



Napoleon Mateusz Tadeusz Orda (1807–1883), Rietavas manor, the end of the 19th c. Reproduction from the archives of the Regional Cultural Initiatives Center

RIETAVAS AND OGINSKIAI

Rietavas – town on the eastern part of Samogitian hill and on the western part of Endriejavas ridge. Passengers are attracted afar with a sight of the spectacular two-tower neo-romantic white St. Michael the Archangel Church, which was built from the funds of the Duke Irenėjus Kleopas Oginskis.

Rietavas is the municipal centre. It is small (about 4000 residents here live permanently) town with an honourable and old history. Historian Dr. Vytenis Almonaitis in his book "What the Sea Roars", published in 1994, writes "for centuries wooded village neighbourhood was sparsely populated by Curonian and Samogitian tribal periphery".

It is believed that the first Rietavas town spread a few kilometres to the northwest of the current Rietavas, near the mound of the Skroblas village.

In historical archives, Rietavas was mentioned for the first time in 1253, in document signed by the Bishop of Courland and Livonia. Historians S. Zajczkowski and H. Lowmianski in their works state that, in the 13th, Rietavas was an important administrative centre of this region. This is one of the oldest settlements in Samogitia. During the middle ages, it belonged to the Ceklis land.

In the 14th–15th c. Rietavas was one of the main centres of Samogitian defense. In addition, through the village went important trade routes.

Historical sources of 1436 calls Rietavas area as "Rita".

In 16th-the beginning of the 19th c. Rietavas was a state territory. In 1527, Sigismund the Old (1467–1548) writes that Rietavas is a village and a parish centre, which belongs to the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and in 1533 Rietavas has been officially named a city.

There is reason to believe that around the year 1529 in Rietavas may have built the first church (this fact is not documented).

The surviving historical sources indicate that in 1554 Rietavas governor (?) Mark Laurinavičius Vnuè-

ka (died in 1587) converted to Protestantism.

There is no knowledge of how Rietavas mansion was built. It was mentioned in written sources of the 16th century. Then the mansion belonged to the Grand Duke intended vicegerent, where he also lived.

In the manor document dated in 1588, the mansion is said to be owned by King Stephen Bator's (1533–1586) wife, the queen Ona Jagiellon (1523–1596). At that time, the estate area, which was surrounded by fir fence, was near the town. The inventory indicated 14 manor buildings: two small wooden dwelling houses with windows, another small house, six barns, sauna, shed, barn, 2 stables.

During the period 1588–1613 Rietavas elder was the Grand Chancellor, Grand Hetman, Lithuanian Statute III compiler Leonas Sapiega (1557–1633).

In 1590, Sigismund III Vasa (1566–1632) granted Rietavas the privilege to hold markets.

Based on the description of 1611, all the buildings in the Rietavas manor were one story and central residential building – similar to the two ends of the Samogitians landowner. It was a wooden farmhouse with two ends. This house had several multi-purpose rooms. From the porch, the way was into the living room, with four glazed windows, green tiled stove, tables and benches. The floor was made out of wood, except for one room, which was floored with ramming clay. Another building of the manor was covered with shingles and was already starting to collapse. It had seven rooms: the guest room, two living rooms, kitchen, hallway and two rooms without windows. Some windows were glazed, stoves decorated with ordinary tiles. Among this and such houses, stood straw and wooden shavings covered old barn. On one side, people laid grain, on the other – agricultural implements. A fence of sharp stakes surrounded the homestead. Cherry and other gardens grew near the manor. Behind them, in

the west, were the bakery and the distillery.

In 1613, after the death of Leonas Sapiega, Rietavas went to the Voivode of Minsk, Joniškis commander the Duke Aleksandras Masalskis (1593–1643). In the same year, under the rule of A. Masalskis, Rietavas was granted the privilege to collect the customs fare and organize city events.

In 1643 after the death of Aleksandras Masalskis, Rietavas was passed on under the management of one of the richest and most influential at that time Lithuanian nobility figures – the scribe and treasurer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Mikalojus Kiška (1588–1644).

