

VOLUME LXXVI

NUMBER FIVE

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1939

Forty Pages of Illustrations in Full Color

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With 26 Illustrations

WILLIAM and ALICELIA FRANKLIN

PUBLISHED BY THE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
HUBBARD MEMORIAL HALL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

\$3.50 A YEAR

50c THE COPY

HISTORIC DANZIG: LAST OF THE CITY-STATES

BY WILLIAM AND ALICELIA FRANKLIN

"CRISIS or no crisis, we must see Danzig!" With this firm resolve calming our political jitters we boarded the Corridor Express in the eventful summer of 1939 for a plunge into the troubled area of the Free City of Danzig, last survivor of a long line of city-states.

From Athens and Venice to Bremen and Riga, every independent secular city of the past had long since struck its colors before the rising tide of modern states. Except Vatican City, Danzig alone, until September 1, 1939, when it was made a part of the German Reich, still flew its own flag, issued its own money, and made its own laws. Danzig was a living relic of bygone days, and we were determined not to let this historical oddity slip through our fingers.

Across our path lay the Polish Corridor (Pomorze), that 130-mile-long wedge of territory from Thorn (Toruń) to the Baltic which severed East Prussia from the rest of Germany and thereby furnished Poland with a direct approach to her narrow bay window on the Baltic Sea.

For some years after the World War a trip across the Polish Corridor had to be made in locked coaches with the shades drawn, but we found the process surprisingly painless. Behind the barbed-wire frontier at Konitz (Chojnice) our German train ground to a halt, and after substituting a Polish locomotive we again sped on our way, through deep pine forests and rolling hills of rye to the flood plains of the Vistula River and the towering battlements of the Marienburg (page 684).

CRUSADERS' CASTLE—WITH CENTRAL HEATING

The mighty Marienburg (Castle of Mary) is the key to Danzig, past and present. Standing on the very frontier of East Prussia, the fortress dominates the area where according to the Treaty of Versailles the boundaries of Poland, Germany, and Danzig met.* In earlier centuries the significance of the Marienburg for Danzig was even greater, for from this stronghold Danzig received its first military protection as well as its earliest and most char-

acteristic architecture, a form of early Gothic in rough, red brick.

One is surprised to learn that the builders of the Marienburg were none of the usual feudal barons who adorned the medieval landscape, but rather the religious Order of the Teutonic Knights. These were Crusaders, who, after returning from the Near East, turned their energies to colonizing and Christianizing the pagan lands of the southern Baltic regions.

Touring the castle, we were amused to find that the warrior-monks had imported many a Byzantine touch, and, practical-minded, had constructed central heating shafts leading from the basement to all major quarters. Although our guide didn't mention it, we were convinced that here was to be found the real reason for the long waiting list of candidates which the Teutonic Brotherhood boasted of in the otherwise chilly 13th century!

At Marienburg we boarded an antiquated "local" for an hour's ride through one of the world's smallest states. Although the territory of Danzig was only three-fifths the size of Rhode Island, yet the Free City had all the paraphernalia of the giant nations of the 20th century, including its own customs inspectors, looking most imposing with their brass buttons flashing the official seal of their tiny state.

Our particular official bowed stiffly and asked for our baggage. When I indicated all six weighty suitcases, he stared in amazement, glanced furtively in the direction of Mrs. Franklin, and with a sigh of understanding stamped our luggage, sight unseen.

As we rattled along over the lowlands of the Vistula Delta, we thought of the checkered history which had produced this pygmy state—area, 754 square miles; population, 407,000.

A FREE CITY FOR FIVE CENTURIES

Although the boundaries of Danzig were designed in 1919 primarily to give Poland a Baltic harbor, still the idea of a Free City of Danzig was more a resurrection of the medieval past than a pure invention of the postwar years. For approximately five centuries in its early history Danzig had actually been a free and independent city. In spite of its various connections with the Teutonic Order, the Hanseatic League, and the Polish kings, Danzig had always been

* See "Flying Around the Baltic," the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, June, 1938; and the new map of Central Europe and the Mediterranean, sent to members as a special supplement to The Magazine for October, 1939.



Photograph courtesy Danzig Archives

A CITIZEN TAKES THE OATH

This 18th-century print shows a good solid burgher taking the Oath of Citizenship in full regalia. As in other medieval city-states, citizenship was limited to a select few who could pass strict qualifications as to health, wealth, character, and parentage.

able to maintain the authority of its city council of merchant princes.

