

Kapčiamiestis (pp.155-172)

*Mine are those woods with stacks of leaves,
With a band of river—the blue vein.
And a tree looks me in the eye like a friend,
And a tree rustles like an old song . . .*

Jurgis Kunčinas

Kapčiamiestis and its rural district sit on Lithuania's southernmost border with its neighbours Poland and Byelorussia. Local people have had to protect their Lithuanian heritage from the influence of Poles and Byelorussians. This honourable responsibility has not lost its importance even today.

The area is known to have been inhabited from as early as the fourth to second millennium BC. A few hundred meters from the Kapčiamiestis-Gardinas road, on the bank of the river Baltoji Ančia, a Stone Age settlement was discovered. The tip of a Neolithic arrow and some decorated ceramic fragments were amongst the objects found at the site. Since ancient times, this place situated by the bend of the river Baltoji Ančia has been known as Pinčiaragis.

During the rule of Grand Duke Vytautas and later, roads were built across the Kapčiamiestis-Leipalingis forest to Gardinas, Kapčiamiestis, Beržininkai and Merkinė. Whilst inspecting these forests during the 16th century, Grigalius Valavičius mentioned the Santautai road which wound along the lakes of Veisiejai, Kaviškis and Juodasis Kauknoris. Santauta foresters who guarded these forests rode their horses on this road.

In the 14th-15th centuries, the entire Lazdijai region including Kapčiamiestis, was covered by dense forests. Žygimantas the Old, king of Lithuania and Poland, gave to his record-keeper and manager of Pervalkas, Kapotis (Kopočius) Vasilyevich, a plot of forest with a farmstead in Pervalkas district at the confluence of the river Baltoji Ančia and the river Neda. Kapotis and his wife, who outlived her husband, founded an estate in the forest. A small town developed next to it. In accordance with the custom at the time, it was known by the Byelorussian version of the owners' name *Kopciovisk* and later the Polish version *Kopciowo*. Further evolution followed: Kapciava and Kapčiamiestis.

The Kapotis family owned the forest and the property in it until 1724 when the wealth of the Kapotis—Kapčiamiestis, Justinavas and other estates- through marriage went to Mikalojus Oginskis from Kozielskas, governor of Trakai and elder of Radoškovas. (*ed. Oginskas married Katerina Kopciowo*) In 1724, Oginskis built a wooden church or chapel in Kapčiamiestis. Soon these estates became the property of the bishop of Vilnius, Jokūbas Masalskis. (*Masalski was executed in 1794 ed*) After that ownership of the town of Kapčiamiestis as well as Justinavas, Kamrūnai, Jurgeliškės, Zivulčiškės, Mikalina and Avirnyčia estates passed to the french Matas Žynievas (Zinievas). After him Tiškevičius and colonel Šlentynas owned Kapčiamiestis. In 1800 Pijus Tiškevičius built a church in Kapčiamiestis and decorated it. These latter owners managed the property for a short time. Kapčiamiestis and the estates of the area together with their serfs became the property of the Ablamovičius family who were reputed to be good managers and retained the property for a century. They were certainly of Polish spirit and patriots of Poland. Before the war the estates were managed by Moravskis.

In 1710 war devastated Lithuania and there followed famine, plague and other diseases. This took many lives in Kapčiamiestis and the neighbouring villages. There is mention of a parish school as early as 1777.

Kapčiamiestis expanded on the right bank of the river Baltoji Ančia, by the mouth of the river Neda which flows into the Baltoji Ančia. The town has a radial structure. The roads that lead to Vilnius, Gardinas and Seinai crossed at Kapčiamiestis. It was a busy crossroads town travelled by merchants taking agricultural produce to Gardinas and returning with salt, iron and other goods. Kapčiamiestis had a saloon with an inn for travellers and a shelter for horses and carriages. Until the end of the 18th century, governmental sessions took place in Gardinas and during these, the participants with their entourages would cross through Kapčiamiestis. Lithuanian noblemen would hunt in the surrounding forests.

Although Kapčiamiestis was a small town, its crossroads character near two borders meant that it was often involved in conflict situations. It is believed that in 1702 a division of Swedish army, led by Karolis XII, crossed Kapčiamiestis on its way to Poland. It remains unknown if the town was harmed by the Swedes. In 1812 one of the routes taken by the retreating French army was Vilnius – Merkinė – Leipalingis –

Kapčiamiestis – Suvalkai. Russian soldiers pursued the enemy along the same road. The residents suffered at the hands of both armies. The soldiers robbed them of food, animals, fodder and other items of worth.

The period of 1830-1831 was again troublesome. The Russian army was stationed in the neighbouring cities, Gardinas, Seinai and Suvalkai, while the rebels gathered in the forests. On May 23, 1831, the joint forces of Mauricijus Prozoras, A. Pušėta and J. Sokontas, a squad of around 300 rebels, located themselves in Paliepis village. A unit of the Russian army unexpectedly attacked them. Cornered at the marshy bank of the Baltoji Ančia and fired at from two cannons, the rebels jumped into the river, crossed it and hid themselves in the forest.

Emilija

Pliaterytė

The grave of Emilija Pliaterytė (1806-1831) is in the old cemetery at Kapčiamiestis. A descendent of Count Pliateris, Emilija was a rebellious offspring of the nobility. She was an activist of the 1831 uprising and an ardent Lithuanian patriot. As a child she much admired books about freedom fighters and strongly opposed Russian rule in Lithuania. She was especially impressed by the French Jeanne d'Arc who led her countrymen in their fight against the English who had subjugated them. Emilija took an interest in military matters, learning how to shoot and to ride a horse. She was interested in mathematics, history and folklore. With her cousin, the owner of Dusetos, Cezaris Pliateris, she organized a rebel force in Dusetos. Joining her forces to those of the rebels of Juozapas Horodeckis, she participated in the attempt to free Daugpilis and took Zarasai. The rebels experienced big losses and near Daugpilis they were forced to disperse. Emilija entrusted her remaining men to Cezaris Pliateris and together with another fighter, Prušinskaitė, she joined the rebel division of Ukmergė. Later she participated in the battle of Prastavonys (Radviliškis region), in the battles at Maišiagala and in the defence of Kaunas. She was awarded the title of the commander of honour of the first company of the 25th regiment of infantry (the 1st Lithuanian regiment) and the rank of a captain. The last time Pliaterytė led her troops was at the battle at Šiaulėnai (Radviliškis district). Scattered troops retreated to Prussia and Poland.

