

Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Crafts

Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Klaipėda Region

The Chamber of Industry and Commerce that was operating in the Klaipėda region during the interwar period had been founded as early as 1919, which was before the Lithuanian Chamber of Industry and Commerce was established in Kaunas. It emerged after reorganising Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants (1822-1919), which, in turn, derived from the Klaipėda Guild of Merchants founded in 1597.



Stamp of the Guild of Merchants

Since it was established, Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce (in fact, just as its analogous institution in Danzig) considered its institutional predecessor to be the Corporation of Merchants, and organised its 100th anniversary celebration on 22 May 1922 [1]. In the occasional texts of the contemporary local press, Klaipėda Guild of Merchants, which was operating until the establishment of the Corporation, was somewhat ironically referred to as an *uralte* (German: ancient, prehistoric) institution, although it boasted that its privileges went back as far as 1464 [2] (an ill-founded date, because Klaipėda Guild of Merchants actually obtained its first privilege on 12 October 1597 [3]). However, in the subsequent publications prepared by Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce [4], the history of the old Guild of Merchants was being presented far more adequately, which might be considered as evidence of the changes in self-identification.

The matter of reorganising Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants into the Chamber of Commerce had ripened earlier than 1919. There was movement in this direction even before the First World War: in 1911 already, for example, the territory covered by the Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants was expanded by incorporating it into Šilokarčema (now, Šilutė) district. Still, in the overall context of Germany and Prussia (as an integral part of Germany), to which Klaipėda belonged until 1920, the reorganisation of the Corporation into the Chamber of Commerce took place comparatively late. With the increasing number of new industries and, at the same time, with the need to represent the developing fields of trade, the organisations that were representing modern business interests were being founded in Prussia back in the 19th century. A decree that was nearly the first to regulate the establishment of any chamber of commerce in Prussia was issued as early as 1848 [5]. A new law on the chambers of commerce [6], regulating the establishment and activities of such institutions in the Kingdom of Prussia, was passed on 24 February 1870. The law on the chambers of

commerce set out their functions, the order of their establishment, membership criteria, and basic principles for organising activities of the chambers. In accordance with this law, such institutions could have been established after obtaining a sanction issued by the Ministry of Commerce. It is known that during the period from 1870 to 1897, there were altogether 15 new chambers of commerce founded in Prussia. In addition, in many locations, former corporations of merchants were integrated into the chambers of commerce [7]. However, the 1870 law was not yet being applied to merchant corporations in Berlin, Shtetin, Magdeburg, Tilsit, Königsberg, Danzig, Klaipėda, or Elbing. A new edition of this law, adopted on 19 August 1897 [8], more accurately defined the principles of election, as well as the tax-related and other obligations of the chamber members. It granted the chambers of commerce the status of a legal person, and added new functions, including the swearing-in of experts and issuing certificates of product origin. Following this revised law, the chambers of commerce also had to contribute to filling out trade registers.

The Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants began being reorganised into the Chamber of Commerce following this particular law. When the issue of such a reorganisation arose during the First World War, the members of the Corporation of Merchants did not have a unified opinion about whether this would be beneficial [9]. Nonetheless, during the 1918-1919 negotiations between the Prussian Ministry of Commerce and Louis Jahn, the Chairman of Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants, the fundamental principles of reorganisation were agreed upon, and the respective outlines were prepared. The reorganisation itself was carried out in the autumn of 1919. At the sitting on 24 September 1919, the Council of the Corporation of Merchants unanimously accepted the principles of reorganisation, and on 1 October, it also unanimously adopted the Reorganisation Statute and the Chamber of Commerce Election Statute. The next day, the Corporation of Merchants voted for these documents at the extraordinary general meeting; and, on 11 October 1919, they were ratified by the minister of Commerce and Crafts of the Prussian Government, Otto Fischbeck [10].

