

## Museums of Latvia University

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**ABSTRACT**

**Museums of Latvia University**

Latvia University Museums serve to increase the value of cultural heritage. Original Greek and Roman works of art and Latvian art treasures enriched the importance and value of this cultural heritage. Riga Polytechnic Institute was transformed into Latvia University and collections from this period were gathered together. After unremitting organizational work, in 1990 a united University of Latvia museum was formed comprising 6 branches: UL Museum of History, Museum of Zoology, Museum of Geology, Museum of Computing and Informatics, Museum of Botany and Museum of Pedagogy. After some years new museums were added: Memorial Museum of Friedrich Zander (Museum of Space Research) and Museum of Human Pathology, and a partnership was formed with the Latvian Museum of History of Chemistry. Today, the UL Museum of History serves the purposes of education and science, as well as popularizes the values of cultural history of the University of Latvia.

**Key Words:** Latvia, University Museum, Museum.

## Introduction

Around 2500 BC, the proto-Baltic ancestors of the Latvian people settled on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Latvia is a democratic parliamentary republic established in 1918. The Republic of Latvia was founded on 18 November 1918. However, its de facto independence was interrupted at the outset of World War II. In 1940, the country was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941, and re-occupied by the Soviets in 1944 to form the Latvian SSR for the next fifty years. The peaceful Singing Revolution, starting in 1987, called for Baltic emancipation of Soviet rule. It ended with the Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia on 4 May 1990, and restoring de facto independence on 21 August 1991. Latvia (officially the Republic of Latvia), is a country in the Baltic region of Northern Europe, It is bordered by Estonia to the north, Lithuania to the south, Russia to the east, and Belarus to the southeast, as well as a maritime border to the west alongside Sweden. The capital city is Riga, the European Capital of Culture 2014.

Today, Latvia University Museums serve to increase the value of cultural heritage. Original Greek and Roman works of art and Latvian art treasures enriched the importance and value of this cultural heritage. Riga Polytechnic Institute was transformed into Latvia University and collections from this period were gathered together. The University museum collections were primarily meant for academic training and scientific research purposes. In 1930, an idea was put forward to unite these study offices museums in a united and general University of Latvia Museum, but due to the faculties' inability to find common ground, it did not come true. But in the meantime another significant decision was made on April 13, 1932, the University management decided to preserve the former students' punishment cell of Riga Polytechnic Institute, thus creating a unique landmark of cultural history. After 1940, the University of Latvia Museum pieces were not spared, many museum collections were destroyed, a lot of valuable items disappeared without a trace, a part of them were included in the national museums' holdings. A change sparks in the late 1960's when in 1967 first thematic exhibition dedicated to the history of the University was opened and, despite contradictory attitudes, promoted compiling of new museum material. A new period of significant importance started in the research on the University of Latvia history in the late 1980's with the renewal of the idea about a united University of Latvia museum. On October 31, 1988, the Council of the University of Latvia passed a resolution to found the University museum. After unremitting organizational work, in 1990 a united University of Latvia museum was formed comprising 6 branches: UL Museum of History, Museum of Zoology, Museum of Geology, Museum of Computing and Informatics, Museum of Botany and Museum of Pedagogy. After some years new museums were added: Memorial Museum of Friedrich Zander (Museum of Space Research) and Museum of Human Pathology, and a partnership was formed with the Latvian Museum of History of Chemistry.

## UL Museum of history

The origin of the UL Museum of History is the creation of

the Office of the History of Art by Ernests Felsbergs, the first Rector of the University of Latvia, in the academic year 1921/22. The idea to gather, preserve and popularize precious museum pieces in the University of Latvia emerged with the establishment of the university. Since 1919 collections of museum objects were gathered in several faculties and with time museums and study offices for educational purposes were set up, good examples are the Faculty of Medicine Museum of Anatomy, the Faculty of Engineering Sciences Museum of Geodesy and Bogs, the collections of the faculties of Theology and Architecture, as well as the values gathered by the Faculty of Mathematics and Nature Sciences. The Office of the History of Art is notable for the richness and value of the collections. It was created and managed by Prof. Ernests Felsbergs, the first Rector of the University of Latvia, in the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy, in the academic year 1921/22. In this museum's holding, there were valuable coins and printed material collections, original Greek and Roman works of art and Latvian art treasures. The University museum collections were primarily meant for academic training and scientific research purposes. In 1930, an idea was put forward to unite these study offices museums in a united and general University of Latvia Museum, but due to the faculties' inability to find common ground, it did not come true. But in the meantime another significant decision was made on April 13, 1932, the University management decided to preserve the former students' punishment cell of Riga Polytechnic Institute, thus creating a unique landmark of cultural history. After 1940, the University of Latvia museum pieces were not spared, many museum collections were destroyed, a lot of valuable items disappeared without a trace, a part of them were included in the national museums' holdings. During this period the research on the University of Latvia history was discontinued due to the new rule which rewrote and reconstructed it anew. A change sparks in the late 1960's when in 1967 first thematic exhibition dedicated to the history of the University was opened and, despite contradictory attitudes, promoted compiling of new museum material. A new period of significant importance started in the research on the University of Latvia history in the late 1980's with the renewal of the idea about a united University of Latvia museum.

