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Protestant Lubań: A Virtual Tour of the Sites of Faith

Protestancki Lubań – wirtualna wycieczka po miejscach kultu

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Introduction

Anniversaries have a way of being instinctively remembered. This is certainly the case here, as the year 2025 provided an occasion to celebrate the initially tentative beginnings of the Reformation in what is now Lubań 500 years ago. The catalyst was the refusal of the town pastor and monastery provost, Matthäus Hoffmann, to perform a child's baptism in German rather than in the difficult-to-understand Latin. In response, Georg Hew, a chaplain from Görlitz, dared to denounce the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church during a sermon at Trinity Church on Easter Sunday in 1525. Hew is today regarded as the first Protestant pastor in Lubań, then named Lauban, to introduce worship services in German, while at the same time abolishing processions and pilgrimages, as well as annual memorials for the deceased and the veneration of saints [Dietmann 1777; Neß 2016]. An indication of the contentious nature of the Reformation is the satirical song posted on the Schullinde a year later, at Easter 1526, modeled after the Easter hymn "Christ ist erstanden," as reported in Martin Zeidler's annals [Zeidler n.d.]. And just a few days later, things took an even more crude turn when figures of a nun and a monk were hung in the pillory with mocking words, which was almost certainly aimed at the Magdalene Sisters and the Franciscans residing in Lubań.

The clergy, who refused to adopt the new doctrine and continued to celebrate Latin Masses, resisted such blasphemous outrages, knowing they had the support of the newly crowned sovereign, Ferdinand I Habsburg (1503–1564). To defuse the situation, the council forced the uncompromising Hew to resign his post and leave Lubań in 1527. At the same time, Provost

Matthäus Hoffmann resigned his office as town pastor and also left Lubań shortly thereafter. The monastery and the town agreed that the council would be permitted to hire a Protestant preacher at its own expense in the future. The joint use of the Trinity Church, which had been practiced since 1525, was also confirmed and regulated in greater detail.

As early as 1525, twelve nuns—half of the convent—had left the Convent of St. Mary Magdalene [Skobel 1970; Dannenberg, Zdichynec 2025]. They were following the Augustinian hermit Martin Luther (1483–1546), who had rejected monastic vows as unbiblical and therefore unnecessary for salvation. In 1526, Prioress Christina Sebeck corresponded with the Order's General, Nikolaus Püschel. He replied that, although he could not come to Lubań himself due to various duties, he instructed the prioress not to readmit the fugitives to the convent without his knowledge. Furthermore, a "Lutheran nun" who had remained in the convent was to be compelled to recant and severely punished. The prioress must ensure that the cloister was maintained. Due to a lack of secular support, he could do no more.

The Franciscan monastery, too, had lost several monks who had left the monastery to pursue secular careers [Dannenberg, Zdichynec 2025]. In addition, the alms from the citizens of Lubań—which had previously supported the friars—dried up. In 1525, the city council confiscated the sacred vessels, that is, the chalices and patens made of silver and gold. In the years that followed, the number of Franciscans who held fast to the old faith continued to decline. After the plague of 1553, there were only two left, and then just one. This last Franciscan in Lubań, Guardian Petrus Kayser, handed over the monastery to the city council on March 7, 1556.

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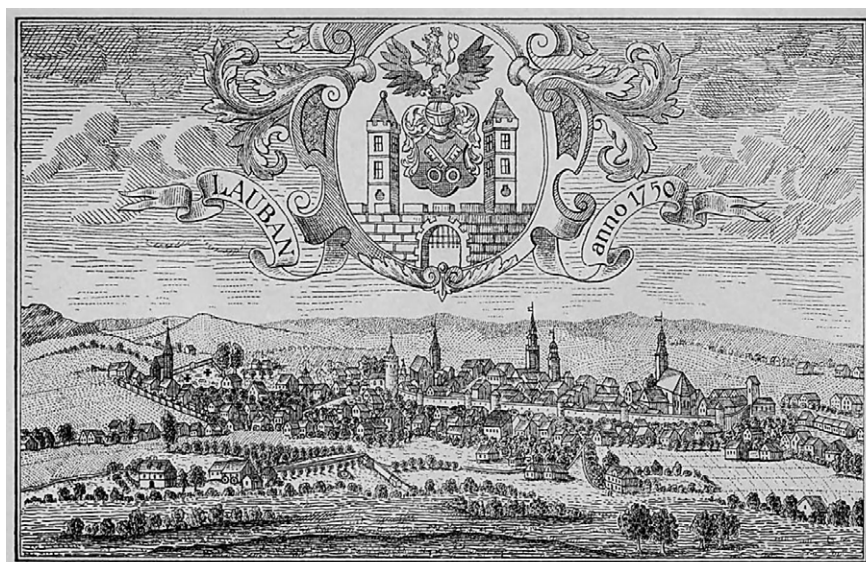


