

LITHUANIA

In Lithuania work towards the conservation of ancient objects started in the 19th century, while restoration programs commenced in 1902. The Temporal Archaeological Commission of Lithuania (in Czarist Russia) was established in 1855 and functioned for 10 years. In 1919 the State Archaeological Commission for protection of cultural heritage was established in Independent Lithuania. The Department of Cultural Heritage Conservation was founded at Vytautas, the Great Culture Museum, in 1936. The statutory regulation of cultural heritage has been in place in Lithuania since 1940, at which time the Law on Cultural Monument Protection was adopted.

However, it was not until 1961 that the first official list of architectural heritage was legally confirmed. The lists of monuments of all other types (archaeology, history and the arts) were confirmed between the years 1963–1972. The organisation for conservation and restoration of cultural monuments was established in 1950, and around 400 objects of cultural heritage were conserved and restored during the period 1950–2000.

After Lithuania regained Independence, the Inspection of Cultural Heritage Protection and Department of Heritage Conservation were founded in 1990. New laws on protection of Cultural Heritage and Protected Areas were adopted in 1993, 1994, and 1996. A new State system of cultural heritage management has been active since 1995. The new Department of Cultural Heritage Protection functions within the Ministry of Culture, and the State Commission of Cultural Heritage is responsible for the Sejm (Parliament).

In the preceding years, Lithuania has registered about 19,000 objects, complexes and sites of cultural heritage value. These existing lists of monuments and properties are currently going through a process of revision. Earlier this year (2001), the Government confirmed a document on the development of cultural heritage management for a ten-year period.

The major threats to cultural heritage in Lithuania arise from processes of development and natural aging.

Development risks

Lithuania is adapting to a changing political-economic system, closely related to which are a number of evolving processes and developments: economic leaps, laws of free market economy, private property, fetishism of building owners' commercial interests, new functional needs, a change in owners or users of a building, the financial capacity of new owners, idiosyncratic priorities of value and taste – all of these can threaten heritage objects and places.

Risks from natural processes

Natural processes that promote decay have become a serious threat to heritage in Lithuania. Due to economic reform, and a delayed process of property restitution, there are many buildings that lack owners and do not receive appropriate maintenance and care – deterioration is unimpeded, and possibly even promoted, through a process of ongoing neglect. The problem becomes even more acute in light of the fact that many wooden buildings and other

objects of heritage significance were erected using relatively ephemeral building materials.

Another major complication is a shortage of financial resources. The Law on Protection of Immovable Cultural Properties fails to include appropriate Regulations to meet the need for financial support of monument conservation (the State allots the equivalent of US \$ 3–4 million in Lithuanian currency per year for cultural heritage conservation).

Most threatened cultural heritage types

We have identified several groups of heritage objects which, in our opinion, are most threatened at present.



Vilnius, historic suburb of Žvėrynas (early 20th century)





Vilnius, historic suburb of Markučiai (late 19th and early 20th century)

Wooden architecture

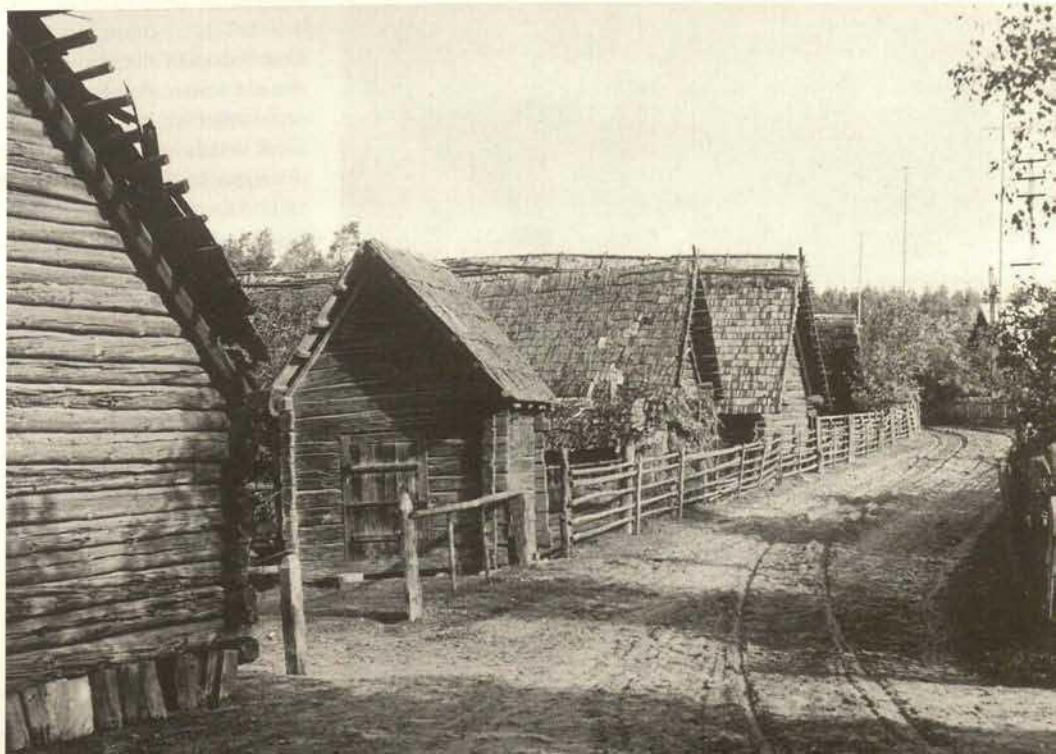
In Lithuania there is an abundant heritage of wooden architecture. The most significant and numerous heritage component of this architecture is represented by vernacular structures: rural settlements, homesteads of peasants and estates, sacred buildings, memorials/monuments and utilitarian structures. There are numerous examples of domestic and professional wooden architecture in small towns and the suburbs of cities. Due to the limited durability of wood, these heritage structures are facing an uncertain future. There were 40 villages on the cultural heritage list in 1970, all of which are today facing a range of conservation and preservation problems. The problem is enhanced in village environments: through neglect, wooden architecture falls into decay as the population decreases, or is otherwise removed in the face of more modern building practices.