From 1645, Rietavas was governed by the nephew of M. Kiška nephew Jonužas Radvila (1612–1655).

In 1661, under the Seimas decision, Rietavas was sold to the Marshal of Vilnius Povilas Sapiega (1609–1665) for a hundred thousand golden coins. Written sources state that the manor had a wooden porch, two farmed wooden houses, stables with wheels, barn, orchard, gardens, a pond with a mill and other bodies of water. Povilas Sapiega died in Rietavas in 1665.

After his father's death, Benediktas Sapiega (1643–1707) took control of the city.

Since the year 1667, Rietavas Powiat is mentioned in the historical sources.

In 1715, under the privilege signed by Augustus II, Rietavas Elder Mokylas Juozapas Sapiega (1670–1738) took over after Benediktas Sapiega died during the fever epidemic. In the surviving description of Rietavas manor, dated 1718, it is noted that the houses were abandoned, some of its buildings collapsed and are covered by the overgrown ponds, and gardens were abandoned. In earlier dated documents, we can establish the fact that under the previous owners the manor lavished and was taken care of.

In 1721, M. J. Sapiega built a new wooden church in Rietavas when the old one burnt down during the Great Northern War. Rietavas manor was leased to the Brest province Stolnik R. Faustinas Kosciuszko for three years (some sources indicate that it was leased to the Kiev flagger Faustino Benedict Kosciuszko (1672–1754/5). The majority homestead buildings had been repaired; rooms, the distillery and ponds were cleaned, cherry garden replanted.

In 1731, the manor was leased to the Mozyr Stol-

nik Jurgis Konarskis (around the year 1710–?).

In 18th c., after the digression of the local population, a number of Jewish people settled in Rietavas town. By the middle of the 18th c., there was already a strong Jewish community, gathering all Samogitian Jewish families and communities.

In 1732, Rietavas was passed on to the Samogitian Castellan Juozapas Benediktas Skuminas Tiškevičius (1694–1754). Later, Rietavas was ruled by the scribe of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vitebsk Voivode Samogitian Castellan Juozapas Benediktas Skuminas Tiškevičius' (1694–1754) younger brother Jurgis Kazimieras Skuminas Tiškevičius (~ 1701–1765)²⁸¹ and his second wife Lettaw Hanna²⁸².

For a short time, Antanas and Regina Duninai also governed Rietavas.

In 1736, Rietavas was ruled by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth state and military figure Jurgis Kazimieras Skuminas Tiškevičius' (1716–1790) son Juozapas Tiškevičius. In the same year, he became the second governor of Vilnius and married his first wife Benedikta Oginskytė. During this period, Rietavas manor was neglected.

In 1748, owner of Rietavas became K. Demeta (Demiota). In 1750, K. Demeta for a hundred thousand golden coins sold to the Samogitian elder Juozapas Tiškevičius, who bought it to his son, elder of Rietavas Kristupas Skuminas Tiškevičius (1729–1762). He ruled Rietavas manor from 1750 to 1763. During that period, a bigger part of the manor buildings were repaired and rebuilt and a millpond was built. In 1760, a shingle-covered one-hewn logs mansion was built. It had an attic, a large hall, 10 rooms, two porches, porch for two (one on each side). Under the manor there were two vaulted cellar room. The house had oak doors, white and azure tiles were for furnaces. By the manor palace officine stood covered with shingles. It had two rooms, porch, stove; rooms were decorated with brown and purple tile stoves. The manor was surrounded by a garden. Behind the officine was the second folwark; there were bread bakery, icehouse, barn, distillery and sauna in it. In territory, there stood also three piggeries, small stables, livestock barn.

Oginskiai history in Rietavas began in the middle

²⁸¹ Polish researchers wrote that he died in 1735.

²⁸² Lettaw Hanna (died in 1733)

of the 18th century, when Tadas Pranciškus Oginskis married the widow of Kristupas Skuminas Tiškevičius Jadvyda Teresa Zaluska Tiškevičienė (1726–1771). She received Rietavas manor as a wedding gift in 1763. Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis' grandfather Traukai Voivode and Castellan Tadas Pranciškus Oginskis (1712–1783) took control of the manor. At that time, the first T. P. Oginskis wife Izabelė Kotryna Radvilaitė (1711–1761) was already dead.

