



**Historical
University of Latvia
student solitary
confinement cell**

The student solitary confinement cell at the University of Latvia is one of the earliest witnesses in the Baltics attesting to the ways of disciplining students at the universities in the 19th century. This type of practice originated in Germany, and spread across the North-Eastern Europe along with the influence of German higher education and science in Russia during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Historical background

The 19th century Germany experienced an industrial revolution, and the rapid development of industrial production brought about major changes in higher education and science. These changes also affected the territory of Latvia, which was part of Russia at that time. Russia's became interested in German universities grew, perceiving an opportunity to become modernized as a Western European country. One of the manifestations of the influence of German universities was the phenomenon of student solitary confinement cell, which was introduced in the territory of Latvia. The history of the student solitary confinement cell is closely connected with the Baltic Germans, who were established in the territory of Latvia for generations as descendants of Christian missionaries and crusaders of the German Order since the 13th century. The long-standing presence of German culture enabled the territory of Latvia to become part of the German cultural space. The phenomenon of the student confinement cell, which originates in Heidelberg, is an element of German academic culture. The first student



solitary confinement cell in Latvia was founded in the first higher education institution in Latvia known as the Riga Polytechnicum/ Riga Polytechnic Institute, established in 1862. The first director of this institute was Prussian German Ernst Friedrich Nauck. It was a German-founded technical university, which marked the beginning of Latvian higher education.³ The historical student confinement cell at the University of Latvia was constructed in 1875 in the edifice which today is the University of Latvia main building, – previously, the location of the Riga Polytechnicum/Riga Polytechnic Institute.



Ивановъ

Терпи казакъ!
атаманъ будешь.
Дд. №. 18 ¹⁸/_{VII} 98.

М. П.
14. 98

Мартъ 1898

Student disciplining method

Students could be placed in solitary confinement cell for the breach of the higher education institution's internal rules, which they had committed during their studies. Offenses included heavy alcohol intoxication, smoking, disrespect for the teacher and the rapier fights (organization of duels with sharp swords between members of student corporations). The minimum length of imprisonment was 12 hours (half a day), whereas the maximum could span 120 hours (5 days). The length of confinement depended on the gravity of the offense, with a minimum incarceration time for minor offenses such as smoking, while a maximum time was imposed for the organization of the rapier fights. However, the students were treated leniently, they were given food and drink. Students had a permission to attend lectures accompanied by a supervisor of the detention.

Routine in solitary confinement

The detained students adorned the walls of the cell with their signatures, which at times were accompanied with the calligraphic symbol of their student corporation (*cirķelis*). These corporation symbols could be inscribed if the student himself belonged to one of the student corporations – Baltic German “*Fraternitas Baltica*”, “*Concordia Rigensis*”, Russian “*Fraternitas Arctica*”, Polish “*Arkonja*” and “*Welecja*” or Latvian “*Selonija*”. The signatures of the detained students have become an important historical testimony, which confirms the presence of a particular student in the cell and his studies at the Riga Polytechnicum/ Riga Polytechnic Institute.



Wislocki
1889
Koschacke

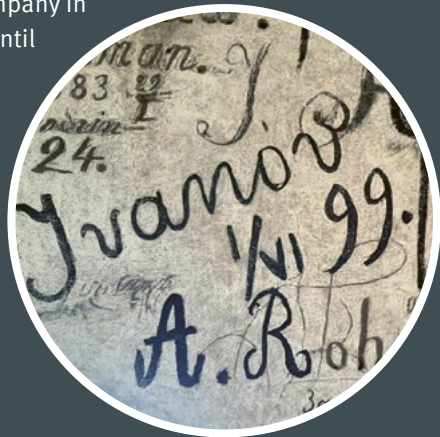
18^{te} 13^{te}
Bedenke was Du
sonst erwartest dich
Bedenke



1900

Alexander Iwanow of Astrakhan (Russia) studied chemistry from 1898 to 1904, obtaining a doctorate. He applied his education in chemistry in his career as an engineer at “Putilow-Werke” company in St. Petersburg from 1904 to 1909. Until 1911, he worked as an assistant to chief mechanic. He was placed in the student solitary confinement cell on 1 June 1899 (for 24 hours).