## Students' Punishment Cell

A small room at the University of Latvia main building preserves evidence about the time when students who had failed to return library books in due time could be punished by deprivation of liberty for several days. The students' punishment cell was installed in 1875 on request by Riga Polytechnic Institute and for more than twenty years it became the joy and dread for the University students. Riga Polytechnic Institute at the time was located in the current University of Latvia main building and its management had the authority to punish students for different violations of internal rules by submitting them to hours, days and even weeks in the punishment cell. As it was a solitary confinement, the grayish-white walls of the cell were quickly adorned up to the ceiling with drawings and inscriptions in the Latvian, Polish, German, Russian, French and Latin languages revealing peculiarities about students' lives of the period: drawings and descriptions of different violations, immediate reflections about the University professors, memories about their sweethearts and

revision of mathematic formulae. The students' punishment cell ceased functioning before the foundation of the University of Latvia. Today the students' punishment cell, the oldest one in the Baltics which has been preserved in its original state, unlike when it was functioning and was mostly locked and inaccessible, is open for all interested visitors.

### **Botanical Museum**

The museum head Irena Berga states that: The UL Herbarium as a museum collection was included in the UL Museum of History of Science and Technology in 1991. The creation of the collection in Herbarium began already in 1920s – 1930s. It contains herbarium collections gathered by both 19th century natural scientists and 20th century Chair of Botany teaching staff. They are meant for teaching and research purposes. The most important are the Baltic plant herbarium, the Latvian plant herbarium, the general herbarium of flowering plants, the herbarium of Pauls Lakševics, the herbarium of Jānis Ilsters, and the moss collection of Nikolajs Malts. The Botanical Museum also holds books, historical materials and objects related to the history of botany in Latvia. The museum's main aim is to support research and academic work of botanists, taxonomists and students, inform visitors about the history of botany, preserve important old collections and supplement them with new material. The museum staff creates thematic exhibition panels about notable botanists in Latvia, gives thematic lectures, and guides tour groups.

### **Friedrich Zander's Memorial Museum of Space Exploration**

Exhibition is open for public since February, 2005 in University of Latvia premises in Raiņa Boulevard 19. This museum was created by taking the majority of exhibition from Zander's memorial house in Candra Street 1, which is a private property now. The museum was founded in 1987, in honour of centennial anniversary of Friedrich Zander, pioneer of constructing space rockets (1887- 1933). Now the exhibition is displayed in his Alma Mater building in Raiņa Boulevard 19, where the young engineer was studying in Riga Polytechnic Institute, Faculty of Mechanics (1907-1914). The Astronomical Tower of the University of Latvia is available for visitors there as well.

The following is provided in Zander's Memorial Museum of Space Exploration, University of Latvia:

- The greatest collection of meteorites in Baltic. There are old astronomical instruments, antique star maps and old astronomical books in the museum.
- The exhibition on the 40 years of Astronautics displays space exploration in the past century in detail and provides information on the newest achievements in space exploration.
- Exhibition devoted to Friedrich Zander the father of space rockets, who lived in Riga. It was in Riga where he got his ideas of space flights and started his independent scientific research. Two of the greatest telescopes are available in the Astronomical Tower. By visiting the museum In daytime, visitors can observe the Sun, or, when it is cloudy Riga sights.

### **Museum of Pathology and Anatomy**

- Museum of Pathology and Anatomy is a great help for students as appropriate materials for the illustration of every new subject are taken from the museum: macro preparations, moulages, micro preparations and educational posters which display possible macroscopic and microscopic changes in the human body.
- Several shelves are dedicated to every organ where they are seen with different pathologies. Many shelves are for human embryos' preparations different size, age, and the whole spectrum of pathologies.
- Impressive collection of bile-stones in various colors and sizes can be found in the museum as well.
- A collection of ancient pathological anatomy micro preparations from the 19th century belongs to the museum as well. These micro preparations are well preserved, as well as their inscriptions in Russian and Latin.
- The museum offers a collection of old medicine journals and books.
- The Museum of Pathology and Anatomy is the newest of all UL museums. In its current form, it was founded in 2001, after a long pause of 47 years.

