest in the former seminary – archaeologists, historians, and art historians began researching the palace and the institution it once housed. By 1995, the seminary palace had regained a tower above the main façade and its original Baroque roof. In 1999, the building was handed over to the Samogitian Bishopric Museum. That same year, the Samogitian Culture Society commissioned sculptor Arūnas Sakalauskas to design a monument for Bishop Merkeliš Giedraitis and Mikalojus Daukša.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

CONTACTS

Samogitian Bishopric Museum (former Varniai Seminary)
6 Daukanto Street, Varniai,
Telšiai District, LT-88138
Phone numbers (+370 444) 47 455,
(+370 687) 20 198, (+370 615) 94 309

OPENING HOURS

Mondays to Thursdays 8 AM to 5 PM
Fridays and eves of national holidays 8 AM to 4 PM
Saturdays and Sundays 11 AM to 6 PM
On national holidays visitors accepted upon prior arrangement.

VIEŠVĒNAI 42

HISTORY. Viešvėnai was first mentioned in written sources in 1253, during the partition of Ceklis Land. At the time, its centre was on Gestautė hill fort near the small Viešvė River. A little further south, there stands the village of Kungiai (Kunigai) which dates back to the 13th century, when the Duke of Viešvė Land had his castle here, in the vicinity of Old (Great) Viešvėnai village. Since the times of Grand Duke Vytautas, the village was part of the king's estate and administered by the Elders of Samogitia. In 1527, however, the Grand Duke took Viešvėnai into his direct management.

In 1884, when poet Antanas Baranauskas was ordained as bishop, he was also entitled to Viešvėnai estate. The bishop's brother Anupras Baranauskas, who had participated in the 1863 uprising and been subsequently exiled to Siberia, took management of the estate, built a residential house on the land and other outbuildings. This was how the Baranauskas family settled in Samogitia.

In 1999, the remains of priest Pranas Gustaitis, who was tortured and executed by the Soviets in 1946 and buried in a mass grave in Tuskulėnai, were reburied in a cemetery near Viešvėnai church. A pieta by sculptor Antanas Kmieliauskas commemorates his life.

Another monument, a sculpture of the Blessed Virgin Mary with a cross, was built on a hill near the church to mark the 750th anniversary of Viešvėnai in 2003. In 2008, a sculptural composition depicting the resurrection of Christ was built outside the church.

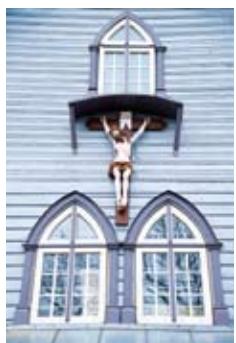
CHURCH. The wooden church of Holy Trinity was founded by Pranciškus Pilsudskis, the Grand Duke's cup-bearer, Elder of Viešvėnai and manager of the estate, and his wife Joana in 1758. In 1786, the house of prayer was reconstructed. In the mid-19th century, priest Dominykas Styrbinskis and the congregation of Viešvėnai donated funds to build a new temple that, several subsequent touch-ups notwithstanding, still stands unchanged today. Even though Viešvėnai have been seeking to be made a separate parish since the late 19th century, it was not until 1924 that Bishop Pranciškus Karevičius finally granted the wish.



Monument to God and Homeland

Tombstone of Viešvėnai parish priest Pranas Gustaitis, murdered by the Communists in 1946. By sculptor Antanas Kmieliauskas





**Fragment of the
façade of the Holy
Trinity Church in
Viešvėnai**

Viešvėnai church is a single-nave cruciform building. The wooden structure features elements of vernacular as well as neo-Gothic architecture with a pointed spire crowning its façade. The church has two altars. The high altar is decorated with carvings and columns and contains an 1832 painting showing *The Holy Trinity and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Another piece, *Saint Michael the Archangel* painted by an unknown artist the same year, hangs in the upper section of the side altar. The church also owns two rare 19th century copes and a monstrance made in 1817.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 12 PM

Workdays at 6 PM (in summer), 17 PM (in winter)

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Holy Trinity – Sunday after Pentecost

CONTACTS

**Holy Trinity Church
and belltower in
Viešvėnai**

Holy Trinity Church

2 Ramybės Street, Viešvėnai, Telšiai District, LT-88468

Phone number (+370 444) 43 673



RAINIAI 43

HISTORY. Someone once called Rainiai a tear of pain in the sorrowful rosary of the nation. A massacre in 1941 inscribed the name of the small town near Telšiai into the bloody pages of Lithuania's history. Rainiai has a population of about one thousand and lies near the small Mastis River. 19th century sources mention an estate ruled by the Kaminskis family. When Lithuania declared independence in 1918, the landlords moved to Poland, while the estate was nationalized and its lands distributed to peasants. In 1936, the manor was given as a state award to singer Kipras Petrauskas (1885-1968).

When Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, its military divisions and the entire administration hurriedly moved eastwards, destroying everything on the way. On the night from 24 to 25 June, fleeing NKVD and Red Army officers, assisted by local collaborators, brutally tortured and killed 73 (or 74) political prisoners held in Telšiai prison. The inmates were not high political leaders, merely teachers, lawyers, public servants, farmers, workers, and citizens who cared about their state. The crime is shocking in its sheer brutality – it was aimed at terrorizing other Lithuanians and leaving a mark of the Soviet power. The bodies were hastily thrown into pits and covered with earth.

A passer-by accidentally discovered the bodies on 28 June 1941. On 1 July, a big procession of relatives and local people escorted coffins of Rainiai martyrs to the



**The site of the
Rainiai massacre**



**The Rainiai
Martyrs Chapel.**
By architects
Jonas Virakas,
Algirdas Žebrauskas

cemetery outside Telšiai cathedral where they were buried in one tomb. The site of the massacre was marked with a memorial plaque. Even during the war, the local community made efforts to commemorate Rainiai massacre: they published a booklet, *Martyrs of Rainiai*, while young architect Jonas Virakas took up building a chapel in Telšiai cemetery.

The Red Army retook Telšiai in October 1944 – the unfinished chapel was torn down, its architect Virakas arrested and incarcerated in the Vorkuta Gulag. Woods around Rainiai were cut down and the Soviets did all they could to make people forget the massacre. They failed, however. Every year, in June – sometimes July or other time, if the KGB kept too close an eye – someone would erect crosses on the site of Rainiai massacre. The Soviet authorities would instantly take the crosses down and burn them, but crosses kept reappearing year after year. Young people sometimes raised the Lithuanian tricolour flag.



MEMORY. After the Independence, Telšiai architect Algirdas Žebrauskas studied sketches left by Jonas Virakas and designed a chapel. It was built on funds donated by people and different organizations and consecrated by Bishop of Telšiai Antanas Vaičius on 23 June 1991, during a solemn ceremony of the 50th anniversary of Rainiai massacre. Despite being a monument to pain, suffering, and death, the chapel is predominantly white – as a reminder that human suffering can be meaningful and lead to a rebirth of men and nations. Bright stained-glass windows by Algirdas Dovydėnas – depicting suffering of Christ and the martyrs of Rainiai – shed light on a white marble cross sculpted by Remigijus Midvikis. The Passion of Christ, intertwined with the sacrifice of Rainiai martyrs, people deported by the Soviets, and guerilla fighters, is also the subject of murals by Antanas Kmieliauskas. The chapel tower contains brass sculptures showing the Martyrs of Rainiai, their hands tied and stretched out like crucifixes. A memorial oak wood was planted to remind of the massacre.

On 1 November 1991, Rainiai community also erected a cross by sculptor Remigijus Midvikis in the wood where the massacre took place.

**Names of the
Rainiai martyrs
in the memorial
plaque**



**Cross
commemorating
the Martyrs of
Rainiai** by sculptor
Remigijus Midvikis

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

CONTACTS

Rainiai Martyrs Chapel

Rainiai, Telšiai District, LT-87001
Phone number (+370 444) 70 282

TELŠIAI ④

HISTORY. Telšiai is the capital of Samogitia and, since 1926, the seat of Telšiai Diocese that covers most of it. Catacombs underneath Telšiai Saint Anthony of Padua Cathedral holds the grave of Vincentas Borisevičius, martyr Bishop of Telšiai. The town stretches across seven hills overlooking Lake Mastis. The area has been inhabited since the Neolithic era, yet written records of Telšiai go back only to 1450. It was mentioned as a royal estate administered by the Elders of Samogitia and other high officials of the Grand Duchy. A town sprang up near the estate in the 15th century, hosting the Sejms and courts of the Samogitian nobility. Starting in the late 17th century, Telšiai became a cultural and political centre of the region. Vice Chancellor of the Grand Duchy Povilas Sapiega, following examples set by Chodkevičius (a monastery in Kretinga in 1609) and Valavičius (Tytuvėnai convent in

1614), invited the Bernadine brothers in 1624 to settle on the Insula hill. A devastating plague hit the town in the early 18th century – almost the entire population perished – but it recovered quickly. A land court was established in Telšiai in 1764. In 1791, King Stanislaw



**Part of the Telšiai
town by the
Mastis lake**

Augustus Poniatowski conferred Magdeburg Privilege of self-government and gave Telšiai a coat of arms showing Saint Stanislaus.