Total of five generations of Oginskiai ruled Rietavas – from 1763 until the beginning of the 20th century. T. P. Oginskis raised a lot of livestock and poultry in Rietavas. The manor had farm buildings, barns complex that at those times were in the other side of the Plungė road.

From 1767, the town had already organized seven fairs a year.

In 1792, the Four-year Seimas granted Rietavas Magdeburg rights and a coat of arms. The King of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth S. A. Poniatowski confirmed these rights. On the backside of the coat of arms were words "For the nation, the King and Freedom" and a golden lion running with a silver sword in its mouth.

When T. P. Oginskis died, his widow Jadvyga Oginskienė up until her death (1794) ruled the Rietavas manor. Later the manor was passed to T. P. Oginskis' son from his first marriage Pranciškus Ksaveras Oginskis (1740–1814), who was Mykolas Kleopas' uncle. After the second partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, for some time, Rietavas hosts were the Counts Zubovai. What kind of reorganization took place after the manor was passed on to Mykolas Kleopas Oginskis (1765–1833), is not known.

Mykolas Kleopas was a rare guest in Rietavas. Under his ruling the 1817 Rietavas manor and the situation of the town plan has been preserved. At the time, the palace stood in the central part of territory, the eastern side had two officinas, and on the western part were barns, stables and other outbuildings. In unpublished childhood memoirs Mykolas Kleopas writes:

"On my way from Vilnius to Rietavas (in the late November of 1820) I saw how the snowflakes fell and disappeared one after the other onto the Samogitian ground. The weather was misty and cold. Peasants worked continuously in the cold; trembling

from the weather, they could not keep the shovel in their hands. I felt sorry for these people, even though they were strangers to me. When it was left to Rietavas the remaining 90 versts²⁸³, I noticed a number of carriages and men walking on foot. I recognized them – it was peasants sent from my Rietavas manor. Workers approached my carriage. I told the equestrian to stop. People were begging for mercy because they died of hunger and fatigue. They wept like children and with bitterness complained that there are about 90 versts from their homes and they were not allowed to return there for about six weeks. During that time, they already have eaten all their food stocks. In Rietavas I learned that there were 150 chariots used by the transport of materials accompanied 300 people and those them.

Rietavas land holdings were densely populated. Of what that took place there, cannot be called otherwise than barbaric, because people were forced to live and work in slave-like conditions.

I started to give the money, which at the time I had with me. They wept in gratitude and joy. They had hope that maybe with the money they could see their families again.

Immediately after I reached Rietavas I wrote a letter to the Head of the District, requesting that my peasants would be returned as soon as possible.

Thinking about the sad things I have seen, I continued my trip through Rietavas. Samogitian roads in many places went through the clayey areas. Clay, mixed with the soaked ground, turned into mud, where the horses would sink to the abdomen. My carriage, pulled by six horses, had been often stopped to rest the horses.

That was what the roads, which were soaked in people blood, were like.

A few days after I arrived in Rietavas, I saw peasants returning. They hardly had the strength to stand on their own. Some were injured with frostbitten feet or other fever, and the suffering they endured marked all the pale faces. Part of the horses was dead, and those returned could barely stand on their four legs. This example shows how it was treated with Samogitian landlords and their people who had neither shelter nor care."

When in 1814 under the Tsar Alexander I decree Rietavas eldership was sold to M. K. Oginskis for

²⁸³ Verst is equal to 1,067 km.

277,600 silver roubles, he paid only a part of that amount right away. Later M. K. Oginskis annually had to pay part of the debt and pay the interest. In 1818–1819, he paid neither the debt nor the interest.

In 1822, preparing for his trip to Italy, M. K. Oginskis Rietavas manor wrote to his wife, Maria de Neri-Oginskienė and children Amelia, Ema, Ida and Irenėjus Kleopas.