Initially, the Reorganisation Statute hardly expanded the volume of the former activities of the Corporation, but it recorded the new status of the organisation. Based on the 1919 Reorganisation Statute, the original name of the Chamber was Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce (German: Handelskammer Memel). Just like before, its territory of operation covered the town of Klaipėda and the rural districts of Klaipėda and Šilokarčema. In total, there should have been 20 members of the Chamber elected, 18 at the first constituency (in the town and rural districts of Klaipėda) and another 2 at the second constituency (in the district of Šilokarčema). The members of the Chamber, elected at the first constituency, were divided into four election groups, respectively: 1) industry company representatives; 2) wholesale company representatives; 3) representatives of banks, agencies, insurance and communication companies; 4) retail company representatives [11].

In the beginning of 1920, after the Treaty of Versailles came into force, the Klaipėda region was separated from Germany and transferred to the Entente states for temporary administration, which, on behalf of the Allied Powers, was executed by the representative assigned by France. Due to the detachment of the region from

Germany, a new district of Pagėgiai was formed in the territory north of Nemunas that previously belonged to the districts of Tilsit and Ragnit. Its emergence led not only to increasing the number of electable members of the Chamber of Commerce from 20 to 24 (the district of Pagėgiai was allocated 2 representatives, and the representation of Šilokarčema district was expanded from 2 to 4 members), but also to a change of the name of the Chamber to the Chamber of Commerce of the Klaipėda Region (German: Handelskammer für das Memelgebiet). These changes were consolidated in the updated Articles of the Chamber of Commerce, adopted on 2 July 1921 and approved by the French High Commissioner Jean Gabriel Petisné [12].

On 12 September 1923, after the Klaipėda region was annexed to Lithuania, the Chamber of Commerce adopted new Articles that were approved by the Directory on 20 September [13]. According to the Articles, the number of members was once again increased up to 28: 20 of them had to be elected in the town and district of Klaipėda, 5 in the district of Šilokarčema (Šilutė), and 3 in the Pagėgiai district. In all three constituencies, the representatives, as in the Articles of 1921, were divided into the four above-mentioned election groups.

The last amendment to the Articles of the Chamber in the interwar period was adopted on 14 March 1928, by the decision of the Chamber of Commerce, which the Directory approved on 14 April [14]. Then, the name of the Chamber was changed: from now on, it was called the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of the Klaipėda Region (German: Industrie- und Handelskammer für das Memelgebiet).

Election of the Chamber and Organisation of its Activities. The Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce had to be elected in accordance with the principles of a general, equal, direct, and secret election. Having elected the Chamber, the positions of a third of its members (initially, it was six, and as of 1921, eight positions) used to remain vacant, and this third would have to be re-elected. In the territory represented by the Chamber, the first election of such type took place every two years (in 1921, 1923, 1925, etc.), usually, in December.

The main operational matters of the Chamber were normally dealt with at the general meeting (German: Vollversammlung), comprised of all the members of the Chamber. The executive body of Chamber operations was the Presidium, which was elected by the general meeting, usually gathering in the beginning of January, from among its members. The Presidium was composed of the president, two vice-presidents, and two treasurers (German: Schatzmeister). The first President of the Chamber, elected at the constituent assembly of the Chamber on 12 December 1919, was Henry Schmäling – a merchant, and a vice-consul of Denmark and Portugal in Klaipėda – who, due to health reasons, resigned in July 1920 already. After him, the Chamber was presided over by: a large-scale wood industrialist and local politician Joseph Kraus (from July 1920 to January 1927); the owner of a shipping company, a wood industrialist, and trader Louis Jahn (from January 1927 to 1932); a milling business industrialist Arno Jahn (from 1932 temporarily; then, from January 1933 to January 1936); and an industrialist and wholesaler of colonial goods and coal Kurt Scharffetter (from January 1936 to 1939). The office of the first vice-president was held by: Joseph Kraus (from January 1920 to July 1920), Paul Schulz (from July 1920 to 1924),

Richard Krips (from 1924 to 1931), Kurt Scharffetter (from January 1931 to January 1936), and William Falk (from January 1936 to 1939). The Office of the second vice-president was held by: Nathan Nafthal (from 1920 to 1923), Bernhard Hennig (from 25 May 1923 to 1925), Adam Vorbeck (from 1925 to 1927, from 1928 to 1931), Kurt Schmidt (from 1927 to 1928), Arno Jahn (from January 1931 to January 1933), Karl Rieth (from January 1933 to January 1936), Paul Klemke (from January 1936 to 1939) [15].