Samogitians were active participants in the 1831 and 1863 uprisings. At one point, the insurgents had even taken control of Telšiai and set up their own government. After the uprising was crushed, many landlords and clergymen were arrested and exiled to Siberia, some even executed. Moreover, the tsar's government closed down a Franciscan convent in 1855. In 1864, two priests, Izidorius Noreika and Antanas Gargasas, were executed

**View of Telšiai town
and cathedral**





The Bishop's Palace in a field near Telšiai; their remains were reburied in the cathedral cemetery in 1922.

A breaking point in the history of Telšiai was when it became the seat of a diocese. A new episcopal palace rose in the town, a seminary was opened in a former convent. Vincentas Borisevičius (1887-1946) was appointed its rector. The seminary was closed down during the Soviet occupation, but in 1989, Bishop Vincentas Vaičius reopened it and named the seminary after Borisevičius. Long-time rector of the institution and bishop since 1940,



Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church in Telšiai

Borisevičius was an ardent critic of the Soviet regime. He was arrested and in 1946, executed following a brutal interrogation and buried in a mass grave in Tuskulėnai. In 1999, his remains were exhumed and moved to the crypt of Telšiai Cathedral.

CHURCH. The first wooden church, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, was built in Telšiai in 1536. It underwent major reconstruction circa 1700, but by the early 19th century it was in so bad a shape that the tsar's government ordered to close it down and, in 1835, to completely demolish. A Byzantine Orthodox church was built in its place in 1867. Only in 1932, following a lengthy court procedure, did Catholics reclaim the temple and, in

St. Anthony of Padua Cathedral in Telšiai





Painting of St. Anthony

Inside Telšiai Cathedral



Door of the Telšiai Cathedral by artist Romualdas Inčirauskas



1935, converted it to a Catholic church. Meanwhile the Orthodox community, paid by the Catholics 30 thousand litas, used the money to build the new church of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

CATHEDRAL. In 1650 the Bernardine monks who had settled in Telšiai a little earlier built the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua. It burned down in the early 1700s and was not rebuilt until 1738, from wood. Even though works for constructing a stone house of prayer began in the middle of the century, it was consecrated only in 1794. Another round of reconstruction lasted throughout the second half of the 19th century and concluded in 1914. When Telšiai became the seat of a diocese, the church was promoted to a cathedral.

Telšiai Cathedral is a late Baroque building featuring elements of Classicism, of rectangular outline with a



three-wall apse and one tower above the main façade. Inside, rows of pillars separate the nave from two vaulted aisles. Telšiai Cathedral has the only two-storey altar in the country; a portrait of Saint Anthony in its upper section is particularly revered by the faithful. The Bishops' Crypt in the cathedral shelters tombs of three Bishops of Telšiai: Borisevičius, Justinas Staugaitis, and Pranciškus Ramanauskas. A new gate was built in the cathedral in 2009 to mark the 600th anniversary of the Samogitian Baptism.

Ceiling paintings in Telšiai Cathedral



Fragment of the door of Telšiai Cathedral by artist Romualdas Inčirauskas



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

Saint Anthony of Padua Cathedral

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 8, 10 AM, 12, 3, 6 PM

Workdays at 8 AM and 6 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anthony of Padua – 13 June (moveable to the nearest Sunday)

CONTACTS

Saint Anthony of Padua Cathedral

2 Katedros Square, Telšiai, LT-87131

Phone number (+370 444) 60 500

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 8:30, 10 AM, 12, 3, 6 PM

Mondays to Saturdays at 6 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 15 August

