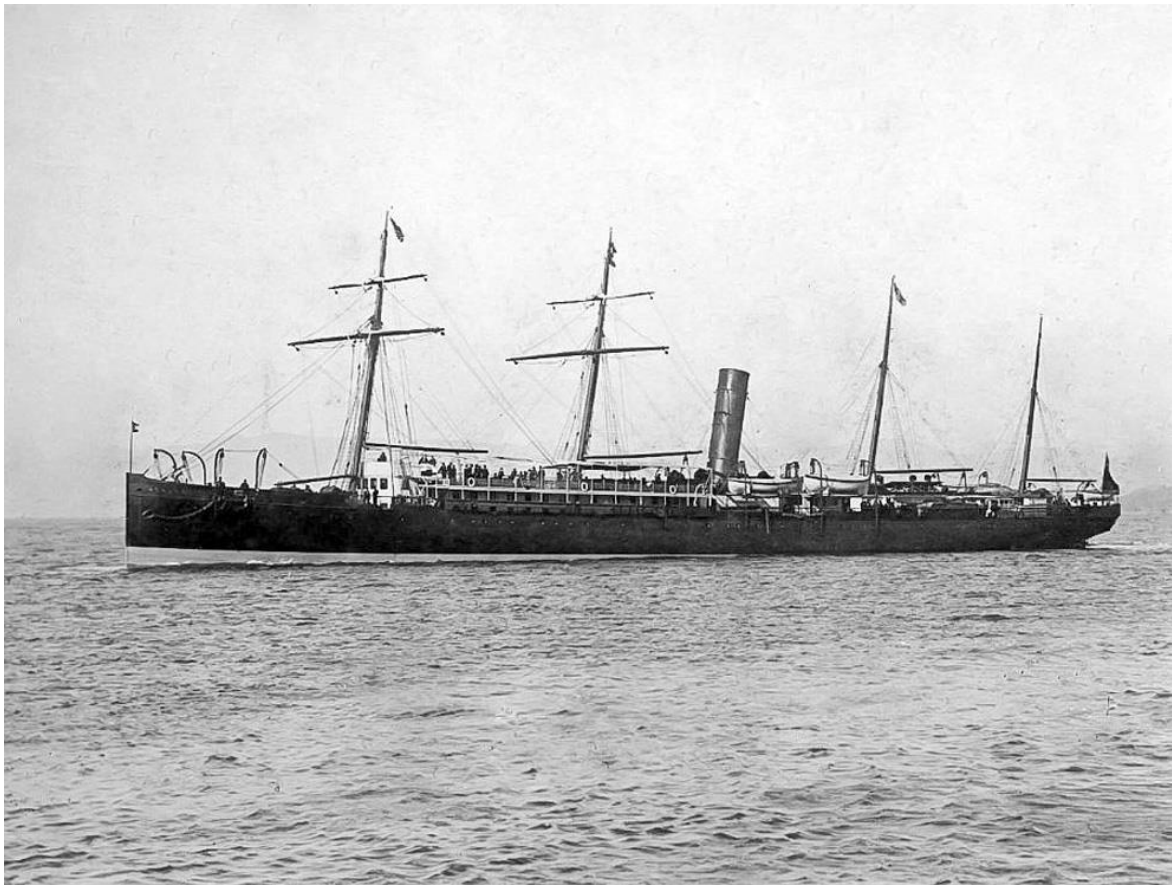


Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations and Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

June, 2023.

An early morning sea mist drifted across the calm waters of the Baltic Sea as the “Black Swan” slowly approached the port city of Memel on the coast of Lithuania Minor, that smaller part of Lithuania transferred to Prussia following the Third Partition of Poland in 1795.



The SS Black Swan approaching the coast of Lithuania.

From his station in the prow of the coastal cargo vessel of the transition period Edward observed the spires of the cathedral and the masts of the numerous ships berthed in the harbour gradually becoming more distinctive as the sea mist began to clear and the summer sun broke through the clouds. Edward Ashbourne, the younger, though not the youngest, son of William and Emily Ashbourne, formally carriage builders of Lee in Herefordshire, though since the autumn of 1866 they had transferred their workshops to Ross and had taken up residence in Western-under-Penyard. As a younger son he did not expect to inherit the business and had therefore decided to pursue his love of the sea, the open waters, and the adventure of foreign travel; he was to make his way in the world via the merchant marine. Although the Royal Navy of Her Majesty would have been his parents' preferred choice, he hoped to increase his remuneration as a deck hand by a little trading in small items on his own account. Looking up at the yard arm of the foremast of the “Black Swan” Edward observed the black and yellow international signal flag fluttering in the strong breeze to signal the message requesting a pilot (also for the letter “G”).



