

# RIGA BRETHREN CEMETERY





*Heraldic group Vidzeme (fragment)*

The Riga Brethren Cemetery is the most outstanding and important memorial ensemble in Latvia. It is dedicated to the Latvian soldiers who fell during WWI and the battles for independence (1915-1920). Around 3,000 heroes have been laid to rest at the cemetery, including about 300 unknown soldiers. The Brethren Cemetery's Memorial Ensemble was unveiled on Lāčplēšis Day on November 11, 1936. The creation of the Brethren Cemetery took 21 years, and was conducted in two stages: 1915-1923, when in accordance with the proposal of Riga's director of gardens Andrejs Zeidaks the cemetery's landscaping was conducted, and from 1923 to 1936, when the memorial complex and ensemble, in accordance with sculptor Kārlis Zāle's design, was completed. The ensemble's architectural work was led by professor and academic Pēteris Feders. Also participating in the construction of the ensemble was architect Aleksandrs Birzenieks, as well as sculptors Mārtiņš Šmalcs, Nikolajs Maulics, Pēteris Banders and others. The memorial ensemble of the Brethern Cemetery with its profound artistic expression and idea is Latvia's national symbol. It is the first ensemble of this kind in Europe. It consists of three parts:



*Riga Brethren Cemetery ensemble*

- The Path of Contemplation with a 205-meter long avenue of linden trees;
- The Terrace of the Heroes with the altar of eternal fire and an oak grove;
- The Graveyard that ends with the Wall of Latvia sculptural group – the image of the mother and her fallen sons (Mother Latvia).

Stepping over the threshold of the gates, the image of Mother Latvia is visible in the distance of 457 meters. Only after crossing the Terrace of the Heroes and approaching its edge, the deepened graveyard comes in sight in all its greatness and tragedy. The long Path of Contemplation is completed when reaching the symbolic and unsurpassable threshold where the living ones are on one side and the dead – on the other.

The ensemble in the form of landscape, sculptural images and architecture demonstrates the gratitude of the nation to the fallen heroes. The presence of the nation is symbolized by the landscape that has been formed, using elements close to Latvia's nature, country and folklore – linden tree, oak, birch, sweet briar rose; sculpture adds to the ensemble the image of a heroic Latvian soldier, while heraldry displays Latvian historic provinces of 1936: four regions - Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme and Latgale, 19 districts and 59 towns. An urn with 517 handfuls of ground from every Latvian county is buried under the image of Mother Latvia. The local construction material – Latvia's travertine – has been used in the architecture.



*Injured horsemen II*

Riga Brethren Cemetery has 13 sculptural groups – featured both in high-relief and low-relief. On either side of the entrance is a group representing two pairs of grieving horsemen. Above them there are the Latvian coat of arms, two crosses and engraved numbers 1915-1920 (destroyed during the Soviet occupation). At the sides of the graveyard there are two expressive groups of injured horsemen: death seems to have exhausted their strength, but the horses with a seemingly supernatural force are trying to return them to life. Two Brothers stand in the central greenery, with the grave of sculptor Kārlis Zāle right at their feet. The most adorned part is the Wall of Latvia at the other end of the cemetery. Four sculptures of men on their knees feature Latvia's provinces. A scene of a Battle is above them, depicting slowly passing figures of soldiers in a battle and the sculpture of Mother Latvia expressing nation's sorrow and gratitude to the lost heroes in the very centre. A large cross is located underneath (destroyed during the Soviet occupation). The Gate of Riflemen, which was left unfinished in the 1930s, features the sculpture Forefathers.