Alexander Iwanow of St. Petersburg (Russia) studied mechanics from 1894 to 1901. He continued his studies at the St. Petersburg Institute of Scientific Research, but in 1901 he chose employment in the financial sector as the financial supervisor of the Riga State Bank. It is not known when and for how long he was detained in the student confinement cell.



Pavel Ronczewski, the founder of the Russian student corporation “Fraternitas Arctica”, formerly a member of the German-influenced Russian student corporation “Borysthena”, studied chemistry from 1877 to 1878, and mechanics from 1878 to 1885. He worked as an excise officer in the towns of Talsi and Bauska. It is not known when and for how long he was detained in the student confinement cell.



Alfrēds Ronis from Riga (Latvia) studied mechanics from 1903 to 1910, obtaining a doctoral degree. In 1910, he started working as an engineer at the Riga Gas and Water Power Plant. He was detained in the student confinement cell for 2 days (48 hours).

Ilja Berstein from Vilnius (Lithuania), who studied mechanics from 1892 to 1898, obtaining a doctoral degree, was detained in the student solitary confinement cell from 1 to 3 March 1896 (for 48 hours).

Andreas Rykman from Kiev (Ukraine) studied mechanics from 1885 to 1898. Member of the Baltic German student corporation “Fraternitas Baltica”. From 1889 to 1909, – until his retirement, he worked as a mechanic of the Russian Railway Technical Department on the Riga-Daugavpils, Daugavpils-Vitebsk and Ryazan-Ural railway lines. Detained in the student confinement cell on 3 March 1885 (for 24 hours).





E. Stradovsk
1888

Eduard Riekhof

A. Turonka

881

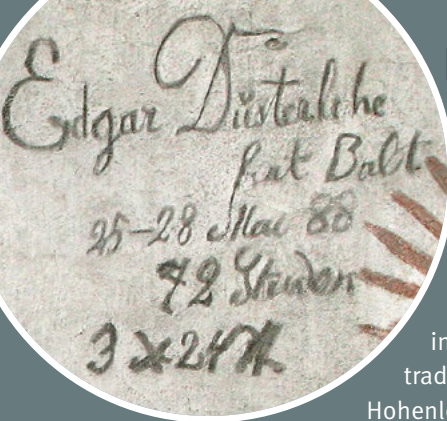
Zidovale



Kārlis Bankins from Tartu (Estonia)

studied chemistry from 1894 to 1898, continued his doctoral studies in chemistry from 1900 to 1910. Member of the Latvian student corporation “Selonija”. He was placed in the student confinement cell on 3 June 1896 for 12 hours.

Jewgeny Polin from Moscow (Russia) studied chemistry from 1893 to 1901, obtaining a doctorate. Member of the “Fraternitas Arctica” Russian student corporation, however, resigned on 11 September 1896. From 1902 to 1910, he worked as a mechanical engineer in the international metallurgical and industrial joint stock company “Westinghouse” established by the USA. It is not known when and for how long he was detained in the student confinement cell.



Edgars Dīsterlohs from Straupe (Latvia) studied engineering from 1883 to 1884, changed the subject to agricultural studies, which he acquired from 1884 to 1888. Member of the Baltic German student corporation “Fraternitas Baltica”. He worked as a farmer in the Kurzeme province, later as a trader in the company “Wittgenstein-Hohenloheschen”. He passed away in 1893 in Hochheim am Main, Germany. Detained in the student solitary confinement cell from 25 to 28 May 1888 (for 72 hours).

Kārlis Georgs Aleksandrs Šiliņš from Perm (Russia) studied chemistry from 1893 to 1900, obtaining a doctorate. From 1899 to 1900 he worked in Almaznaya metalworking enterprise in Yekaterinoslav (Dnipro, Ukraine), and from 1900 to 1901 he was an assistant to the head of the Dityatka pulp mill in Kiev (Ukraine). Placed in the student solitary confinement cell twice – on 2 April 1893 and 25 May (on each occasion – for 24 hours).

