

# Laidu Manor House School.

## Assessment of Cultural Heritage Assets upon Closing of the School

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**Abstract.** The architecture of Courland manor houses is rich in classical monuments. Many of them form impressive building ensembles. The use of the buildings varies, historically – schools, parish boards, farm administrations, nowadays – guesthouses, private properties and still schools. One such site is in Laidi, where the existence of a school is problematic.

**Keywords:** architectural and cultural heritage, monument protection and preservation, landscape architecture, historical environment

### Introduction

On the side of the Aizpute–Kuldīga road, there is one of the most interesting ensembles of manor buildings from the classical period – Laidu Manor (*in German – Laiden*). Its central part consists of the manor house, two adjacent blocks – the manager's house and the coach house / barn. The buildings are interconnected by a classical stone fence and gates. Other evidence of the manor house has also been partially preserved. From 1921 the manor buildings housed a school. It is now being closed. What will happen to the historic manor buildings? What is their significance in the overall development of manor architecture in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century? Isn't there special value for rural children to learn in a culturally rich environment?

### Owners and history of the manor

In 1562, Bishop Magnus von Holstein leased the manor to his chamberlain Erdmann von Gantzkaw [1]. In 1601, the brothers Johann, Karl and Magnus von Gantzkaw divided the property between themselves. Johann and Magnus continued to manage the Courland properties, while Karl took over the Pomeranian manors [2]. From these and later documents, it can be concluded that at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries there was a building or group of buildings in Laidi, which can be considered as the beginning of the settlement. Around 1620, the von Szöge family began to manage Laidu Manor [3]. First it was Karl (? – 1634), the younger son of the owner of Kazdangas Manor, Johann Manteifel, then his son Johann. Around 1650, Laidi became the property of Colonel Johann von der Brincken (?–1672) and later belonged to his widow Margarete, née von Redern. It is known that in 1678, Manteifel von Brincken sold the Valtaiki tavern and two farms to his widow as the owner of Laidu Manor [4]. In 1695, the manor was owned by Ernst Johann von der Brincken (?–1749). In 1720, the manor was acquired by

Karl Heinrich von Mirbach (1686–1745). From 1750, it was owned by Baron Christopher Alexander von Taube, later by his son Ernst Johann. In 1797, Laidi was bought by the rich Liepaja merchant Hermann Johann Friedrich Bordehl, who in 1800 acquired the title of nobleman and continued to be called Bordehl von Bordelius (1754 – 1826).

The construction of the manor house began after 1808, when the owner of the Katzdangen (*Latvian – Kazdangas*) Manor, Karl Gothard Ernst von Manteifel-Szöge (1756–1834) bought the Laidi for his daughter Katharina Juliane Johanna, called Jeannette (1787–1846) von Lambsdorff, when she was married to Johann Levin, Count von Lambsdorff (1781–1852), the owner of the Suhr (*Latvian – Zūru*) Manor. It was in 1800 that the construction of the mighty Katzdangen Palace began under the direction of German master builder Johann Georg Adam Berlitz. The manor house of Laidu Manor is believed to have been built according to a design by the architect Heinrich Eduard Dicht (1782–1843) [5]. Later, Count Nikolai Hermann von Lambsdorff (1817–1866) and his wife Charlotte Dorothea Caroline, née *Lieven* (1823–1857) were the owners of Laidu Manor. The next owner of the manor, their son Count Johann Gustav Nikolaus von Lambsdorff (1823–1902), died unmarried. The manor buildings did not suffer during the 1905 Revolution in Latvia. Until the Latvian agrarian reform, the manor belonged to the von Lambsdorff family. Count Lambsdorff did not agree to the allocation of the new folwark (*German – Neuhof*) as a non-alienable part and tried to exchange it for the centre of Laidu Manor with all its buildings and park. He pointed out that the Charlotte *Edge* (small, or folwark) manor he was granted was the worst folwark. There were only four rooms in the building, only two of which had plank floors and the rest paved floors. Apart from that, there was no garden and forest, besides, the arable land was very bad as it



Fig. 1. Hermann Johann Friedrich Bordehl  
[internet resources]



Fig. 2. Karl Gothard Ernst von Manteifel-Szöge [internet resources]

had been lying fallow for many years. However, the Count's efforts were in vain and in 1923 he sold the folwark house, while staying in Paris himself. From 1921, the Laidu Primary School began to operate in the manor house and adjacent buildings.