CONTACTS

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church

2 Šviesos Street, Telšiai, LT-87127

KĘSTAIČIAI 45

HISTORY. This small village neighbouring the main residence of the Bishop of Samogitia is known for the fervent faith of its people: in the 19th century, the congregation bravely fought the tsarist government's repressions against their church. Fewer than thirty people live in Kęstaičiai today, but it was once a rather sizeable estate owned by the Kęstavičius family, lending its name to both the estate and the adjoining village. The Kęstavičius received the estate for services to King Sigismund Augustus. However, the village never grew into a town. The Kęstavičius family sold the estate to Jonas Antanas Rim-

gaila at the turn of the 18th century. The new landlord invited the brothers of Saint Rocco who built a convent in Kęstaičiai and a twelve-bed hospital for the poor and the disabled. By the middle of the century, the hospital had grown to accommodate up to thirty patients. The tsar's government, closing down a number of Catholic institutions in recompense for the church's support to the 1831 uprising, confiscated the convent's lands in 1842. Unable to maintain the hospital, the brothers were forced to close it. The poor were moved to Telšiai hospital, while the disabled were sheltered by the Brothers Hospitallers in Vilnius. Since the tsar did not expropriate the buildings themselves, Bishop Simona Mykolas Giedraitis set up a home for disabled priests on 26 June 1843. By the turn of the 20th century, Kęstaičiai had become an indistinctive Samogitian village.

CHURCH. The first church in the village was founded by its landlord Kęstavičius. After a plague that swept the area in the early 18th century, a small chapel was built near the burial site of the plague victims and visiting priests sometimes held services there. The brothers of Saint Rocco, invited by Rimaila, settled near the church. When it burned down in 1808, the brothers contributed to building a new temple that was finished in 1820. Back in the 1700s, pope Pius VI had signed a bull ordaining the feast day of Saint Rocco and Saint Sebastian and sent relics of Saint Rocco.

While the convent had its activities restricted, the



Commemorative sign in the former site of the church

In the former site of the Telšiai church, a hill of crosses has risen, encouraged by the Bishop Jonas Boruta



church and the hospital continued to function. In 1886, however, the authorities decided to close down the church, too. The 24 September of that year was to be the last day of worship in the church. Even before the date, police had been sent to guard that the property of the church and the disabled home be not removed. The local people, aware about the imminent closure of their church, would hold vigils in the house of worship, sing hymns and say prayers. When the tsar's commission arrived on 24 September, they found Kęstaičiai church full of people. To prevent the closing, women had removed the door and hidden it. The authorities and priests who came to the church found it wide open. People from the village and the entire region kept coming and guarding the temple from closing. The church and the churchyard could no longer contain all the people; they built barricades around the building and barred the sacristy to prevent the removal of the Holy Eucharist. The authorities, unable to take the church, sent three Cossack squadrons and several carriages with axes, saws, shovels, and other tools to disassemble the church. Finally, the governor himself arrived in a four-horse carriage accompanied by a dozen Cossack riders. The governor inspected the church from the outside and saw that it was full of people. The Cossacks then started storming the church, causing injuries and bloodshed. The church was eventually taken – the Cossacks axed the altars, crosses, pulpit, confessionals, the stations of the cross in the churchyard, crashed altarpieces, and wanted to tear down the church tower and the roof, but left the town before they could finish the work. Many people were injured and arrested in the process, including women.

The defence of Kęstaičiai church was one of the first public manifestations of Lithuanians' struggle against the tsar's anti-Catholic policies, an example that has not been forgotten. Even though the site was used as a military ground and restricted during the Soviet era, after the Independence, a cross was put on the spot where the church used to stand. Bishop of Telšiai Jonas Boruta set up a small Hill of Crosses.

ALSĒDŽIAI 46

HISTORY. The small town of one thousand people, Alsėdžiai, is situated in Plungė District near the Sruoja River. It is the old seat of Bishops of Samogitia. The village grew from a base court near a

fort hill and still retains its original radial street plan. Alsėdžiai was first mentioned in historical sources in 1253, when the Bishop of Courland and the Grand Master of the Livonian Order agreed how to divide up the lands that were up for taking. In 1421, during the Samogitian christianisation campaign, Vytautas gave the village to the Bishop of Medininkai. A town grew near the episcopal estate at the turn of the 16th century. Bishop Merkeliš Giedraitis set up the diocese's first seminary in Alsėdžiai. In 1643, the town even hosted a synod. The last bishop to reside in Alsėdžiai was Jonas Krizostomas Gintila who accrued a sizeable library of some thirty thousand volumes. In 1850, Bishop Motiejus Valančius decided to move his seat to Varniai. Under the tsarist rule in the early 1900s, the estate was confiscated and burned down. Not a trace of it remains today. Alsėdžiai is the birthplace of Kazys Varnelis (1917-2010), a famous expatriate artist and bibliophile. The town's cemetery holds the grave of Stanislovas Narutavičius (1862-1932), a signatory to the 1918 Independence Act whose brother Gabriel Narutowicz (1865-1922) was the first president of the Republic of Poland.