But long-continued conflicts between Poland and Sweden so weakened the position of Danzig that in 1793 it was annexed to Prussia. From that time Danzig became an integral part of Germany, although Napoleon gave the city an enforced "freedom" of seven years from his Prussian enemy.

At this point our historical ponderings were interrupted by a squeal from our little locomotive, which wished thereby to indi-

cate that we had reached the railway terminal of that freak of history, the Third Free City of Danzig.

ZONING FOR THE PAST

Danzig has a surprising way of impressing the visitor's first glance. Although the city is about as large as Memphis, Tennessee, we found that even the busy railroad station had been built to harmonize with the prevailing architecture of old Danzig. Only the taxis marred the medieval effect of clock tower and rose window. By careful zoning and traditional good taste, Danzig merges imperceptibly into its past. Everywhere we went, even in the major business quarters, we found long rows of magnificent baroque façades with "A. D. 1938" matching

the delicate scrolls of her 1638 neighbor.

Quaint old street names also had been religiously preserved. For example, one of our pleasant rambles through the heart of the city took us from "Holy Ghost Street" through "Cow Lane" and "Parson Lane" to "Bread Counter Street." From there we turned into "Old Horse Lane" and walked down "Thread Lane" and "Street of Nine Eyes" as far as the avenue called "Pepper City."

Strolling through the city, one begins to wonder whether the old Danzigers were



Photograph by Waino © C. Anders & Co.

GERMANY HAS ANNEXED DANZIG, WHOSE TROOPS NOW MARCH FOR THE REICH

Soldiers of one of the city's Nazi military groups parade past the railroad station. Of the 407,000 population of the former Danzig state, about 93 per cent are German. The latest shift of sovereignty is the tenth in 800 years. From 1920 until September 1, 1939, the city and its environs constituted a free state, governed by its own constitution under the League of Nations, but in customs union with Poland.



Photograph by Rene Zuber © C. Anders & Co.

TRAFFIC BETWEEN DANZIG AND POLAND STOPPED AT THE BORDER FOR CUSTOMS INSPECTION

The sign, photographed before the invasion by German forces in September, reads: "Republic of Poland, Border Crossing, Orłowo-Kolibki." No visa was required for passage across this boundary. The truck was carrying freight between Gdynia, Poland's port, and Warsaw, its capital.

extraordinarily religious, or simply reluctant about walking. At any rate, every tiny section of the old city was supplied with at least one ample church, even in pre-Reformation days. Today the array of religious buildings, ranging from Romanesque to Renaissance, and from Catholic to Menonite, is truly astonishing.

Mightiest of all is the Church of St. Mary (Marienkirche), begun by the Teutonic Knights in the 14th century. Subsequent burgomasters, with an eye for comfort if not beauty, have since dotted the imposing nave with their own special pews, cosily heated with enormous Dutch ovens. But the original windows still leap toward

heaven, to lose themselves in groined arches so ingeniously constructed of handmade brick that modern bricklayers can scarcely be found to attempt a job of reconstruction (page 682).

"At least," as a local architect told us, "no contractors of today would give a five-century guarantee!" Artistically considered, the old glass is a disappointment, but one might reserve a quiet smile for the old windows donated by the medieval guilds who saw nothing inappropriate in gently advertising their homely products alongside the Holy Apostles.

Together with a Danzig friend of ours, we panted up the massive, winding steps to



© Hilde Brinckmann-Schröder

DANZIG DAMSELS ON EXCURSION TAKE A THOUGHTFUL VIEW OF THINGS

Jumpers and blouses are of traditional style. Dresses seen on the streets are either quite modern or simple adaptations of the older designs. Genuine native dress is rarely seen.

the dizzy heights of St. Mary's tower. On the way, we stopped to catch our breath and inspect the vertical wooden treadmill where one strong man, like a squirrel in a cage, could toll the heavy bells. At last we reached the summit, atop 248 feet of ancient brick rising sheer from the cobblestone street far below.

THREE-WINDOW MILLIONAIRES

A breath-taking view was the reward of our breath-taking climb; for our horizon lay beyond the Baltic Sea, and at our feet clustered the last of the city-states, with its pointed fortifications and circular streets looking for all the world like a 15th-century engraving. Taking advantage of the panorama, our Danzig friend pointed out some

of the striking characteristics of the old town.