The Chamber operations were also carried out through various committees that were composed of the members of the Chamber. Each committee consisted of two to seven members, and the same members belonged to several committees at the same time. For example, according to the 1921 data [16], the following committees were active under the Chamber of Commerce: 1) Committee on Administering the *plantage* of the Corporation of Merchants; 2) Committee of the Funds of the Corporation of Merchants; 3) Committee on Administering the Agency of Weights and Measures; 4) Committee on Administering the Property of the Chamber of Commerce; 5) Arbitration Committee; 6) Committee of the Ice Breaking Agency; 7) Committee on Wood Trade; 8) Committee on Coal Trade; 9) Committee on Industry in Klaipėda; 10) Committee on the Wholesale of Food Products and Colonial Goods; 11) Committee on Grain Trade; 12) Committee on Communication Affairs; 13) Committee on the Retail of Colonial Goods; 14) Committee on Drapery Trade; 15) Committee on the Affairs of Port, Navigation and Ship Movement; 16) Committee on the Revision of the Cash; 17) Committee on the Development of Commerce and Industry in Klaipėda. Moreover, two representatives, elected by the Chamber, took part in the Curatorium of the Merchant Qualification Development School, and six representatives comprised a Supervisory Commission of the Wood Measuring Agency. Some of the Chamber members acted as commerce judges or their assistants, while others were constantly performing the functions of experts in individual business fields; two members performed the functions of a wood/commerce broker and his assistant, and yet another member acted as a dispatcher. There was no set number of committees. In April 1927, for instance, only seven committees were elected: Fund Administration Committee, Committee on Administering the Agency of Weights and Measures, Committee on Administering the Real Estate of the Chamber of Commerce, Committee of the Merchant Qualification Development School, Committee of Tilsit Wood Measuring industry, Committee of the Port and Navigation, and the Council of Honour [17].

Certain Aspects of Chamber Operations. In associating the major industrialists and traders of the Klaipėda region, the Chamber, throughout its existence, was not only one of the most influential organisations in the economy of the Klaipėda region, but it also had an impact on the political decisions taken at a regional level. The Chamber gained its biggest political weight during the French administration (1920-1923), when its members managed to take advantage of the vacuum that, in terms of real power, existed in the region: the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Joseph Kraus, acted as the Vice-President of the State Council of Klaipėda Region, and he actually dominated the activities of the latter. He remained an influential political figure even after annexing the region to the territory of Lithuania (in 1925-1927, he was the

Speaker of the first *sejmik*). During the French administration, the main efforts of the Chamber were directed at restoring free trade, and making the port of Klaipėda more competitive in the context of its neighbouring ports, especially, the port of Königsberg. Therefore, when, following the Danzig example, the project to announce the Klaipėda region as a free state crystallised, the Chamber supported this idea enthusiastically. For example, in May 1922, during the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants, the President of the Chamber of Commerce Joseph Kraus said in his congratulatory speech that due to cultural, legal, and economic reasons that the Chamber of Commerce was and will continue striving so that the Klaipėda region would be announced as a free state [18]. In the transition period, the Chamber was aiming to ensure the perspectives for business development in the Klaipėda region. It managed to achieve that the Klaipėda region would continue being supplied with German raw materials, semi-manufactured goods and products, as well as food products at prices that, in Germany, were applied to the internal vs. the external market [19]. On the other hand, separation from Germany meant the emergence of a new customs border, and also the necessity to create a local tax collection system. In December 1920, the Chamber consequently prepared a basic draft for the regional tax and finance reform, which came into force at the start of 1921 [20]. The process of entertaining the perspective of a free state, to which, as mentioned above, the Chamber of Commerce also contributed, formed a very favourable climate for business development, which could be evidenced by the fact that for 1919-1922 the number of trade companies in Klaipėda alone increased from 425 to 846 [21]. In this case, the Chamber of Commerce itself played a critical role in the negotiations aimed at concluding trade agreements with Germany, Lithuania, and lastly, Poland [22]. In the Chamber's terms, the trade agreement with Poland, which was concluded on 27 April 1922, with the Polish Consul in Klaipėda acting as an intermediary, was particularly beneficial [23], because it was Poland that the most influential local traders considered as the best perspective economic backup for the Klaipėda port.

