

8 Conclusion

8.1 Summary

The outstanding importance of the Steinort landscape park can be summarized with following considerations, see Fig. 19a:

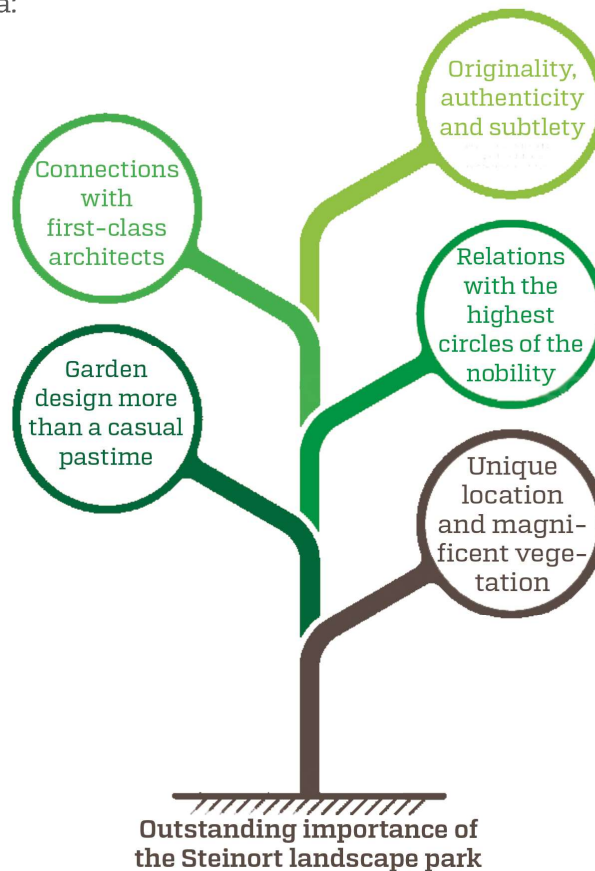


Fig. 19a: Aspects of the Steinort landscape park's importance

1. The Lehndorffs were intertwined with the highest circles of the nobility.

One aspect is the numerous contacts of the family with the highest circles of the nobility, especially Prince Heinrich (1726-1802) and Prince Ferdinand of Prussia (1730-1813) as well as Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770-1840). Those nobles had a strong interest in garden design and architecture. Through marriage, the Lehndorffs gained access to the most important aristocratic houses. The Schmettau, Dönhoff, Schlippenbach and Hahn-Basedow families were particularly influential in the exchange on horticultural topics. But there is also a political dimension to the Lehndorff family. Besides their high positions in the Prussian state apparatus, their involvement from the 19th century onwards included the Stein-Hardenberg's reforms, the liberation wars and above all the assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler in 1944. Steinort is thus a unique cultural symbol for the Masurian, Polish, German and European history of this region.

2. The Lehndorffs had connections with first-class architects.

The contacts in the highest political circles as described above were the basis for connections to first-class architects of the 19th century. In parts, there is even evidence for such connections as with Stüler, and others seem extremely probable, as for example with Lenné to whom the connection existed via Countess Anna, born as Hahn-Basedow. Even today, Steinort park exhibits clear signs of the work of an experienced architect. The natural effect of the landscape park is based on a subtle composition with skillful visual relationships and arrangements. This composition with its

deliberate deviations seems to just shine through without missing the effect. Based on the motto: „Oaks and beeches form the best base color“³⁵⁵, which also found its way into the „Lehrbuch der schönen Gartenkunst“ of 1873, woody plants were tactfully placed. Despite the sheer amount of newly available plants in the 19th century, Steinort did not end up a disjointed arrangement of fashionable shrubs. Discreet color and shape contrasts, for example, were only applied for subtle accentuation and orientation purposes. Around 1820, a garden plan was drawn up for a landscape garden whose forms had an anglicized Lenné structure. However, the plan did not survive the turmoil of the Second World War. How and when this plan was implemented eventually is unknown. Only a map from 1862 gives clear indications of such a redesigned landscape garden.