Fig. 1. View of Lubań, 1760, copperplate engraving by Georg Böhmer after a drawing by Andreas Lenck; source: https://polska-org.pl/535367,Luban,Panoramy_Lubania.html (accessed: 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 1. Widok Lubania, 1760, miedzioryt autorstwa Georga Böhmera na podstawie rysunku Andreasa Lencka; źródło: https://polska-org.pl/535367,Luban,Panoramy_Lubania.html (dostęp: 13.08.2026).

In return, the city undertook to establish a school in the monastery. Kayser was granted the right of residence and a generous financial stipend for life. With his death in 1559, the Franciscan monastery ceased to exist for good.

In 1527, the council had appointed Ambrosius Kreusing as the city's first Protestant pastor. However, he apparently acted with great recklessness, which is why he had to resign from his office after only one year. His successor was Nikolaus Grenewitz (1483–1569) [Neß 2016]. He had married the daughter of Lubań citizen Caspar Bornemann and was thus the first married clergyman in Lubań.

However, when King Ferdinand I (1503–1564) ordered the dismissal of all married pastors in Upper Lusatia in 1538, the town council—which at that time no longer included a single Catholic—had no choice but to comply and dismiss Grenewitz. He, however, immediately found a new position in nearby Steinkirch, on the Silesian side. To replace Grenewitz, they wanted to appoint the unmarried Johann Frobenius (1490–1553), who was currently in Wittenberg, to Lubań. With this idea in mind, town clerk Joachim Knemiander was sent to the “capital of the Reformation” to persuade Frobenius to accept the position [Knemiander n.d.]. However, he hesitated and only agreed after Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) had persuaded him. Frobenius served as city pastor for fifteen years until his death from the plague in 1553.

Nevertheless, many connections remained. For instance, until 1542, it was customary for the nuns to perform Latin hymns together with the students of the Latin school during the main Protestant service. The introduction of the Reformation reached a certain conclusion in 1584 with the reorganization of clergy salaries. With the exception of the town pastor, the Magdalene Convent had continued to pay

the preachers and chaplains. Now the town council ceased these payments from the convent's assets and took full responsibility for funding the clerical positions. In return, the convent lost any right to object to the appointment of clergy. The Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene also ceded the right of patronage over the town church to the council.

But what happened to the apparently numerous church buildings? Indeed, when one looks at old views of Lubań, the incredibly large number of towers, churches, and chapels catches the eye, so much so that one is almost reminded of the great city of Prague or of important imperial cities such as Nuremberg [Kasper 1995].

However, very little of that remains today, or has been rebuilt, because in the final days of the Second World War, the front swept through Lubań three times, leaving virtually no stone unturned. The city center was a sea of rubble. This was compounded by a complete population exchange when the German population was expelled in May and June 1945 and later replaced by a Polish population—many of whom, in turn, had roots in the historic Polish eastern territories.

Thus, in our search for traces of the past, we can at best take a virtual tour through the lost city of Lubań and, in this brief sketch, recall its former ecclesiastical splendor [Donath et al. 2025].

St. Nicholas Church

Let us begin with St. Nicholas Church, which may have been the oldest church in what later became Lubań, as St. Nicholas churches were recognized as early merchant churches. However, neither architectural remains nor any illustrations of it have survived. It stood at the western end of Nikolaistraße (today Mikołaja) on Nikolaiplatz. By the sixteenth century, it had fallen



Fig. 2. Orphanage in Lubań, colored lithograph by Gustav A. Kadersch, ca. 1825; source: <https://polska-org.pl/10808374,foto.html?idEntity=3226398> (accessed: 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 2. Dom Dziecka w Lubaniu, kolorowa litografia autorstwa Gustawa A. Kaderscha, ok. 1825; źródło: <https://polska-org.pl/10808374,foto.html?idEntity=3226398> (dostęp 13.08.2026)

into such disrepair that the city council decided in 1606 to demolish it to make way for a new building. The new St. Nicholas Church was built between 1608 and 1610 and served as a burial church. During the Thirty Years' War, it was burned to the ground by passing Croats on December 13, 1634, leaving only the outer walls standing. Finally, the ruins were cleared away in 1715, and the stones were used to build the orphanage on the neighboring Äußere Nikolaistraße.