In allying with Poland, however, Klaipėda traders incurred the disfavour from Germany and Lithuania. Both countries declared a boycott against the Klaipėda region: Germany resorted to that right after Poland ratified the said trade agreement [24], and Lithuania, which was seeking a customs union with the Klaipėda region, did so a little bit later. Such pressure from both neighbours, as well as the economic crisis in Germany, gloomed the future economy of the region. The attempts to at least partially dissociate from the Deutschmark, which had devaluated at a cracking pace in the second half of 1922, were evidenced by the fact that the Chamber of Commerce arranged for the release of the special "crisis money" (German: Notgeld), which was intended for the Klaipėda region (the size of the release amounted to 21,175 million marks [25]).

The annexation of the Klaipėda region to Lithuania brought major changes to the operations of the Chamber of Commerce. On 16/17 February 1923, the Conference of Ambassadors transferred its sovereign rights over the Klaipėda region to the Republic of Lithuania. The annexation of the region to Lithuania meant that the issue of a customs border with Lithuania was eliminated; the region was integrated into the

customs and excise space of Lithuania; and the railway communication with Germany was terminated in the long run. All of that predicted the changing role of the Chamber.



Temporary currency of Klaipėda: 5 marks



Temporary currency of Klaipėda: 50 marks

Furthermore, in accordance with the Convention of the Klaipėda region, signed in France in 1924, the region was incorporated into the composition of Lithuania, by providing it with considerable autonomy rights. The Convention did not individually define the activities of the Chamber of Commerce or any other organisations in the region that were representing the interests of the business strata. In the meanwhile, the competence in the trade sector was divided between the centre and the autonomy institutions: the right to trade, as well as the power to regulate the organisation of banks, stock exchanges, and insurance agencies remained in the competence of the respective institutions of the Klaipėda region. However, it was noted that all operations of credit, stock exchange, and insurance agencies had to comply with the collective laws of the Republic of Lithuania. Direct and indirect taxation remained in the competence of the autonomy, whereas the right to determine the customs and excise duties, consumption taxes, and monopolies for luxury goods was in the competence of the centre. The Republic of Lithuania was also responsible for the regulation of the production, the movement of goods and prices, and the distribution of goods [26].

Thus, when the 1925 Convention came into force, the Chamber of Commerce of the Klaipėda Region formally neither had to change its Articles, nor the nature of its

operations, but it undoubtedly lost some of its (especially, political) influence. Moreover, the provision – programmed in the Convention itself – to solve commercial affairs by ways of compatibility and agreement between the competencies of the centre and the autonomy forced Klaipėda Chamber to still search for contacts and possibilities of co-operation in Lithuania.

The establishment of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Kaunas in 1925 was a particularly important factor for the business representation interests of the Klaipėda region in the contemporary capital of Lithuania. With the pragmatic approach prevailing, the two Chambers immediately entered into favourable businesslike relations which, as the Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce stated [27], were becoming increasingly collegial, because in the economy sector there was less and less room for conflicts between both interested parties. However, such co-operation was never formally institutionalised. Only in the spring of 1930, both Chambers appointed two representatives each (in Kaunas and in Klaipėda, respectively) [28]. The first time that Paul Schulz – the representative of Klaipėda Chamber – participated in the plenum of Kaunas Chamber of Commerce and Industry was on 27 August 1930 [29]. The bilateral delegacy of representatives allowed for the solving of various minor current issues, and coordinating positions, etc. more quickly and efficiently. It has not yet been studied as to how this co-operation shifted after the relations between the Klaipėda region and Lithuania became particularly complicated in the 4th decade. In fact, many aspects of the relations between the Klaipėda and Kaunas Chambers still require more detailed studies.