Eduards Adolfs from Cēsis (Latvia) studied engineering from 1878 to 1885. Member of the Baltic German student corporation “Fraternitas Baltica”. From 1885 to 1900 he worked as a logistics administrator in Vidzeme province. Detained in the student solitary confinement cell on 7 May 1878 for 12 hours.





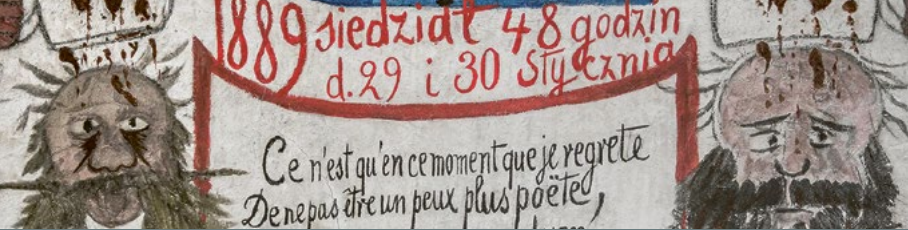
Moses Dubner from Kherson (Ukraine) studied mechanics from 1885 to 1897, obtaining a doctorate. Became the owner of the Moscow Technical Office. It is not known when and for how long he was placed in the student solitary confinement cell.

Kārlis Ūdris-Rudzītis from Kurzeme (Latvia) studied engineering from 1891 to 1893. Member of the Latvian student corporation "Selonija". Detained in the student solitary confinement cell from 14 to 16 February 1892 (for 48 hours)

Salomon Nudelman of Odessa (Ukraine) studied architecture from 1897 to 1906 and obtained a doctoral degree. Probably emigrated from Russia to the USA. Placed in the student solitary confinement cell on 5 December 1898 (for 24 h).



The Soviet authorities exaggeratedly claimed that students were imprisoned in the student solitary confinement cell for up to 2–3 weeks and were oppressed. How could a student feel oppressed if he could leave his testimony on the wall of the cell and fail to receive an extended term of incarceration for such conduct? The USSR purposefully tried to eradicate the Germanic influence from the history of Latvia in order to distance Latvia from Europe. These factors hindered a comprehension of the nature and meaning of student confinement cells with regard to Latvia's affiliation with European higher education and science. The myth of the student confinement cell as a “student torture chamber” was created, disregarding the fact that the student society at the beginning of the 20th century was ideologically diverse and a great part of it was not involved in politics. Although left-wing students were the politically active ones, their influence on the general Latvian society was not significant.



Student solitary confinement cell today

The historical student solitary confinement cell of the University of Latvia ceased to function early in the 20th century when, in the context of the 1905 revolution, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia came to the decision to issue the so-called October Manifesto, which marked the end of the bloodshed between the tsar's government and the public. Consequently, the approach to student disciplining practices changed, terminating the use of student solitary confinement cells in the territory of Latvia. The student solitary confinement cell of Riga Polytechnicum/Riga Polytechnic Institute was closed but not dismantled. It survives to the present day. The former student solitary confinement cell of the Riga Polytechnicum/Riga Polytechnic Institute in the main building of the University of Latvia was fortunate, as it escaped the destruction by the floods of the 1980s. The restoration took place from 2007 to 2013 with the financial support of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the University of Latvia. Today, the historical student solitary confinement cell of the University of Latvia represents a cultural and historical treasure, as it confirms that Latvia belongs to the history of European universities. Taking into account the multinational composition of students detained in the student solitary confinement cell, in addition to contributing to the history of Germany and the Baltic states, it also constitutes a part of the history of Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland. The historical student solitary confinement cell of the University of Latvia has roused great interest in the University of Latvia Museum, which oversees the future research and promotion of the student confinement cell's history.



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The project of the Baltic-German University
Liaison Office is financially supported by
the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
from the funds allocated by the German
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



**UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
MUSEUM**

Text: Rūdolfs Rubenis

Photography: Sarmīte Livdāne, Klāvs Loris, Rūdolfs Rubenis

Translation: Andra Damberga

Design: Baiba Lazdiņa

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ISBN 978-9934-18-737-7

ISBN 978-9934-18-737-7