*Grieving horsemen group*

The Brethren Cemetery is located in the northeast part of Riga – 5 km from the city center. The cemetery is 6.62 hectares large. The Riga Brethren Cemetery tells about the events of WWI and the battles for Latvian independence. Mobilization had already been declared in Latvia when on August 1, 1914 Germany declared war on Russia. As the German army was rapidly pushing into Russian territory, a front-line along the Daugava River was established. In order to secure the Riga front-line, the Russian Empire for the first time allowed for the formation of Latvian military units – on August 1, 1915, the first Latvian riflemen battalion was formed. In October of that year, three Latvian riflemen fell near Lake Babīte, whose bodies were taken to Riga and ceremoniously laid to rest at the cemetery. The Russian army began a counter-attack from the Riga front-line on the eve of Christmas, 1916. 9,000 Latvian soldiers lost their lives during the so-called Christmas Battles, which lasted until January 22, 1917. Overall, approximately 32,000 Latvian riflemen fell fighting for the Russian army during WWI. 983 of them have been laid to rest at the Brethren Cemetery. When Germany was defeated and forced to withdraw



*Two brothers*

its troops from the occupied territories, and Soviet Russia ceded hegemony over the Baltics as part of the Treaty of Brest, a sovereign Latvian state was declared on November 18, 1918. However, the struggle for independence did not end here. With the Red Army rapidly approaching, Riga was captured on January 3, 1919. Latvian riflemen who fought for the Red Army and fell during the capture of Riga were also buried at the Brethren Cemetery. In March of 1919, a counter-attack was launched from Liepāja by the forces of the Latvian Provisional Government and the remnants of the German forces against the Red Army, and by May 22 the Provisional Government was in control of Riga. After the battles of Cēsis, the now hostile German forces pulled back to Jelgava, where they merged with the forces of the German-established Western Russian army under the command of Pavel Bermond-Avalov. On October 8, 1919, instead of going to the frontline to fight in the Russian civil war, Bermond's forces attacked Riga. Over 2,000 Latvian soldiers died fighting the Bermond army, with some of them laid to rest at the Brethren Cemetery as well. After the Latvian forces were victorious over the Bermond army, the



*Heraldic group Kurzeme*

liberation of Latgale was launched on January 3, 1920 and continued until the end of January. 630 Latvian soldiers fell during the liberation of Latgale, with a similar number of soldiers dying from injuries or lost in action. Dozens of them have been buried at the Brethren Cemetery as well. Also buried at the Brethren Cemetery during the first period of Latvian independence between 1920 and 1940 were recipients of the Order of Lāčplēsis, former Latvian riflemen and participants of the battles for independence. On August 5, 1940, Latvia was illegally annexed by the Soviet Union. Laid to rest at the Brethren Cemetery are also officers who resisted the occupation of Latvia. When war broke out between the Soviet Union and Germany on Latvian territory, there was also an increase in the number of people laid to rest at the Brethren Cemetery. During the period Riga was occupied by German forces, Latvian legionnaires and members of the national resistance movement were buried at the Brethren Cemetery. Meanwhile, when Riga was under the control of the Red Army, Red Army soldiers and "red" guerillas were buried here. In 1958, the renovation of the Brethren Cemetery Memorial Ensemble began, albeit in the ideological