Seat and Property of the Chamber. The main seat of the Klaipėda Chamber of Commerce was the stock exchange building in Klaipėda. Moreover, in the end of 1921, the Chamber of Commerce opened its branch in Šilokarčema[30] (after establishing a branch in Šilutė, local merchants were able to obtain licences for import and export trading in many goods (except white salt, building materials, explosives, weapons, and ammunition)). Most of the property owned by the Chamber was inherited from the Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants, which had been operating until then. During the reorganisation, the following property and institutions were taken over from the Corporation of Merchants: 1) Shelter for Merchants' Widows; 2) J. L. Wiener's Shelter for Merchants; 3) J. L. Wiener's Fund; 4) stock exchange building in Klaipėda; 5) Klaipėda Agency of Weights and Measures; 6) *plantage* of the Corporation of Merchants; 7) Funds for Sea Pilot Widows and Education [31]. Based on the 1929 data [32], the Chamber owned the following property:

A. Real estate: the main seat of the Chamber, i.e. the stock exchange building on the bank of the river Dangė (built in 1776-1777, rebuilt in 1856-1857 and 1907-1908; not extant; destroyed in 1945-1947); a residential house at the present address: S. Nėries Str. 6 (built in 1922; extant); a rest-house in Kopgalis (built in 1927-1928; non-extant; destroyed in the postwar period);

B. Funds: Fund for Merchants' Widows (founded in 1797), along with the inherited shelter building at the address: S. Daukanto Str. 28 (built in 1877; extant); Julius Ludwig Wiener Fund for Merchants (founded in 1862), along with the inherited shelter building at the preset address: Herkaus Manto Str. 23 (built in 1863; extant).

Abolition of the Chamber. In March 1939, when Lithuania accepted the ultimatum presented by Germany, it lost the Klaipėda region. Already in spring 1939, the most significant steps were taken to integrate the territory that was newly incorporated in the composition of Germany, including the integration of the region's economic sectors into the economic structure of the East Prussian province. As all of the chambers that were operating individually in the towns of East Prussian province were, back in 1932 already, unified into a single organisation, i.e. the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of East Prussia, which was later reorganised into the joint Chamber for the Provinces of East and West Prussia (German: Industrie- und Handelskammer für die Provinz Ost- und Westpreußen), the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of the Klaipėda Region was also affiliated to it, and lost its independence [33]. During the Second World War, after abolishing the Chamber of Klaipėda Region, its former premises in Klaipėda were used as an office for handling the affairs of the Klaipėda area. Its chairman in 1942 was a fish trader and wholesaler named Emil Suhr [34].

Chamber of Crafts of the Klaipėda Region

As distinct from Lithuania, where representing medium- and small-sized businesses was only begun in 1936 after reorganising the Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry into the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts [35], a separate Chamber of Crafts was already operating in the Klaipėda region since 1921, and institutionally it was never merged with the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of the Klaipėda Region.

Like the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Crafts was founded in the Klaipėda region in accordance with German legislation: the 1 July 1883 edition of the Business Regulations that were adopted in the North German Confederation [36], and the so-called Craftsmen's Law adopted on 26 June 1897 [37]. At the initiative of the Directory, the Chamber of Crafts of the Klaipėda Region was founded on 9 February 1921, following the decree of the French High Commissioner for the Klaipėda region [38]. On 16 February of the same year, the Directory approved the Election Rules for the Chamber of Crafts and the Council of Apprentices [39]. Finally, on 2 March 1921, the Directory adopted the Articles of the Chamber of Crafts of the Klaipėda Region (German: Handwerkskammer für das Memelgebiet)[40].