St. Elisabeth

We continue on to St. Elisabeth Church on Äußere Nikolaistraße (today Rataja). There stood a hospital first attested in 1358, though likely older, whose church was dedicated to St. Elisabeth. Nothing remains of it either.

After the Reformation, the little church was renovated and rededicated, as the former hospital was used as a preacher's college for students of Protestant theology, who held weekly sermons there for practice. But when the Croats invaded the city during the Thirty Years' War, they burned down St. Elisabeth Church on December 13, 1634. After a makeshift repair, it was once again used for sermons. In connection with the founding of the Lubań Orphanage, the parish decided in 1714 to demolish the small church and use the property for the construction of the orphanage.

In a sense, the orphanage church was thus a successor to the former St. Elisabeth Church.

Orphanage Complex

The orphanage was a building complex on Äußere Nikolaistraße (today Rataja) outside the walled city center. The building was constructed between 1715 and 1717 according to plans by the Hirschberg architect Martin Frantz (d. 1742), who also built the two Gnadenkirchen in Hirschberg and Landeshut (Kamienna

Góra). The orphanage was the most significant Baroque monument in Luban.

The three street-facing sides featured an elaborate Baroque façade design. On the two upper floors, Corinthian pilasters separated the window axes. Ionic double columns in the central axis and a ridge turret drew attention to the Orphanage Church located inside. Unfortunately, no drawings or interior views of it have survived.

The Baroque Protestant church was rarely used. Three times a year, the residents of the poorhouse celebrated Holy Communion here. Between Easter and Michaelmas, the parish offered catechetical instruction here every Wednesday morning, a kind of children's service. In 1845, the orphanage church was handed over to the Christ Catholic community, a schism from the Roman Catholic Church, which, however, soon lost its significance and faded away.

Due to a lack of need, the orphanage was closed in 1870. Large parts of the building had already been used as a school since 1823. In 1876, the church was finally deconsecrated. The interior was divided by a ceiling, with one section used as an auditorium and the other as the city library. The exterior appearance of the building complex remained unchanged.

Until 1945, the former orphanage served as the Luther School. After its destruction during the Second World War, the ruins were demolished. Today, the site is home to modern buildings.

Trinity Church

The Trinity Church served as the town's parish church until 1760. It was located on the square by the old gymnasium (today's Plac Lompy), where the Trinity Tower still stands today as the last remnant of this church.

What made it unique was that, following the founding of the Convent of St. Mary Magdalene in 1320, it



Fig. 3. Luther School in Luban, formerly an orphanage, ca. 1930; author unknown, source: <https://polska-org.pl/7731552,foto.html?idEntity=4975726> (accessed 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 3. Szkoła Lutra w Lubaniu, dawny Dom Dziecka, ok. 1930; autor nieznany, źródło: <https://polska-org.pl/7731552,foto.html?idEntity=4975726> (dostęp 13.08.2026)

also served as the convent church, as the convent had been granted both the patronage and the revenues.

It was struck by lightning and damaged by fire on several occasions until the great city fire of 1760 finally brought it to an end, when the entire interior was destroyed and the vaults collapsed.

The nuns held their services in St. Anne's Chapel within the convent, while the congregation moved back and forth between the Orphanage Church and the Frauenkirche.

Since this could not be a permanent solution, the Protestant parish decided not to rebuild the ruins and designated the Kreuzkirche—which had also burned down but was in significantly better condition—as the new parish church. This also meant the abolition of the Simultaneum. Only the tower was given a new spire and bells. In 1879, the outer walls of the church were demolished. Only the tower remained.

It also survived the destruction of Luban in 1945.

Cross Church

As mentioned above, the Kreuzkirche served as Luban's Protestant parish church and main church from 1760 to 1945. It stood on the square at the southern edge of the town center, which was called "An der Kreuzkirche" until 1945 (today the city park between Bracka and Lwówecka streets). Its official patronage name was "Church of the Cross of Christ." It stood on the site of the former Franciscan monastery church.