Maria de Neri ran his manor while he was in Italy and St. Petersburg. It was difficult in the short time left to settle the debts, so during the second Mykolas Kleopas departure to live abroad, she appealed to the Tsar, asking for preferential conditions for payment of the debt. The Tsar granted her request, allowing the payment of the debt within 12 years, starting with 1824.

However, because of her fragile health she had to return to Italy, so she passed on the manor to Mykolas Kleopas son Irenėjus Kleopas. E. Ravickienė in her book "Centuries Trails" (Klaipėda, 1997, p. 66) writes that to "Rietavas parish belonged 52 300 tithes of land, Rietavas, Endriejovas, Veivirpėnai towns, 93 villages, 1200 farmsteads and 9200 peasants."²⁸⁴

Mykolas Kleopas' son Irenėjus Rietavas manor chose as the main residence and moved here together with his children Bogdanas and Mykolas from their residence in Zalesye. At the beginning of the 19th c., Rietavas played an important role of science, culture, technology; it was the centre of techniques, which contributed the country's progress.

Irenėjus and his wife Olga Kalinowska redecorated the main manor building and built a neo-romantic style church. The design work was entrusted to the architect S. Blek. The main construction work has been completed in 1850.

The new neo-style stone houses stood almost at the same spot where stood the old wooden palace. Beside there was built an office building. This building as well as the palace had beautiful, same height, similar proportions, horizontally decomposed towers. These towers differed only in the form: palace tower was octagonal, administration building – square.

Of the surviving written sources central building layout and interior view was restored. They were exceptionally ornate and beautiful as suggests Napoleonas Orda Rietavas, who created the manor drawing

at the end of the 19th century. The palace held more than 20 rooms and halls. Floors in many places were made from oak parquet and ceilings were decorated with moulding; the walls were decorated by punctured cloth. On the left side of the palace, there was a large banquet hall. In the Knights' Hall Oginskiai family held an exhibition of weapons collections from the various eras. Rietavas nobility gathered family portraits, four of which were very big and 22 smaller ones.

Archaeological mineral collection, consisting of the minerals found in Samogitia and other places of Lithuania, as well as the palace archive could have been found in the library. The palace had several salons. One of them was called the Yellow one. Here both the furniture and the upholstery were yellow; the ceilings were also painted yellow. The room was decorated with maple and ebony oak mosaic parquet and English tile fireplace. Next to it was the Blue salon. Its huge, multi-glazed glass doors were seen from the conservatory.

The manor was famous for its deer antlers sitting area, which furniture was brought from Amsterdam in 1857. The palace had also representational rooms, bedrooms, a small dining room, gorgeous billiard room. Its doors and parquet were made from ash wood, two glass windows 16 panes of glass, walls covered with pink wallpaper that in 1857 were changed to blue. The room was nice billiard table cell with canaries, gilded candlesticks, and a small statue of Napoleon. Gold accented framed mirrors and expensive watches adorned many of the palace rooms. Everywhere you looked, you could feel the luxury. Even the dishes were decorated with coats of arms and monograms of the relatives.

After the construction of the new palace, the old entrance to the palace was left in the same place – over the milldam. The newly designed area opened as a flower garden. Much later, the old trees growing in ponds were trimmed off this way opening a view from the palace to the town centre. The two-storey officine was built on the site of the old wood-storage. During the Oginskiai time, a Volost board held their meetings there; manor and Volost treasuries were also established there. Near the central building, stood beautiful two-storey stone manor artisans house, next to it was the building for the Vaitas. On the west side of the homestead stood stone brewery and stables, near the

²⁸⁴ E. Ravickienė, *Dimtmeišio takai*, Klaipėda, 1997, p. 66.



pond – a stone mill. The entire area was fenced by homestead brick wall. The manor had two accesses through gates, which were decorated with bronze statues of lions. On the road to Plungė Oginskiai built a small stone chapel. In 1848–1849, a park of 83 hectares was formed surrounding the entire manor. It was "created by the Ferdinand Gypelt from Saxony, Frederick Brown and Hungarian subordinate August Ulrich." (E. Ravickienė "Centuries Trails", Klaipėda, 1997, p. 67).