"As you can readily see," began our oracle-friend, "all the old Danzig houses are very narrow in front, but run a long way back from the street. Most of them have only two windows in front, but a few of the most elaborate ones have three. Those houses belonged to the millionaires—the 'three-window men'—who could afford the higher taxation which they had to pay for the luxury of an extra window. Those were the so-called patrician houses of the Uphagens and Steffens (pages 685, 692).

"Space was always at a premium within the old city gates," continued our friend, "but the good burghers were not to be denied their flower gardens; so special

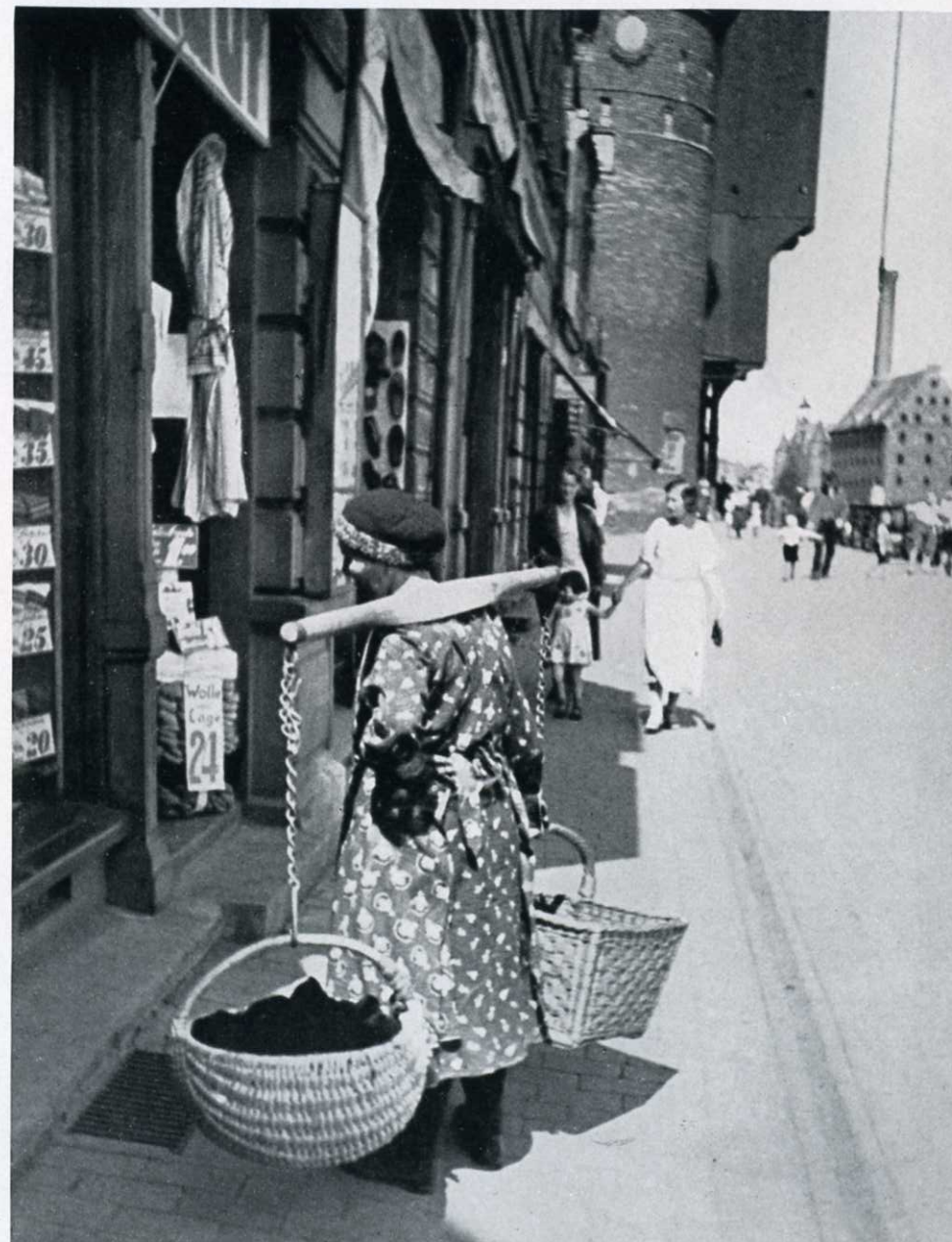


Photograph from William Franklin

HIGH ABOVE NARROW, TIGHT-PACKED DANZIG HOUSES LOOMS THE MAGNIFICENT BRICK PILE OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY



Photograph by Rene Zuber © C. Anders & Co.
DANZIG BOYS FACE THE FUTURE WITH A GRIN



Photograph by Paul Wolff from European
NO CHARGE FOR LOOKING



Photograph courtesy Ferd. Preuss

MIGHTY MARIENBURG WAS A STRONGHOLD OF THE TEUTONIC KNIGHTS, MEDIEVAL CONQUERORS OF PRUSSIA

This picture of the famous church and castle was made from the Danzig bank of the Nogat River, which separated the Free City from East Prussia. From 1309 to 1457 the fortress was the seat of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. At the battle of Tannenberg (1410), the Poles crushed this military brotherhood (page 677).