The rebels were defeated. Pliaterytė together with her faithful friend Marytė Rašnavičiūtė and Cezaris Pliateris tried to reach Poland. On her way she caught a cold which became severe. (Some say she was injured by the Tsar's soldiers whilst crossing the river. Another story suggests that in her illness, she was abandoned by Dluzevkis, the aide of the rebel commander, Antanas Gelgaudasen, who had courted her and promised to marry her.) The rebels stopped at a forester's cabin near Kapčiamiestis. Emilija Pliaterytė was taken to the Justinavas estate owned by Ignacas Ablamovičius where she was hidden as the governess Koravinska. Later the son of Ablamovičius wrote: "My father knew about the sick woman. He sent my mother and me, a seven-year-old, to bring her. We took her from the care of Madam Sambožecka and brought her to Justinavas. We treated her as one of our family. Pliaterytė died on the arms of Alina Hofman on December 23, 1831."

Her coffin was brought to Kapčiamiestis church in secret. As the Russian army was stationed in the area, the funeral was modest and the mass was held in a locked church. A stone was put by the grave and four poplars were planted. Later the heroine's name Emilija was inscribed on the stone. Still later a cross with an inscription took the place of the stone which was moved from the grave to the Veisiejai road on the outskirts of the town. A metal cross was attached above the stone. Two monuments in Kapčiamiestis commemorate the brave rebel.

The Tsarist commission of interrogation assessed Pliaterytė's offence against the Russian government as that of the 2nd degree. Such rebels were sentenced to hard labour or conscripted in the Russian army and their property was confiscated.

Emilija Pliaterytė's deeds as a freedom fighter for her country have not been forgotten. Various artists have painted her portraits (unfortunately, there is no authentic portrait as Emilija never sat for one.) English, Italian, French, German and Hungarian poets have dedicated their poems to her. She was considered a new Jeanne d'Arc. Wojciechas Kosakas painted the picture "Emilija Pliaterytė in the Battle against Cossacks". Vaclovas Gensiorovskis depicted her character in one of his short stories, and Tadas Kočinskis created a play about her. The poet Adomas Mickevičius wrote "The Death of the Colonel" and writer Antanas Vienuolis-Žukauskas wrote the historical play *The Year 1831* recounting the events of the uprising and romanticizing the sacrifice for one's country. A sincere friend of Lazdijai region, Armenian folk artist Ašotas Sarabjanas, created a bas-relief of Pliaterytė and donated it to the museum of ethnography at Leipalingis high school which also houses a portrait of Pliaterytė painted by Lithuanian painter Leonas

Juožėnas. In Poland, Pliaterytė is remembered with great respect. Polish divisions which fought against German invaders were named after her and one of Warsaw's central streets carries her name.

M. Rašanavičiūtė, who used to be her teacher and, like her, was a well-known rebel, accompanied Pliaterytė on her last trip to Poland. For her boldness and for saving Pliaterytė in one of the battles, she was awarded the rank of lieutenant. After the uprising she was arrested by the Tsarist government and imprisoned for two years. After regaining her freedom Rašanavičiūtė went to live abroad.

Emilija's cousin Cezaris Pliateris from Kapčiamiestis successfully reached Warsaw. After the rebels lost, he went to live in Paris where he was elected head of Polish Literary Association. Famous Polish writers visited his parlour, and Frederic Chopin played there.

Justinavas

estate

Justinavas estate in which Pliaterytė died stood between two beautiful lakes: Vainežerio and Ančios. The estate is believed to have been named after the owner's daughter Justina. A few smaller estates belonged to it: Aukštadvaris, Paveisininkai, Elenava (near the Polish border), Juozapava (near Kapčiamiestis) and Viktorinas. The residential building of the estate, shaped like a horse-shoe, was built either at the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century Murauskas became its owner. After WWI, the land was distributed to peasants who had no land or owned small plots of land. The forestry of Seinai and an elementary school moved into the buildings of the estate. Justinavas changed its name to Vainežeris. In 1948 the residential and farm buildings of the estate were destroyed by fire. The buildings where servants used to live went to ruin and were demolished. The trees of the former alley were dug out.

In the eighteenth century a park had been planted on the Justinavas-Vainežeris estate. It has survived. The park is of informal design and is situated in a beautiful location – on the shore of Lake Vainežeris. A stream which takes its source from the lake divides the park in two. Ancient fortifications which have archaeological value for the Lithuanian Republic can be found half a kilometre to the northeast of Lake Vainežeris. Local people call this 5 meter high and 5-6 meter wide mound “akopta.” The fortification was built and used during the 15th-18th centuries. It is said that this used to be a military settlement built during the wars with Swedes.

The uprising of 1863 had an effect on Kapčiamiestis.. The manager of Beržininkai estate, Alordas Cyriakas was one of the organizers of the uprising. He established a rebel camp near Paliepis village. A smithy was opened there. The camp received a supply of weapons and ammunition from France. A veteran soldier Vladislovas Cibulskas was the commander of the squad. The Russian army encircled the camp. On March 8, 1863, there was fighting in the Paliepis sector of the forest. Cibulskas managed to lead the rebels out of the encirclement. Kapčiamiestis was for some time under rebel control. Krivonys Cossacks took away the rebels' food supplies, while six fighters were captured.

During WWI, severe fighting between Russians and Germans took place in the Kapčiamiestis area. Russian artillery fired at two ranks of Germans. The Germans experienced losses burying their dead in the village of Kalviai near the Kapčiamiestis-Kauknoris road.

