



ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR
PROVINCE OF ST. CASIMIR
IN LITHUANIA

ST. ANTHONY FRIARY *of* KENNEBUNK *the* HEART *of* LITHUANIAN FRANCISCANS *beyond the Atlantic*

ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR PROVINCE
OF ST. CASIMIR IN LITHUANIA

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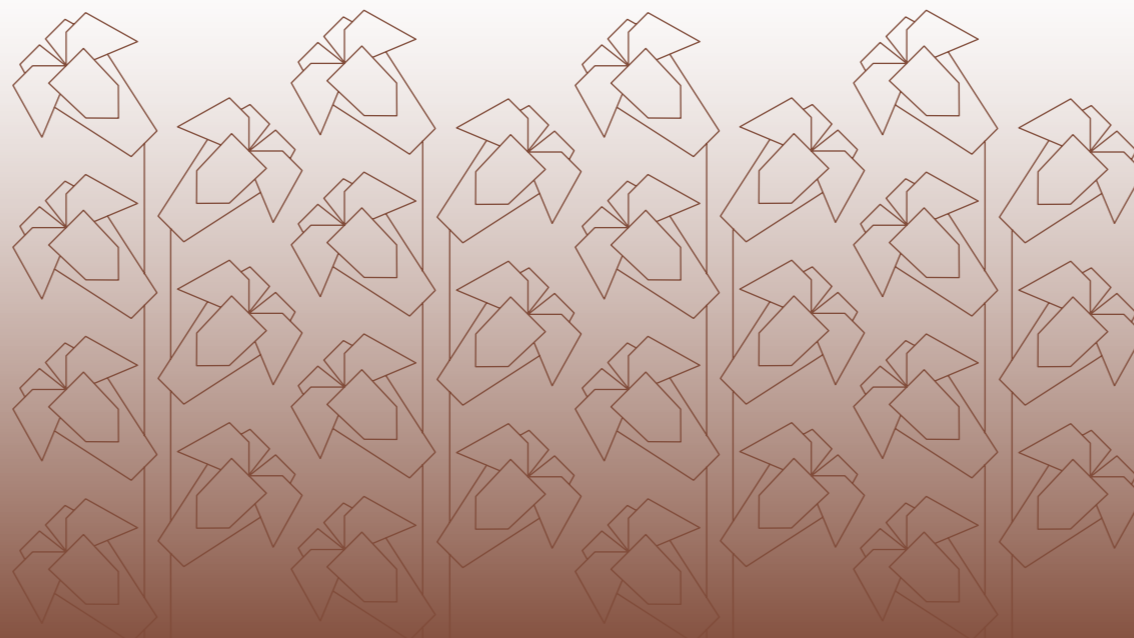
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Photographer: Fiselis Boruchobicius.
Mission days with father Augustinas Dirvele in the parish of Varniai,
1934. Museum of Samogitian episcopate.



Editorial office of
"Darbininkas"
(The Worker) in New York.

Repairs of
St. Anthony monastery
in Kennebunk.



Friars in Greene, Maine.

2017 marks the 70th anniversary of the Lithuanian Franciscan friars coming to live in Kennebunk, Maine. After suffering great losses to the repressions of the Soviet Union, Lithuanian Franciscans were scattered throughout the world. They eventually reassembled in the monastery at Kennebunk to continue their service to God and their people, as well as to boost the spirit of Lithuanians, both in the diaspora and those who remained in their homeland. During these seven decades, St. Anthony Franciscan Monastery, together with its friars, have become an integral part of the local community.



Franciscan Friars at the Baltic sea (interwar).

The Feast of Corpus Christi in Kretinga (interwar).

FRANCISCAN FRIARS IN LITHUANIA *until* WORLD WAR II



1253	First Franciscans arrived to Lithuania and participated in the Baptism of king Mindaugas and his family.
1341 and 1369	A dozen Franciscans faced martyrdom in Vilnius.
September 30, 1469	Friars Minor (Observants) arrived to Lithuania.
1729	An independent St. Casimir province of Lithuania was founded.
1762	There were already 52 convents established in the St. Casimir province, where about 400 Franciscans lived and had many missions.
1864	St. Casimir province of Lithuania was destroyed by the tsarist Russian Empire. The only convent left for the Friars Minor was in Kretinga.
September 24, 1913	The Monastery of Kretinga was incorporated as a commissariat to the province of St. Jadwiga, order of Friars Minor, in Silesia, Germany.
1918	Lithuania regained its independence and the Franciscan Fathers flourished in Kretinga.