In 1273, Margrave Otto V the Tall of Brandenburg, as ruler of Upper Lusatia, together with his mother, Bożena (Beatrix), the daughter of the King of Bohemia, granted permission to build a Franciscan monastery in honor of the Holy Cross. We do not know whether construction of a monastery actually began as a result. Presumably, the establishment of the Franciscans was delayed by another half-century, as Pope John



Fig. 4. Luban, ruins of the Trinity Church, the former parish church, colored lithograph by Gustav A. Kadersch, ca. 1825; source: <https://polska-org.pl/10808361,foto.html?idEntity=559012> (accessed 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 4. Luban, ruiny kościoła Świętej Trójcy, dawnego kościoła parafialnego, kolorowa litografia autorstwa Gustava A. Kaderscha, ok. 1825; źródło: <https://polska-org.pl/10808361,foto.html?idEntity=559012> (dostęp: 13.08.2026)



Fig. 5. Luban, Cross Church from the north with the Brüderturm (right), author unknown, before 1945; source: <https://www.heimatarchiv-lauban.de/bis-1945-der-kreis-lauban-seine-st%C3%A4dte-und-gemeinden/043-l-a-u-b-a-n/043-10-2/> (accessed 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 5. Luban, kościół Świętego Krzyża od strony północnej z wieżą Brüderturm (po prawej), autor nieznany, przed 1945; źródło: <https://www.heimatarchiv-lauban.de/bis-1945-der-kreis-lauban-seine-st%C3%A4dte-und-gemeinden/043-l-a-u-b-a-n/043-10-2/> (dostęp 13.08.2026)

XXII granted permission once again in 1333 to build a Franciscan monastery. As noted above, the monastery struggled to survive during the upheavals of the Reformation. However, two external factors contributed to its ultimate demise: first, the plague epidemic of 1553, and a fire the following year that reduced everything to rubble and ashes. Consequently, contrary to the promises made when the city took over the monastery in 1556, no school was built on the site of the former monastery courtyard. Instead, the cornerstone for a new church was laid in 1703, and it