The centre of Lithuanian culture founded in Seinai influenced the inhabitants of the Kapčiamiestis area as well. The land in the area is sandy and infertile. Although poverty and shortages were everywhere, it is not in “dzūkas” character to be sad. Local people responded to trouble with a melodious song and joyful accordion music.

On September 23, 1920, a battle between the Lithuanian and Polish armies took place. The Lithuanians were forced to retreat. Although a demarcation line was drawn between the two nations at war, fighting continued. On November 30, 1920, the United Nations established a neutral zone on both sides of the demarcation line. It was to be free of both Lithuanian and Polish armies. Polish partisan-robbers known as “peoviakas,” taking advantage of the situation, attacked and robbed the villagers in and around Kapčiamiestis.

In 1920 estate owners who had escaped Lithuania and were supporters of Lithuania's annexation to Poland and other adventurers gathered in the village of Varviškės located in the neutral zone.

(Note. The village of Varviškės is situated 13 kilometers to the southeast of Kapčiamiestis, by the river Nemunas, very close to the Byelorussian border, on the farthest edge of this area. Kapčiamiestis forest

separates it from the town of Kapčiamiestis. Varviškė is an ancient village mentioned in documents dated 1518 and 1744. Later an estate was established here. In the eighteenth century, by the mouth of the Baltoji Ančia, a ferry was built. On that occasion, St. John's chapel was fastened to a tree on the bank of the river. This place and the village located in the area was given the name of Sventijanskas ("Švientojanski" in Polish). In 1896, Varviškė had 302 inhabitants, in 1923 – 253, and in 1979 – 139 inhabitants. In the place where the cemetery is now located, estate owner Ochmanas built a chapel. In 1935 the chapel and the parsonage next to it burned down. Only the bell survived; it hangs on a pine tree and is used today to announce funerals and summons the congregation to mass.)

With the support of the Polish government, Polish partisans declared autonomy at Varviškės. They pretentiously referred to this village and its area as Varviškės Republic. A special commemorative postage stamp was issued and serves as testimony of the support of the Polish government for Varviškės partisans. A powerful squad of partisans was organized (in fact they were soldiers in civilian clothes). Officer "Chmūra" (Cloud) was in charge of it. His real name was Pilewski. Others claim that the estate owner Moravskis from the Kapčiamiestis area was the leader of the squad. The *Lithuanian Encyclopedia* says that H. Muellers signed as the supervisor of the autonomy, while chief lieutenant Pilewski-Chmūra was only his assistant.

Varviškės military post robbed residents and instigated their dissatisfaction with the local Lithuanian government. The Poles caused most harm to Lithuanian residents of the neutral zone; they robbed, tortured and killed them. They shot poet and teacher Petras Mockevičius. One night they attacked teacher and rifleman Bloznelis's house. Having killed Bloznelis, they dropped his body into the river Nemunas. In spring his remains were discovered near the city of Alytus. Bloznelis was solemnly buried in the courtyard, and the riflemen erected a monument to him. Poles cruelly tortured to death Lithuanian partisan Juozas Slavikas from Šventežeris district. Priest J. Bakšys was also killed. They injured Jonas Juškaitis and Liudas Augustinavičius of Gerdašiai village. Only old people and children remained in the neutral zone. The young men and women went to hide in remote places. The robbers of Varviškės deprived the local people of everything: animals, food, fur and fur coats, wool and cotton. The Polish squad constantly expanded its zone of action. The *War Archives* say, "When around a hundred robbers surrounded one of the villages, they could easily cut our soldiers to pieces."

The "supervisor" Chmūra sent his messengers to demand from the villagers what they must supply to Varviškės. For example, the elder of Lipliūnai was ordered to supply 4 pigs, 2 cows, 3 saddled horses, 6 fur coats and other goods. The order was followed by a threat: "If you fail to obey the order, I will send a punitive squad for whose actions, such as rape, arson, murder and the like, I bear no responsibility." To intimidate the residents, a black flag with a skull was carried in front of a punitive squad which consisted of a few dozens of riders. Chmūra stamped his written announcements with a skull, too. When Poles happened to enter a Lithuanian school, they would break everything and tear up Lithuanian books.

A resident of Kapčiamiestis Šapura remembers: "Chmūra would ride into the village and order the elder to gather the people and inform them how much flour, grain, meat and other food supplies they had to bring. Polish robbers would take all those goods brought by the people to their 'capital' Varviškė."

Similar "placufkas" could be also found in other places by the Polish border. By night attacks on the villages, torture and killing, robbing and arson, Poles sought to intimidate the residents and force them to support Lithuania's annexation to Poland.

The residents appealed to the Lithuanian government for help. A military division arrived and a few soldiers were stationed in each village. Volunteer riflemen were supplied with guns. Fighting between the Lithuanian soldiers and volunteers against Poles occurred in the villages of Lipliūnai, Didžiasalis, Dulgininkai and Smališkės. Large groups of Poles armed with rifles, machine guns and swords would attack Lithuanians. During the fighting in the village of Didžiasalis, not only were the villagers robbed but Povilas Šatikauskas, Pranas Mikelionis and J. Urba were killed and many people were injured. A Lithuanian unit was attacked in the village of Paliepis. Six Lithuanian soldiers were cruelly killed with swords, their eyes were pulled out and ears cut off. Such barbarous behaviour shocked Lithuania. Demands were made to do away with the Varviškės gang.

Seirijai militia headquarters organized a special unit of partisans and volunteer riflemen for the purpose of ousting Poles from Varviškės but the plan failed. The Polish partisans and their "samožandas" in Varviškės

were ousted by a unit of Lithuanian army on March 23, 1923 and the neutral zone was cancelled. Volunteer riflemen and militia participated in this battle, too. For the purpose of freeing Varviškės, the first battalion of the 11th infantry regiment was sent from Alytus. Senior lieutenant Borchertas, captain Ščepanavičius, senior lieutenant Opulskis and senior lieutenant Berentas commanded separate companies. Ethnologist Algirdas Volungevičius claims that a unit of Byelorussian soldiers took part in the battle as well. Writer Julius Būtėnas indirectly confirms this fact.

