

A STORY OF THE TIME BALL AT GDANSK NOWY PORT (DANZIG NEUFABHRWASSER)

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For centuries lighthouses have stood alongside sea routes, but now they have become monuments to history and technology. One technological mechanism that has become part of history is a time ball. It was affixed to the roof of many lighthouses. A small number of them have survived, for example, at Greenwich (UK), Karlskrona (Sweden), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Norfolk (Virginia, USA) and Singapore. They are all great tourist attractions. The time ball in Gdansk has joined this select company of magical places.

The dropping of the time ball at noon every day, triggered by a telegraphic signal sent from the Royal Astronomical Observatory in Berlin in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century enabled the captains of the ships anchored in the port and in the roads to adjust their chronometers.

You can become acquainted with this history in detail by taking part in the Society's trip to Polish lighthouses on July 8 through July 18, 2010.

Time Ball Above the Gdansk Nowy Port

The ship's chronometer came into use on all the seven seas in the mid-18th century. It was synchronized with astronomical time using a time ball, an invention patented by the Captain Robert Wauchope of the British Royal Navy. Time balls were erected in over 100 different places, one of which was Gdansk Nowy Port (Danzig Neufahrwasser) in 1876. In Gdansk this device was affixed to the roof of the wooden tower of the pilots' station, which stood near the bliza (tower topped by a light) whose light first shone in 1758.

The time ball station was operated by employees of the Post Office, who raised and dropped the ball twice a day. The first drop

was at noon Gdansk Nowy Port mean time. The second was 1 h 14 m and 39.2 s later, at noon Greenwich mean time. The relevant order establishing the time ball was signed by the Imperial Superintendent of Posts in Gdansk on July 7, 1876.

The poor state of the tower housing the pilots' station meant that the time ball

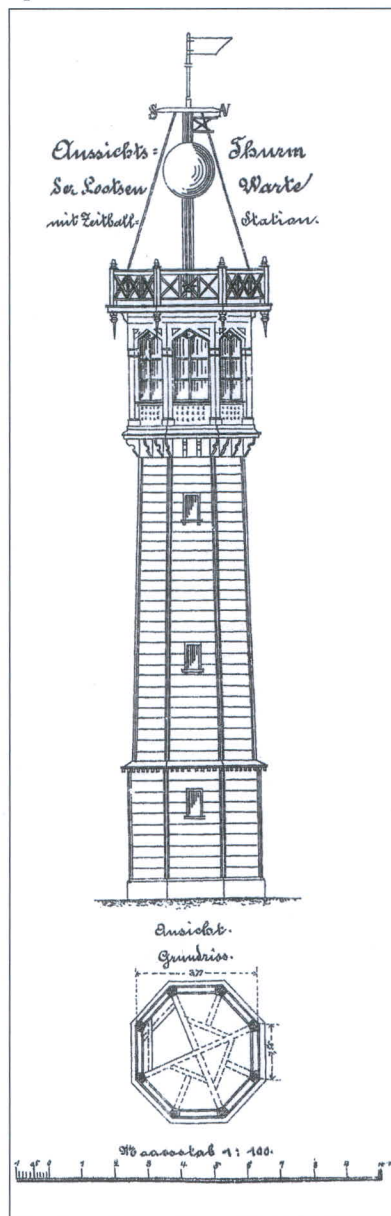
had to be moved to a newly-erected lighthouse in Gdansk Nowy Port. The mast consisted of four metal rods along which the time ball moved; the ball was manufactured by Steimmig & Co. of Gdansk in 1895. Placed on the copper cupola of the lighthouse, the mast was stabilized by eight stays. The cycle for signaling noon involved raising the 80 kg (176 lb) ball to a height of 3 m (10 ft) and then rapidly dropping it on two occasions: to signify noon at Gdansk Nowy Port, and then noon at Greenwich. Both the Royal Inspector of Port Construction and the Imperial Superintendent of Posts deemed it their responsibility to move the time ball. The time ball remained in operation until 1921, when time signals began to be transmitted by the Gdansk Radio Station. Following storm damage, the ball was taken down in 1929; the mast survived for another 30 years.

From its inception, the Gdansk Nowy Port lighthouse served three purposes:

- as a lighthouse
- as a port pilot station
- as a time ball station

The lighthouse became obsolete as a navigational aid in 1984. Many times, the people of Gdansk suggested that the lighthouse with its intact equipment was a valuable monument of industrial archaeology and that the restored time ball would be an unusual attraction for the city. In 1999 the city authorities approved a proposal to renovate the lighthouse and to open it for tourist visitors.

The idea was received with enthusiasm on the part of the City Administration, the Maritime Office, and the Port of Gdansk Authority. Following renovation and adaptation work, the lighthouse was opened to the public in 2004. Today, with its beautiful Neo-Gothic architecture, optical equip-



Left: The tower of the pilots' station with the time ball of 1876.