At the eastern end of the palace there were at that time the richest in the Baltics winter garden (conservatory), in which for more than 200 rare species of plants, including subtropical have been cultivated. The winter garden was connected with the officine by the glazed gallery. The homestead was full of greenery, flowers. Buildings, parks, gardens and kitchen gardens were well-maintained and kept up to date.

When Rietavas manor and the town centre were redesigned, I. Oginskis turned his attention to the new city stone church, draft of which was already prepared for construction works. In 1846, he turned to the bishop of Telšiai asking for permission. In 1850, the church building committee (the chairman Irenėjus Oginskis) was created. Church construction started in the 1853 – on the 9th of June, bishop Valanėius consecrated the cornerstone of Rietavas church altar.

In the summer 1853, Rietavas celebrated Irenėjus Kleopas Oginski's son Bogdanas Pranciškus (1848–1909) name giving. Irenėjus Oginskis, as we mentioned before, renewed Rietavas fundamentally.

From 1863, after his death, his second wife Olga Kalinowska-Oginskienė took over the manor, and after her death, his sons – Bogdanas and, before settling in Plungė, Mykolas.

During the Bogdanas ruling, the manor had some new buildings, the old part was renovated, and the town has developed in the industry. In 1872, large reconstruction works of the conservatory took place, since the fire at that time burned a big part of the ceiling. In the last decades of the 19th century, disasters started pursuing Rietavas central manor. One night, the palace caught fire when the servants were making alcoholic beverage *krupnik*. That time a large part of the library was destroyed, nevertheless, the palace was restored.

In 1902, Bogdanas Oginskis' brother Mykolas

Oginskis died. Bogdanas with his relatives began to sue for his legacy. During that time, Bogdanas' health problems started to show up. He failed to overcome the tension and fell ill with severe mental illness. For this reason, Rietavas music school and Rietavas symphony orchestra were closed in 1903.

Bogdanas Oginskis died in 1909. He was buried near the manor in the family chapel-mausoleum.

In the same year, Rietavas palace caught fire again. No funds have been found to restore it.

After Bogdanas' death, his wife Maria Potulicka-Oginskienė took care of the manor but she could not deal with the entrusted duties and the manor began to deteriorate, the park was left abandoned.

Documents, dated 1911–1912, state that the manor is in bad condition, in some places the ceiling began to rot.

Bogdanas had no children, and by laws of that time, his manor was divided to his relatives. According to the court's decision, the last Rietavas manor hosts were assigned Maria Potulicka-Oginskienė, Visockiai, Juozas and Karolis Zaluski.

Shortly after the division of the manor, Maria moved to Austria (now the Polish territory) and settled in the Bobrek manor. She died in 1927 in Potulice (Poland) at the age of 74 years old.

When in 1915 Kaiser German army occupied Lithuania, Rietavas mansion was looted, many valuable items, musical instruments, art works were taken to Germany. Even the copper roof of the palace was torn off and swans, pheasants lived in the park were shot. At that time, the palace was even promised as a gift to the German General Staff chief Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934). With the lack of true supervision, the palace wearied out.

During the war, the children broke the windows of the palace leading to destruction of the palace interior – everyone tried to take everything that had any kind of value.

After the war and the land reform, Rietavas manor buildings were expropriated – in 1924, became the state property. In 1926, the central part of the manor was passed on to the Lithuanian Catholic Women's Association. During this period, the music school building became the girls school of agriculture, musicians' dormitory – gymnasium, after that – the elementary school, a former brewery were transformed into stables. The ma-



nor house and the park were under no one's supervision.

In 1926, during the Land reform, the manor was officially divided. The manor owners have been left with only 80 hectares (homestead, the park and its former forest part).

In the same year, 1926, Lithuanian Catholic Women's Association for 20.000 LT sold the palace at auction to Povilas Jurgaitis, property owner from Budriai village. Under his directions, the palace was demolished and the bricks were sold as building material for the townspeople and settlers. Intellectuals learned about the horrific Rietavas palace destruction and publicly complained, but they did not receive any support – in 1927 the central manor building was destroyed and the park over time had been completely deserted. They kept destroying the manor ensemble and the following years, especially during the Second World War.