The Poles resisted persistently and many of them were killed. The survivors escaped in boats to the other side of the Nemunas river, the part of Lithuania still occupied by Poland. Their leader Chmūra was killed later during his attempt to illegally cross the demarcation line to Lithuania by Cipliškės. As a result of the battles, Varviškės experienced considerable damage. Following the defeat of the Varviškės terrorists, the Poles stopped attacking Lithuanian villages.

The Lithuanian side had losses too. Lieutenant Aleksandras Urbelis, lieutenant Beras, lieutenant Kukneris, a few soldiers and local volunteers, father and son Kuckailis and Kvederavičius, were killed in the battle. Those battles are remembered in folk songs:

The cuckoo cuckooed as it flew through the wood.

The orphan girl cried oh cried as she did her hard work

Oh misery, my misery, my poor fate,

When will I end you being a young orphan?

My father is old; my mother is under the ground,

My youngest brother perished by Varviškė.

He fought bravely on the other side of Baltoji Ančia

And laid his head for the land of Dzūkai.

In the years of independence, memorial plaques to commemorate those who perished in the battle at Varviškės were set in the volunteer riflemen house in Leipalingis. Lieutenant Urbelis and three unknown soldiers, volunteer riflemen Viktoras Kuckailis and his father Feliksas Kuckailis, Antanas Kvedaravičius and Vaclovas Jurkonis are buried in Leipalingis cemetery.

Volunteers of the Lithuanian army were also buried in Kapčiamiestis cemetery. Having been captured in the fighting, they were held in a prisoners of war camp in the Carpathian Mountains by the town of Vadovica. After their release, they had to walk back home. Not all of them managed to reach Lithuania. Suffering from hunger and cold, they were unable to cover the few remaining kilometres to Kapčiamiestis. One of the returning volunteers later wrote: "It seemed to us that the road to Kapčiamiestis was covered with stones."

On the edge of Galelis forest situated in the Kapčiamiestis area, at Navikai village, there is a tomb with an inscription: "An unknown Lithuanian warrior who died in a fight with Poles in 1920. Warrior, let the native land for which you gave your life be light for you. 15 May 1930. Volunteer riflemen squad of Sapiegiškės.

In the autumn of 1920, a more numerous force of Poles drove our soldiers out of Beržininkai (now in Poland). Beating off the attacks, Lithuanian soldiers retreated via the village of Navikai. Despite the danger, local people took the soldiers to the other side of Lake Veisiejai by boats. A shooting between Lithuanians and Poles occurred in the village area. The body of a Lithuanian soldier was discovered on the edge of Galelis forest. He was buried in the place where he was found. Later volunteer riflemen of Sapiegiškės village erected a monument on his grave. The grave of this fighter for Lithuania's independence is not forgotten. On All Saints' Day, people light candles on it.

THE FORESTS

A millennium and more ago, Lithuania was known for its dense forests which covered more than half the land. By the beginning of the second millennium, the forests had started to deplete. From ancient times the forest has served as a shelter and provided building materials, fertilizers and food supplies which the sandy unfertile soil of Dzūkija could not. Later people realized the importance of the forest for the protection of soil and water as well as for recreation.

In the west and south Kapčiamiestis is bounded by the Kapčiamiestis-Leipalingis forest – the remnant of the great forests of the land of Sūduva. During the last period of the ice age, when glaciers were moving to the north, water filled the area, flowing flowing to the south. The forest, like the town, carries the name of the first owner of this property Kapočius. In Polish it was called “Kapciovska Puščia.”

At one time, Kapčiamiestis forest belonged to Trakai province. Lithuanian noblemen used to hunt here. Hunting was more than entertainment in the economy of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy. Furs were stored in the warehouses of Lithuanian rulers, and salted meat was preserved in barrels. Grand Duke Žygimantas the Old established a hunting camp in Krikštonys. Salted and smoked meat was exported. Fur was the ‘money’ of trade. In 1279, the year of famine, “jotvingiai” (a Lithuanian ethnic group) offered Vladimir, the Duke of Volynia, furs of squirrels, beavers and martens in exchange for grain. In the thirteenth century Lithuanians traded fur for salt and iron. Fur was one of the most popular goods in Western Europe. Ermine was considered the most valuable. Sable, marten, beaver, fox and lynx was also valued. Lithuanian Grand Dukes would give fur as gifts on special occasions. Ermine and sable fur coats signified wealth and nobility.

Starting with the 15th century, the inventories of estates mention such positions as foresters (“lovčije”), beaters (“osočniki”), dog-keepers (“psarcy”), falcon-keepers (“sokolniki”) and riflemen (“strely”). Hunters of martens, beavers and foxes would pay their taxes to the estate in fur. Others paid their dues in squirrels and hares. There were different ways of dressing fur: it was dyed or carved or cut into pieces (head, limb, abdomen, back).

Kapčiamiestis-Leipalingis forest occupies almost 28 thousand hectares among the rivers Ančia, Mara and Igarka. 23,600 hectares are covered with woods. It is the seventh biggest forest in Lithuania. This area of woods, shaped like a semi-circle, stretches from east to west for 30 kilometres along the border with Poland and Byelorussia. To the east and southeast, the forest borders with the Nemunas. To the south, its woods stretch as far as the tributary of the Nemunas, the Igarka, and to the southwest the river of Mara. The forest consists of 40 separate woods. The biggest of them are Kapčiamiestis, Kuodžiai, Krivonys, Justinavas, Ustronija, Varviškė, Pertakas, Baltas Kauknoris, Juodas Kauknoris and Leipalingis. The Nemunas flows along the southeastern and eastern edges of the forest. The rivers of Snaigupė, Avirė, Bilsinyčia and the Baltoji Ančia with its tributaries, the Seira and the Neviedė, run through the woods till they flow into the Nemunas. The Zapsė flows along the north-western edge of the forest, and the Mara, the tributary of the Juodoji Ančia, along the south-eastern edge. The forest is full of small lakes. Among the larger lakes are Veisiejis, Niedus, Ančia, Aviris, Kaviškis and Vidugašlis. Swamps are not numerous in this forest. Krakinis swamp is the biggest. It has a botanical reserve – Krankinis cranberry reserve has been established to preserve the abundant supplies of cranberries in this area. The lake of Krakinis is in the middle of the swamp.