November 19, 1931	Superiors of the Order of Friars Minor revived the province of St. Casimir as an independent commissariat. Fr. Pranciskus Bizauskas was appointed as Provincial Commissary.
1940	<p>The army of the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania.</p> <p><i>A severe persecution of the Catholic Church as well as the Franciscan Fathers broke out. All the churches and monasteries were nationalized. Seminaries and private Catholic educational institutions were closed.</i></p> <p><i>The same fate affected the Lithuanian Franciscans. By 1940 there were 6 friaries, 25 priests, 34 seminarians, 70 brothers and 10 novices in the province of St. Casimir. Their monasteries and all property were taken away, the Franciscan gymnasium in Kretinga and their printing house closed.</i></p> <p><i>After losing their friaries, some Franciscans found shelter in the houses of parishioners, some of them were arrested and exiled to Siberia, others fled to Western Europe. After World War II, a number of Lithuanian Franciscans appeared abroad or just remained where they were studying in German, Austrian or Italian universities or Franciscan seminaries.</i></p>



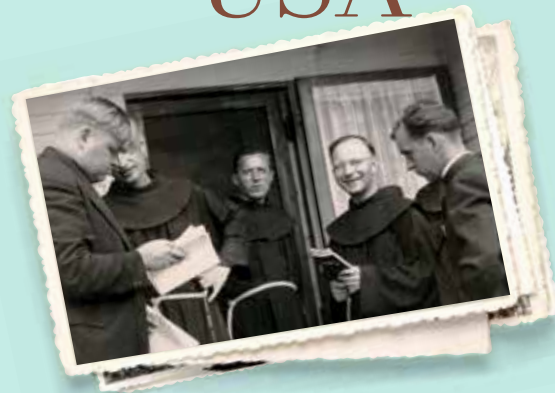
Father Jurgis Gailiusis OFM.



The community of Kennebunk arrives to the Holy Mass.

The chapel of Saint Anthony is solemnly blessed in Kennebunk, 1948.

LITHUANIAN FRANCISCAN FATHERS *in East Coast,* USA





*Franciscan Fathers beside a farmhouse in Greene, Maine.
Friars farming in Greene / Father Justinas Vaskys OFM.*

Festival near Kennebunk monastery.

1742

John Mitchel, farmer, shipbuilder and trader, buys the land where the Franciscan monastery now stands.

He built a two-story farmhouse, the proportions of which far exceeded typical houses of the region at the time. Mr. Mitchel built the first wharf on the west side of Kennebunk River and was also a part owner in the first vessel built at the Port on his wharf in 1955. John Mitchel and his wife had 13 children, six of whom survived him.

1744

Threatened by Indian attacks John Mitchel builds a garrison house for the protection of his family and others who might find themselves aggressively displaced from their homes.

The garrison had long since been dismantled when the Lithuanian Franciscan Fathers purchased the property in 1947. The former location of the garrison is now marked with a statue of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha. It has a symbolic meaning, as St. Kateri was the daughter of a 17th century Mohawk Indian chief. She became a devout Roman Catholic and was stoned by her own people for her adopted faith.

1906

Industrialist William A. Rogers from Buffalo, New York, buys the property from the Mitchel family.

William A. Rogers built the beautiful Tudor mansion that now stands at the site today as an opulent summer home for his family. The house has over 6000 square foot of interior. Outlying buildings included a gardener's cottage, servants' rooms, a garage and a boathouse on the river.

1937

William Neal Campbell purchases this fine estate for his family.

July 22,
1944

Lithuanian Franciscans purchase a farmhouse in Greene, Maine, USA.

Because of the Soviet occupation, more than 30 Friars were unable to return to Lithuania. Some of them ministered to Lithuanians in refugee camps located in Western Europe. Superiors of the Order, recognizing that it was impossible for them to serve in their homeland, commissioned Fr. Justinas Vaskys OFM to establish them in the United States. With the support of Lithuanians there, he opened a temporary house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and only in 1944, a permanent friary was established in Greene, the diocese of Portland, Maine. The establishment of the Franciscan Fathers wouldn't have been possible without a generous support of benefactors.

1946

A separate Lithuanian St. Casimir Commissariat is confirmed for Lithuanian Franciscans in the United States.

As the number of Franciscan Fathers increased, friars decided to buy a larger house suitable for their needs. Such a house was found in Kennebunk, Maine, near the Atlantic Ocean.

September 8,
1947

Franciscans purchase an estate from the Campbells' family and establish the St. Anthony Monastery.