By 10.30am the pilot cutter had delivered the port pilot aboard, and the “Black Swan” now flying the flag of Prussia in place of the request for a pilot, had safely entered the port and berthed alongside a Russian brigantine on the starboard side and a Prussian barque to port.



Recognising Edward’s superior education compared with the majority of seamen, and the likelihood that he would make good use of his time ashore and not return dead drunk, the captain, an unusually kindly gentleman granted Edward three days leave. Captain McKay was very much aware that with the development of screw propelled steam ships, that the days of sailing ships would, in time, draw to a close, and his employers would require more young men with the ability to grasp the technicalities of advanced steam engines and various other maritime inventions of recent years.



The Curonian Lagoon in 1880 by Adolf Closs.

The painting shows the town of Memel in the middle distance.

Last month I introduced you to three members of the fictional family, the Ashbournes. This month I will introduce you to, as yet the youngest member of this family – Edward.

The “Black Swan” had sailed from the new Royal Albert Dock (see Note 2) situated downstream of London Bridge on the Isle of Dogs on the 10th of June, 1887 and thus before joining the ship Edward had had the opportunity to see the activity then in progress decorating the streets for Her Majesty’s Golden Jubilee to be celebrated on the 20th and 21st June, although he was to miss the actual event.

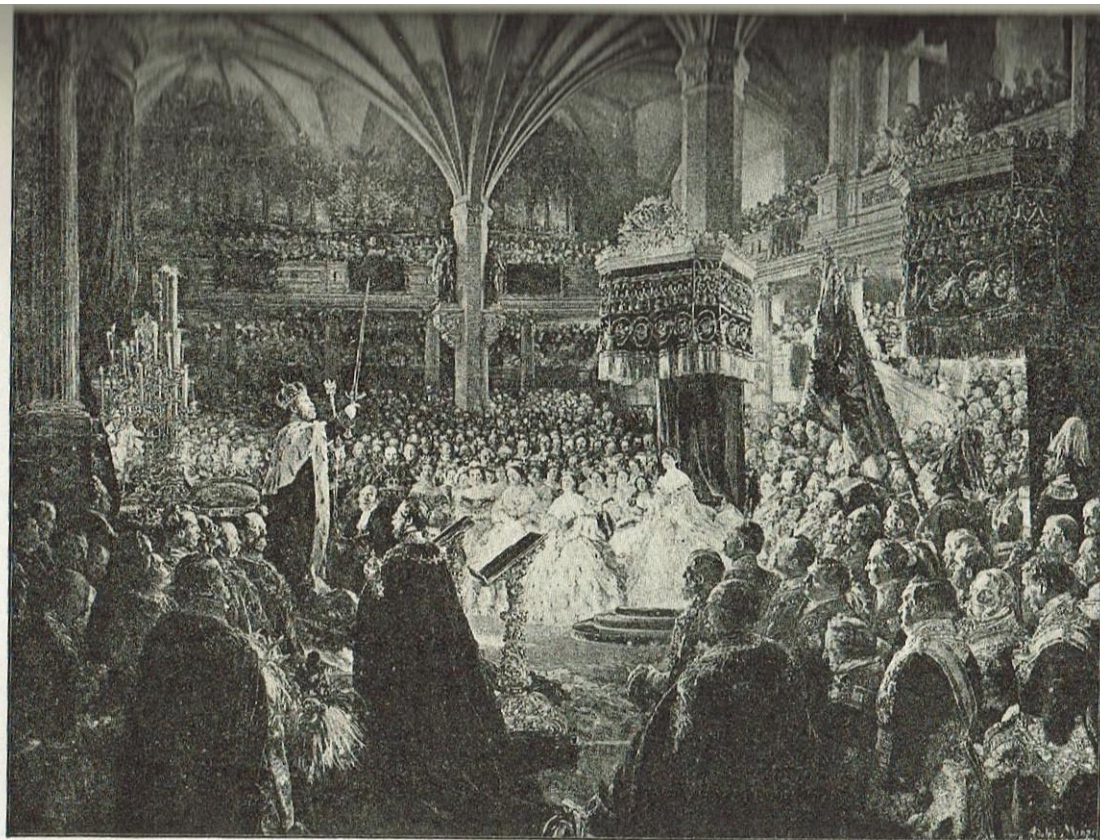


Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, 21st June, 1887. The Royal Procession passing. Trafalgar Square by John Charlton.