On 7 August 1930, after the *sejmik* of the Klaipėda region passed the Amendments to the old Business Regulations of the German Reich [41], the Directory approved the new editions of the Articles and Election Rules of the Chamber of Crafts on 20 June 1931 [42], and specified, on 23 July 1932 that, based on the new Articles, the Council of Apprentices should also be elected. Hence, the Rules approved in 1921 were superseded [43].

The activities of the Chamber of Crafts covered the entire territory of the Klaipėda region. In accordance with the Statute, the main functions of the Chamber included representing the interests of the regional craftsmen, and ensuring the quality of craftsmanship in the Klaipėda region. In performing these functions, the Chamber was entitled to: 1) regulate the affairs of the craftsmanship disciplines; 2) supervise that the current instructions were observed when training craftsmen; 3) advise state and local

agencies on the development of crafts, and on other craftsmanship-related matters; 4) discuss and present to the authorities its requests and demands related to craftsmanship; 5) form the examination commission for passing the exams of apprentices; 6) form a commission for solving complaints regarding the decisions of the examination commission. Furthermore, the Chamber had a right to found and supervise craft schools, to arrange qualification development courses for apprentices, to organise exhibitions, etc. In accordance with the new 1931 edition of the Articles, the rights and functions of the Chamber were extended: it was established that the Chamber could publicly appoint and swear in the experts, who would provide expertise on the quality of the goods and works delivered by craftsmen, and on the appropriateness of the prices indicated by them; the Chamber could also keep a Crafts register that would include the entries of all the businessmen who were individually engaged in crafts in the operational territory of the Chamber of Crafts.

Election of the Chamber and Organisation of its Activities. In accordance with the Election Rules for the Chamber, approved in 1921, the Chamber consisted of twelve members, nine of whom could be elected by the craftsmen's companies (seven in Klaipėda town and district, and two in Šilutė and Pagėgiai districts), and another three – by business associations and other unions, which sought to develop business interests of the craftsmen, and half of the members of which were craftsmen (one of whom in Klaipėda town and district, and two in Šilutė and Pagėgiai district). Only the individuals who attained 30 years of age, who were engaged in a certain craft at least for three years, and who were entitled to train apprentices, could become members of the Chamber. The members of the Chamber were elected for four years, but half of the members had to be re-elected every two years. Each member had an assistant. Moreover, only two experts, who did not necessarily have to be craftsmen, could be invited to join the Chamber of Crafts as its equal members with an advisory vote. Following the 1931 edition of the Articles, not only the number of the Chamber members was increased to 16, but also their election principle was changed: the craftsmen's companies and business associations were no longer to be represented, introducing the representation of the business sectors instead. In accordance with the new Articles, construction and construction-related business, metal business, food product business, clothing business, and the business of cleaning services had to be represented by three members of the Chamber each; wood processing business had to be represented by two members, and the paper and print business, as well as the textile, leather, rubber, and chemistry business – by one member of the Chamber. In addition, the serving term of the members was extended from four to five years, and the possible number of experts who could be appointed to work at the Chamber was increased to four.

The main operational issues of the Chamber were solved at the general meeting (German: Vollversammlung), comprised of all the members of the Chamber. This meeting would hear out the president's report; elect the Board and councils; appoint experts; approve the budget; validate and accept annual reports; sanction expenses that were not included in the budget; solve issues on purchasing and selling real estate; provide solutions and requests to authorities; approve the rules for training in crafts; elect a secretary (German: Sydnikus) from a group of individuals who did not