The headquarters of the St. Casimir Commissariat were transferred from Greene to Kennebunk, which then became the heart of Lithuanian Franciscan fraternity beyond Atlantic. In 1953

	<p>being unable to reach Franciscan friars in Lithuania, the St. Casimir Commissariat became a Custody with the rights of a province, which headquarters remained in Kennebunk.</p> <p>As the years went by, the St. Anthony friary in Kennebunk became a famous place for retreats, summer camps and vacations. Many of the faithful visited the monastery for confession or spiritual talks. The Friars also assisted parish priests not only in Maine but in the other states as well, especially the Lithuanian parishes, where the Franciscans conducted missions and retreats.</p>
August 15, 1948	<p>His Excellency Daniel J. Feeney, Coadjutor Bishop of Portland, solemnly blesses the monastery and the chapel, dedicated to Saint Anthony.</p> <p><i>A large turnout from all parts of United States and Canada attended this very important occasion.</i></p>
1951	<p>Lithuanian Franciscan Press is opened in Brooklyn, New York, next to the Franciscan Friary.</p> <p><i>The Friars have not forgotten the very important field in apostolate through the press. Even though the Lithuanian Franciscan Press was established in Brooklyn, New York, the heads of the St. Casimir Custody, living in Kennebunk, were responsible for its activities and funding. The Friars of Kennebunk, in its peaceful surrounding near the ocean, wrote various articles for Franciscan newspapers and magazines.</i></p>

	<p>The Lithuanian Franciscan Press published very important Lithuanian print media for decades. Some of the publications were a culture monthly “Aidai” (Echoes) journal, the newspaper “Darbininkas” (The Worker), the weekly “Lietuvos ziniuos” (Lithuanian news) and “America”, as well as the monthly “Bell of Saint Francis”. Later on, the Friars became involved in the Lithuanian resistance by publishing the „Chronicles of Catholic Church“ which disclosed the crimes of Soviets and the persecution of the Church in occupied Lithuania.</p>
1952	<p>The beautiful shrine in honor of St. Anthony is built by the efforts of Fr. Kestutis M. Butkevicius OFM.</p>
1953	<p>A unique Grotto is constructed in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes.</p>
September 12, 1956	<p>St. Anthony High School is opened at the friary of Kennebunk in order to educate the candidates to the Friars Minor.</p> <p><i>The Custodian Fr. Jurgis Gailiusis OFM, highlighted that the High School was intended for Lithuanian children and for those of Lithuanian origin and they would be taught by Lithuanian Franciscans. Although there were some American teachers later, the students prayed, sang and read in Lithuanian, as well as studied Lithuanian language and history. The Friars intended not only to have as many friars as possible, but also to educate the patriotic and mature generation. The annual religious and national feasts were also celebrated for this same reason.</i></p>

July 13,
1958

New buildings of St. Anthony High School are blessed.

Each year around 100 students were enrolled in the school and the new space was necessary to fulfill their needs. There were other groups like the young Secular Franciscans and Scouts, who would also gather at St. Anthony High School. The students were very competitive in sports, particularly in basketball, where they played with two or three times larger size schools. During one season, they even reached the semi-finals of the US schools' league. Eventually the friars even bought a special bus to take students to the games. The formation of youth and the funding of St. Anthony High School was a concern not only for Custodian Fr. Jurgis Gailiusis OFM, but also for his successor Fr. Leonardas Andriekus OFM, who cared deeply about young people with all his heart.

1959

A Chapel of the Stations of the Cross is constructed.

June,
1969

St. Anthony High School is closed after a farewell banquet of the last graduates.

As the number of students was increasing, there was a growing burden to maintain the school and dormitory. A majority of the students were unable to pay the full amount for their studies, with large outstanding balances never being paid. There was also a shortage of Franciscan teachers. All these challenges forced the Friars to close St. Anthony High School in 1969.

Soon after the school was closed, the property became a year round hotel/guest house and retreat center. Groups of students would travel from all over the north-east U.S. to summer camps, youth festivals, gatherings of the Scouts, retreats or just simply to vacation.

April 11,
1971

Even after St. Anthony High School was closed, the Friars continued to organize summer camps for boys as well as took care of the Catholic formation of the youth.

The Lithuanian Custody of St. Casimir is raised to the status of Vicariate.

The center of Vicariate remained in Kennebunk, Maine, USA, because of the special and difficult circumstances prevailing in Lithuania at that time.

1976

St. Anthony's Monastery becomes a Formation Center and a Novitiate is established.

By 1983, fourteen new Friars Minor had been professed.

1988

The Lithuanian Vicariate of St. Casimir is elevated to the status of Vice province with Fr. Placidus Barius OFM becoming the first Provincial Minister.