Photograph by Waro © C. Anders & Co.

NAZI STORM TROOPERS CHAT WITH A POLICEMAN

A high-crowned cap with large metal insignia distinguished the Danzig "cop."



Photograph from William Franklin

A TASTE OF FLANDERS IN DANZIG—THE STEFFENS HOUSE

Heavy taxes were imposed on houses with three windows across the front (p. 681).



Photograph by Pasi from Three Lions

GOLD BRAIDS AND WHITE BLOUSES GLEAM AGAINST AN AGE-OLD PORTAL OF DANZIG'S
SPLENDID CITY HALL

A class of school girls has come out on the balcony to view the venerable coat of arms with its lions.



Photograph by William Franklin

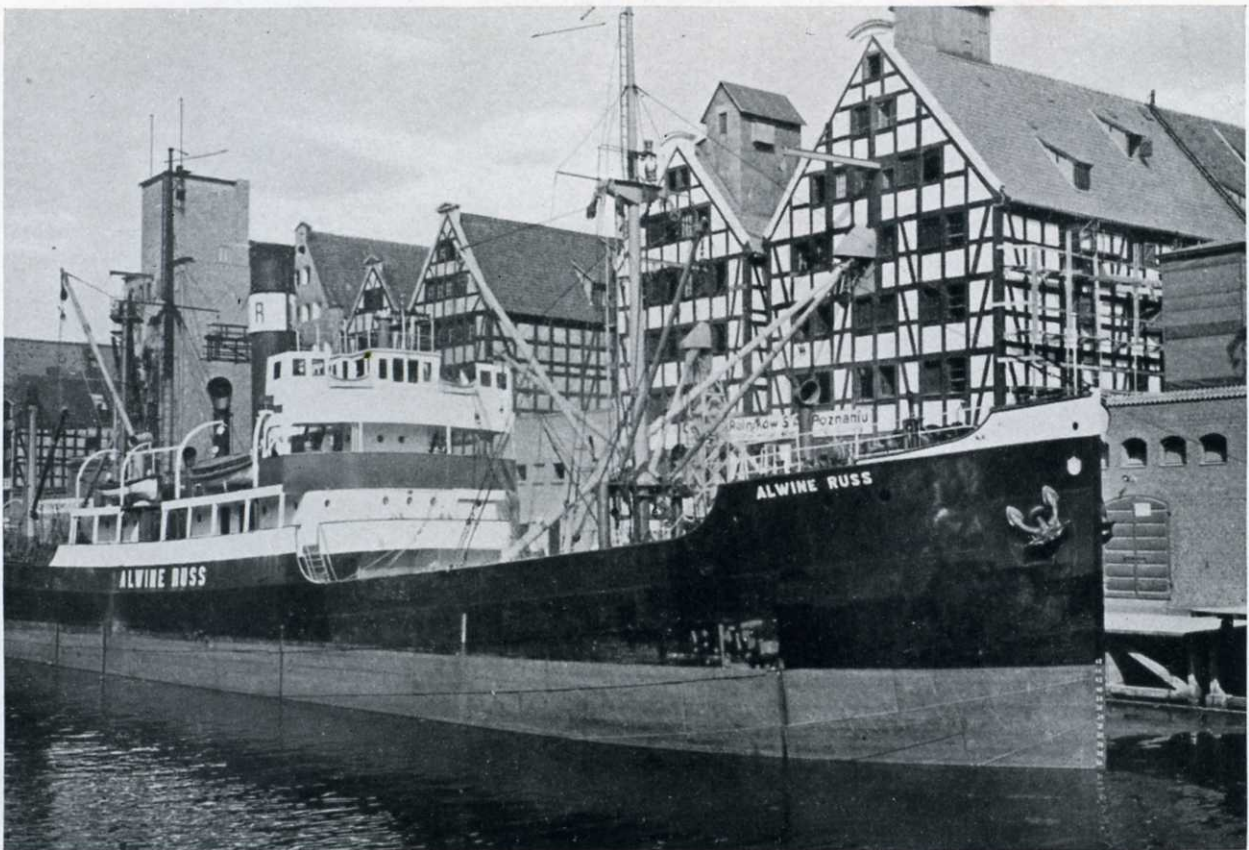
DOWN THE WAYS OF SCHICHAU YARDS SLIDE SOME OF EUROPE'S FINEST SHIPS
Before the World War, this shipbuilding plant turned out a number of Germany's big naval vessels.