Apse of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Church in Alsėdžiai



Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Church in Alsėdžiai

CHURCH. Bishop Baltramiejus Svirenkavičius had the first wooden church built at the foot of the Alka hill in 1475, serving as the centre of a parish. The second house of prayer, also built from wood, was founded by Bishop Jurgis Tiškevičius in 1648. A parish school was opened in 1765. In 1793, a new church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, rose on the flattened hilltop, while a chapel was built to mark the old spot.

The church is a wooden basilica with a three-wall apse and two spires. The interior is divided into the nave and two aisles and houses eight wooden Baroque altars. One of the side altars sports a valuable 18th century portrait of the Holy Family. All the altars underwent restoration in the beginning of the 20th century. A wooden bell tower contains a brass bell cast in 1679 by the famous Joanes de la Marche. A stone wall surrounds the churchyard that contains the grave of Bishop-nominee Jonas Krizostomas Gintila, who headed the Diocese of Samogitia for six years between 1844 and 1850. His tomb is marked with a sculpture of the Virgin Mary. Vaclovas Stirbys (1912-1982), a great bibliophile and parish priest of Alsėdžiai (in exile between 1950 and 1956), has also been laid to rest here.

Once upon a time, Alsėdžiai Church possessed a miraculous portrait of the Virgin Mary, according to Albertas Vijūkas-Kojalavičius who noted the fact in his 1630 treatise *Miscellanea*. Later authors refer to a statue rather than a painting. Today, the church treasures a portrait of the Holy Family and Saint Anne.

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 12 PM
Workdays at 5 PM

PATRON FEAST DAYS

Saint Anne – 26 July at 12 PM

Saint Bartholomew – 24 August

All feast days are celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

CONTACTS

Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Church

2 Bažnyčios Street, Alsėdžiai,
Plungė District, LT-90471
Phone number (+370 448) 48 191

ŽEMAIČIŲ KALVARIJA ④

HISTORY. The small town of Žemaičių Kalvarija (Samogitian Calvary in Lithuanian) is best known for its Great Žemaičių Kalvarija Feast, 20 Stations of the Cross, and an early-17th century church founded by Bishop Jurgis Tiškevičius and holding the famous painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Christian Families. The town,



Procession at the Great Feast of Žemaičių Kalvarija

which today has a population of under eight hundred, is very old, first mentioned in a written document from 1253. Until 1637, it went by the name of Gardai and was given by Vytautas to the Diocese of Medininkai. In 1637, Bishop Jurgis Tiškevičius invited the Dominican brothers to come to Gardai, granting them lands an a convent. In 1639-1640, the Dominicans built the Calvary Hills – ni-

Pilgrims visiting the Stations of the Cross





Mother of God
of Žemaičių
Kalvarija painting
(without casing)

neteen chapels containing twenty Stations of the Cross (chapel number seven has two stations). The founder himself scattered the earth brought from Jerusalem and sprinkled with Christ's blood around the chapels. Their vernacular forms fit well into the hilly landscape. Particularly beautiful is chapel number eighteen, decorated with murals by Kazys Varnelis.

Since the mid-17th century, Žemaičių Kalvarija gained fame for a portrait of the Virgin Mary with Child that was brought by a Dominican monk from Rome. The painting has been revered as miraculous since 1643. The Dominican brothers initiated a feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary which was merged with the earlier feast of the Calvary Hills. A relic of the Holy Cross was brought from Lublin in 1649 – it is still kept in Žemaičių Kalvarija today.