The following relationship results from points one and two:

3. For the Lehndorffs, garden design was more than a casual pastime.

The third point is rooted in the interests of the Lehndorff family. Those included, among other things, horticulture and garden design, a subject that was already widespread at the time, but went beyond the usual scope. Especially through the acquaintance with Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801), the Prince-Bishopric of Warmia, there was a constant exchange about the design of landscape gardens. This took place in the context of theories, such as those of Hirschfeld, as well as through the exchange of seeds and plants. The practical side of horticulture saw further improvements in the first half of the 19th century through the study of modern agricultural methods. It seems likely that Karl Friedrich Reichsgraf von Lehndorff (1770-1854) advanced the design of the landscape park decisively, especially from 1832 onwards, the year when he finished military service. Until his death in 1854, he occupied himself with many questions, such as the creation of park-like gardens also in areas with less available space than in English ones, rules for the creation of lawns, for excavations and for the creation of water areas, the creation and maintenance of living enclosures, the transplantation of large ornamental trees, the grouping of the same and the best mix of trees, the connection of larger gardens by integrating the surrounding fields as well as basic rules for the beautification of landscapes.³⁵⁶ The latter part of the sentence refers to the basic idea of beautifying the countryside, which Lenné implemented by enhancing entire landscapes.

4. The Steinort park exhibits a high degree of originality, authenticity and subtlety.

The presented work concludes that the Steinort landscape park was completed by 1862 at the latest. It can be assumed that the redesign began in 1852. If Lenné has taken over the design of the park, the Steinorter Park can be placed in the third phase (1860-1860) of Lenné's creative period. The Pleasureground was designed on a regular geometric basis, while the parts of the park remote from architecture were seamlessly integrated into the adjoining landscape.

After this zenith, the estate was more and more neglected until around 1900 when it came under the control of a provisional administrator. Due to the financial situation, valuable trees, above all the magnificent oaks (*Quercus spec.*), were cut down, but the basic structure of the park itself has been largely preserved. The park also survived both world wars relatively well and was to be preserved in place of the completely ruinous properties at Schlobitten and Friedrichstein. Due to the lack of continuous maintenance, the park is now largely savaged. What is left of the old structure, however,

355 MEYER 1873, p. 106.

356 VVBG 1842, p. 72.

is still preserved in its original form; a true treasure which is in urgent need of immediate attention. The park combines different styles to form a homogeneous entity. Baroque structures were incorporated into the landscape park and were combined with Neoclassicist and neo-Gothic elements.

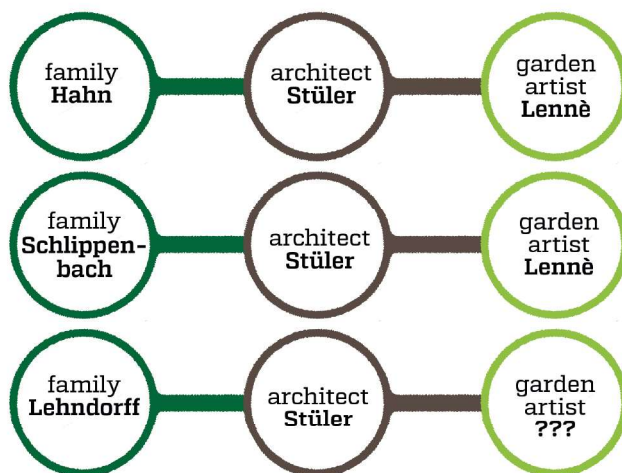


Fig.: 20a: Relationship between the Lehndorff family, their architect and garden artist

5. The final aspect is the unique location of the Steinort landscape park.

In the 19th century, there were a multitude of charming country castles, grand mansions and remarkable farm buildings all over East Prussia, and their surrounding parks blended in with the landscape harmoniously. Steinort with its size of around 6 600 ha and its picturesque location on the largest peninsula of the Masurian Lake District has an extraordinary significance standing out from similar regions in East Prussia. It is also important to mention that the traditional use of the lake, mainly for forestry, agriculture and livestock farming, has been largely continued to this day so that the general structure has been widely preserved. Not less important is the magnificent vegetation, especially the mighty and still numerous Steinort oaks (*Quercus spec.*). They were described by the German Dendrological Society after a visit in 1921 as follows:

