



## ***Restorer's Workshop***

### **DOOR OF THE "RESORT" PUNISHMENT CELL**

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During the interwar period (1924–1940), the division of Kaunas Hard Labour Prison was operating in the Ninth Fort. The three punishment cells remind us of this period: "Resort," "Concrete Sack" and "The Wet." The punishment cell is a small room in which the convicted person was imprisoned for the offenses committed inside the prison. An important element of the punishment cell is the door through which the convict entered and exited. Thus, this time the restorer of Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum is working on the door of the "Resort" punishment cell.

The "Resort" punishment cell is located under a metal staircase, leading to the second floor. It is believed that it was arranged and the door was installed in 1924, adapting the fort, which had lost its military purpose, to Kaunas Hard Labour Prison. There was a wooden bunk in the cell and a container for the calls of nature in the corner. There was no heating; therefore, the prisoner could be deprived of poor bedding as an additional form of punishment, leaving him practically sleepless due to the cold. Lighting was only a weak light bulb in the ceiling. The prisoner was held in the punishment cell from 1 to 7 days.

The door of the punishment cell is rectangular (1.98x61.5 cm), 3.4 cm thick and made from four conifer boards. The door is reinforced and fastened with massive steel strips screwed through the boards. An internal lock with a key is

installed. From the front, the door boards are connected by massive strips of hinges. In addition to providing protection, a crossbar was made from the former security fence element of Kaunas Fortress and attached to the wall, which protected the closed door from being broken from the inside. The crossbar is locked with a padlock or metal pin. The wooden boards of the door are not primed and painted with gray oil paint directly on the wood. On the inside of the door there are surviving inscriptions carved by prisoners: names, surnames and dates.

### **Condition of the door before restoration**

After a detailed inspection, the condition of the door was assessed. It has been determined to be bad: due to the constant moisture in the fort, the decay processes are constant and unstoppable. The metal door elements are damaged by corrosion, covered with a thick layer of corrosion and dirt, smeared with grease, paint, lime and chalk mixture of unknown origin. Some of the metal fasteners have been lost.

The wooden elements of the door are covered with a layer of dust and other dirt that has accumulated over decades as well as sprayed with a mixture of lime and chalk left over from the repair (painting) done earlier. Nails are nailed to the wood, the gaps between the boards are covered with tin elements and wooden boards. The glass that covered the small observation window is lost.

### **Restoration process**

As the door was designed for the prison cell, it was assembled in such a way that it could not be dismantled and following all the security requirements of the time. The wooden parts were connected with metal elements by tightening them with nuts, which tightened very much; therefore, trying to dismantle them, the authentic and unique exhibit would be destroyed. Because of this reason, a more difficult but harmless way was chosen, i.e. to restore it on site.

After assessing the condition of the door, it was decided to remove the layer of accumulated dirt from the wooden surfaces. First, all additional objects were

removed: pieces of tin, wooden boards and nails of various sizes that were nailed without a clear purpose. Then the surface of the wood was cleaned. Large dirt on the paint coating and various additional elements, such as chewing gum, lime and chalk pieces were removed mechanically with a scalpel, i.e. using the dry method of cleaning. The next step was wet cleaning with a swab moistened with a mixture of distilled water and ethyl alcohol. After drying and cleaning, the entire wood surface was covered with a protective synthetic wax coating.

Metal door elements were cleaned mechanically. First, all large dirt, paint, lime and chalk residue were removed. Corrosion products were softened with mineral oil and removed with metal brushes, steel wool of various roughness and scalpels. Also, grease was removed from the cleaned metal surface using ethyl alcohol. Taking into account the specificity of the fort, i.e. constant increased humidity, a decision was made to cover the metal elements with a rust modifier and to paint them with a matt black anti-corrosion paint after drying. All the metal elements were painted with this colour during the period of Kaunas Hard Labour Prison.

The restoration/conservation of the museum exhibits and especially large objects such as doors also leads to interesting discoveries. In this case, the inscriptions made by prisoners were found on the door. In addition, one of the most important unexpected discoveries was the inscription "KARCERIS" ("PUNISHMENT CELL") above the door. The inscription was simply painted with a layer of lime, most likely when the museum was being arranged and the walls were bleached.

The door, which will turn one hundred years after a couple of years, has survived the period of Hard Labour Prison, the first and second Soviet occupations, the Nazi occupation, and later times. It was knocked down, broken and unattended; however, it has been reborn in order to continue serving as an important and interesting element of the building.



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