The rivulets of Rūdakasys and Pertakas run from the west to the east of the forest. The Rūdakasys takes its source in the swamp of Žmirkliai and flows into the Baltoji Ančia. It starts flowing in spring when the snow begins to melt. In other seasons it disappears in the sandy soil of the wood. Many names in Kapčiamiestis forest and its surroundings have originated from the word “rūda” (ore): Rūdnia (Rūdninkai), Rūdininkėliai, Rūdnia meadow, Rūdnia pond. They testify to the fact that iron-ore was dug out of these swamps. The Pertakas rivulet begins in the swamps of Stalai forest. It covers quite a distance under the ground until it emerges to the surface and flows into the Igarka.

A hill with an interesting name, Robinzonas, can be found in the forest. A very winding river, the Mara (Maricha) flows by it. Its water is always cold. Previously salmon used to spawn in it.

The Baltoji Ančia has a deep and wide valley. It flows into the Nemunas 466 kilometers from its mouth and 18 kilometers from Druskininkai. In its lower part, the Ančia flows and winds rapidly in a deep canyon, making its way through numerous rapids and tree trunks. In 1955 a dam and a hydroelectric power station were built on the river, 4 kilometers from its mouth. A reservoir of 250 hectares was formed. Three rivers

meet by the hydroelectric power station. The Baltoji Ančia is one of them. The Stirta flows from the north through the lakes of Snaigynas, Trikojis, Vilkaitis, Vilkinis and Stirtas. The Seira flows from the east through the lakes of Sagavas, Seirijas and Kraštas. A few years after the power station was built, the water broke the dam and by destroying everything in its way fell into the Nemunas. The dam was rebuilt, and the hydroelectric power station continued its work.

In 1815, the Tzarist government organized the administration of forests on the opposite bank of the Nemunas. A part of Kapčiamiestis-Leipalingis forest was administered by Ančia forestry. Its headquarters were in the village of Kadyšas (now in Byelorussia). The forestry had three sections, one of them in the village of Paliepis. Tzarist Russia received good profits from the woods. From Kapčiamiestis forest timber was floated by the Nemunas to Prussia.

In 1832 a tar distillery functioned in Kauknoris, the area of Kapčiamiestis.

The forest served as a shelter from troubles and enemies. Kapčiamiestis-Leipalingis forest sheltered the rebels of the two rebellions: 1831 and 1836. In spring of 1944, when “Dzūkija” was still under German occupation, a squad of Soviet partisans “Dainavos partizanas” (The Partisan of Dainava) made its home in Sventinjanskas wood of this forest. Antanas Kacvingelis and Juozas Olekas were the commanders of the squad. The main task of the partisans was to keep the bridgehead by the Nemunas in their hands for the use of the Red Army as it force crossed the river. A memorial stone marks the place of the former main camp of the partisan squad. During the Soviet rule in Lithuania, Olekas was the Prorector of the Lithuanian Agricultural Academy. He wrote a book of memoirs about his partisan past entitled *Neramios naktys* (Troubled Nights).

Antanas Olšauskas

In one of the Lithuanian forests I happened to see a mushroom-shaped stone with the following inscription: “When you plant a tree, you don’t know who will take rest in the shade of its dense foliage.” A forester plants trees but, when they mature, they are cut by others. Antanas Olšauskas, the former forester of Veisiejai section of the forest, too, has given the fruit of his labour to others.

Antanas Olšauskas, the honored forester of the Republic, is the living history of the forestry. In 1933 he started working as a forester in the Seinai section of the forest. For many years he worked as a forester of Ančia, Kapčiamiestis and Pertakas forests. He cultivated more than 5000 hectares of forest plants. Most of them were pine-trees because they are best suited for sandy soil. Since 1960 pine trees have been mixed with birch-trees and bushes. In addition to pines, in the forests under Olšauskas’s care, one can see rare species of oaks and apple-trees, ninebarks, bird-cherry trees, maples and various exotic bushes. From early spring till late autumn one can see plants in bloom; they are useful for forest insects. The forest has lots of berries, a source of vitamins and medicinal qualities; people gather them and birds, which nest in trees and bushes, feed on them. Even in winter birds do not experience hunger in such a forest.

When Antanas Olšauskas arrived to start his work in the forestry of Pertakas, he saw a plot of century-old larches by the Byelorussian border. The experienced forester who loves his work was fascinated by the tall, slim trees which looked like candles almost reaching the clouds. The powerful branches of the trees stretched so high that they seemed to embrace the sky. Olšauskas decided to cultivate more of these trees which were rare in Lithuanian forests. He worked hard to accomplish what he was determined to do. Nowadays larch woods occupy 200 hectares of the former Pertakas forest.

Antanas Olšauskas is a great organizer and participant of folk groups. Under his supervision, Pertakas forest had a mixed choir, a men’s ensemble, a women’s ensemble, dancing groups of youth and seniors, and a folk band. Olšauskas, who had a nice and strong voice, sang in the choir and solo. The performances of these folk performers were a big success. They competed in regional and nation-wide competitions and performed in culture clubs, schools, forestry clubs and sanatoriums of Lazdijai, Varėna and Gardinas.