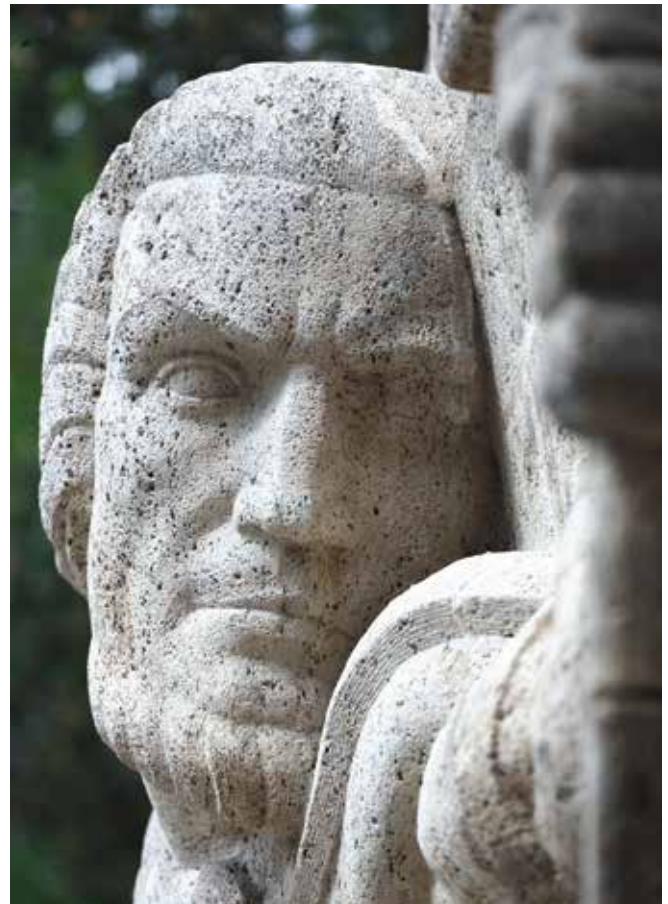


*Heraldry of Latvian cities. Fragment.*



*Sculptural group Forefathers*

spirit of the Soviet Union. Red Army soldiers were re-buried here, and as the Sovietization process of the cemetery continued, between 1981 and 1989 Communist party veterans were also laid to rest at the cemetery. After Latvia regained its independence, restoration and reconstruction works of the Brethren Cemetery were resumed in the 1990s. Respecting the author's original plans of the cemetery project, various historical details of the Brethren Cemetery that had been taken down during the Soviet occupation period were renewed – the years 1915-1920, the Latvian Coat of Arms, an ensemble of crosses, as well as the large cross under the Statue of Mother Latvia. In 2005, the I depository was renovated, and a memorial room was unveiled for all recipients of the Order of Lāčplēšis. In 2010, the II depository was renovated, and a memorial room was unveiled to all Latvian soldiers fallen on foreign soil. In 2011, in the III depository, the For Honor and Appreciation room was unveiled, honoring those who made donations for the restoration of the Brethren Cemetery, and in 2013 in the IV depository the memorial room IN MEMORIAM 1915-1920 was unveiled, honoring soldiers who gave their lives in foreign armies so that the Latvian state could be born. The unfinished Riflemen Gate from the 1930s, as well as the former chapel have been completely reconstructed. Over the past 20 years, the cemetery's pathways have also been gradually reconstructed, the sculptures and walls have been restored, and damaged or lost gravestones have either been restored or replaced. Historical research is still ongoing to update the database on those buried in the cemetery.



*Sculptural group Forefathers. Fragment.*

GUSTS	1899 1968	DUŠA RIHARDS	1891	DZEGUZE GEORGS	1897 1919
EISEN / RAUDME	1893 1945	OSVALD	1892 1942	ĒKIS LUDVIGS	1892 1943
ZONS	1890 1940	EZERINŠ JĀNIS	1894 1944	EZERS KRIŠJĀNIS	1887 1969
HEINRIHS	1899	FREIBERGS / KALNIETIS JĒKABS			1900 1987
RS	1899 1945	GAILĪTIS KĀRLIS	1893 1973	GAILĪTIS MARKUS	1882 1942
GLINSKIS PĒTERIS	1886 1928	GEUHOWSKI JANUSZ			1888 1964
GRICMANIS NIKOLAJŠ	1898 1919	1897 1970	GRIEZE JĀNIS		1895 1949
GROSVALDS JĀNIS	1896 1970	1891 1933	GRŪBE BERNHARDS		1900 1969
NDRIKIS	1898 1942	GULBIS JĀNIS	1895 1983	GULBIS PĒTERIS	1897 1945
HARTMANIS ERNESTS	1895 1983	HARTMANIS MĀRTINŠ			1892 1941



Memorial room for recipients of the Order of Lāčplēšis (1 depository)