By the following day they were far out to sea in the German Ocean (see Note 3) sailing eastwards. The "Black Swan" reached Cuxhaven at the estuary of the River Elbe by the 12th of June where a cargo of factory machinery, children's toys and eider duck feathers was loaded aboard. Departing two days later they traversed the short cut of the Kiel Cannel to enter the Baltic Sea by morning of the following day, and thus arriving off the coast of Lithuania Minor by the 18th day of June. An hour or two after dawn those on deck, had they been looking to starboard and if the weather had been clear may have noticed the sand dunes along the coast of East Prussia, but a lookout in the crow's-nest at the mast head on a clear day may have seen the tower and spire of the Ordensburg Castle. The castle on the Pregel River captured by the Teutonic Knights in 1255 and rebuilt in stone in 1257. Later known as Königsberg Castle (see Note 7) it contained the Schloßkirche or castle church where the coronation of the first King in Prussia was celebrated in 1701 when Elector Friedrich III Margrave of Brandenburg become the first of the Hohenzollern dynasty to use the title of King in Prussia. By 1772 the title of King of Prussia had been adopted by King Friedrich II, the Great.



Königsberg Castle.



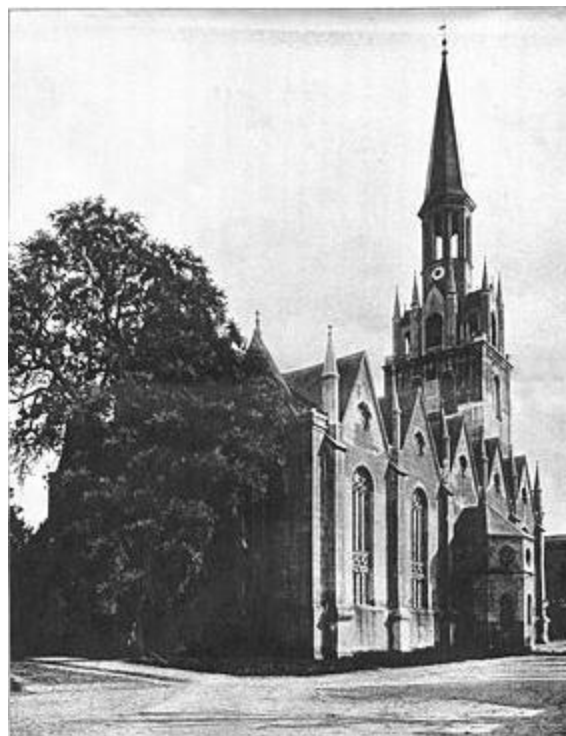
Munich : Photographic Union.]

MENZEL : "THE CORONATION OF KING WILHELM AT KÖNIGSBERG."

The Coronation of King Wilhelm I in Königsberg Castle Church on 18th of October, 1861 by Adolph Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel.

Picture from "The History of Modern Painting" by Richard Muther, Volume Two published in 1896.

Stepping ashore in the port city of Memel or Memelburg (see Not 6) at is was sometimes known Edward produced the paper passport his Father had obtained for him together with the papers that Captain McKay had given to him which satisfied the Prussian port guard, and proceeded to explore the city visiting the principle buildings, the church of St. John with a



The Church of St. John, Memel,

spire 75 meters high dominating the town skyline, (see Note 8) and the Ordensburg castle of Memelburg founded in 1252 by the Knights of the Teutonic Order. Having come across a café overlooking the River Niemen, Edward decided that this would be a good place to rest his now weary feet and order a glass of the local brew which proved to be a good choice and an excellent beer. The River Niemen, (see Note 4) Edward was to learn is the chief artery of commerce in Lithuania and is navigable for 832 versts of its length from the sea. Much more was explained by a local gentleman who was already seated at a nearby table and who, asking if Edward minded, joined him, and ordered a cup of coffee for himself. He was dressed in a dark brown velvet jacket, white shirt and a large floppy bow tie as was then fashionable, trousers to match, and on a spare chair there resided the gentleman's broad brimmed matching hat and walking cane. When later he stood up Edward noticed his back was ram rod straight, and coupled with his generous moustache marked him out as a cavalry officer, which he had been in his younger days. Our young man fell into conversation with the local gentleman who informed him that he was very lucky to be granted leave for tomorrow is midsummer's day and there will be national celebrations. In the meantime, the Lithuanian gentleman, who had introduced himself as Andrius Martinkus enquired of Edward in perfect English.

