

The fate of East Prussian Heimatmuseen and the memory of the Masurians in the years 1945-2018 north-eastern Poland

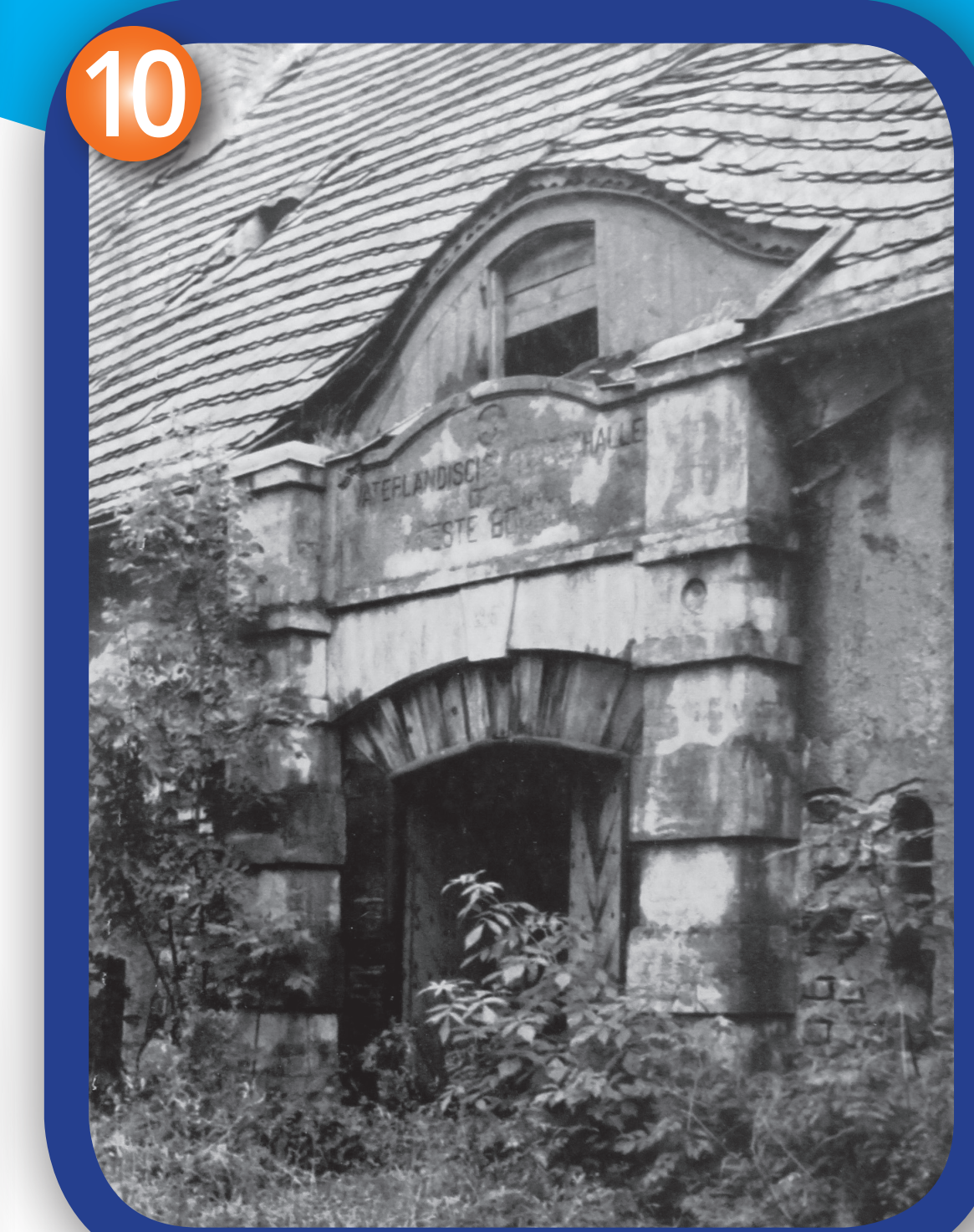
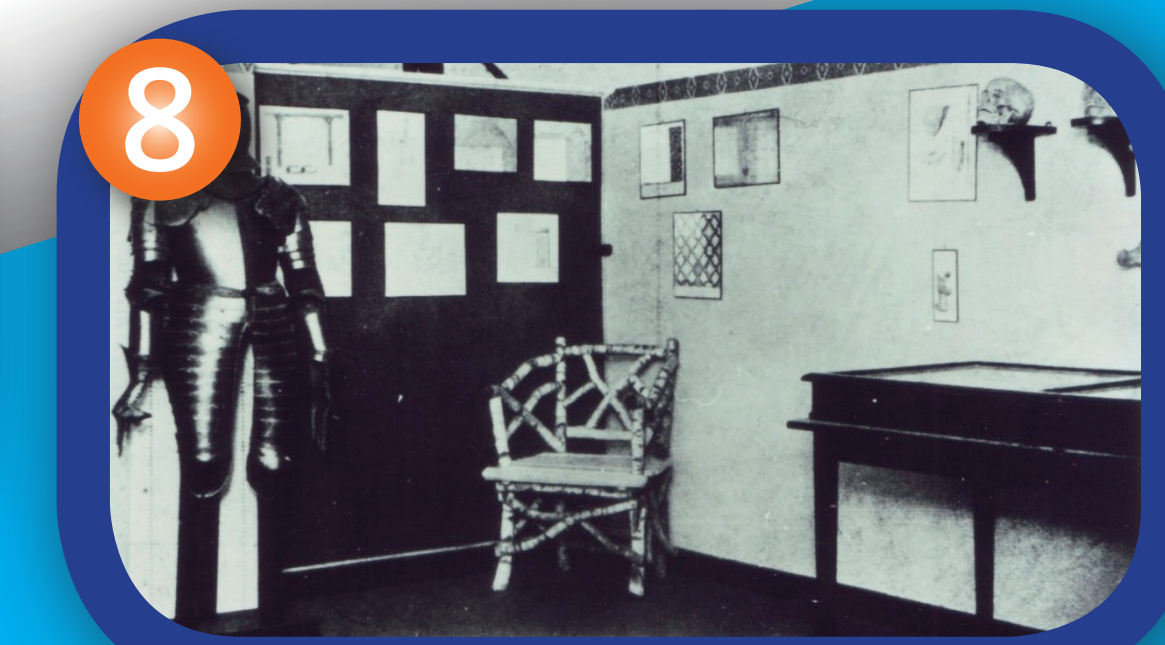
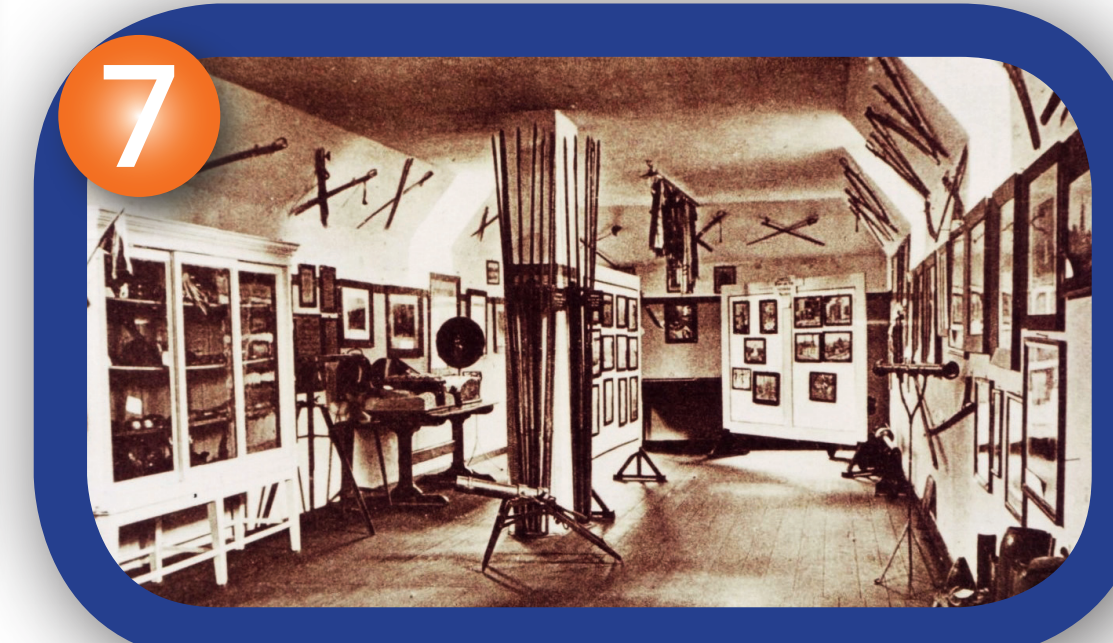
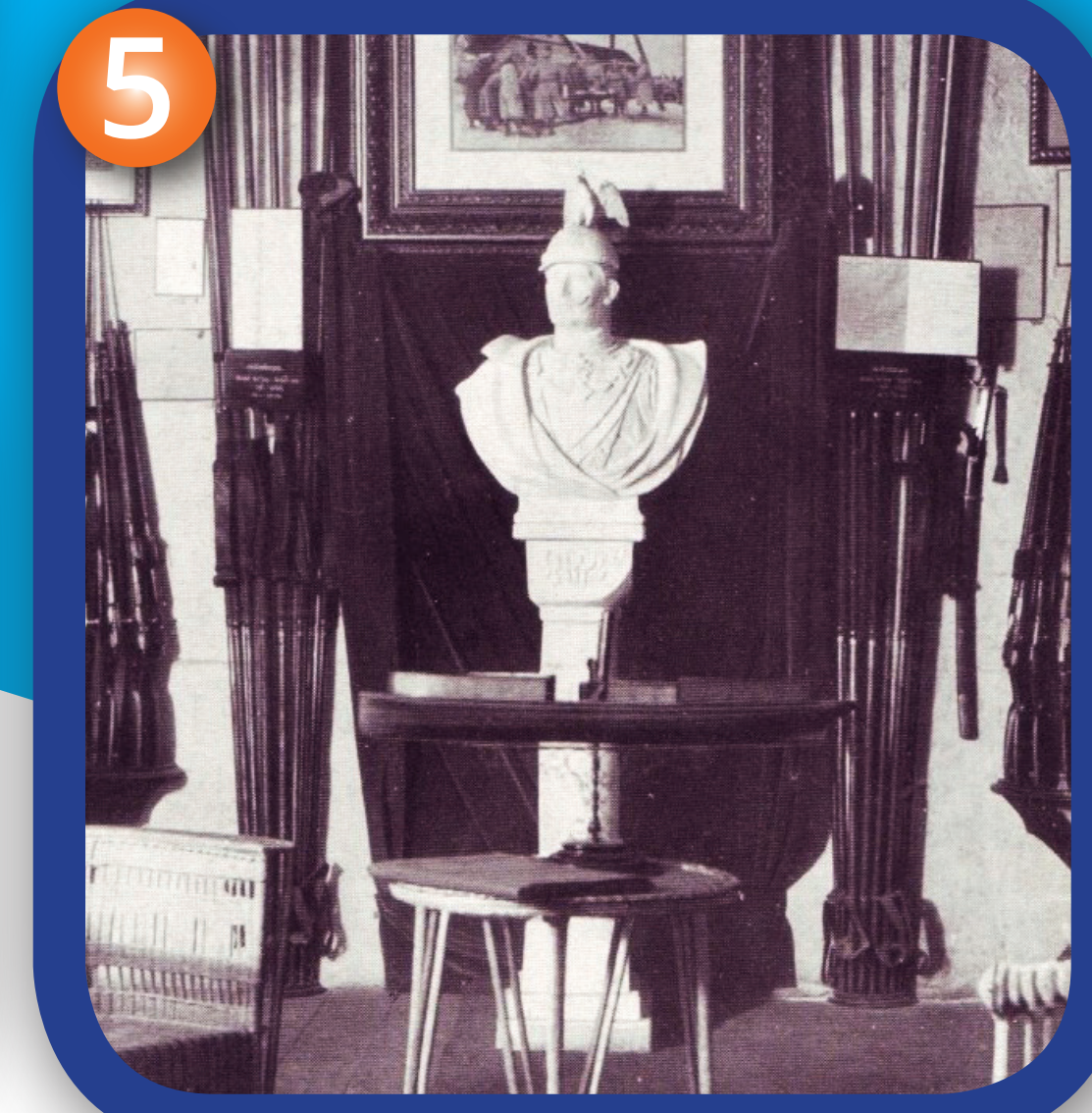
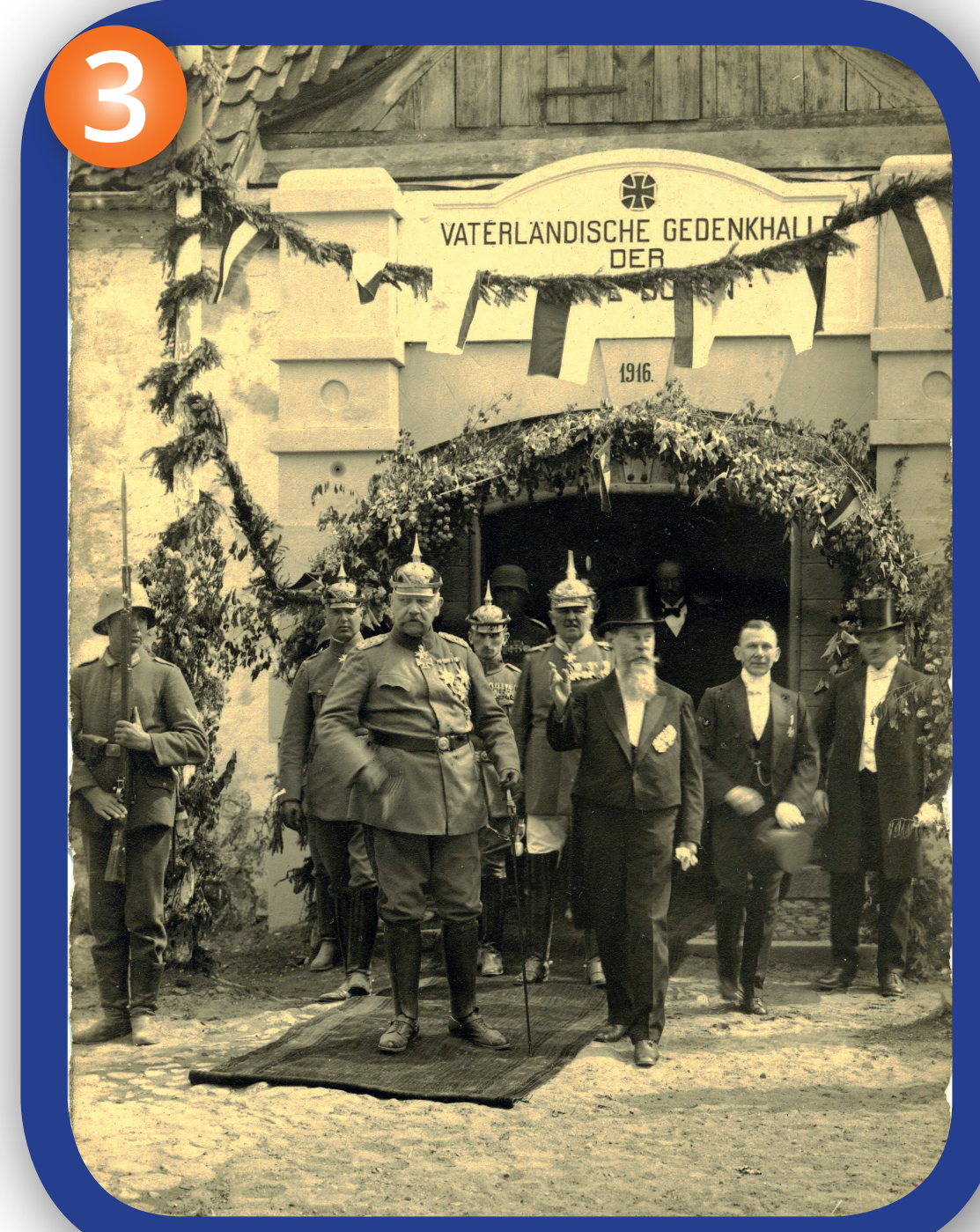
Until the end of the World War II, a large part of today's north-eastern Poland belonged to the province of Germany called East Prussia. During last two decades of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century, 34 local and regional museums were created there. They were called Heimatmuseen. Their collections contained exhibits related to the history and heritage of the East Prussia. Twenty-one of them were located at the territory of present north-eastern Poland. Right after World War II, in the second half of the 1940s, new Polish residents have appeared here, as a result of mostly forced migration of Polish and Ukrainian people and displacement of former German and Masurian inhabitants. At the same time new political, social and cultural reality have started to create the new memory of the new inhabitants. This political and social process, along with previous war devastation, caused destruction of most of Heimatmuseen. Collections and seats only of a few of them – in Kętrzyn (germ. Rastenburg), Lidzbark Warmiński (germ. Heilsberg), Olsztyn (germ. Allenstein), Olsztyniek (germ. Hohenstein) and Szczytno (germ. Ortelsburg) – have survived, mostly thanks to the efforts of Masurian autochthons, but their exhibitions have been heavily changed. Exhibits from other museums have been destroyed or taken to the new Masurian Museum in Olsztyn. The surviving exhibits were used to create a new exhibition showing the Polish history and culture of Masuria and Warmia, in the context of socialist ideology. These actions were ordered by the Polish government and the communist party. Their effects continue until now in respect to the understanding of the history and cultural heritage of Masuria by their contemporary inhabitants.