Eternal flame

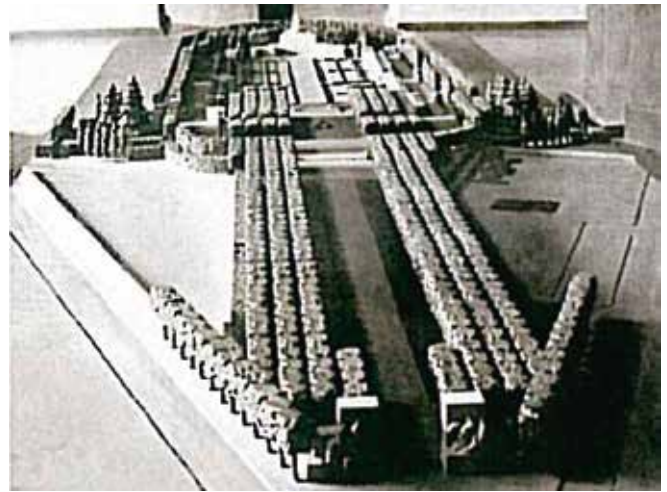


Mother Latvia with her fallen sons



*Kārlis Zāle. 1920s.*

Author of Riga Brethren Cemetery ensemble Kārlis Zāle (Zālīte), born October 28, 1888 in Mažeikiai and died February 19, 1942 in Riga, spent his childhood in Liepāja. From 1909 to 1913 he was an unenrolled student at the Kazan Art School's Sculpture Department. Later, he went to Moscow where he worked in the workshop of the prominent sculptor Stepan Erzia. Zāle continued his studies in Petrograd – in 1916 at the school of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Art, from 1917 to 1918 as an unenrolled student at Imperial Academy of Art and the Petrograd Free Art Educational Studios. In 1921, Zāle also went to Berlin to continue his studies, where he got acquainted with modernism (abstractionism, constructivism, cubism) trends in art. In 1923, the sculptor returned to Riga.

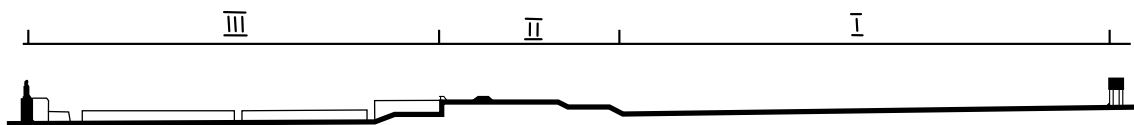
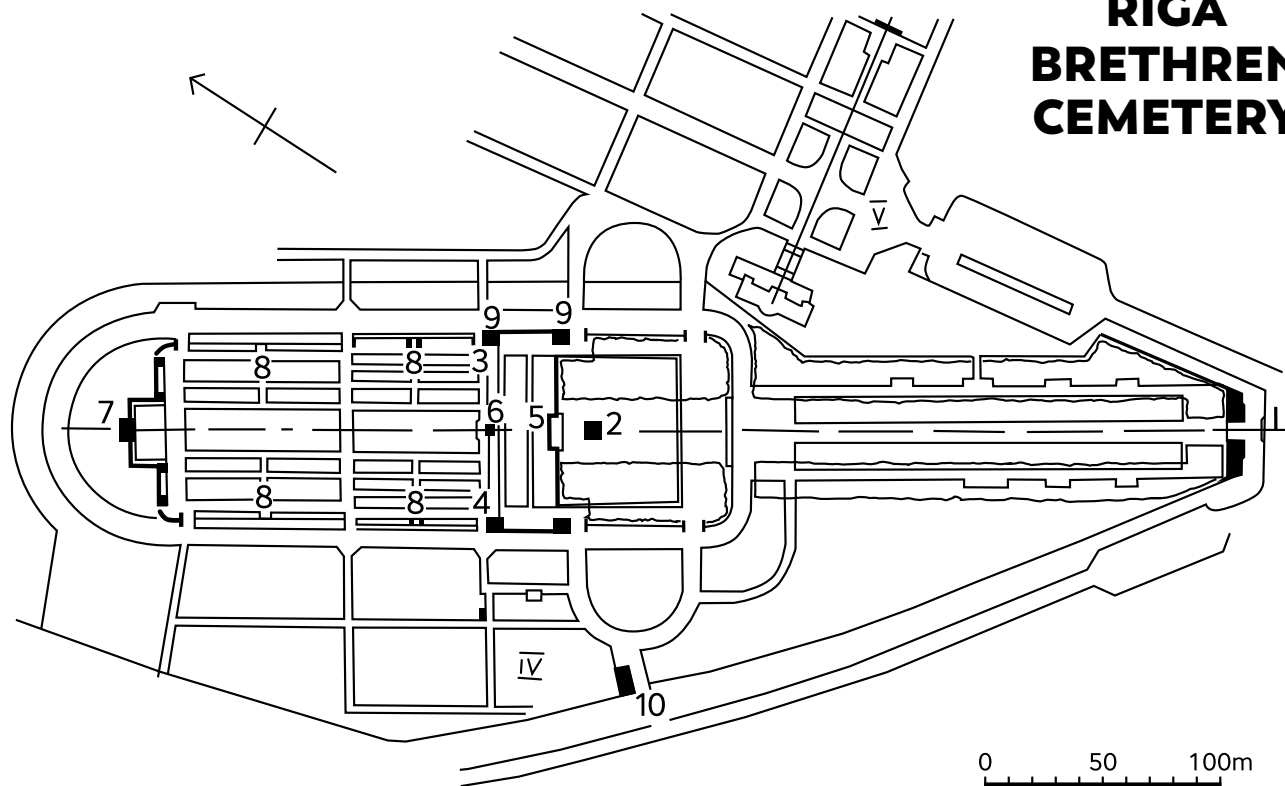