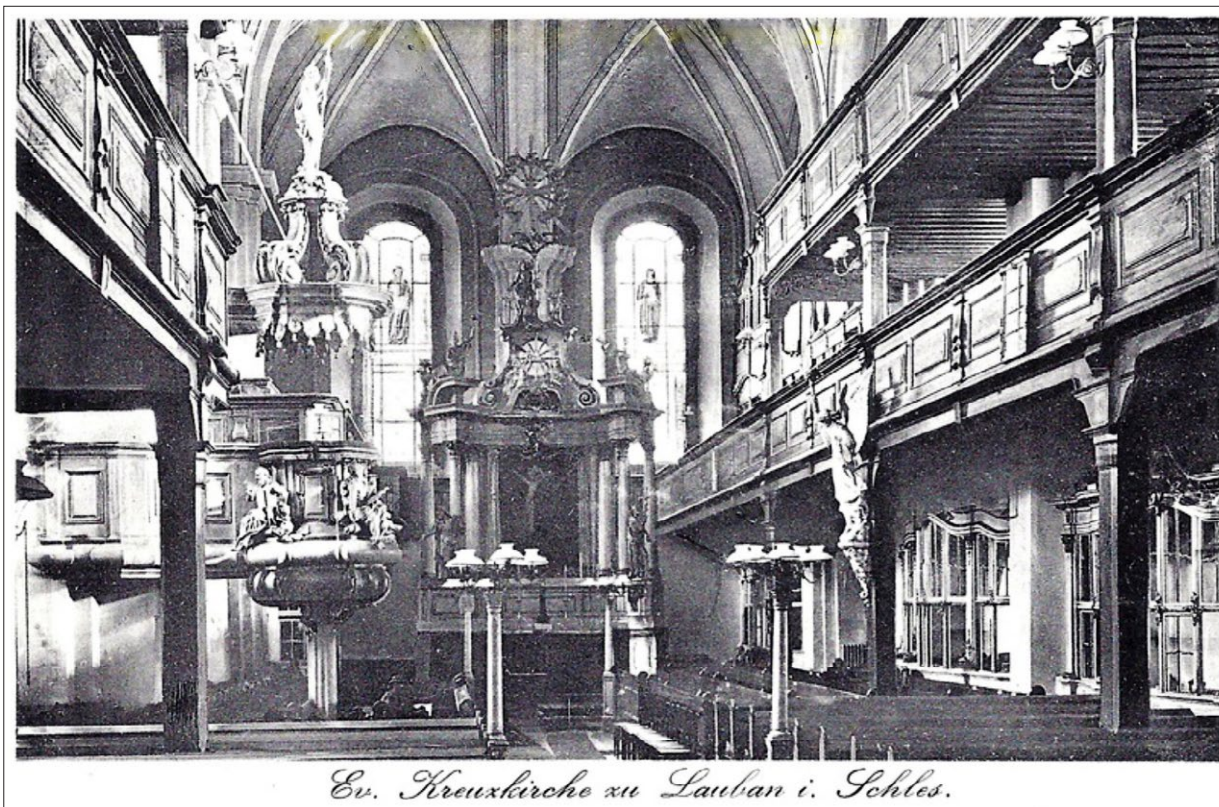


Fig. 6. Lubań, Cross Church, interior facing east with pulpit and altar, postcard, ca. 1920; source: <https://www.lubanski.eu/weekend-z-historia-lubanski-kosciol-krzyza-czesc-i-lata-1706-1945/> (accessed 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 6. Lubań, kościół Świętego Krzyża, wnętrze od strony wschodniej z amboną i ołtarzem, pocztówka, ok. 1920; źródło: <https://www.lubanski.eu/weekend-z-historia-lubanski-kosciol-krzyza-czesc-i-lata-1706-1945/> (dostęp 13.08.2026)



Fig. 7. Ruins of the Lubań Cross Church before demolition, view from the northwest, March 18, 1956; author unknown, source: Archiv Stadt und Kreis Lauban

Ryc. 7. Ruiny kościoła Świętego Krzyża w Lubaniu przed rozbiórką, widok od północnego zachodu, 18 marca 1956 r.; fot. autor nieznany, źródło: Archiv Stadt und Kreis Lauban

was completed in 1706. However, this church burned down again as early as 1760, leaving only the outer walls standing.

Following this disaster, the city council decided to rebuild the Kreuzkirche as the future main church. The consecration took place on July 28, 1765. This gave the church the form that would shape the cityscape for the next 180 years.

A look inside was also worthwhile. The new city church impressed with its dimensions and its corresponding capacity, made possible by the addition of galleries.

The church was severely damaged by Soviet artillery fire in February 1945. The roof, the spire, and the interior furnishings were destroyed by fire. However, the stone structure was still well-preserved and would have allowed for reconstruction, especially since the building had been explicitly listed in the register of historical monuments on December 3, 1949. However, a spring storm on April 8, 1954, caused the upper part of the east gable to collapse. The stones struck a Polish farmer's cart that was parked against the church wall, killing both the horse and the driver. As a result of this "catastrophic threat to public safety," the authorities in the town and district of Luban requested a demolition permit from the provincial monument preservation officer, who, however, refused it. The Ministry of Culture and Art in Warsaw, which was responsible for



Fig. 8. Lubań, Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, postcard, ca. 1910; source: <https://polska-org.pl/3293155,foto.html?idEntity=535774> (accessed 13 August 2026)

Ryc. 8. Lubań, kościół Najświętszej Maryi Panny, pocztówka, ok. 1910 źródło: <https://polska-org.pl/3293155,foto.html?idEntity=535774> (dostęp: 13.08.2026)

monument preservation, also saw no reason to demolish the structure. Consequently, in March 1956, the authorities in Lubań began demolishing the Church of the Holy Cross on their own initiative. After the first blast caused only the vault to collapse, the outer walls were gradually torn down using pulleys. The tower, which had sustained hardly any damage except for the missing spire, was dismantled from top to bottom. By the end of June 1956, only a pile of rubble remained on the site. The debris was cleared away by November 1957. Today, nothing remains to remind us of the former heart of Protestant Lublin.

However, since the demolition in 1956 was illegal, the public prosecutor's office launched an investigation, and the Lubań District Court filed a lawsuit against Bronisław Carbuch, chairman of the district council's presidium and first secretary of the district leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party.

And to avoid any misunderstanding: even the Brothers' Tower, which stands today as one of the few remaining towers of old Lubań and bears its name after the Franciscans, was not part of the monastery, but rather of the old city wall—when the gray-robed monks were assigned to guard this section in case of danger—and was aptly named the Brothers' Tower.