The first foundations for the museum were laid by the coroner and Professor Roman Adelheim (1881-1938) in 1921. In 1919, Professor Adelheim was invited to work in the newly founded Faculty of Medicine as he was a highly experienced expert. He was entrusted with organizing education in the field of pathological anatomy. Professor Adelheim founded the Chair of Pathological Anatomy, set up lecture rooms, created patohistological laboratory, library of the chair and the Museum of Anatomy.

Pathological anatomy is the basis of clinical medicine. In Greek, pathos means suffer, illness. The coroners are the truth's finders and researchers of a body that has recovered from a disease. The coroner finds out and explains why a body has not coped with the disease. Pathological anatomy examines all questions connected with the changes in an ailing human body by using the main research methods in their field – autopsy, biopsy, examination of operating materials on macroscopic level when the changes are seen with the naked eye, or on microscopic level when the changes are seen only with the light or electron microscopes.

### **Museum of Geology**

The exposition displays a wide range of minerals, rocks, fossils as well as mineral deposits. Experts lead thematic tours and workshops concerning such topics:

- Structure of Earth entrails;
- Geological processes on the Earth and in space;
- Mineral deposits;
- Historical development of wildlife;
- Unique fossils of Latvian plants and animals;
- Microscopic examination of rocks;
- History of geology in Latvia.

Highly skilled staff members of the museum can introduce the visitors to the use of natural stone materials in Riga's architecture, their transformation in the aggressive urban environment, rock outcrops and quarries in the vicinity of Riga and other places in Latvia.

Geology Museum of the University of Latvia dates back to September 29, 1929 when it was established from the collections of the Institute of Geology and Palaeontology of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. The collected materials of the natural scientists from the previous century were also included in the exposition.

Currently the Museum of Geology possesses materials related to geology: rock specimens, minerals, cuts, fossils of plants and animals from Latvia and many other places of the world, representing all continents; as well as evidence of the geology science's history: maps, archives, tools, memorial objects, photographs and books. The objective of the museum is to not only collect, store and study rock specimens and the history of geology's development, but also, using all the collected materials (~ 20 000), provide the opportunity of obtaining the required knowledge to students and others interested in this sphere as well as the opportunity of conducting research to scientists.

### **Museum of Zoology**

The head of museum Aivars Petriņš; The museum personnel offer consultations in entomology, malacology and ornithology issues. The museum can be visited not only by students of biology or other specialties but also by would be students as well as anyone interested in nature.

The museum was founded in 1920, when Systematic Zoology Institute and Comparative Anatomy and Experimental Zoology Institute were established in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Its basic zoological preparations were taken from the Zoology and Pisciculture collections of Riga Polytechnic Institute.

### **Museum of computing and Informatics**

The museum was founded in 1984 and it preserves evidence about usage of computer equipment and automatic calculating in scientific research and national economy, as well as in various technical and consumer fields since as early as 1959. The museum is located in the former State University of Latvia Calculating Center - a building of historical notability; the Center used to be one of the leading research institutions in computer science (informatics) and in applied mathematics in the Soviet Union; later it became the Mathematics and Informatics Institute.

### **Latvian Museum of the history of chemistry**

The museum head Ilgars Grosvalds remarks that "Latvian Museum of the History of Chemistry (LMHC) is one of the biggest natural sciences history museums in Latvia." It was established in the so called "Old Chemists Building" (the present building of the UL Faculty of Biology), built at the beginning of the 20th century as a laboratory for the Riga Polytechnic Institute.

### **Conclusion**

The professor's office and private laboratory have been preserved from the beginning of the 20th century. The LMHC was initially founded on May 27, 1975 as the memorial office of professor Gustavs Vanags. It has expanded significantly over the past years. The collection of the museum contains more than 6000 exhibits about chemists, the study process in chemistry and the chemistry science in Latvia. The museum's collection is available for research-

ers, chemistry teachers and everyone interested in chemistry and its founders. The museum's staff members research the development of the study process in chemistry and the chemistry science in Latvian higher educational establishments; the development of chemical production in Latvia as well as the scientific activities of a number of chemists. Many articles on these matters have been published. The museum frequently organizes colloquiums and exhibitions on the history of chemistry.

Latvia University's collections were brought together to serve academic and scientific researches. The goal of the museum is to collect, keep and protect the objects and use them in various scientific studies. They serve to contribute scientists

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