*Draft design of Brethren Cemetery ensemble by K. Zāle*

Kārlis Zāle is the pioneer of Latvian monumentalist sculpture, and is seen as the greatest sculptor in the nation's history. His works, especially the Brethren Cemetery ensemble and the Freedom Monument, are artistic masterpieces, in which the sculptor speaks in the language of symbols and allegories. They are generalized and permeated with philosophical meaning, expressing the desire of the people for freedom, love of their nation, hard work and the beauty of the ethical values maintained by Latvians throughout the centuries.

Kārlis Zāle created the Freedom Monument (architect E. Štālbergs, metal artist R. Myrsmēden) and the Riga Brethren Cemetery's ensemble (architects P. Feders and A. Birzenieks, garden architect A. Zeidaks). His work also includes the monuments dedicated to Oskars Kalpaks in Meirāni (1927), Andrejs Pumpurs at the Great Cemetery in Riga (1929), Fallen WWI Riflemen in Smārde (1936), Liberators of Riga from Bermond's Army at Sudrabkalniņš in Riga (1937, architect E. Štālbergs), Soldiers Fallen in the Independence Battles in Jaunpiebalga (1930, architect A. Birzenieks), as well as private memorials at cemeteries in Riga, Valmiera, Trikāta and Vilķene. Kārlis Zāle also worked as a professor at the Latvian Academy of Arts and headed that Master Workshop of Sculpting. He is a recipient of the Order of the Three Stars (Commander Grand Cross, 1st Class), the Fatherland Award (1938), as well as a Grand Prix winner at the World Fair in Paris (1937). Kārlis Zāle has been laid to rest at the Riga Brethren Cemetery.

# RIGA BRETHREN CEMETERY



- 1 – Entrance Gate
- 2 – Altar of eternal fire
- 3 – Wounded Horseman I
- 4 – Wounded Horseman II
- 5 – Mask of the Known Soldier and Mask of the Unknown Soldier
- 6 – Two Brothers
- 7 – Mother Latvia with the Fallen Sons and Latvian Wall 8 – Memorial Wells
- 9 – Depositories
- 10 – Riflemen Gate with the sculpture Ancestors

- I – Linden alley
- II – Terrace
- III – Burial field
- IV – Riflemen section
- V – Meža Cemetery



Rīgas pieminēkļu aģentūra

Text and photo materials: Riga Municipal Monument Agency  
 Publisher: Riga Tourism Development Bureau  
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