Friars farming in Greene.



Graduate students of St. Anthony High School.

St. Anthony High School / Formation of candidates to Franciscan Order in Kennebunk, 1976.





*Pupils of
St. Anthony High
School in Kretinga.
Drawing lesson,
1935.*

*General Minister of
the Order of Friars
Minor visits
St. Anthony's Friary
in Kennebunk.*

REVIVAL *of the* PROVINCE *of* ST. CASIMIR *in Lithuania*



November 19,
1989

Lithuanian Franciscans return from the underground Church to their Revelation Monastery in Kretinga.

When the Friars living in occupied Lithuania decided to return to Kretinga, the most active members were Fr. Benediktas Jurcys OFM and Fr. Juozapas Pudzemys OFM. The Provincial Minister at that time Fr. Placidus Barius OFM, blessed the request of the Lithuanian friars and allowed them to reestablish in Kretinga. He supported the recovering fraternity of Friars Minor in Lithuania by all means possible. Fr. Placidus Barius communicated with the Bishop of Telsiai at that time HE Antanas Vaicius and the Friars Minor regained their own monastery and parish. Thus, on November 19, 1989, the Friars Minor in Lithuania celebrated the first Holy Mass in the church of Kretinga. Fr. Placidus Barius OFM appointed a young friar from Lithuania Fr. Astijus Kungys OFM his delegate responsible for the recovery of Franciscan province in Lithuania.

1992–1995

Lithuania is finally freed from Communist rule and St. Anthony's Franciscan Monastery is blessed with two large classes of novices from Lithuania.

In 1993, eleven out of 13 novices gave their first vows and in 1995, nine out of 14 novices gave their first vows. The Friary of St. Anthony in Kennebunk provided a very good Franciscan formation for the young Lithuanians. Financially, the Vice province of St. Casimir, in the United States and Canada, had enabled the Lithuanian friars in Lithuania to start almost from nothing. St. Anthony's has had a great share in this as well. Thus, the Lithuanian Franciscans living in U.S.

accomplished their mission – having preserved the Lithuanian St. Casimir province and maintained the hope and spirit of Lithuanians during the Soviet occupation until Franciscans could reestablish themselves in an independent Lithuania.

1997

At the Vice provincial Chapter in Kennebunk, Maine, a decision is taken to move the headquarters of the Vice province to Kretinga, Lithuania.

Fr. Benediktas Jurcys OFM is elected as the Provincial Minister.

2000

“Franciscan Guest House“ hotel and retreat center is renovated.

The Friars continue to serve the people in and around Kennebunk. St. Anthony Monastery is a beloved place for retreats and vacations. The “Franciscan Guest House“ is always open and available for them.

December 8,
2004

St. Casimir Vice province in Lithuania is elevated to the status of province. The headquarters are moved to Vilnius.

*Perpetual vows of first
Friars who entered the Order
after an Independence
of Lithuania, 1996.*



2004–2017

Five friars are living in Kennebunk at the moment. The monastery has been recognized by the Diocese as a Friary/Shrine with Semi-public status, pastorally. For this reason, the friars are able to offer the faithful the opportunity of participating in Masses on Sundays (3 Masses) and on weekdays. The friars are also available every day for confessions and spiritual talks.

Franciscan Fathers are grateful to all previous bishops of Portland, Maine, and especially to the current bishop H. E. Robert Deeley for his constant attention and support of Friars. Franciscans also want to express their gratitude to all priests of the diocese for the collaboration and to the local community of

the faithful and sponsors for the constant friendship and the support of St. Anthony's Friary.

The secular Franciscans, even on the regional level, have their retreats and meetings there. There also gathers community of Lithuanians in Maine named „Atlantas“. The Friars organize „Franciscan day“ for the Secular Franciscans and all those interested in Franciscan spirituality. There also seminars about the iconography take place. All these activities testify the significance of St. Anthony's Friary not only for the local Church, but also for the faithful, pilgrims and tourists from all United States.

While the activities of the Friars were changing during the seven decades, the main mission remained and remains the same today – to lead thirsty souls towards God.

*Monastery of St. Anthony
close to the seashore.*

*From the left:
Andrew Bisson,
Jonas Bacevicius,
Astijus Kungys,
Placidus Barius,
Raimundas Bukauskas,
Pranciskus Giedgaudas,
Aurelijus Gričius and
Gabrielius Baltrusaitis.*





*In the kitchen
of the monas-
tery in Kretin-
ga (interwar).*



*Beside the
monastery of
Troskunai. In
the right stands
Placidas Barius.
Close to him
Jurgis Gailiusis.*