**THE HISTORY OF THE LENTZ VILLA**

The history of August Lentz’s villa epitomises the fate of historical bourgeois villas in Szczecin. Once a factory director’s residence, it became a modern city salon, and later served as Wehrmacht barracks, an air-raid shelter and the Red Army’s military headquarters, a temporary seat of church administration, and a communist ‘youth palace’.

The history of what is now Pogodno housing estate in Szczecin began on 6 July 1871, when influential Szczecin businessmen – Johann Quistorp, his son Martin, Heinrich C. Burmeister, August Horn, and Ernst Petzold – established the Westend Joint Stock Construction Company (Gesellschaft Westend Stettin Bauverein auf Aktien). One of the company’s customers was August Lentz (1830–1895), who commissioned for himself and his family a residence meant to reflect his hard-won social status.

Designed by the young Leipzig graduate Max Drechsler (1857–1892), the villa makes a staggering impression. Finished with bricks and decorated with stonework, it brings to mind the architecture of Baroque palaces. It was built in the pompous Second Empire style and combines architectural ‘quotations’ from various well-known European edifices, which clearly reflects the owner’s high aspirations.

August Lentz did not have much time to enjoy the splendour of his Szczecin residence. He died suddenly on 10 May 1895, a mere five years after his *opus magnum*, the villa, was completed and opened. By that time, he already permanently resided in Berlin, and was expanding his global business ventures from that city.

November 1911 marks a new beginning in the villa’s history. It was then purchased by grain merchant Wilhelm Doering (1869–1935), who was also the owner of Mercur AG cement works in Jatznick in the Vorpommern-Greifswald district. Doering had a treasury built in the villa’s basement. Apart from other valuables, the treasury probably protected the numerous works of art that Doering’s collecting passion brought to the villa’s interiors. His collection comprised paintings by German artists from the late 19th century to the mid-1920s, as well as sculptures and graphics. The collector and his wife Frieda née Steckling generously donated the most precious works by German avant-garde painters to the Szczecin City Museum in 1925.

In 1935 Frieda, now a widow, first leased and then sold the villa to the city, which in turn leased it to the Nazi party and then to the army. In December 1939, the NSDAP district authority set-up a concrete air-raid shelter in the villa’s basement.

In 1947 the villa becomes the seat of church authorities and branch office of the apostolic administration in Gorzów Wielkopolski – the germ of the future Szczecin diocesan curia.

In late 1949 and early 1950, the clergy were forced to leave the building, which the state authorities handed over to Children’s Friends Society. After renovation, a ‘youth palace’ (‘out-of-school educational institution’) opened there, and the former Lentz villa was converted into the ‘palace’s’ Pavilion No. 1, housing numerous mostly artistic workshops and studios. The villa later also became the venue for various artistic projects not directly related to the activity of the youth institution.

The ‘youth palace’ definitively ended its operations in the villa in 2008. It was, however, only in 2018–2019 that a genuine breakthrough came, with the city of Szczecin designating more than 20 million zlotys to a comprehensive supervised conservation and renovation of the villa and the surrounding garden, combined with modernisation and adaptation of the interiors for the needs of a wide range of cultural activities. Crucially, painstaking conservation restored the original atmosphere of a late nineteenth-century factory owner’s residence.

The most recent chapter in the villa’s history started on 1 January 2021. The new cultural institution housed in that historical building aims creatively to interpret the history and heritage of this unique place, important for both the past and present-day urban culture of Szczecin.

Text by Michał Dębowski, City Historic Preservation Officer

More at: <https://willa-lentza.pl/history>.