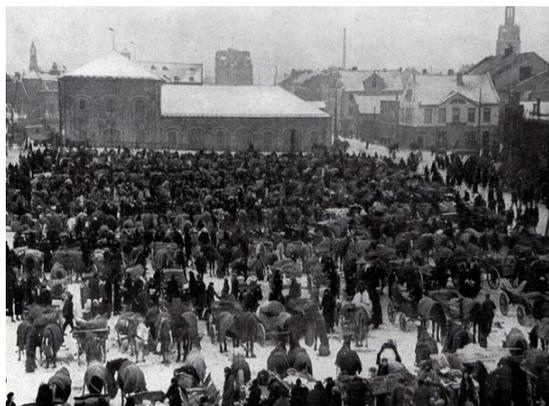


Memel, French Administration (1920 – 1923)

History



Memel Marketplace

1920: After the defeat of the German Empire in World War I, the terms of surrender were ultimately agreed and codified in the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June, 1919. The terms of the treaty required Germany to give up territory to neighbours in Europe as well as all of its foreign colonies in Africa and Asia. In the East Prussia area, a large portion of land would be given to the newly created independent state of Poland, Danzig (Gdansk) would become a Free City and Memel (Klaipėda) was made a protectorate of the League of Nations (although Lithuania occupied and annexed the region in 1923). Allenstein and Marienwerder were allowed to have a vote (or plebiscite) to determine whether they would become a part of Germany or Poland.

To the north, Schleswig would conduct a plebiscite to determine whether it would be part of Denmark or Germany. To the West, Eupen and Malmedy would go to Belgium, Alsace and Lorraine would, once again, become part of France, and Saar would be administered by the French for the League of Nations, and a referendum would be held 15 years later, in 1935 to determine their fate.

To the southeast, Upper Silesia and Eastern Silesia also planned to conduct plebiscites to determine their fate.

Memel (Klaipėda) is a city on the Baltic at the mouth of the River Niemen which for centuries had considerable importance as a trading center. It was part of the Hanseatic League in the Middle Ages before being controlled by the Swedish. After the Napoleonic wars, it became part of Prussia. Memel and the surrounding area formed the eastern boundary of the German Empire and at the end of World War I, was ceded to the Allies who wanted to make it into a Free City.

In 1920, according to the Treaty of Versailles, the German area north of the Memel river was given the status of *Territoire de Memel* under the administration of the Council of Ambassadors, and French troops were sent for protection. During the period of French administration, the idea of an independent State of “*Memelland*” grew in popularity among local inhabitants. This, however, was unacceptable to the government of the new Lithuania, who viewed the area as part of their own.



On 9 January 1923, three years after the Versailles Treaty,

Lithuania instigated the so called Klaipėda Revolt, mainly by militia that had entered from Lithuania. France at the same time had started the Occupation of the Ruhr in Germany, and the French administration in Memel did not take any significant counteractive measures against the rebels. On 19 January, 1923 the territory was annexed by Lithuania, and the fait accompli was eventually confirmed by the Council of Ambassadors in 1924.

Stamps



Initially, seventeen Germania design stamps from Germany were first issued on 1st August, 1920 and overprinted “**Memelgebiet**”. With supplies of these stamps running out, French stamps from 1900 to 1906 were used - the sower design and the “Merson” issue, overprinted “**MEMEL**” and surcharged with Germany currency (first issued on 7th July, 1920).



In total 94 postage stamps and 29 airmail stamps were used throughout the period of French Administration. Subsequently, Lithuanian stamps, overprinted “*Klaipėda*” were used.

During World War II, German stamps, both with and without overprints were used. Subsequently, Klaipėda was absorbed into the USSR. At the present time, Klaipėda is once again a Lithuanian town.