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## THE DESTINY OF CASTLES AND COUNTRYSIDE RESIDENCES IN POLAND TODAY

The artistic landscape of old Poland, traditionally an agricultural country, was marked by countryside residences of great landowners: castles, palaces of north Italian *villa* type, and most of all simple, sometimes wooden, manor houses. In spite of considerable devastation in the first world war, before 1939 there were in Poland about 20.000 of such buildings, sometimes of great historical and artistic value. Many of them were destroyed by the events of the second world war. Others, laying in the former Eastern territories of the Polish Republic, remained outside the borders of the new Polish State. But the real *coup de grâce* for that type of buildings was the so called Land Reform of 1944, involving the formal expropriation of the previous owners, who were also not permitted to live in the neighbourhood of their estates, nearer than the distance of 30 kilometres. Devastated by Russian troops or peasants, these buildings, if fortunate, were used as seats of local administration, by the state Agricultural Farms, or as schools, hospitals or nursing homes. But most of them, especially small manor houses, so typical of the Polish countryside, were abandoned, devastated or simply destroyed for ideological reasons as symbols of feudalism. In such a way we have lost about 80% of previously existing historical buildings. On the other hand, it is necessary to stress that some historically most important countryside residences were restored and used as representational public buildings, such as the Branickis Baroque palace in Bialystok, a seat of the Medical Academy, or the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lubomirskis castle in Rzeszow, use by the local authority, not to speak of numerous previously private historical buildings in big cities and their suburbs, carefully restored or reconstructed for State or public use, like those in Warsaw, for example, the famous Krasinski Palace, used by the National Library (Fig. 1), or small, and so typical Lubomirski Hotel in the same city, restored for the purposes of the Institute of Arts of the Polish Academy, where I have been working. Thanks to the great efforts of Polish art historians, architects, historians and conservators of the monuments, remembering only personalities like Stanislaw Lorentz, Jan Zachwatowicz, Piotr Bieganski, Aleksander Gieysztor, and Alfred Majewski, immediately after the war several historically most important private residences of the nobility were converted into the State Museums and consequently saved. Let me name only the Branicki Palace in Wilanow, the Radziwill residence in Nieborow, the Potocki Castle in Lancut, or the Krasinki's Krolikarnia manor house in the suburbs of Warsaw. Under the pressure of the educated circles of

1. Krasinski Palace in Warsaw.





2. Press information concerning the restitution of the palace in Kruszyna to the Lubomirski family.

3. Manor house in Tulowice.



Polish society, the great State programme of the reconstruction of historical monuments, in particular of the old parts of big cities: Warsaw, Gdansk and Wroclaw was undertaken and, finally, in 1962, a law was passed in Parliament on the legal protection of historical monuments. About 7.000 buildings, in three groups, qualified for financial assistance from the government for their conservation. But in most cases that law has remained a sheet of paper merely. It is opportune now to stress the indefatigable initiative and ability of our esteemed colleague, the late professor Alfred Majewski, who - in the difficult times of the communist regime - could find among the governmental authorities and the leaders of the State industry several sponsors for the restoration of many historical castles. Is it thorough his activity, not only as a conservation architect, that such important medieval castles as in Pieskowa Skala and in Niedzica in the Cracow region were restored, and so were the famous 17<sup>th</sup>-century residences of the: Leszczynskis in Baranow; Lubomirskis in Wisnicz and Krasinski-Sapieha in Krasiczyn. Unfortunately his great project to save the ruins of the enormous Krzyztopor castle of the Ossolinski family in central Poland was not accomplished, because of the lack of money and the death of professor Majewski himself. The political changes after 1989 had also a great impact on the situation of the old rural residences in Poland. First of all, the State Agricultural Farms were dissolved, and the historical buildings on their lands ceased to have any occupier. Big estates in State ownership became the property of the newly created State Land Agency which was obliged to sell them to private persons. However the problem of ownership has not yet been resolved, for it is not an easy task. A recently projected law for the restitution of properties to the old owners was not passed by the Polish Parliament. Nevertheless some beautiful countryside houses were sold to the well-to-do persons of today, like the famed composer Krzysztof Penderecki (Luslawice), film manager Andrzej Wajda (Laskowo-Gluchy), or painter Andrzej Novak-Zemplinski (Tulowice, Fig. 3), who carefully restored and perfectly maintained their buildings. In some historical residences and manor houses the new holders, following the rules of the reintroduced market economy, open hotels, restaurants, guest houses, bars and so on. For example, Leszczynski castle in Rydzyna or the manor-houses at Rokosowo and Kobylniki. It happens that some important castles and countryside residences were sold for rather a symbolical sum of money, to their legal owners, like a palace in Gozow to the Sobanski family, or restituted to them by the local authorities, like the beautiful castle in Wisnicz and a countryside palace in Kruszyna to the Lumobirski family (Fig. 2). Frequently these new-old owners have not enough money to maintain, not to speak carry out expensive restoration of their historical residence, but at least they try to do their best to find optimal solutions. However it must be stressed here that, without solving of the whole question of the ownership, in other words without the legal restitution of the former owners their old properties, the last remains of the important part of the Polish cultural heritage would disappear for ever.