A good example of the above political, social and cultural processes is the history of the *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle der Stadt Lötzen und der Feste Boyen* in today's Giżycko (germ. Lötzen). It was created in the year 1916, by the com-

mander of the fortress *Feste Boyen*, colonel Hans Busse, to commemorate fights from the World War I in Masuria. During next nearly three decades of its history the memory house was turned into a regional museum with exhibits related to World War I, archaeology, history, culture, and the nature of Masuria. At the end of its existence, during the World War II, the museum became the biggest war museum in Central Europe – *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle Lötzen Ostpreußisches Weltkriegsmuseum*. After the war, in the year 1946, archaeo-

logical, ethnographical and some historical exhibits were taken to the Masurian Museum in Olsztyn, and the seat of the *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle* existed as a ruin until the fifties of the 20th century. Despite the large need of the local community, Giżycko still does not have its regional museum. Its creation was one of the electoral slogans during the last local elections, four years ago. However, the winner has not yet fulfilled his election promise. The dispute over the nature of the new museum is still going on. Its crucial point is the history of Masuria before 1945.

Literature: W. La Baume, 1942, *Die Bodendenkmalpflege in Ostpreußen*, „Alt-Preußen“, J. 7, H. 2, p. 29; idem. 1942, *Die Ostpreußischen Heimatmuseen*, „Alt-Preußen“, J. 7, H. 2, p. 30-31; M. Karczewski, Muzeum w mieście Lötzen. Historia i zbiory (1916-1944); H. Skurpski, 1947, *Uwagi o byłych muzeach na obszarze województwa olsztyńskiego*, „Instytut Mazurski w Olsztynie. Komunikat Działu Informacji Naukowej. Seria Sztuki i Kultury”, nr 1 (7), p. 1-11; idem. 1948, *Przeszłość i stan muzealnictwa na ziemi mazursko-warmińskiej*, „Kwartalnik Muzealny”, R. 1, z. I-IV, p. 38-50.



- 1: Location of the study area
- 2: The seat of the *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle* (first building on the left) in the year 1916
- 3: The entrance to the museum during the Field Marshal's Paul von Hindenburg visit to Lötzen (6th June 1922)
- 4: The reduced admission ticket to the museum
- 5: The archaeological exhibition, called *Busse Sammlung*, in the year 1916
- 6: The Great War memory exhibition, called *Ehrenhalle*, in the year 1917
- 7: The History of the Great War exhibition, called *Kriegsgeschichtliche Sammlung*, in the 30^s of the 20th century
- 8: The History of Masuria and Giżycko (germ. Lötzen) exhibition, called *Masurische Zimmer* and *Dr. Hess von Wichdorff Zimmer*, in the 30^s of the 20th century
- 9: The archaeological exhibition, called *Vorgeschichtliche Sammlung*, in the 30^s of the 20th century
- 10: Manifesto of establishing the *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle Lötzen Ostpreußisches Weltkriegsmuseum*
- 11: The abandoned seat of the *Vaterländische Gedenkhalle*, in the year 1950