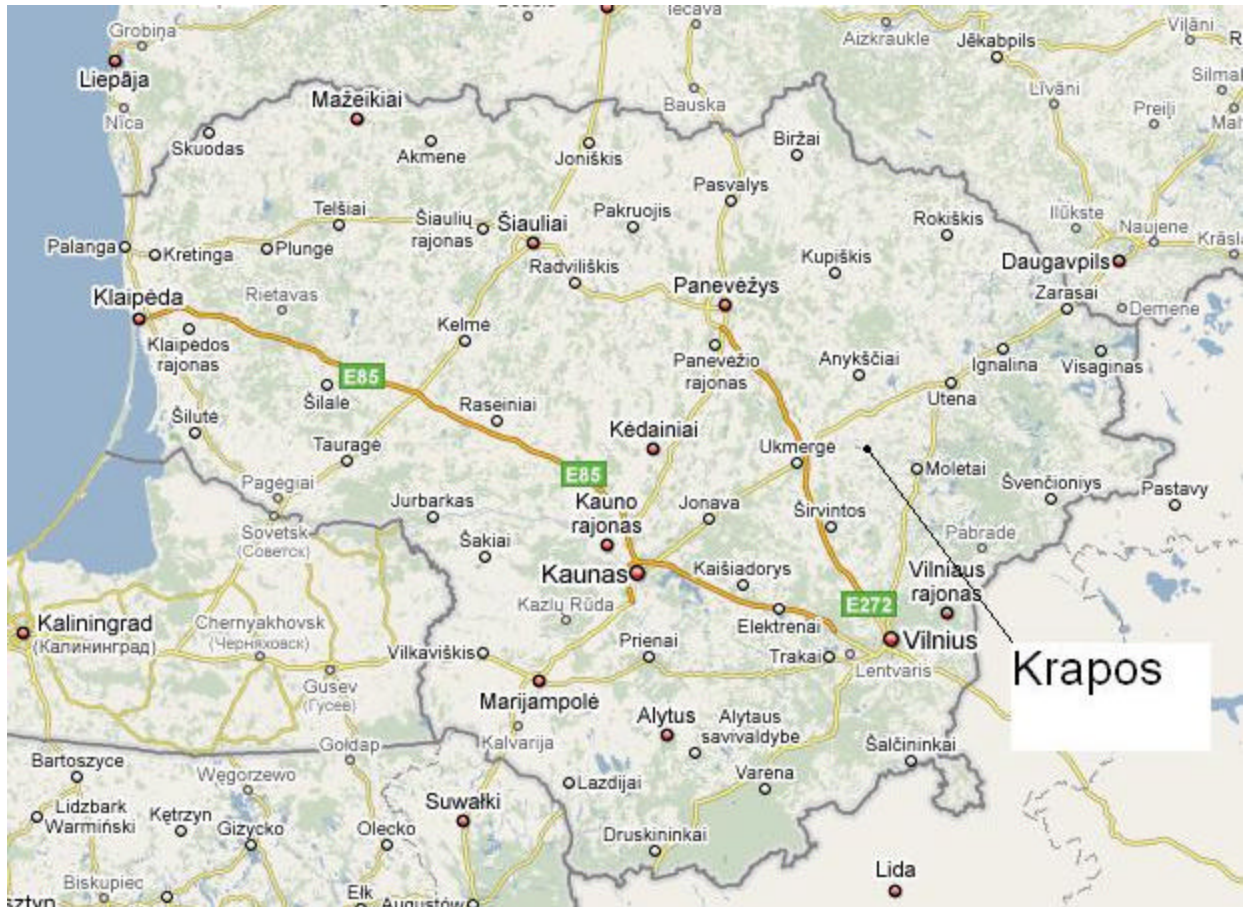


On the Ann Wigmore Trail in Lithuania

Loretta Jones

In July, 2008, my sister Rita and I traveled to Lithuania to attend a matchmaking ceremony and wedding and to look for the farm where our grandparents lived. While there we tried to find the village where Ann Wigmore was born. The village is spelled Krapos and has a population of 6, so must be just a few houses in a cluster. It is just north of Zelva, which is east of Ukmerge and north of Vilnius. It has a population of only six people. We weren't able to visit Krapos, but found its location with the help of a banker and his wife.



We found Lithuania to be a beautiful country and realized why our grandfather had said that northern Minnesota reminded him of home. There were a lot of pine and birch forests, many small farms and homesteads, abundant wildflowers, and many fruit trees and shrubs. A lot of the homesteads have vegetable gardens as well as family cows and other livestock. Everywhere we went, trees were loaded with ripe cherries and apples and shrubs were bowed to the ground with currants, gooseberries, and raspberries. It was light until about 10:30 pm. We were surprised by the long days, but it turns out that Lithuania is about the same latitude as Hudson's Bay, so has long days in the summer, short days in the winter. However, the temperatures are milder than in Canada because of the jet stream. We were amazed by the number of storks. Nearly every little

hamlet and many farms have a stork's nest on a telephone pole and some people seem to have erected poles just for the storks to nest, probably because they are supposed to bring good luck.

We learned some interesting things about how it must have been to grow up there in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, the knowledge and use of herbal remedies is still very widespread there; people commonly grab mint from the garden for their morning tea and even bankers seemed to be able to identify the weeds on the roadside and know what they are good for. We also visited three rural museums that have been established to preserve the traditional Lithuanian culture.



Here are the outbuildings of a typical small Lithuanian farm, with a garden and stork's nest.



Farmer's market in Birjati. Below the yellow sign is a display of wild and cultivated herbs.



Small dogs like this one are common in both urban and rural areas of Lithuania. Ann Wigmore had a dog like this one.



Many farms still have their own wells. Here I am getting ready to drink the ice cold water from a well in Papilys.



Interior of a traditional Lithuanian farmhouse, similar to the type of house in which Ann Wigmore would have lived. The tall structure on the left is a tile stove used for heating.



Rita with a loom and spinning wheel in the rural museum in Papilys; Ann Wigmore's grandparents would have made all their own clothes from yarn they spun from the linen and wool on their farms.



Some typical herbs and wildflowers in the museum garden in Papily.



Apple trees overflowed with fruit.



The Hill of Crosses outside Šiauliai (pronounced Shawl'-eye) is often described as a sign of the deep religious faith of the Lithuanians. This amazing collection of thousands of crosses, each cross left by different individuals, had been bulldozed by the Russians in 1961, but people kept bringing more and more crosses and it is now more impressive than ever.



Rita and I dressed in traditional costumes for a matchmaking ceremony. Here we are making a wreath of wildflowers for one of the women in the wedding party to wear.