About 30% of our structures are wooden. During the Soviet period, estate homesteads fell into rapid decay, having lost both

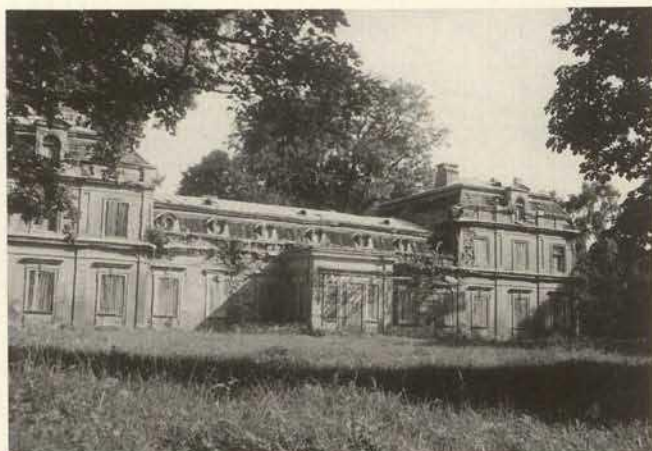
function and owners. Wooden churches are not only valuable architectural monuments, but also the place of traditional and social focus in many small towns. In comparison to other objects of wooden architecture, their condition is improved because church authorities take care of and protect them. Small wooden memorial architecture—crosses, road shrines, and small chapels are particularly valuable. Rich, diverse and often archaic, their forms reflect the nation's spiritual character. Under the unfavourable official attitude to religious values during the Soviet period, a large number of them have been lost.

The wooden architecture found in small towns is characteristically of two types. In the centre, near the church and market place, houses, commercial structures and public buildings were built that were generally designed by professionals. Homestead buildings, on the other hand, were constructed on the outskirts, carrying on the tradition of vernacular architecture.

The established list of cultural heritage included 62 urban monuments in towns. The most valuable buildings were often part of



Vernacular architecture in Zervynos village, Varena district



Palace of the estate of Zypliai, Šakiai district (late 19th century)



Palace of the estate of Gelgaugiškis, Šakiai district (late 19th century)



Palace of the estate of Vilkenai, Šilutė district (late 19th century)

the historical town centres. Unfortunately, in accordance with earlier regulations, wooden houses were often paid less attention in preservation projects. Wooden buildings also prevailed in the suburbs of cities. They were often designed by professional architects and reflected local stylistic trends of a specific period (for example, Czarist Russia and European stylistic trends). In cities and small towns the main dangers to wooden architectural heritage are ineffective regulations and the impact of development.

Historic centres of small towns

The preservation of wooden architecture in small towns and their historic centres is problematic. The material substance of buildings is lost and urban fabric is destroyed due to development programmes. Frequently, reconstruction in historic town centres results in a changed image and character, particularly seen in the enlargement of structures and changes to the density of building. Historic centres of small towns that are not inscribed on the list of cultural heritage are unprotected: they lose authenticity and individuality, and are faced with the precarious situation of evolving into totally 'new' towns.

Estates

On a larger scale, not only are many estates faced with the problems of preserving wooden structures, but the threats also extend to more extensive buildings and complexes. At the beginning of the 20th century, 3000 estates were recorded – today 300 of these are inscribed on the list of cultural heritage. The process of decay and decline commenced in the Soviet period, encouraged by the negative policy with respect to private property. Nowadays the restoration of estates to their former owners is taking place, but owners are often financially unable to manage such large assets. Privatisation of estates' structures to a range of different owners, without re-establishing the system of land-ownership, does not create a viable economic or functional basis for the preservation of estates as a complex whole.

Authentic details of historic buildings and their interiors

One impact of the change of ownership and function in many of the old towns' buildings was the increase in building repair and reconstruction. It resulted in the disappearance of authentic structural details (for example: window frames, doors, handrails of stairs, roofing). Interiors, including original floor plans, silhouettes of buildings and attics were all altered.

Unfortunately, heritage research work has also decreased, as the State support is too little and less attention is paid by relevant monument protection institutions; as is often the case, owners are reluctant to finance research works. Inadequate investigation and research prior to repainting or repair works have resulted in the loss of polychromatic decors. These losses are compounded by inadequately regulated development, absence of financial interest in heritage preservation, and a lack of proper public understanding and support for the protection of cultural values.