Photograph courtesy "Mare Nostrum"

POLES CROWDED GDYNIA'S NAVAL BASE TO WATCH THEIR FLEET IN REVIEW

At the outbreak of hostilities, a few destroyers and submarines comprised the backbone of Poland's fighting fleet. Its base was here in the harbor of the busy Baltic port. Three Polish destroyers joined the British Fleet.



Photograph by William Franklin

WHEAT FLOWS FROM OLD-TIME GRANARIES INTO A MODERN STEEL SHIP

Wooden vessels formerly moored before Danzig's 18th-century timber-and-stucco warehouses and elevators. Then, as now, cargoes were chiefly coal, grains, timber, and wood products.



Photograph by Maynard Owen Williams

DANZIG'S CRANE TOWER IS THE HARBOR'S CHIEF LANDMARK

For six centuries ships have discharged or loaded cargoes within its shadow. Two big tread-mills furnished power for the hoisting machinery. Once the tower was used to drag a wrecked motorcar out of the Mottlau River.

areas were set aside just outside the city walls, where each good family could enjoy its own little plot and sit and gossip of a warm summer evening. The Long Garden and New Garden Streets still mark the sites of these old flower beds."

Little did we suspect that at the old City Hall (pages 686, 694) we would see one of the world's most expensive paintings. Of course, we had expected that the council rooms would be as magnificent as they proved to be, in the ornate style of the High Renaissance and in keeping with the dignity of the wealthy patricians whom even the crowned heads of Europe addressed as "Most noble and dearest friends." But thinking of the fabulous art treasures in many a world-famous gallery, we remained very skeptical about the value of Danzig's alleged prize.

Our guide was positive. "Come this way," he said, "and I'll show you the world's most expensive picture!" With our curiosity now thoroughly aroused, we followed him into a small antechamber where hung a not very distinctive portrait of Napoleon I.

"That's it," he pointed. "You see, Danzig had no choice in the matter. To avoid being wiped out by Napoleon's armies, it was forced to buy this portrait of the Emperor from a French general. The picture alone cost 80,000 gold ducats and the remainder of the tribute totaled almost 40 million marks; so that was certainly the world's most expensive picture!"



Photograph by William Franklin

FOR THREE CENTURIES THE SALMON HAS MARKED THE
HOME OF DANZIG'S FAMOUS DISTILLERY

Here is produced "Goldwasser" (goldwater), a strong, sweet liqueur with bits of gold leaf floating in it.

In the famous Guild Hall, or Artushof (p. 694), we found another painting with as curious a history as one could well imagine. After first showing us the splendid collection of guild trophies, our guide stopped in front of a mural and told us this story:

"A Danzig artist by the name of Anton Möller was hired by the guilds to decorate this panel in 1602, with the plans calling for an allegorical Last Judgment scene. But



© C. Anders & Co.

THROUGH THE GREEN GATE TRAFFIC REACHES THE HEART OF DANZIG

A streetcar and pedestrians cross the Green Bridge over the Mottlau River. Jealously Danzig clings to its medieval character, building new baroque façades to harmonize with old structures (page 678). In the center background loom the tall tower and spires of the Church of St. Mary (page 682); at the right rise steep gables of the English House, the city's finest Renaissance dwelling.



Photograph by Soenneke

OPERA IN THE WOODS—A SCENE FROM "LOHENGRIN"

Justly famed is Zoppot's "Forest Opera," of which the natural setting deep in a forest glade is ideal for presentations of Wagner (page 696).