#### The architecture of the manor house

The Laidu manor house is a peculiar monument of classicism. The building is covered by a low-pitched gable roof with chamfered ends. The two longitudinal facades facing the courtyard and the park, are identical. The central part is accentuated by a portico of four Ionic columns with a triangular pediment. Above the main entrance is a large semi-circular window with ornate fan-shaped tracery. The ends of the facade are also strongly accentuated with buttresses, formed by four columns with entablature on the ground floor and a large semi-circular window above with equally ornate tracery. The overall architectural composition of the facades also includes the plinth solution floor, which has larger and smaller semi-circular windows. The floors of the building are separated by a wide



Fig. 3. Laidu manor house from the front yard  
[photo by author, 2014]



Fig. 4. Laidu manor house from the park  
[photo by author, 2022]



Fig. 5. Laidu manor house [internet resources]



Fig. 6. The central portico of the manor house  
[photo by author, 2014]



Fig. 7. The manor house from the front yard  
[photo by author, 1982]



Fig. 9. Ceiling and wall paintings  
[photo by author, 2022]

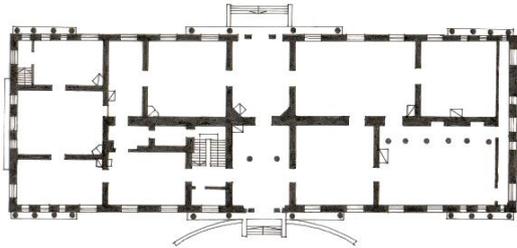


Fig. 8. Ground floor plan of the manor house  
[drawing by author]

inter-storey cornice. The facades reflect the internal functional structure: the ground floor with large windows was representative, the second floor with small square windows was for servants, guests, etc., and the plinth solution floor housed the kitchen and servants' quarters. A historic image of the manor house published in the book *Baltic Manor Houses* by architect Heinz Pirang, shows the facade of the yard [6]. The architecture of Laidu manor house shows a solution that influenced the architectural image of more than one Courland palace and manor house, for example, the Snēpeles manor house, built in the 1830s for A. von Hahn.

### The interior of the manor house

From 1921, when the Laidu manor house became a school, the interior was remodelled to accommodate the new function. For example, in 1923, during a major renovation, the wall paintings in some rooms on the ground floor and in the hall were removed, as were all the ceiling decorations. During this period, the exterior door leaves were replaced and a new heating system was installed, destroying a number of historic taps and fireplaces. The worn parquet flooring in the dining hall was also replaced. As can be seen, the 1920s were unthinkingly devastating for the old building. However, a number of photographs from 1949 show a beautiful classical stove still in place and a series of Ionic columns in the dining room [7]. In the centre of the facade of the furnace was a scenic scene, below it a rhythmic ornament and below – a

series of meanders. On either side of the furnace hearth was a vertically arranged garland of flowers and fruit. However, not everything from interior decoration and carpentry products has been lost over time. The ceiling beams of the hall are still supported by two Doric columns, the historic door leaves, and the internal shutters of the windows are preserved. In one of the rooms, wall and ceiling paintings with antique scenery were uncovered. Judging by them, similar paintings may also be found in other rooms of the manor house under layers of later paintwork.