The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Frauenkirche, located outside the city walls, was the only medieval church to survive all the city fires and

the destruction of the Second World War. It is therefore the only authentic building remaining from old Lubań. As the name suggests, it is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In German, the patronage was usually referred to as "Unser Lieben Frauen," which was shortened to "Frauenkirche." It is located in what was then known as the Marklissaer Vorstadt, below the Steinberg. The first documented reference dates back to 1384. At that time, Heinrich Wyenberg donated a St. Catherine's altar here. In 1411, it was referred to as "St. Mary's Chapel Outside the Walls" ("capella St. Maria extra muros").

Its original function is disputed. The Frauenkirche may have evolved from a wayside chapel. It is also conceivable that it was used as a burial church—possibly in the wake of the plague epidemics that recurred with regularity during the Middle Ages and early modern period.

The city cemetery on Steinberg, directly across from the north side of the church, was not established until after the Reformation.

Around 1452, a new Gothic structure was built. A nave with a ribbed vault and slender Gothic tracery windows was erected, along with a slightly narrower choir. A tower with a square floor plan was added to the north side of the choir. Well above the eaves, the structure transitions into an octagon. Although the spire was struck by lightning and destroyed several times, for example in 1683 and 1709, the tower retained its rather tall, slender spire until 1945.

Its time came during the Counter-Reformation, when Silesian religious refugees established their

parish here and the Frauenkirche thus took on a new role. Following the introduction of the Counter-Reformation in the Principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer and the closure of numerous Protestant churches on the Silesian side, the Protestant Christians of Silesia sought places of worship across the border but close to their hometowns. The Bertelsdorf parish requested the Frauenkirche and received it from the Lubań City Council. There, the Bertelsdorf pastor continued to serve, including for the residents of the villages of Thiendorf, Klein Naundorf, and Seifersdorf. When it became clear that a return to their home churches was not possible, arrangements had to be made to minister to the Protestant Christians who crossed the border into Upper Lusatia every Sunday. To this end, the position of “plague preacher” (*Pastor pestilentiarius*) was established. The title dated back to the years when the plague ravaged Lubań and a specially appointed clergyman visited the sick. Between 1654 and 1818, twelve pastors held the parish office of the Frauenkirche.

When, following the Prussian conquest of Silesia in the Three Silesian Wars, it became possible once again to hold Protestant services, the people of Thiendorf, Naundorf, and Seifersdorf no longer traveled to Upper Lusatia. Only the people of Bertelsdorf remained.

They decided to continue attending the Frauenkirche as their parish church. Even though there had been no separate parish since 1818, the clergy of the Lubań parish took over the Sunday services.

The interior was naturally not as magnificent as perhaps in the Kreuzkirche, but it still impressed with its Baroque furnishings. These were deemed no longer in keeping with the times and the interior underwent a fundamental renovation in 1888, during which all fixtures were removed and a new interior in the Gothic Revival style was designed.

The Frauenkirche was damaged by shelling from the Red Army in 1945. There were large holes in the roof, and tiles were missing from the roof truss of the ridge turret.

Despite all the destruction and damage it suffered during the Second World War, the Frauenkirche remains the most authentic building in old Lubań and is now the home of the Lutheran congregation—or, as it is known in Poland, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, to which the building was transferred in 1945–1946.

We will conclude our historical virtual tour here. For those who would like to learn more, we recommend the publication “Ewangelicki Lubań – Das evangelische Lauban.”

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Abstract

In 1525, Chaplain Johann Hew preached in the Lutheran tradition for the first time in Lauban am Queis. This marked the beginning of the Reformation. This article sets out to trace the history of the church buildings. The historic town of Lauban (present-day Lubań) was completely destroyed at the end of the Second World War. This is therefore a virtual tour of the sites of faith, which helps to provide a better understanding of Lauban’s history, both past and present.

Streszczenie

W 1525 r. kapelan Johann Hew po raz pierwszy wygłosił kazanie w duchu luterańskim w Lauban (obecnie Lubań) nad Kwisą. Wydarzenie to zapoczątkowało reformację w mieście. Artykuł ma na celu prześledzenie dziejów miejscowych budowli kościelnych. Historyczne miasto zostało niemal całkowicie zniszczone pod koniec II wojny światowej. Tekst stanowi zatem wirtualną wędrowkę po miejscach związanych z historią wiary, pomagającą lepiej zrozumieć dzieje dawnego i współczesnego Lubania.