Photograph by Reinke

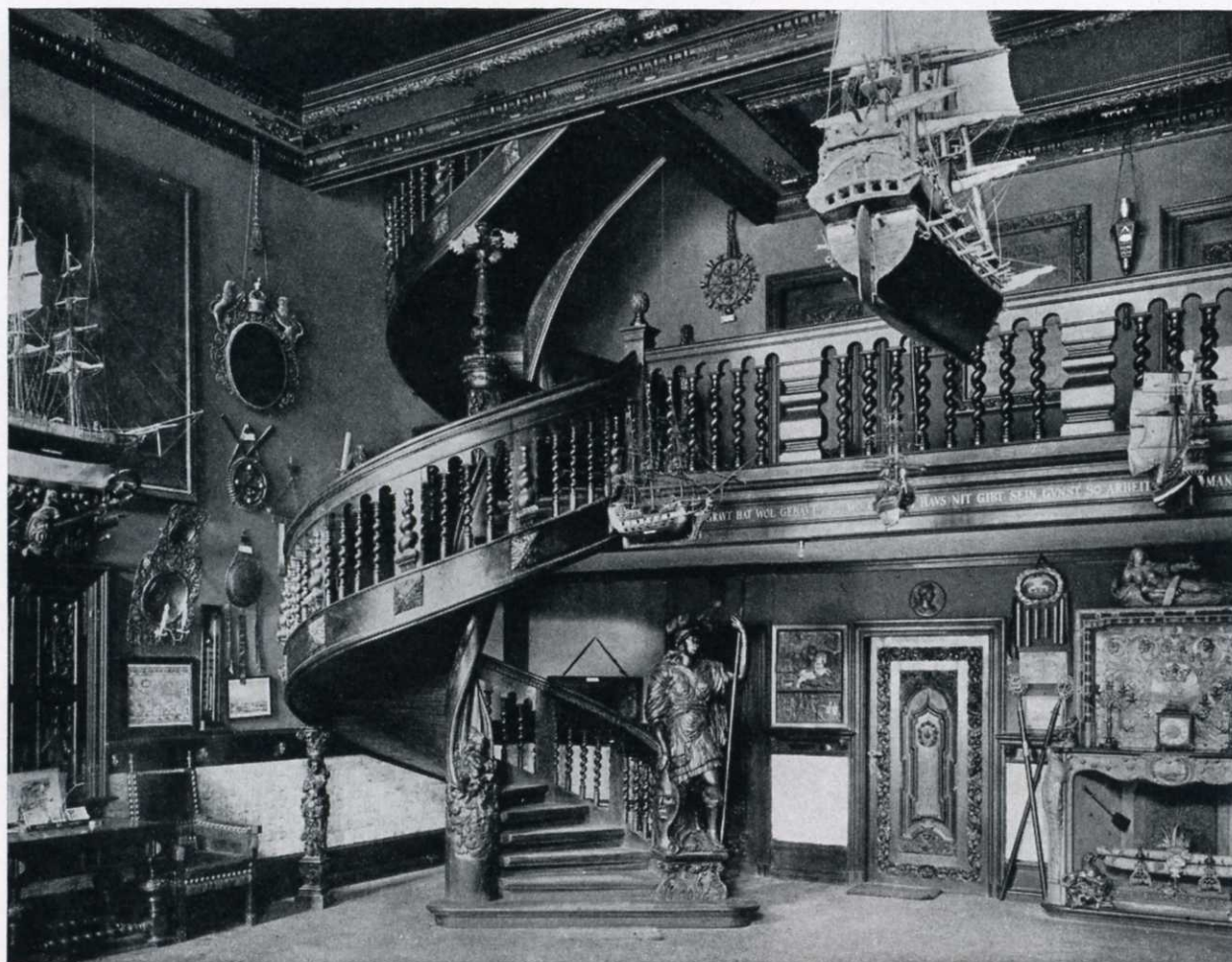
EVEN BASEMENT DOORS BEAR EXQUISITE CARVINGS

Danzig's architecture is noted for its wealth of ornamental detail. Merchant princes employed Europe's best artists and craftsmen to decorate their houses, churches, and public buildings.



