
MUSEUM OF OCCUPATIONS AND FREEDOM FIGHTS

The building housing the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights is over 100 years old. During World War II, it was occupied by both the Soviet KGB and the Nazi Gestapo. Today the building operates as the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fighters.

The museum houses diverse exhibitions, revealing the wounds inflicted upon Lithuania by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Various exhibits tell stories of the forced exile to Siberia and labor camps, mass executions of the Jewish population, the resistance fight that continued after the

end of World War II, and other anti-Soviet activities carried out by Lithuanians. In the basement of the museum, visitors can also look into the terrifying legacy of the KGB and see the infamous interrogation cells and the execution chamber where many resistance fighters were tortured and killed. Being one of the most visited museums in Lithuania, the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights was visited by more than 83,000 visitors in 2017. It is also a center of scientific research, with more than 100,000 documents in the vaults of the museum and researchers actively working toward making them public in books, exhibitions and educational opportunities.

The inside of the museum reflects the darkest period of Lithuanian history during World War II. The NKVD (later- the KGB) “inner” prison, a pre-trial detention center, was set up in the basement in the autumn of 1940, after the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania on 15th June 1940. Since then, its 50 basement cells (only 19 original cells still exist in the present day museum) became the place of inexplicable horrors. Their walls had seen so much and were so badly stained, that the cells had to be repainted many times; now, there are 18 layers of paint.

This prison was turned into an extreme torture and execution machine at the end of World War II and the post-war period, when the Lithuanian resistance fight was still very active. Successful at the beginning, the fighting weakened and was suppressed by NKVD attacks, spies, and treason. More than 20,000 men and women died in active fight which lasted 10 years, and their families were punished and exiled to Siberia. Those freedom fighters who were caught alive ended up in NKVD prison cells. Tortured and mutilated, they were usually killed in the execution chamber. Some were left alive and spent long years in exile and prison

camps. The memory of the resistance fight has never faded away; there are stories about freedom fighters in almost every family. Despite Soviet propaganda attempts to diminish the scale of the resistance fight, it was and still is one of the most inspiring moments in the history of Lithuania. There are resistance fighters still alive who share their experience with schoolchildren. Recently the remains of one of the resistance leaders, Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, were found in an unmarked grave. This is the latest find in the long search for secret mass graves, where victims of the KGB were buried. In 1994, the remains of 767 people shot in the KGB prison from 1944 to 1947 were found buried in mass graves at Tuskulėnai, not far from the center of the town.

More than a thousand prisoners were killed in the **execution chamber** in the basement of the central KGB building between 1944 and the early 1960s. Approximately one-third of them were sentenced to death for participation in the anti-Soviet resistance. Executions were carried out by a special top-secret group, and the chief of the prison himself acted as an executioner between 1944 and 1947. During that period, up to 45 convicts would be killed in a single night.

Cell No 11 has a small exhibition “*For God and the Motherland*” and tells the story of the retaliations against Catholic clergy. Some priests were accused of taking part in the resistance or of rendering support and religious services to freedom fighters, but most were accused of anti-Soviet propaganda. During Soviet occupation approximately 20 percent of clergymen were arrested, deported or killed, and approximately 30 percent of the priests were put under surveillance and their activities were restricted. Regardless of these restrictions, many priests continued their services to Lithuanians in Siberia and Central Asia, participated in the defense of the Church and believers’ rights, and published and distributed underground

publications including *The Chronicle of the Catholic Church*, which for a long time was the only voice heard in the west about the human rights’ violations in Soviet Union.

Cell No 3 still has the engravings on the walls made by the prisoners of Gestapo in 1942–1944. The exhibition in the museum also covers the Nazi occupation, the Vilnius ghetto and the mass executions at Paneriai and other places in Lithuania.

An original monument can be seen on the walls of the museum building: names written on the stone bricks (from Gediminas Avenue). Those names are of the freedom fighters and anti-Soviet activists who were

A MEMORIAL TO THOSE KILLED IN THE BUILDING

tortured and killed by the KGB in the dark prison cells at this very place. The dates of birth and death and different surnames reveal how diverse in age and nationality were those who chose to fight and die for the freedom of Lithuania. Up to this day, the monument is one of the best examples

how historical memory can be incorporated into the landscape of urban architecture. This monument is also a part of the *Vilnius Talking Statues* project, allowing visitors to listen to an artist retelling these horrific stories.

A MEMORIAL OF STONES TO HONOUR THE VICTIMS OF THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

Right next to the museum building, is a very special monument of stones which reminds us of the thousands of lives lost during the Soviet occupation. From 1940 to 1953 more than 120,000 people (with every tenth person being a minor) were exiled to Siberia. Transported in cattle trucks for weeks, many of them died on the way or soon after arrival. In total, at least 28,000 people died in exile – 5,000 children included. The Memorial of stones to honour the victims of the Soviet occupation was created on 14th July 1994, on the anniversary of the “**Day of Grief and Hope**”, marking the beginning of mass deportations to Siberia, when teachers,

public servants, officers, doctors, farmers were sent to the cold, malnourishment, and hard labor. It is likely that the brightest and most forward looking members of the Lithuanian society were exiled to Siberia and other places of exile. Many of them never returned.

In 1994, those who had managed to survive in Siberia brought the stones here from their local fields. A monument was erected by the hands and hearts of the survivors. Every year commemoration services are held here, during which the endless lists with the names of exiles are being read aloud day and night by young and old.