The forest is temptingly beautiful at all seasons. In the spring its beauty comes from the green foliage of trees and bushes, the blossoms of berry bushes and the blue candle-like blossoms of lupines. It is the time when “every bud opens and breaks, when branches of apple-trees get grizzled with the cheese of blossoms,” and when one gets dizzy from the singing and chirping of birds. In the summer bees hum among heather blossoms, and, if they get enough rain, the hats of early mushrooms, such as butter-mushrooms and chanterelles, start to peek timidly from under the moss. The pine-tree woods of Dzūkija are

truly beautiful: pine-trees, lean as reeds, swing in the meadow of moss. One can not admire enough their swinging tops which seem to be touching the blue sky. In the autumn leaf-bearing trees decorate themselves in gold, and “quelder roses drip blood.” In the winter two colors, green and white, weave themselves into a miraculous fairy tale. Animals resting in the bed of snow and birds, if having stayed for the winter, write the book of their lives.

From the beginning of the 19th century to 1950 Kapčiamiestis was the centre, first, of a rural district, later, of a small town district. In 1923 it had 835 inhabitants. In 1924 the whole rural district of Kapčiamiestis had 5171 inhabitants. Once a week the town held a market and a few times per year big fairs. There were also some small shops selling a variety of goods.

On the bank of the Baltoji Ančia there was a smithy. People called it “armarnia.” Ploughshares, metal parts for ploughs, knives and small nails for shoe soles were made there. The huge hammer and the bellows were lifted by a wheel driven by the water flow of the river. People say that in still weather one could hear the beats of the hammer against the anvil as far as 20 kilometres away. The owner of the smithy would bring materials from Gardinas and Suvalkai. In 1863 swords for the rebels were made in the smithy. It was the only metal-processing shop of this kind in Lithuania. Iron goods were sold to local people and exported to Russia. During World War II, the smithy burnt down. After the war, a sawmill and a windmill were built in its place.

In old times there was a windmill on the river Nieda whose owner was Jewish. His name was Zelikas. The quern was driven by the water of the river. During World War Two the mill burned down.

A few dozens of Jewish families lived in Kapčiamiestis before the war. How did they make their living? Grušauskas and his children worked in the smithy. He had a bus and would take people as far as Kaunas. The fare to Kaunas was 5 litas (approximately the price of a sack of grain). People called the rich Jew Mileris “Kupčiulis” (trader). He sold timber and also owned an iron forgery. The butcher Ofčinskas would buy cattle from the farmers and sell meat. The drugstore was owned by a Jew. Almost all shops were owned by Jews. The town had a two-floor synagogue. It served not only as house of prayer but also as a school for Jewish children. During the war the synagogue burned down. A Jewish cemetery has survived in Kapčiamiestis.

Germans occupied Kapčiamiestis on the first day of the war. Ten of the Jews escaped. However, not all the Jews survived. Under German rule, the lives and property of Jews were not protected by law. On August 15, 1941, all Jews of Kapčiamiestis were gathered together, taken to Lazdijai and there, in Katiškės, were shot together with other Jews of the region. Tailor Laizeris managed to escape this tragic death. Kind people hid him.

On the first day of war a fire broke out in the town. Since the weather was dry, the roof of the church caught fire, and the church burned down. The flames destroyed valuable paintings and the organ on which the future composer Česlovas Sasnauskas sometimes played instead of his father, the organist. In 1940-1941 Russians had built barracks. Germans gave a permission to use one of those buildings for the construction a church. Transported to Kapčiamiestis and placed in the churchyard, it served as a house of prayer. In 1956 the building was taken apart and reassembled on the foundation of the previous church. The church later was renovated and decorated. Since local masters, Kazys Sedeckas and Juozas Krasickas, did the construction and the decoration, the church acquired features of folk art.

In 1935 a new, Paveisininkai, parish was established in Kapčiamiestis district. A modest wooden church was built in the village of Paveisininkai, in a beautiful location on the shore of the lake Veisiejai. In postwar years the soviet government closed the church and used it as a warehouse. For many years believers tried hard to regain the church. However, it was only with Lithuania’s independence that the church regained its function as a prayer house.

Before the war there was a windmill on the river Nieda. Its turbine rotated a small, 30 kilowatt, generator which provided electric power for the town. It took as little as plugging in an iron for the lights in town to dim down. During German occupation the owner of the windmill was shot, and the power station stopped working. After the war two generators, 30 kilowatt each provided power for the town. However, power was supplied only in the evenings. Since the dam was only 2 meters high, by midnight the water level in the reservoir would already be too low. The electric power line from Kapčiamiestis went as far as Veisiejai.

After the war Lazdijai got power from Katkiškės hydroelectric power station built on the river Lazdija. Its power was 40 kilowatts. Later generators driven by diesel engines were built in the former windmill. They provided power for the town.

In 1955 the 450-kilowatt Baltoji Ančia hydroelectric power station was built. It became the main supplier of power for quickly growing Druskininkai resort.

In 1956-1957 Kapčiamiestis hydroelectric power station underwent reconstruction. A brick building was built instead of the wooden windmill. A 5-meter high dam was built on the river Nieda.

In 1963 Lazdijai electric power department, a branch of Alytus power department, was established. The network of power lines reached 3000 kilometers.

In 1957, after the hydroelectric power station was built in Kapčiamiestis, the water level in Uses, Veisiejas and Nieras lakes rose by 2 meters. Big areas of fertile land were covered by water. Even buildings had to be moved from lower areas. Some time ago meadows formed on the edges of Lake Nieras. When the water level went up, big patches of these meadows rose to the surface of the lake and started “travelling” around. To prevent these meadows, the so-called “kiniai”, from floating away, people would fasten them to the shore with chains or poles hammered into the ground. It was possible to harvest hay on such meadows only from a boat.

Before the dam was built in Kapčiamiestis, a stone road Veisiejai-Kučiuškai passed by the narrow end of lake Veisiejas. Today that part of the road is under water, like some ancient “kūlgrinda” (a secret underwater road).

Before WW II there was an estate in the village of Macevičiai. A watermill stood on the river Baltoji Ančia.