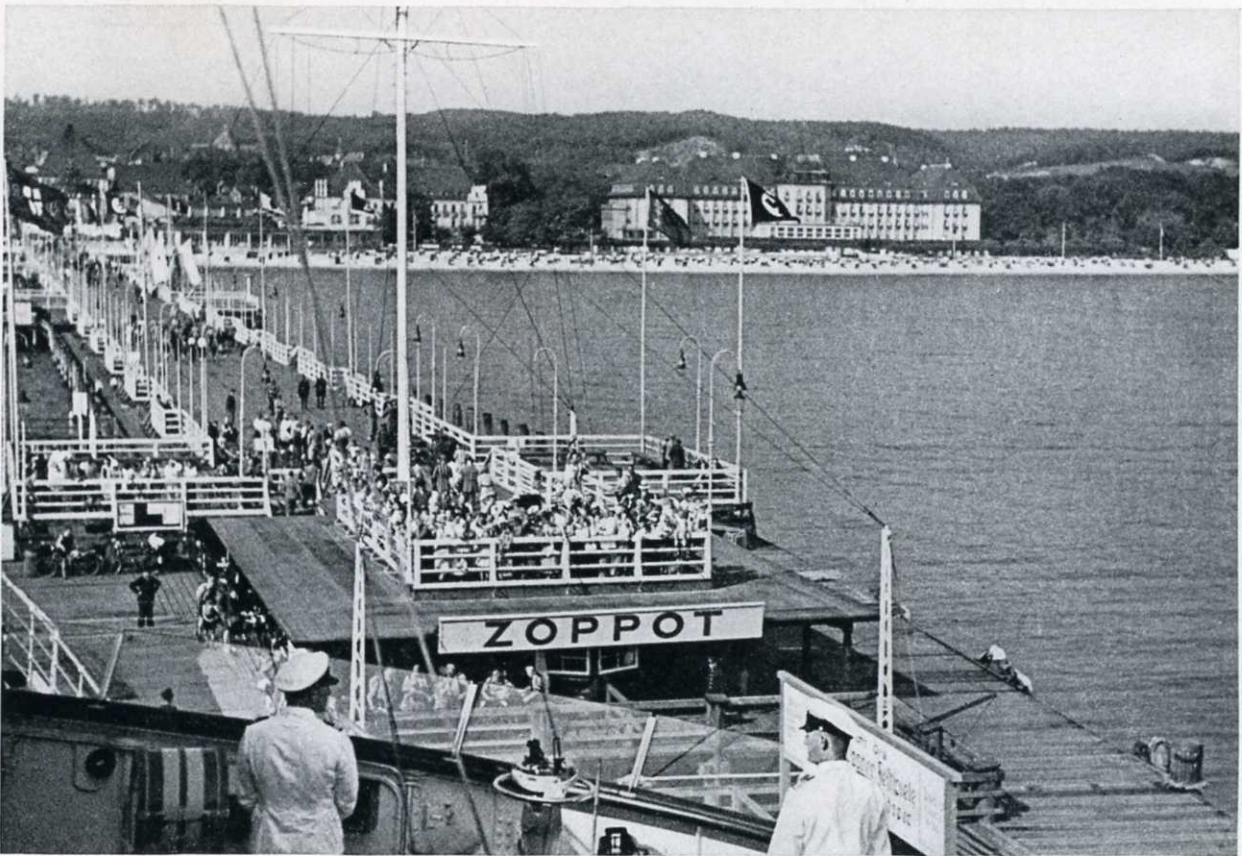
Photograph by William Franklin

"IN HARMONY SMALL STATES GROW AND IN DISCORD GREAT ONES FALL"
So reads the inscription over Langgasser Tor, through which Danzig troops are riding.



Photograph by Berthold M. Hemme

PRICELESS TREASURES OF ART ARE DISPLAYED IN THE DIELE OF DANZIG
The house is preserved as a fine example of the richly furnished old homes of the patrician merchants.



Photograph from William Franklin

A SHIP APPROACHES ZOPPOT, THE REGION'S MONTE CARLO

Beyond the pier jutting into the Baltic Sea lie the beach and Casino of Danzig's second largest city.



Photograph by Pasi from Three Lions

POLISH POST BOXES WERE INSTALLED IN THE FREE STATE

On the card beneath the eagle was printed in Polish and German: "Only for letters to Poland."



Photograph by Waro © C. Anders & Co.

DANZIG BOASTED THIS SKYSCRAPER WHEN MANHATTAN WAS BOUGHT FROM THE INDIANS

The City Hall's slender spire with its chimes has towered above Long Market for 380 years. Through this square have tramped the armies of many nations during Danzig's turbulent history. When Adolf Hitler welcomed Danzig into the German Reich on September 19, 1939, he spoke to Nazi throngs in this plaza from the 15th-century Artushof, or Guild Hall (building above the wagon).

the artist had recently been jilted by the burgomaster's daughter and he consequently got his revenge by painting her as the central figure being carried off to the eternal fires.