To our day only those buildings that had supervisors had remained. In particular, the historical Oginskiai Music School building, where is now settled the Oginskiai Cultural History Museum of Rietavas. Survived to our days are the Bogdanas Oginskis music school dormitories, built in the 19th century, officine building (building from the middle of the 19th c.), brewery-laundry (building from the second half of the 19th c.).

One of the most striking architectural highlights of the manor – a water tower built by Oginskiai, survived as well. In the street called after the Oginskiai stands the house of a former worker of the manor, which by locals is often called "krypiauna". During the Oginskiai ruling, all of the 60 hectares of the park area was surrounded by 2-meter high fence. Today only its fragments remain – the White and the Red Gate – and near to them (from the side of the church), guard hut still stands (built in the 19th c.) Former manor officine now operates as Rietavas hospice, in the former brewery-laundry-water tower private apartments were established, different companies now manage the first and the second house, some space was left for the municipal administration offices, in the restored part of the mansion Rietavo culture, business and tourism centre is running.

Near the road to Plungė Oginskiai family built a stone chapel – a mausoleum (supposedly built by the architect Leon Bukno (Leon Boucneau) and is now restored by the architect Pivilė Maėionienė's design. Although experienced many hardships, Rietavas manor park survived to our days. At one time, it was doomed to destruction. The Soviet economy Rietavas Technical School building complex deteriorated the area: educational housings, residential buildings and hostels built in 1971–1975 in the former territory of the manor. During these constructions, not only the architectural image of the manor was destroyed but also the western water park access system was damaged. In the 70's of the 20th c., the intellectual society began to protest against the destruction of the cultural heritage left by Oginskiai family.

Oginskiai Memorial Chapel was defended from the barbaric destruction. During the 1973–1976 with some initiative people began cleaning the Mill Pond from the construction waste and other garbage, repair works for the ruined park protective wall along the Plungė and Oginskiai (at the time they were called Nation and Komsomol streets respectively) started to take place.

In 1975, a long-term B. Oginskis music school building rescue campaign was initiated.