### Laidu manor house buildings

Laidu manor house was historically a large economic complex with many buildings and structures. In 1921, the following manor house buildings and properties were listed: two residential houses, two barns, three cattle and poultry sheds and wood sheds, a yard part of the park and a garden [8]. The manor's house buildings are also evidenced by a plan of the manor's lands made in 1922 [9]. The buildings symmetrically placed on both sides of the manor's house – the manager's house and the coach house / barn are one-story, covered with a steep gable roof, the ends of which are partially sloped. A portico with a triangular pediment is created in the symmetrical centre of the buildings. As with the manor house, there is a large semi-circular window above the main entrance. The roof eaves are particularly emphasised by the rich shaping. However, the somewhat unwieldy form of these buildings is more attributable to local building traditions. The manor's house is connected to these buildings by a stone wall fence with a monumental gate that already resembles a triumphal arch. The aforementioned buildings next to the manor's house have undergone changes over time. The manager's house, the oldest building on the manor, underwent major changes in 1929 due to the collapse of the ceiling. The layout of the building was completely changed and the old metal wind indicator disappeared from the roof. The original layout before the changes was not recorded.



Fig. 10. Land plan of Laidu Manor. 1922.  
[Latvian State Historical Archive,  
1679. f., 2. descr., p. 218.]



Fig. 11. Manager's house [photo by author, 2014]



Fig. 12. Manager's house [photo by author, 2014]



Fig. 13. The gate connecting the manor's house and the manager's house [photo by author, 2014]



Fig. 14. One of the corner towers of the manager's house  
[photo by author, 2022]

The barn / coach house also underwent a change when the Laidu Educational Society was established there. In 1924, a stage was added to the end of the building, changing the shape of the building.

### Park

The roughly 14-hectare manor park was laid out in the second half of the 19th century and contains three ponds. The park has a mixed avenue of deciduous trees and its oldest part is around and to the south of the central building – the manor house. This part of the park has the characteristics of a regular layout. Most of the park north of the manor house is laid out in an open plan. In 1993, a number of native conifer species were listed in the park, such as Norway spruce, Norway maple, black alder, white alder, European white, common hazel, European spindle, Mayday tree, common oak, goat willow, etc. During this time, there were also introduced species, such as conifer species: Caucasian fir, Siberian fir, Silver fir, Blue spruce, Baltic pine, Eastern white-cedar, as well as broadleaved trees and shrubs: Sycamore and Amur maple, Silver maple, Horse chestnut, Siberian pea shrub, Traveller's joy, Shiny cotoneaster, European beech, White walnut, Oregon grape, English dogwood, Staghorn sumac, white and red Apple rose, Brittle willow, Black elder, White meadowsweet, Siberian dogwood, etc. In 1993, the existing situation of the park was also described: there was a milk collection

centre, sheds, a barn, an old stage, tables and benches at the edge of the pond [10]. In 2011, the preliminary design of Laidu Manor Park was studied by Ilze Māra Janelis, an architect and specialist in historical parks and gardens. She points out, among other things in relation to the buildings, that *even at the beginning of the 1920s the now apparently 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscape park was neither a continuous area nor a coherent composition. All this leads to the conclusion that the centre of Laidu manor house and the park were built over a longer period of time. Presumably, the former buildings are believed to have been at least roughly in the same locations as the present ones. In addition, it is possible that all three of the present main buildings could have been rebuilt in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from earlier material. This is evident on the north facade of the manager's house, where an exposed sgraffito suggests an earlier period* [11]. The author also points out that the two hexagonal towers at either end of the manager's house could have been built at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when this ancient Romanesque fashion was common not only in Latvia, but also throughout Europe. Yes, it was the time of Romanticism, when medieval towers appeared in more than one manor house, for example in Suntaži (*German – Sunzel*), Bikšēre (*German – Libsien*), Ērgļi (*German – Erlaa*), Īle (*German – Ihlen*) and elsewhere. But how did these towers end up at the back of the Laidu Manor manager's house, where no one could really perceive them from the front yard? Maybe the layout of the development was different? There are many questions in this respect and further research is required.