belong to the Chamber; pass a resolution regarding the modification of the Articles, etc. The executive body of the Chamber was the Board, which consisted of the chairman (president) and four members (in 1931, the composition of the Board was expanded to include the chairman (president) and five members). From among its members, the Board had to elect an assistant and a manager of the cash. The first Board of the Chamber of Crafts, with Karl Hilpert, a painter (craftsman), acting as its chairman, was elected on 28 June 1921 [44]. When the first president of the Chamber resigned in 1925, he was succeeded by the former vice-president Wilhelm Richtsmeier, a mason and carpenter (craftsman), who was elected by the general meeting of the Chamber on 14 September 1925[45]. After Richtsmeier's death, and following the 24 November 1930 decision of the general meeting, Wilhelm Rudat, a tailor (master craftsman), was elected as the new president [46]. The last president of the Chamber of Crafts (no later than from 1934; the exact date of taking up the office is not known) during the Interwar period was William Sabrowsky, a joiner (master craftsman).

Without having the Board, the Chamber of Crafts was executing its functions through steadily active councils. The latter included: the Council for Craftsmanship Disciples' Affairs, the Council for Claims, and the Council for the inspection of Accounts. The Chamber could also appoint representatives to supervise the implementation of its resolutions, and to form special councils for the apprentice examination affairs.

It was not only master craftsmen, but also the apprentices (German: Gesellen), who had organisations representing them. It was the so-called Council of Apprentices, which had to represent the interests of apprentices and disciples. This Council, which consisted of four members and four assistants, was elected together with the Chamber of Crafts, and had to continually cooperate with the latter.

Membership both at the Chamber of Crafts and at the Council of Apprentices was considered as the service of honour, so it was not paid for.

Seat of the Chamber. Unlike the Chamber of Commerce, which took over the former premises of the Klaipėda Corporation of Merchants in the stock exchange building, as well as other real estate, the Chamber of Crafts of the Klaipėda Region only settled at its private premises in the 4th decade. As soon as the Chamber was founded, however, Karl Hilpert, the first president of the Chamber, established its seat in his own house at the address: Roßgartenstraße 1 (the building is non-extant; a house built in the 4th decade of the 20th century stands in its place at the current address: Vytauto Str. 24).



The Chamber of Industry and Commerce of the Klaipėda Region in the 4th decade of the 20th century

When the first president stepped down, the Chamber had to look for a new seat. For a while (at least until 1931), the office of the Chamber was located at the address: Palangos Str. 3 (the building is non-extant; it was located in the territory of the contemporary Atgimimas Square). It was only in the beginning of the 4th decade that the Chamber finally had its individual building built in Locų (now, Jūros) Street. In 1937-1938, the building was enlarged by setting up additional premises for the professional school. It was back then that it acquired its present-day look. Today, it is the only building of the Chamber that remained in Klaipėda, Jūros str. 4 (the building is now used as the Dermal and Venereal Diseases Polyclinic of Klaipėda District Hospital).

Abolition of the Chamber. When the Klaipėda region was annexed to Germany, the individual chambers of crafts representing the interests of minor businessmen ceased to exist. In integrating the region into the province of East Prussia, on 30 March 1939, barely a week after the annexation, the Chamber of Crafts of East Prussia took over the Chamber of Klaipėda Region, and transformed it into the Fraternity of the Area Craftsmen (German: Kreishandwerkerschaft) for Klaipėda town and districts of Klaipėda, Šilutė and Pagėgiai[48]. On 6 April, the president of the Chamber of Crafts of East Prussia appointed the former president of the Chamber William Sabrowsky as the Commissioning Crafts Master of the Area (German: Kreishandwerksmeister)[49]; from 15 April, he took up permanent office [50]. After the abolition of the Pagėgiai district, the territory covered by the Fraternity of the Area Craftsmen was reduced to Klaipėda town and the districts of Klaipėda and Šilutė, and in the beginning of May, Erich Kehrer, a joiner (master craftsman), was appointed as the new Crafts Master of the Area [51]. Respectively, the former seat of the Chamber of Crafts (German: Handwerkskammer) was called the House of Crafts (German: Haus des Handwerks).

Text prepared by: Vasilijus Safronovas, a Postgraduate at KU (June, 2010).

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