Noon on May 21, 2008. The ball is at the masthead.

ment, and fascinating display of large-format photographs of lighthouses, it is an invaluable testimony to technology, history, and architecture. It has become a popular tourist

attraction in Gdansk, especially since 2008, when the time ball was restored and put back into operation. The 80 kg (176 lb), 1.6 m (5 ft) diameter openwork ball installed above

the lantern cupola is 37 m (122 ft) above sea level and is raised 3.2 m (10 ft), after which it is dropped exactly on the hour.

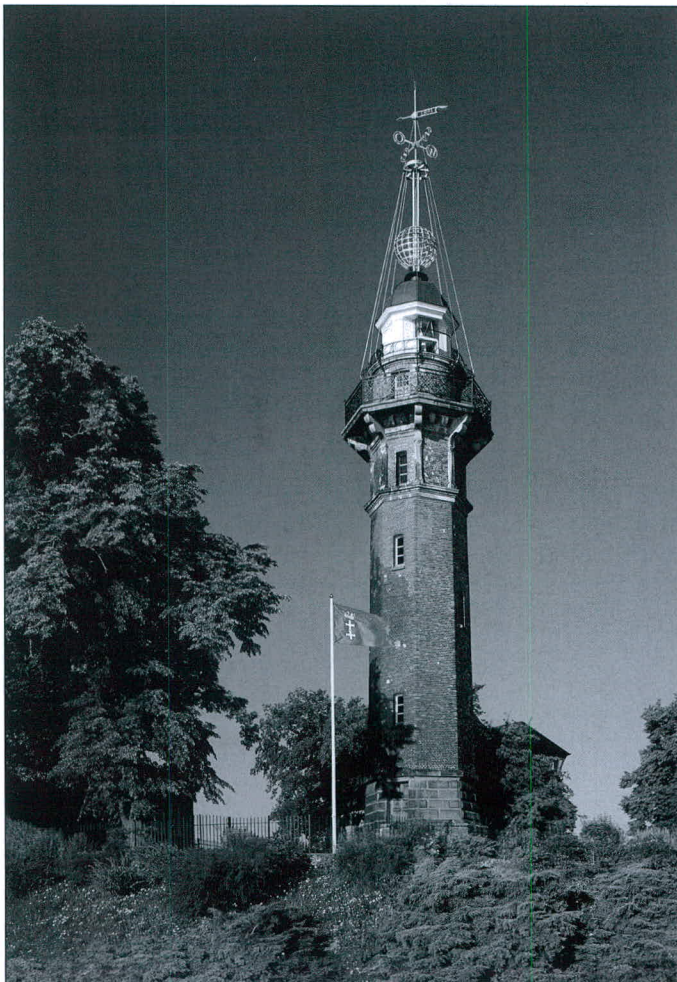
After 80 years, to the great joy and satisfaction of the local people and of tourists, the time ball returned to its rightful place. Its ceremo-

nia! inauguration took place at noon on Wednesday, May 21, 2008.

The release of the time ball is now controlled by the radio signal from the European Time Centre at Mainflingen near Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, and not, as originally, by a telegraphic signal transmitted by post office workers. So that a greater number of people can witness this show of time, the ball drops four times each day—at noon, 2 p.m., 4 p.m., and 6 p.m.—from May to September.

The lighthouse at Gdansk Nowy Port has become a tourist magnet. With its fascinating architecture, history, its exhibition devoted to the earlier light marks at this site, and its charming location at the point where the Dead Vistula (Martwa Wisla) enters the Gulf of Gdansk, this lighthouse fills visitors with enthusiasm, especially since the Port of Gdansk is one of the few places in the world to have preserved their old lighthouses (here, only the bliza from 1758-1894 is missing). Imposing, indeed second to none, is the vista from the top, embracing the whole Gulf, from Gdynia and Sopot, and the whole Hel peninsula across to the Vistula Spit (Mierzeja Wislana). Nowhere else do we find combined the amber-yellow of sandy beaches, the green of the forests, and the dark blue of the sea. That great scholar and traveler, Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1767-1835), captivated by this view of the Gulf of Gdansk, called it one of the three most beautiful coasts in Europe.

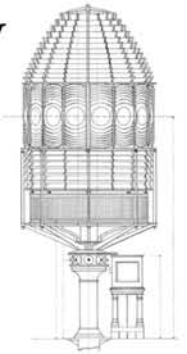
And here is one of the splendid, fascinating spots in Gdansk that you just have to see! You can see personally this Time Ball in Gdansk this summer.



Above: Drawing of the lighthouse and the surrounding fortress circa 1756. Left: The back of the Nowy Lighthouse.



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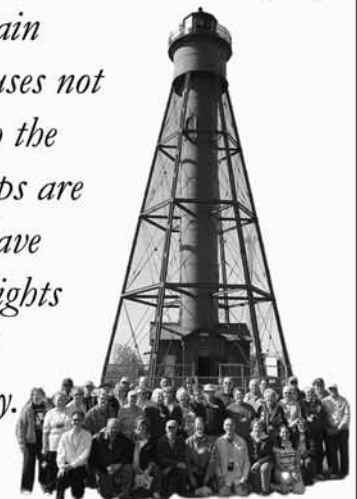
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