

**Material Provided to Esther Rechtschafner
By Petras (Peter) Čeliaskas**

Here is information from an email about life in Sveksna today:

"Sveika (Hi in Lithuanian) Esther!

"23/12/11

"Now I have time to respond your letter. I hope you understand my bad English. I learned this language 60 years ago, so I have all forgotten, now I must use dictionary. I speak Russian and Esperanto well.

"About museum. When I founded it, there were four sections: archaeology and numismatics, history of Sveksna, ethnography and people's art, history of our school. Now other person is working there. The museum is open 5 days in a week and visitors have to pay to enter. In summer there are more visitors and excursions, but now in winter they are not. Majority of excursions of course is from Lithuania, because our small town is very nice.

"Sveksna has 2050 inhabitants, about 100 of this number have university education (teachers, doctors, office-workers, priests), so I am not sole intellectual in Sveksna. In our school (gymnasium) there are two classrooms with 48 computers and pupils are learning to use them. About 70 per cent of pupils in higher classes have personal computers and internet at home. I know few families which have 2-3 computers at home. Since the year 1931 our gymnasium let out 2593 graduates, and 34 of this number became scientists.

"In our schools are teached two foreign languages: the first English, the second Russian.

"Few words about climate. Average temperature is: in January minus 4,9 Celsius, in July plus 17 C, in the year plus 6,1 C. In November comes frost, but in last years the winters are almost snowless.

"I added chapter of my book about Jews (in Lithuanian), but I doubt you can understand it with help of translator.

"Sincerely – Petras"

Here is an email from him asking for permission to use information from my article in his book and giving more information about Jewish schooling in Sveksna:

"26.1.12

"Sveika, Esther!

"Now I am working about history of schools in Sveksna. During 1919-1930 here operated separate Jewish school, later it was made as Jewish class in school of our town. It worked in separate house, there were about 40 - 50 pupils and instead of Saturdays they learned on Sundays. I found names of teachers: Cipe Prisman(aite) 1929-1933, Seifer(yte) 1934-1936, Boruchovic(iene) about 1938-1939. Monika showed me photo which she received from you. May I use it in my new book? And perhaps you know in what year the photo is made also what is the name of teacher in this photo.

"I am waiting your positive reply and sending my best wishes for you -

"Petras"

Here is a copy of his synopsis of the history of Sveksna:

Švėkšna and its environs

Švėkšna (pr. 'Shvekshna) is a small town in Western Lithuania. The settlement is estimated to have been founded shortly after the Battle of Grunwald and the Peace Treaty of Meln (1422), when the menace of the Crusaders' attacks was totally excluded. The town grew and developed on the border with Prussia. The 15th century saw the first mention of a local estate; 1509 is the year when a church was constructed. In the 17th century the town of Švėkšna had a paper mill as well as glass- and powder producing workshops. In 1819 a Lutheran church was also built. Jews at that time made up the majority of the inhabitants. After the Tsarist authorities banned the Lithuanian press, books were smuggled across the border.

In 1820 the huge estate of Švėkšna was divided among the four sons of Jerzy Plater. New palaces in Švėkšna and Vilkėnas were completed, new parks with decorative statues appeared. The Platers controlled Švėkšna right up to 1940.

A large neogothic Catholic church was built in 1905. It had been designed by Karl Eduard Strandmann, a Swedish architect, who had lived in Liepaja and had designed eight churches throughout Lithuania. The Švėkšna church has the shape of a cross, and the three naves are separated by columns. Inside there are eight altars. The central one manufactured in Tyrol, Austria, is the most magnificent (see p.5). This altar is a present of the counts of Plater. The towers are 65 meters high.

A viaduct connects the churchyard with a park (p.7), which takes up an area of 8 hectares. Among the flora the ginkgo and the yew are the most interesting plants. The park is decorated with a sun-dial (p.11), the original of which is in the Louvre, a statue of the Goddess Diana (p.12), and decorative vases. On the other side of the street one can see a statue of St Florian, the patron of firemen (p.12).

In 1925 the town burned down but was soon rebuilt. On the edge of the park the building of a school (Gymnasium) was constructed as well as a Freedom Monument (1928, p.6). Since 1931 the gymnasium has been seeing off numerous school-leavers.

The Second World War brought no damage to the town; the central part with its preserved former sight has been given the status of an urban monument. In order to get a deeper acquaintance of the town's history, one should visit the museum (p.13).

The estate of Vilkėnas is 2 km away. The local park presents the style of a landscape park with some rare plants in it (p.18). Nearby there is an old cemetery, where some outstanding figures of Lithuania's cultural life are