His memories of the manor house were published by L. Mieriņš. He writes that the outbuilding of the manor house contained a laundry room with two large boilers, a bakery and a sauna. The manor manager's house was home to teachers, a school attendant, a midwife and others [12].

### **School – manor house**

As already mentioned, in 1921 a school was established in the Laidu manor house and in the two adjacent buildings, which did not cease its activities after the Second World War. Laidu School – the name this place has been known by for more than 100 years! Many generations have come from this school and gone on in life, taught for many years by local teachers, providing their knowledge and skills, cared for by their parents, both when they started school and later when they continued their education. It is absolutely unbelievable that this thread of education in the historical environment of Laidi can be broken! As of 2022, Laidu School will no longer exist and the fate of the manor ensemble is unknown [13]. The buildings will be managed by the Laidu Parish Administration, which will look for a solution for the future use of the buildings in the near future.

Many of the palaces and manor houses survived the Soviet era because they housed schools. In recent years, the school network has been streamlined and the old manor houses have been left empty and their future is unknown. It is strange that in our neighbouring country, Estonia, the book *A Guide to Estonia's Manor Schools* was published just recently [14]. The situation is quite different there, schools in palaces and manor houses exist and there is no intention to close them en masse! In Estonia, the project *Manor Schools – Preserving through Use* was funded by the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The Association of Estonian Manor Schools was also created. Great care is taken to ensure that children learn in a culturally rich environment. I would not like to mention the schools in Estonia's palaces and manor houses where the number of pupils exceeds 100, such as the Vasalemma Primary School at Vasalemm Manor, the Secondary school at Aruküla Manor, etc., but rather those manor houses where the number of pupils is small and which still exist, most often combining kindergarten, vocational school and primary school, such as Kabala Manor (28 pupils and 27 kindergarten attendees), Vodja Manor (30 pupils), etc. However, a review of the catalogue of Estonia's manor schools shows that the institutions there are well established and are not in danger of being abandoned. For example, the Vatla Manor House School, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century building where the school opened in 1923 still exists with 12 pupils [15]. Of course, time and social circumstances can make their own adjustments, but judging by the current situation, there is no need to worry.

Time will tell in Latvia, whether the Kortenhof manor house (*Latvian – Beļavas*), the Lappier manor house (*Latvian – Ozolu*) and many others will exist without the school...

### **Conclusions**

The Laidu manor ensemble with its park is a remarkable testimony of classicism architecture, protected by the state as a cultural monument. It reflects the golden age of Courland Classicism, unmatched anywhere else in Latvia. The building of the centre of the manor is believed to have been formed long before the construction of the existing manor house and indicates an earlier period of construction, future research of which is urgently required. The closure of the school in this cultural monument, which has been restored with state and municipal funds over many years, is worrying. The main aim of this publication is not to present in detail the cultural history of the still understudied Courland manor house ensembles, to which Laidu Manor also belongs, but to draw attention to the future fate of this site, when the school will cease to exist and the future remains unknown.

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## AUTHOR:

In 1979, **Jānis Zilgalvis** graduates from the Faculty of Architecture of the Riga Technical University. In 1990, he defends his doctoral thesis on the theme "The Latvian manor architecture from the second half of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century. Since 1995, he heads the Department of Architecture of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection and from 2001 until 2014 – he is the dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Riga Technical University. Since 2012, he is a full member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. He has more than 180 scientific and popular scientific publications, and he is the author of 21 books (for some books – a co-author). His main research directions are as follows: manor architecture and history of culture, sacred architecture, protection and utilization of the cultural heritage.