"Now tell me my young friend, what have you seen of our fair city" to which Edward replied,

"I only landed this morning and have so far only been walking about but have been inside what appears to be the main church, and a rather damaged castle".

"Very good" replied the Kindly Gentleman "and is this your first time in Lithuania Minor?"

"It is" responded the young man, "It is also my first time overseas. I joined the crew of the "Black Swan" to see something of the world, but I may not remain as a merchant seaman."

"I see you are drinking our beer, you must also try our wine, the vineyards hereabouts provide an excellent wine, some consider it similar to those of Pomerania and the Rhine Valley, a sweet wine from grapes that are harvested late in the year, come, drink up and I will show you our city, and whilst we walk I will tell you a little of our history."

Thus, the two set off to expand Edward's education. On the way Mr. Martinkus explained that Memel is a Prussian name for the port city which grew after the Prussian Teutonic Knights forcibly introduced Christianity to the region, and to establish their power founded in 1252 Memelburg Castle, known as a Ordensburg Castle being one of a number of such castles in the lands controlled by the religious Order of Knights. As they reached the remains of the castle, the Lithuanian Gentlemen stated that much of the damage was the result of Swedish aggression attempting to recover territory lost to Russia in Czar Peter's Great Northern War in the early years of the Eighteenth Century. As they approached the Church of St. John Andrius Martinkus informed Edward that Lithuania is extremely old with a history of some 10,000 years, although only recorded in writing from 1009 AD. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was established in the Thirteenth Century, and in 1385 a dynastic union with Poland was created by the Union of Krewo, to be followed in 1569 by the Union of Lublin to found the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth which controlled a vast area from the Baltic to the Black Sea including the Ukraine, well the whole of the Ukraine until Czar helped himself to the eastern part after the Battle of Poltava in 1709, adding that it is always the Russians that desire to dominate.

During Edward's sojourn ashore the "Black Swan's" cargo was unloaded onto the dockside and the local stevedores filled the holds with a cargo for the return voyage to London of tar pitch, timber, flax, and potash.



The coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania,

Whilst the Lithuanian Gentleman found Edward intelligent company and considered him a cut above the average deck hand from foreign ships who seemed only interested in visiting the brothels found in all port cities and consuming alcohol in vast quantities. However, being rather prudent he refrained from mentioning the supply of bibles printed in Great Britain and the United States of America in the Lithuanian language to be smuggled into Russian controlled Lithuania Major where possession was prohibited and had been since the Partition of Poland in 1795; and also, his good friend Jonas Basanavicius the principle of the Lithuanian National Revival group. However, Andrius decided to take Edward with him to the celebrations for the Summer Solstice.



Jonas Basanavicius, leader of the Lithuanian National Revival organisation.

Turning to Edward Mr. Martinkus observed that he must now be a little tired and as he had already ascertained that the Englishman was not required to report to the captain that evening, he invited him to the night's celebrations. Firstly, the family gig and horse was retrieved and they passed through the port crossing the bascule bridge then clearing the



Bascule Bridge, Memel Harbour.

town they travelled southwards through northern Memeland with the Curonian Lagoon to their right, the islands on the seaward side of which formed the lagoon and protected the coast from the winter storms of the Baltic Sea. After travelling some 12 versts (see Note 5) Andrius turned the horse to the left and they entered a long drive to a large imposing house, which closer examination exposed the rather unkempt state of the building which was sadly in need of repainting and other repairs. Andrius called to a stable lad to see to the horse and put the gig in a barn.

Entering the house, the Kindly Gentleman introduced Edward to his Wife Joutca explaining that Edward would be dining with them, and staying to participate in the Summer Solstice festivities that night. Mrs Martinkus, a lively lady, a little shorter than her husband in height and beautifully dressed in woven light woollen skirt, embroidered waistcoat over a white blouse with a white embroidered apron, a traditional Lithuanian costume, immediately commenced making the necessary arrangements. On entering the spacious room which appeared to combine dinning and drawing rooms together with other uses i.e., Andrius's study and Joutca's sewing room. However, what singularly drew Edward's attention was a large print from a steel engraving of Napoleon at the Battle of Eylau by Antoine Jean Gros. Edward was familiar with a general overview of the activities of the Great Disturber with emphasis on the successes of the Royal Navy, and the Iron Duke at Waterloo, but as most of his countrymen at home, had little knowledge of Napoleon's many battles on the Continent. To see a major battle fought in the snows of mid-winter seemed highly unusual, and who was the man appearing to kiss the Emperor's saddle?