"The resemblance was unmistakable and the old burgomaster in a spluttering rage informed the artist that he would have to cover the features of his central figure. Whereupon Möller returned to his work and painted the transparent glass globe which you see around the lady's head, just below the cross which he mercifully added."

"When the city council wrathfully sent him back to change his vengeful masterpiece a second time, the incorrigible artist painted the faces of the city councilors on the sorrowing inhabitants of his snake-infested Purgatory."

Just what then happened to the lover-artist we couldn't find out; though the worthy councilors must have had an unsuspected sense of humor to permit the mural to stay as it was.

LAND BELOW THE SEA

One shouldn't forget that Danzig, the city, was by no means all of Danzig, the state, though the terminology is often confusing. The remainder of the area lay in almost equal halves to east and west of the muddy



© Douglas Chandler

A WROUGHT-IRON EAGLE DECORATES THE CITY HALL



Photograph courtesy Danzig Archives

DANZIG'S OLDEST SEAL—USED IN 1299

Vistula as it rolled north from Poland to the Baltic Sea.

Our first excursion was into the eastern part of the state which bordered on the broad, shallow lagoon called the Frisches Haff.* Strikingly Dutch is the appearance of this flat farming area, most of which lies from two to five feet below the level of the near-by sea. Many of the early settlers were in fact Flemish, and even the Teutonic Knights adopted the Dutch types of dikes and windmills for controlling the unruly Vistula and protecting the low-lying plains.

We were surprised to find that Danzig had not a single bridge over this elevated river which divided the state. Since the only suitable spot for a bridge lay under Polish control at Tczew (Dirschau), 20 miles up the river, the citizen of Danzig had to use one of the three primitive ferries which joined the lifelines of road and railway in his little state.

But far from primitive is the system of flood control along the Vistula. Ever since the 14th century the restless stream has felt the hand of man, with the result that today almost two-thirds of the area which formed the Danzig state owes its existence solely to the man-made levees.

Like the Netherlands' Zuider Zee, the great lagoon of the Frisches Haff has also been forced to beat a steady retreat before the land reclamation projects of the ambitious Danzigers.

SOPHISTICATED ZOPPOT

We returned from our little junket to the sub-sea villages of the Vistula Delta with the impression that the Danzig state was as quaintly primitive a farming area as we had ever visited. But our impression was only half correct, for in the western part we found one of Europe's most sophisticated

* The Haff (*i. e.*, lagoon), lying between Danzig and Königsberg, is 52 miles long, 4 to 12 miles wide, and 310 square miles in extent. A narrow spit, with a navigable channel, separates it from the Baltic. Several rivers flow into the Frisches Haff, so named from one of them, the Frisching.

† See "War Clouds over Danzig and Poland's Port," NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, October, 1939.

‡ The local term for the tributary branches of the Vistula. They have practically no current.

cities. Zoppot, the state's second largest city, boasted a bathing beach, one of the best on the Baltic, a gambling Casino, which sought to rival Monte Carlo, and an open-air opera (page 693).

Better judgment dictated that we should not tarry too long in the palatial Casino with its glittering wheels and laughing crowds. In such an atmosphere immunity vanishes like ice in August and the spreading contagion paralyzes the arithmetic sense. Feeling already slightly under the influence, we fled to the safer ground of grand opera.

Deep in the wooded hills outside of Zoppot we saw a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* which for beauty of setting could hardly be equaled. The curtain of living green with castle turrets against a background of primeval forest would certainly have delighted the romantic heart of the great master of the music drama (page 691).

HARBORS OLD AND NEW

To complete our tour of the Free City with a taste of its ancient harbor, we decided to leave by boat.

Boarding our little vessel at the wharf near Speicher Insel, "Granary Island," we watched the modern freighters loading cargoes from 18th-century warehouses. Down the canal-like Mottlau River we sailed, past the picturesque Crane† and the infinitely mightier cranes of the newer ship-building yards (page 687). At the piers in the so-called "Dead Vistula,"‡ we saw ships from literally all the Seven Seas, for Danzig was still an important export center for coal, timber, and grains.

At the very tip of the deeply indented harbor we saw the last remnant of Danzig's Hansa days: the fort that guarded the heavy-laden galleons which were once the Free City's pride.

As the spires and towers of old Danzig faded into the twilight, we entered a new port and a new world. The new port was Polish Gdynia, captured shortly afterward by the Germans, and the new world was the 20th century whose engineering had enabled Gdynia in its short life of thirteen years to outstrip in commercial importance the last of the city-states, historic Danzig.