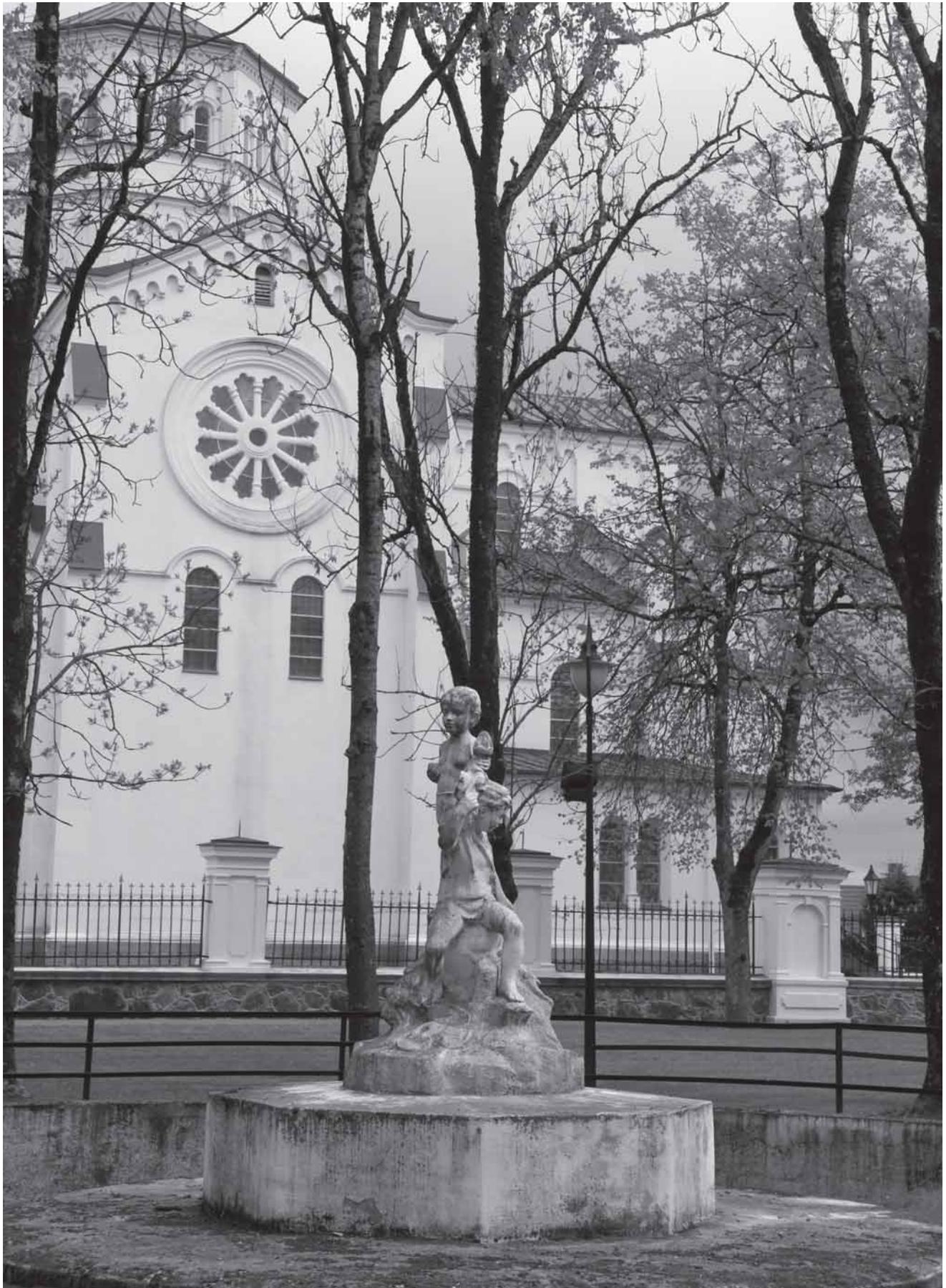
During these activities pre-war period Rietavas high school students – theater fan Adolfas Liaugaudas, ethnographer Justinas Kontrimas and Professor Romanas Chomskis played a vital role in the society's eyes. Most of them by that time lived in Kaunas. Thanks to them, intellectuals were joined not only from Rietavas, but also from Vilnius, Kaunas, Plungė, and Palanga.

In those days, Lithuanian Cultural Fund established Rietavas Club "Pilalė" importance was exceptional.

In 1990, "Pilalė" ensured that the abandoned B. Oginskis Music School restoration works were carried out. The building of the music school was left in the emergency state. To the rescue came intellectuals gathered by Vytas Rutkauskas – they joined their forces and established restoration fellowship called "Rietuva". It took great effort to correct the mistakes that the pseudo restorers worked before had left defect.

"Rietuva" also had to carry out basic and other objects of the manor restoration and rehabilitation







Rietavas (26-09-2015). Photo by Mykolas Juozapavičius

work, when, in 1991–1992, began the preparation for Lithuania's first power plant 100-year anniversary. In that year, the celebration was held in the territory of the former palace: southern part of the colonnade was restored, Ground floor fountain was resurrected from the ruins, the northern part of the white gate and the water tower facade were restored as well. Implementation of this program has become a key turning point in Rietavas Genius Loci – return of Oginskiai cultural heritage.

The success came in large part due to the fact that the program of the Organizing Committee was headed by an extraordinary personality – the first independent Lithuanian Energy Minister Prof. Leonas Aðmantas and his deputy Saulius Kutas. JSC "Lithua-

nian monuments" specialists, led by the director Alfonsas Jocys and Klaipėda's electricity network staff (director Vytautas Girdvainis), designers Kęstutis Linkus, Nijolė Dvegþdienė, architect Algirdas Þebrauskas, sculptor Regimantas Midvikis and Rietavas residents had to give up a lot of their time and effort that the restoration works could have been successful.

In 2000, Rietavas city municipality was restored. Its council positively evaluated the work that has already been done and decided to set up the Oginskiai Cultural History Museum of Rietavas, which is housed in a restored B. Oginskis music school. This was yet another important step in actualizing Oginskiai cultural heritage and rallying the society for a new meaningful work.