**Kopsavilkums.** Viens no interesantākajiem klasicisma laika muižu apbūves ansambļiem ir Laidu muiža. 1562. gadā bīskaps Magnuss fon Holšteins muižu izlēņoja savam kambarkungam Erdmanim fon Ganckavam. 1601. gadā brāļi Johans, Karls un Magnuss fon Ganckavi sadalīja savā starpā īpašumus. Ap 1620. gadu Laidu muižā sāka saimniekot fon Cēges dzimtas pārstāvji. Vēlāk īpašnieki mainījās. Kungu mājas celtniecība sākusies pēc 1808. gada, kad Kazdangas muižas īpašnieks Karls Gothards Ernsts fon Mantefels - Cēge Laidus nopirka savai meitai Katarinai Julianeij Johannai fon Lambsdorfai, kad viņa bija stājusies laulībā ar Zūru muižas īpašnieku Johanu Levinu grāfu fon Lambsdorfu. Domājams, ka Laidu muižas kungu māja celta pēc arhitekta Heinriha Eduarda Dihta projekta. No 1921. gada Laidu muižas kungu mājā un blakus ēkās sāka saimniekot Laidu II pakāpes pamatskola. Kungu māja ir savdabīgs klasicisma stila piemineklis. 1921. gadā uzskaitītas sekojošas – divas dzīvojamās ēkas, divas klētis, trīs lopu un putnu kūtis, malkas šķūņi u. c. Par muižas apbūvi liecina arī 1922. gadā izgatavotais muižas zemju plāns. Kungu mājai abās pusēs simetriski novietota pārvaldnieka māja un ratnīca – klētis. Kungu māju ar šīm ēkām savieno mūra žogs, kurā izbūvēti monumentāli vārti. Minētie kungu mājas blakus korpusi laika gaitā piedzīvojuši izmaiņas. Pārvaldnieka mājai, kas ir pati vecākā muižas ēka, 1929. gadā pilnībā tika mainīts plānojums un no ēkas jumta pazudis senais metālkaluma vēja rādītājs. Arī klētis – ratnīca piedzīvoja pārmaiņas, kad tajā ierīkoja Laidu Izglītības biedrību. Aptuveni 14 ha plašais muižas parks ierīkots 19. gs. otrajā pusē un tajā atrodas trīs dīķi. Parkā ved jaukta lapkoku aleja un tā vecākā daļa atrodas ap centrālo ēku – kungu māju un uz dienvidiem no tās. Šai parka daļai ir regulāra plānojuma iezīmes. Parka lielākā daļa ziemeļu virzienā no kungu mājas risināta brīvā plānojumā. 2011. gadā Laidu muižas parka pirmsprojekta izpēti veikusi arhitekte, vēsturisko parku un dārzu speciāliste Ilze Māra Janelis. Skola pēc II pasaules kara, savu darbību nepārtrauca. Tātad Laidi, kā skola ir atpazīta jau 100 gadus! Daudzas paaudzes nākušas no šīs skolas un aizgājušas tālāk dzīvē, to pārstāvju ilgus gadus mācījuši vietējie skolotāji, sniedzot savas zināšanas un prasmes, par viņiem rūpējušies vecāki, gan skolas gaitas uzsākot, gan vēlāk, turpinot izglītību. Pilnīgi neticami, ka šis izglītības pavediens vēsturiskajā vidē – Laidos var tikt pārtraukts! No 2022. gada Laidu skola vairs nepastāvēs un muižas ansambļa tālākais liktenis nav zināms. Ēku apsaimniekotājs būs Laidu pagasta pārvalde, kura tuvākā nākotnē meklēs ēkām turpmākās izmantošanas risinājumu. Liela daļa muižu pils un kungu mājas padomju laikā izdzīvoja tāpēc, ka tajās atradās skolas. Pēdējos gados skolu tīkls tiek optimizēts un senās muižu ēkas pieliek tukšas, un to nākotne – nezināma. Taču, mūsu kaimiņzemē Igaunijā tieši nesen tika izdota grāmata *Ceļvedis pa Igaunijas muižu skolām*. Tur situācija ir pavisam citādāka, skolas pils un kungu mājās pastāv un nav pat nodoma tās masveidā likvidēt! Tāpēc satraucoša ir Laidu skolas slēgšana šajā kultūras pieminekli, kura atjaunošanā ilgus gadus ir ieguldīti valsts un pašvaldības līdzekļi.