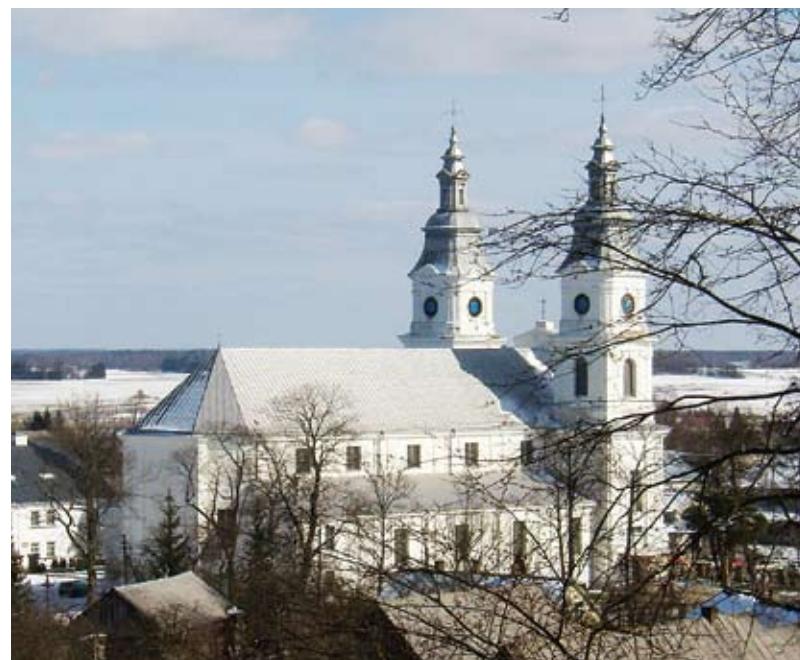
The town greatly suffered amidst the two 19th century uprisings. In 1889, the tsar ordered the Dominican convent closed. There were also attempts to discourage pilgrimage to Žemaičių Kalvarija. Under the interwar Republic, Marian order settled in the town. The brothers

worked intensively with young people, led spiritual retreat, spread education in rural communities, renovated the church and the Stations of the Cross. In 1931, they held a solemn celebration to mark the 30th anniversary of the Calvary Hills, attracting over a hundred thousand pilgrims.

Under the Soviets, the town's name was changed to Varėna. Thanks to efforts of believers, the church was not closed and the Stations of the Cross were left to stand. The authorities, however, did everything possible to discourage pilgrims from coming and celebrating the Great Feast, unsuccessfully.

The Great Žemaičių Kalvarija Feast begins in early July and lasts for two weeks, during which bishops from across Lithuania celebrate Holy Mass. The Way of the Cross in Žemaičių Kalvarija consists of two main parts: *The Way of Jesus' Arrest* which begins in the first station, *The Last Supper*, and ends in the eleventh, *In the Town Hall*; and *The Way of the Cross* which begins in station eleven and continues until the last station, *The Discovery of the Cross*.

Žemaičių Kalvarija
Visitation of the Blessed
Virgin Mary Basilica



CHURCH. It is believed that a chapel in Gardai, on the episcopal estate, stood as early as in 1593. Other historians suggest that the first Saint John the Baptist Chapel was built on Gardai hill fort by Stanislovas Kiška in 1619. A parish was established in 1636 and Bishop Tiškevičius had a parish church built on a different site. Since 1644, the Dominican brothers ran a school whose graduates include many outstanding personalities like Motiejus Valančius and Simona Daukantas. A bigger wooden temple was built in 1750, housing as many as fifteen altars. The first stone church rose only in 1822, a little further from the previous spot, but a fire claimed the building and the entire parish archive in 1896. In 1906, the church was rebuilt, sticking strictly to the original design, except the spires were made taller. Since 1988, its official name is Žemaičių Kalvarija Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica Minor. Its style is a mixture of Baroque and Classicism. Ornate Baroque décor is tempered by Classicist composure, austerity, and celebration of structural elements. The building is rectangular in outline with a three-wall apse, its front façade graced with twin spires. The interior space consists of a nave and two aisles, furnished with nine altars. The high altar contains a famous miraculous painting. In 2006, it was adorned with crowns consecrated by Pope Benedict XVI.

Inside the Žemaičių
Kalvarija Visitation
of the Blessed Virgin
Mary Basilica



INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOLY MASS

Sundays at 10 AM, 12 PM

Saturdays at 12 PM

Workdays at 5 PM (October to April) or 12 PM (May to October)

On monthly feast days – 9, 10 AM, 12 PM

During the Great Feast – 8, 10 AM, 12 PM and 7 PM

COMMUNAL PROCESSION ALONG THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

After the 12 o'clock Mass on monthly feast days

After every Mass during the Great Feast, with the main procession held after the 12 o'clock Mass