During the interwar period and some time after the war, there was a brick-yard in the village of Menciškės. Good quality full-size and half-size bricks produced in the brick-yard were in great demand in the area.

In the 18th century it was planned to build a Jesuit monastery in the village of Purviniai, in Kapčiamiestis area. Stones were brought to the construction site, and work on the foundation started. However, the war with Swedes and the plague of 1710 stopped the work and the monastery was never built. The remaining huge stones now mark that place. People call the surroundings of Purviniai village the land of “jėzavitai” (jesuits) and its residents “jėzavitai.” The nickname “jėzavitas” sticks to Purviniai natives even when they move to a different area.

In 1949 there were two teams of fishers in Kapčiamiestis hired by Kaunas Fishery Department. The fishers would catch fish in the lakes of the area until these teams were dismissed. Meteliai fishers, too, caught fish in lake Veisiejas and some other lakes in Kapčiamiestis area.

After the war a pioneer camp, “Smiltelė” (A Grain of Sand), was established on the shore of lake Juodas Kauknoris in a scenic place by the border with Poland. Not only Lithuanian but also Polish children used to spend their summers there.

After the war Kapčiamiestis became the main settlement of the collective farm. New administrative buildings were built there. In 1918 an elementary school was opened, and in 1945 a middle school which, in 1949, became a high school. A new school building was built. In the renovated old building the parish opened a social care centre.

In 1993 Kapčiamiestis had 751 inhabitants.

Česlovas Sasnauskas (1867-1916), a composer, organist, choir conductor, singer and one of the founders of Lithuanian music, was born in Kapčiamiestis. He learned to play the organ from his father, the organist of Kapčiamiestis church. However, his true teacher was his uncle L. Rizauskas, the organist of Naumiestis church. At the age of 16, Česlovas started to work as an organist in Gražiškiai parish, later in Vilkaviškis and Daugpilis. In 1891 he moved to St. Petersburg. There he played the organ in St. Catherine’s church, was the leader of the professional choir and other choirs. The professional choir of St. Catherine’s church played an important role in the music life of St. Petersburg. Famous musicians used to come to listen to the music performed by the choir. Č. Sasnauskas worked as a lecturer in St. Petersburg schools and the religious academy and seminary. He also sang in men’s vocal quartet and the opera company founded by

him. Č. Sasnauskas finished the speciality of a vocalist in St. Petersburg conservatoire, St. Petersburg Institute of Archaeology, took private lessons of composition, and studied church choir music in Prague. The composer had a good voice and performed in concerts and operas. However, because of inborn nervousness and heart disorders he had to quit the singer's career and to devote himself to the work of an organist, a choir leader and musician.

Č. Sasnauskas participated in the work of the commission of the Society of Science of Lithuanians responsible for collection of Lithuanian songs, in the activities of Lithuanian Society of Arts, did work in the field of Lithuanian terms and published booklets of Lithuanian music "Lietuviška muzika." He created the cantata "Broliai" (Brothers) to the words of M. Gustaitis, 2 requiems, and a few songs for the choir, including "Kur bėga Šešupė" (Where the Šešupė Runs), "Užmigo žemė" (The Earth Fell Asleep), "Jau slavai sukilo" (The Slavs have Risen) and "Karvelėlis" (The Pidgeon), as well as fugues, compositions for the organ and romances. He harmonized such Lithuanian folk songs as "Siuntė mane motinėle" (My Mother Sent Me), "Lėk, sakalėli" (Eagle, Fly) and others. In his creative work, he combined classicist and romantic forms of expression and sought national colour as well as emotion. The composer also created religious compositions and religious songs. To this day, Lithuanians sing his song "Marija, Marija" (Mary, Mary) in churches.

Č. Sasnauskas enjoyed visiting his native Kapčiamiestis and play its organ. The organ music echoed in the ancient church and touched the hearts of poetic "dzūkai" (people of Southern Lithuania). His songs echoed throughout Lithuania and awakened nationalist feelings in Lithuanians as well as strengthened their national consciousness. He dedicated his talent to his native country.

Sasnauskas was not yet 50 when he died. One evening he felt sick. The doctor, who was called, asked for some water to cool him with but by the time it was brought the patient was already dead. He probably died of a heart attack. The composer used to complain of pains in the heart area, especially after intense work with choirs.

The town people respect the memory of this member of their community. It is symbolic that the town's culture club stands in the place of the house where Sasnauskas was born and raised. The building has a memorial plaque to remember the composer. His songs are performed to this day. Festivals of Sasnauskas's music are being organized. During those festivals, choirs from Lazdijai, Dzūkija, Suvalkija and other places of Lithuania perform his works.

A big crowd attended Sasnauskas's funeral. However, his remains were not meant to rest in peace. Sasnauskas was buried in the cemetery in the centre of St. Petersburg. When that cemetery was closed, his remains were moved to Bielesteriov and later brought to Kaunas. When, in 1981, that cemetery was closed as well, his remains were reburied for the fourth time in Petrašiūnai cemetery in Kaunas.

"He used to be the Sun of Lithuania whose rays melted the snow and ice. He opened everybody's eyes and showed what Lithuania is and what it should be. Česlovas Sasnauskas lived in the dark period of Lithuania's history when everybody prided in an ability to speak any foreign language except Lithuanian. This educated man used his authority to show everybody that we were wrong in disowning Lithuanianess and adopting a foreign garment. Therefore the personality of Česlovas Sasnauskas, the talent and the genius of our nation, should live among us forever in order for us to regain everything we have lost or what was stolen from us." This evaluation of the importance of Česlovas Sasnauskas's work for the Lithuanian nation was voiced by composer Juozas Žilevičius.

