

PLACES CONNECTED WITH COMENIUS IN LESZNO:

- 1 ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH** – built in the years 1652 -1654 by the Unity of Czech Brethren. It served three parishes: Polish, Czech and German; Comenius was a preacher in the Czech parish.
- 2 THE FORMER GYMNASIUM** – the building was designed by Catenazzi in c. 1714 on the site of the former seat of the Gymnasium of the Czech Brethren, which was famous in the first half of the 17th century. The school was situated here until 1845. On the opposite side of the church yard there is the so called bell-ringer's house from the 18th century.
- 3 COMENIUS SQUARE** – monument from 1898 presenting the bust of Comenius, funded in 1898 to commemorate the anniversary of Comenius' arrival in Leszno.
- 4 JONSTON PARK** – until the 1950s the Calvinist cemetery was situated here.
- 5 THE AREA OF THE FORMER RYDZYNA GATE** – the site of the house bought by J.A. Comenius.
- 6 THE LAPIDARIUM** (tombstone collection) at the Holy Cross Church consists of a number of tombstones moved here from Evangelical cemeteries that had been closed down. You can find here, among others, obelisks of gentry patrons of the church of the Czech Brethren and tombstones of burghers – parishioners of St. John's Church.
- 7 DISTRICT MUSEUM IN LESZNO** – collections include mementoes of the Czech Brethren (including liturgical vessels from St. John's Church), portraits of Comenius and Rectors of the Leszno Gymnasium and editions of works by the "teacher of nations" from the 17th-20th centuries including an extensive Comeniological book collection.
- 8 ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCH** – from c. 1580 to 1654 it was used by the Czech Brethren; its present form originates from the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, with a chancel from the beginning of the 20th century.
- 9 TOWN HALL** – the Town Hall funded by Leszno burghers in the times of Comenius, in the first half of the 17th century, was destroyed by fire. The present architectural design is a Baroque-Classical building considered to be one of the most beautiful in Poland. It was rebuilt several times; in its walls there are relics of the first Town Hall from 1639. The Town Hall constructors and architects were Marcin Woide, Georgio Catenazzi, Pompeo Ferrari and probably Domenico Merlini.
- 10 JAN AMOS COMENIUS COMPLEX OF SCHOOLS OF ECONOMICS** – the building was erected in 1910 for a Catholic teacher college for women. Before World War II it housed a boarding secondary school. In 1970 the Secondary School of Economics was established here. The building has retained its original décor of the elevations. Inside, on the landing, there is the bust of J.A. Comenius from 1927, sculpted in sandstone by Leon Dudek.
- 11 JAN AMOS COMENIUS STATE HIGHER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL** – in front of the building there is the statue of Comenius, erected in 2003 according to the design by Ireneusz Daczka. Nearby, there is a bronze donkey, a character from Comenius' philosophical parable.

THE UNITY OF CZECH BRETHREN



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The Unity of Czech Brethren is a religious denomination based on the teachings of Jan Hus. The year of 1457 is considered to be the date of the establishment of the Church. As a result of persecutions of the Unity after 1548, many members of the Church emigrated. On their way to their exile in Royal Prussia, some of them settled in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska). In the years 1557-1558 the Polish province of the Unity was established with its seat in Ostroróg. Small groups of German members of this denomination also settled in Leszno in the second half of the 16th century. In 1550 Rafał Leszczyński (c. 1526-1592), the then owner of Leszno, joined the denomination of the Czech Brethren and in about 1580 he handed over the Leszno parish church to the believers of his faith. After the defeat in the Battle of White Mountain near Prague in 1620, the great exodus of the Unity took place. In consequence, around 1500 refugees from the Czech lands and Moravia settled in Leszno in 1628. The leader of the new settlers was Jan Amos Comenius. The arrival of the settlers in Leszno led to spatial, economic and cultural development of the town which became the main centre of emigration. The archive and library of the Unity as well as the printing house from Kralice in Moravia were moved to Leszno. Leszno became the seat of the Seniorate of the denomination and thus the "capital" of the Unity. As a result of a long-lasting process, the Unity of Czech Brethren in Poland merged with the Calvinist Church with similar doctrines in the years 1633-1634.



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

- 1 J.A. Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus*, Nuernberg-Warsaw 1745.
- 2 J. Łasicki, *De Ecclesiastica disciplina...*, Amsterdam 1660.
- 3 J.A. Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus*, Nuernberg-Warsaw 1745.
- 4 Chalices from St. John's Church in Leszno: 1564, early 17th century.

Cover: Portrait of Jan Amos Comenius, mid 19th century.

Photographs courtesy of the District Museum in Leszno.



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JAN AMOS COMENIUS
1592-1670

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JAN AMOS COMENIUS BIOGRAPHY



Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) educator – theologian – philosopher. He was born on 28.03.1592 in Nivnice in Moravia (the present Czech Republic) to a family of a miller, a member of the Unity. He studied in Herborn and Heidelberg (Germany). In 1614 Comenius took up the position of a teacher in a school in Prerov and two years later he was ordained as a priest in Fulnek. In 1628 he settled in Leszno, where he lived until 1656 with longer stays in England, Transylvania and Elbląg.

During that time he fulfilled his pastoral duties and pursued academic activity. When he lived in Leszno, Comenius wrote his most important educational works and created theoretical basis of the educational system. He participated in the creation of curricula for schools in Sweden, Transylvania and England – in all those countries, schools used his textbooks.

In 1629 he became the Consenior and three years later the Senior of the Unity. In the years 1635-1642 he was the Rector of the Leszno Gymnasium: he reformed the school, introduced modern textbooks adapted to the age of students and set up the school theatre. In 1645 he took part in the convention of the Colloquium Charitativum as a delegate of the Unity of Czech Brethren and Calvinists. He maintained academic and religious contacts with important personages in Poland and Europe. After the Leszno fire in 1656, during which he lost his precious collections and manuscripts, Comenius left for the Netherlands, where he died on 15.11.1670.

Academic achievements:



Theory of pansophy – universal wisdom and omniscience. It was to encompass all the knowledge about the world, which was to be accessible and comprehensible to all people. Comenius' conception was that pansophy was to be the great synthesis of knowledge thanks to which everyone would be able to comprehend everything about everything.

Criticism of rote learning overloaded with contents that had no application in adult life and propagation of the visual method described in *Didactica magna* (Amsterdam 1657). Comenius called for lifelong learning and universal education (also accessible to girls) based on everyday life and the surrounding reality.

Comenius won greatest popularity and fame thanks to his textbooks for learning Latin, which were also a rich source of knowledge about the surrounding reality. *Janua linguarum reserata* (Leszno 1631) - a textbook for learning Latin, which was also a compendium of fundamental knowledge about the world and abstract notions. On basis of this textbook, two other books were written: *Vestibulum* – for beginners based on the use of 1000 words and the illustrated textbook, *Orbis sensus alium pictus*.