PATRON FEAST DAYS

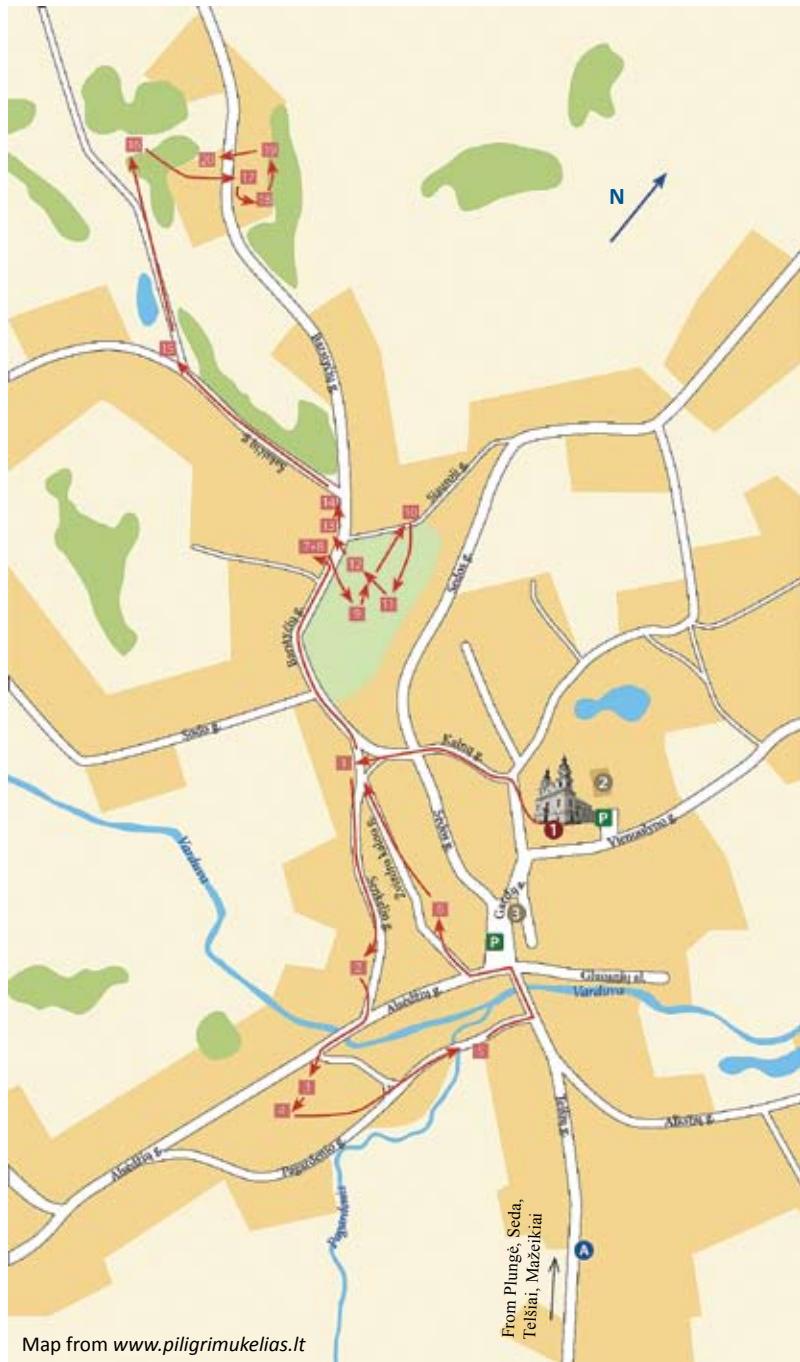
Monthly Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary feast – on the 2nd of every month (moveable to Monday if it falls on Saturday of Sunday)

Great Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary feast – 2-12 July

CONTACTS

Žemaičių Kalvarija Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica

1 Vienuolyno Street, Žemaičių Kalvarija,
Plungė District, LT- 90442
Phone number (+370 448) 43 088



- 1 The Last Supper
 - 2 Jesus says farewell to Mary
 - 3 Jesus prays in Gethsemane
 - 4 Lord Jesus is arrested
 - 5 By the Kedron river
 - 6 At Annas'
 - 7 At Caiaphas'
 - 8 In prison
 - 9 At Pilate's
 - 10 At Herod's
 - 11 In the town hall
 - 12 Jesus meets his afflicted Mother
 - 13 Jesus meets St. Veronica
 - 14 By the City Gates
 - 15 Simon of Cirene helps Jesus carry his cross
 - 16 Jesus falls a third time
 - 17 Jesus is undressed
 - 18 Jesus suffers and dies on the cross
 - 19 Jesus is laid in the tomb
 - 20 The discovery of the Cross
- ①** Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica
② Propedeutic course and recollection house of the Telšiai Seminary
③ Parish House