„[...] huge old oaks in large numbers, *Quercus pedunculata* [...] with enormous crowns due to solitary positions. [...] The Steinort oaks alone are worth the trip to Masuria for every nature lover“³⁵⁷

The following section summarizes the urgency for prompt preservation measures in Steinort: The water level of the lakes surrounding the Steinort peninsula is apparently higher today than it was in the 19th century. As a result, trees and shrubs that are less tolerant against waterlogging are disappearing, most of all the old Steinort oaks (*Quercus spec.*) whose loss is greatly accelerated by this. Furthermore, forests become marshy and ultimately change their function and shape. The fragmentation of the originally very large property is equally problematic. The PNF only owns the castle, the mausoleum and a few meters of adjacent green space. The protected areas are equally fragmented. Unclear ownerships and insufficient controls of the property leave room for illegal logging which as well affects the invaluable Steinort oaks (*Quercus spec.*) endangering an irretrievable cultural and natural heritage. Countess Marion Dönhoff³⁵⁸ commented on this with the following poetic lines:

„Landscape is more important and certainly more influential than anything else. At the end of the day, it belongs to nobody anyway; if anything, maybe just to someone who is able to love without

357 SCHWERIN 1921, p. 17.

358 Cousin of Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff-Steinort (1909-1944).

making any claims.³⁵⁹

Fortunately, the necessary commitment to rescue Steinort is growing continuously thanks to Prof. Andrzej Tomaszewski (1934–2010), Prof. Gottfried Kiesow (1931–2011), Prof. Dr.-Ing. Wolfram Jäger and Dr. Peter Schabe, but also all the volunteers of the cultural project „STN:ORT“³⁶⁰ restoring some of the castle's cultural dignity even in its unrefurbished state.

8.2 Results of the work

The presented work is based on an extensive pool of historical materials. As the Lehndorff family archive was divided before and during the Second World War and as it was not always possible to ensure proper storage, it is in a condition that is sometimes difficult to read and seems arbitrarily spread across the three main archives in Leipzig, Allenstein and Berlin. Consequently, it was not possible to review and transcribe all of the material. The majority of the sources listed here come from the Leipzig State Archives. This archive holds a considerable number of letters from the Lehndorff family. Besides these letters, numerous diary entries were evaluated as well. The authors of these letters and diaries often assumed that many things were known to the relatives who may have read them. This made the classification of the contents all the more challenging. Due to personal views in those sources, it was difficult to verify their objective content.

In the course of this work, an in situ inspection was carried out as well. However, an inventory of the current situation would have exceeded the scope of this work. For further details, please refer to the NID study instead.

The transcriptions were accompanied by analyses of historical illustrations and maps from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In order to compare the findings with the family history, a family tree was created for this work including the most important family connections. A short chronicle gives an overview of events and also provides general historical background information about each period. Despite extensive research, it was impossible to find aerial photographs from the time of the Second World War.

In preparation for this work, existing studies about Steinort were reviewed, but since most of them were written in Polish, they needed to be translated into German. So this work closes the gap between existing studies which primarily focused on the Baroque period on the one hand and the development of the Steinort park in the 20th and 21st century on the other hand.

8.3 Outlook

Another important point with regard to Steinort would be an examination of the water problem, as the persistently high water level can cause considerable damage to the historic trees. It would also be interesting to compare the park with other landscape gardens of the time, for example Basedow and Schmolainen, the summer residence of Bishop Krasicki of Warmia, as Krasicki not only had a harsh opinion on baroque landscape ideals, but was also in constant exchange with numerous noble families, including the Lehndorff family.

Krasicki's saloon was an attraction both for Eastern European society and for demanding travelers such as the later Tsar, Grand Duke Paul of Russia, or Prince Henry. Also the names of the Schrötters,

359 DÖNHOF 1979, p. 9.

360 Comp.: <http://stnort.org/de/home-de>: date 3.07.2019.