Napoleon at the Battle of Eylau by Antoine Jean Gros, 1808.

When Andrius returned with two generous glasses of vin rouge he immediately noticed the Englishman's interest in the print over the mantle.

"You are intrigued by the picture, is that so."

"Well, yes, who is the man in shirtsleeves by Napoleon in the middle of winter" enquired Edward.

"It is my Wife's Great Uncle, a Polish Noble who was overjoyed at the Emperor's success, it meant the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw which us Lithuanians hoped might lead to the re-establishment of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, even if we did not recover all of our lost territory, at least we may have prospered by re-establishing the Union."

On Mrs. Martinkus returning she explained briefly the family history, how they had been quite wealthy with estates in Lithuania and Poland, but all had been lost in the wars, and now they had only this small estate in Lithuania Minor. In Poland property was sold to pay debts, and in Lithuania Major the Russians had confiscated their lands. She stated that she had been raised in Kaunas to the east, part of the country under Prussian control where they were far less restricted than those living in the Russian sector.

Dinner was an enjoyable occasion, and they were joined by their daughter Alexandra, who, Mrs. Martinkus explained, had been named after the Princess of Wales, and Karl, their son. Edward was delighted by Alexandra's vivacious and sparkling personality and beautiful features and form. It was explained to Edward that in their country the Summer Solstice had been celebrated on the 21st June for over one thousand years, in fact from before Christianity had been adopted during the time of the Teutonic Knights.



Alexandra (lower left) with her cousins.

As darkness eventually settled over the country, the family and Edward plus three of Alexandra's cousins who arrived after dinner and made their way to the nearby village where a large pyre had been constructed, and the villagers were all gathered around waiting for Andrius Martinkus, the local headman to put a flaming torch to the wood to set it ablaze. Once well alight and two of their number commenced playing on a violin and a small piano accordion, more like a squeeze box. The music and the occasion set many of the gathering dancing whilst a few of the ladies produced food and drink for all to participate of. The festivities continued for some hours and Edward was able to make the most of the merriment to further his friendship with Alexandra, who in turn was only too keen to practice her limited knowledge of English. As the fire began to die down the young lads of the village commenced jumping across the dwindling flames, to be joined, as the last flames died away, by the village maids and then by all those agile enough to participate, whilst their elders watched and called encouragement whilst they drank their beer or wine. Edward spent a most enjoyable time joining in the merriment with the sparkling company of Alexandra. When the following morning it came to the time for Edward to depart for the docks of Memel, there was a sorrowful parting as both the young people realised that the chances of them meeting again would be extremely unlikely.

Lying in his bunk at night having just completed his turn on watch, or on watch at night when there was little to do except to keep his eyes peeled for possible danger, Edward reflected on his experiences in Lithuania, the people he had met, the customs and history he had discovered and the joyous celebration of mid-summer.

Notes:

1. Reference to Edward Ashbourne and the voyage of the "Black Swan" is entirely fictional together the Martinkus family although all other matters are historically accurate.
2. The Royal Albert Dock was opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught in 1880.
3. The German Ocean was renamed the North Sea at the time of the Great War.
4. River Niemen, Nemunas in Lithuanian.
5. One verst, a Russian land measure is equal to three quarters of a mile.
6. Memel has been known as Klaipeda since 1947.
7. Königsberg has been known as Kaliningrad since 1946.
8. The Church of St. John in Memel was destroyed by the Communists after 1945.
9. I wish to record my grateful thanks to Mrs. Jouita Banett of Kaunas in south central Lithuania for her invaluable assistance and local knowledge.
10. Acknowledgement is also due to "Peoples of all Nations", volume V, published by the Educational Book Company in the early 1920's, the section on Lithuania by Florence Farnborough, Special Correspondent of "The Times" has been especially helpful in writing this blog.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



**Another post card from
the Author's private collection.**

**Does the rope divide the parts of the beach reserved for Ladies
bathing from that reserved for Gentlemen? Very likely, so are
the girls larking about to attract the boys? More than likely!**

Trailer for next month.

This month young Edward Ashbourne finds himself on a vessel sailing to Japan, to arrive there in time for the Gion Matsuri Festival in Kyoto, a continuation of the Ashbourne family saga.

Historical Talks.

In addition to writing these articles or “blogs” for the Chimes, I am available to give illustrated power point talks on a variety of historical subjects. To see the complete list please email to me at brockswoods@yahoo.co.uk, or telephone 01989 780634.

Dorian Osborne

1st June, 2023.