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**THE ROAD OF THE
SAMOGITIAN
BAPTISM**

**A GUIDE FOR PILGRIMS
AND TRAVELERS**

Design by Rasa Jasiulionytė

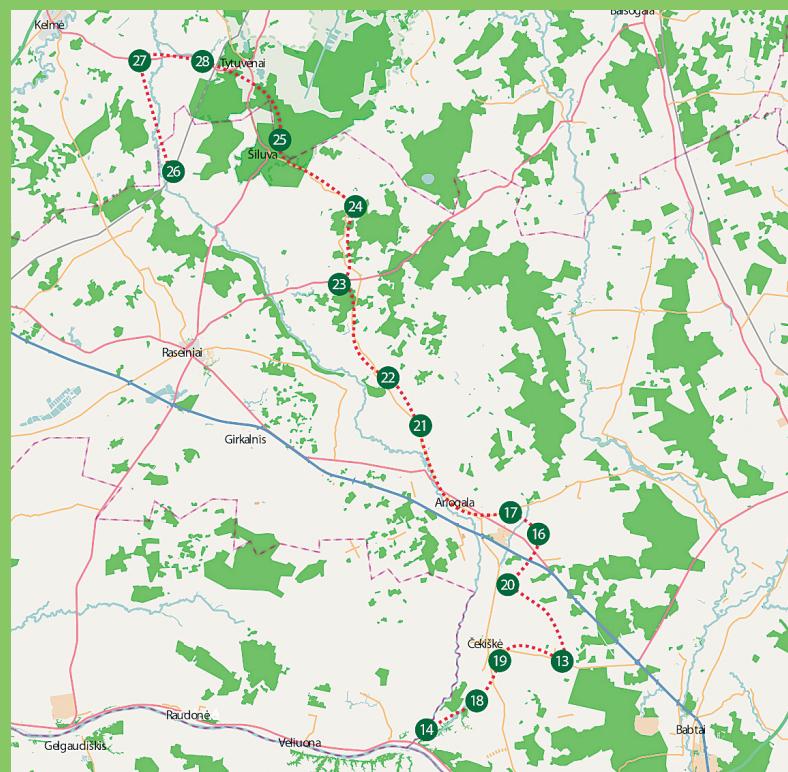
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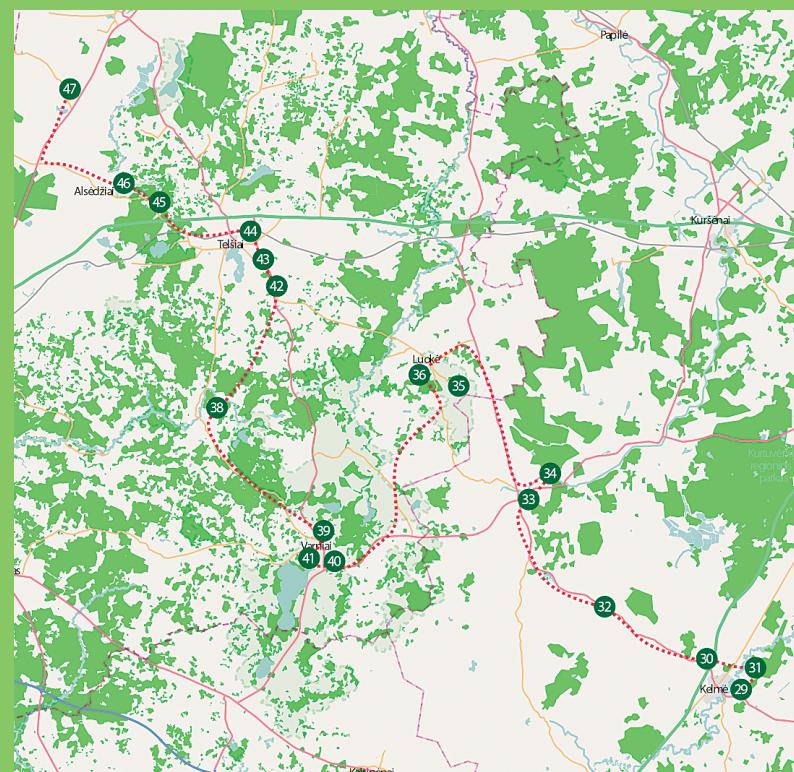
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Chemijos g. 29, 51333 Kaunas

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