Mečislovas Bulaka, an artist in graphic and an associate professor, was born in Kapčiamiestis in 1907. He worked as a professor in Vilnius Art Institute and Vilnius University. For some time he worked at the Lithuanian Film Studio as an artist. Since 1932 he has taken part in exhibitions. He is the author of a few pieces of graphic art. His peculiar technique is engraving on wood. He illustrated a number of books: Kazys Boruta's *Duona kasdieninė* (Daily Bread) and *Suversti arimai* (The Plowed Land) and Jonas Biliūnas's *Beletristika* (Fiction) and *Liūdna pasaka* (A Sad Tale). The latter illustrations won a gold medal in the world exhibition in Paris which took place before the war. He is famous for his drawings on the theme of Vilnius old town and his exlibris. He designed the following publications: *Pirmoji lietuviška knyga* (The First Lithuanian Book) by Martynas Mažvydas as well as *Lietuviškos dainos* (Lithuanian Songs) and *Lietuviškos svotbinės dainos* (Lithuanian Wedding Songs) by Antanas Juška. Bulaka designed plays and

films. The artist peculiarly blends the traditions of Lithuanian folk and professional art. His art is characterized by distinct drawing and expressive engraving.

It was in Kapčiamiestis that Veronika Janulevičiūtė-Povilionienė developed her love for songs. “I can’t remember when my love for songs started,” says this famous folk singer. “It probably started when I was little and Kapčiamiestis young women used to come to our house to spend the evening. They would bring spinning wheels, knitting or embroidery. They used to sing while they worked. Povilionienė is a frequent guest in Kapčiamiestis. Her concerts which take place in the club of culture are always popular with the song lovers of the area. She is the winner of Basanavičius prize.

Wrestler Česlovas Jazerskas, the Europe and world champion in self-defense wrestling, was born in 1949 in the village of Mikalina.

Kazimieras Kadziauskas, a mechanical engineer, a Master of technical sciences and Lithuanian Honoured Engineer. He worked as an executive and a senior researcher in the Institute of Mechanization and Electrification of Agriculture. The field of his research was the mechanization of crop and hay harvesting and the improvement of combines and other agricultural machines. He is one of the authors of *Javų nuėmimo mechanizavimas* (Mechanization of Crop Harvesting) and *Kombainininko žinynas* (A Reference Book of Combine Machine Workers).

In a secluded corner of Dzūkija, close to Kapčiamiestis, there is a village of Mėčiūnai. Writer Vincas Kazokas (1919-1984) was born there. He finished Lazdijai high school and studied in Kaunas, Vilnius and Tübingen universities. In 1944 he emigrated to Germany. There he taught in Ratline Lithuanian high school and was the leader of the students’ “Ateitininkai” organization. In 1949 he settled in Australia, where he worked in the Australian Lithuanian community and was the chairman of Sidney “Plunksna” (Pen) in 1956. He published his poems and articles in the press of independent Lithuania and later in Lithuanian press published abroad, such as *Aidai* (Echoes) and *Mūsų pastogė* (Our Shelter). He was the editor of the latter weekly. His creative work was published in the following publications: *Tremties metai* (Exile Years) and *Lietuvių poezijos antologija* (The Anthology of Lithuanian Poetry). His collection of poems *Sapnų pėdomis* (In the Footsteps of Dreams) was published as a separate book. He translated into Lithuanian Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, A. Gide’s *Immoralist*, and Dostoyevsky’s *The Great Inquisitor*. The poetry of Kazokas is a lament of someone rejected and misunderstood and speaks of a search for a kindred and friendly soul. He is sincere, frail and personal in his attempt to become one with nature, to disappear in its beauty, to forgive everybody and to find consolation in a letter to a friend. The influence of the poets of his time can be felt in his ideological and philosophical poetry. The form of his poems is simple and traditional.

Veterinarian Antanas Kėrys collected historical and archeological material about Kapčiamiestis and its area. He has written works about the customs of Kapčiamiestis residents, their daily lives, and the life of the Jewish community. Kėrys collected folk songs, too. He believes that the founder of Kapčiamiestis was not Kapočius but the estate owner Ablamovičius.

In 1928 Vincas Korsakas was born in Kapčiamiestis area, Navikai village. In 1951 he was arrested and sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for anti-Soviet propaganda in his poems. He was imprisoned in one of many Vorkuta labour camps. “We did time in a high-security camp. Prisoners had to wear numbers on their trousers and shirts. Their labour was one of the hardest; they had to lift logs and hand them to people in the mine. Prisoners felt weak because of hunger and thirst,” Korsakas would later remember his suffering in the camp. In 1953 Korsakas participated in the prisoners’ strike and was sent to a punitive camp. The only “furniture” in the barracks was plank-beds. In 1956 Vincas returned to Lithuania. However, he did not stay free for long. In 1957 he was arrested and sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment for the same “crime” – his poems. Again he served his sentence in labour camps. Since 1964 he has lived in the village of Lukšiai, Šakiai district. In 1989 he was rehabilitated.

In 1930 Adolfas Liaukonis was born in Jančiuliai. He went to Kapčiamiestis high school. In 1951 he was arrested for his poems and prose published in the underground press and was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment. In 1956 he returned to Lithuania and worked as a zoologist in the Marijampolė region. He is one of the authors (under the pseudonym of Žilvitis) of the collections of poems in manuscript form prepared in *Inta Rūda ir rauda* (Ore and Lament) and *Benamiai* (The Homeless).

Birutė Stacevičienė, a teacher of Kapčiamiestis high school, with the help of the students, has collected a substantial amount of material about Kapčiamiestis and its area.

Ona Sukackienė-Žemaitytė, a teacher of Paveisininkai elementary school and a Soviet activist, was killed in 1946 in postwar resistance fights. Her husband Antanas Sukackas who worked for the Soviets, was killed together with his wife. They were buried in Paveisininkai cemetery.

Vytautas Valenta, a doctor of Biology, head of the Department of Forest Protection of the Institute of Forestry, was born in 1931 in the village of Vainiūnai. He founded a station for battling parasites and diseases. He is head of the department of Zoology of Vilnius University and a professor. In collaboration with others he founded a research school for entomologists. He published over 200 articles about environmental protection. He is the author of the system of measures to protect conifers from harmful insects.