

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE «POLYTECHNICIANS» BURIED IN THE MĀRTIŅŠ CEMETERY, RIGA, TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RIGA AND LATVIA

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Summary. Many notable personalities are buried at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga, including those who have contributed to the development of engineering sciences. Several personalities are associated with Riga Polytechnicum (RP) / Riga Polytechnic Institute (RPI). These are the founders of the RP, members of the Council, lecturers and former students. Nine individuals were identified during the research: one founder of the RP, two lecturers and four former students, one of whom was also a lecturer, and two graduates. The most well-known personalities are the Thilo family and the RP lecturer and entrepreneur Rudolph Heinrich Mantel (1853–1924). Monuments have survived for some of the buried, and their photographs are included in the article.

Keywords: Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga, Riga Polytechnicum, Riga Polytechnic Institute, Thilo family, Rudolph Heinrich Mantel.

Introduction

Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga is one of the oldest in the city, founded on 3 August 1773, and closed to new burials in 1952. This Cemetery mainly houses those who lived in Pārdaugava, Āgenskalns. Only a small part of the burials are currently being looked after by relatives. Many families

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emigrated from Riga abroad during World War I or at the beginning and end of World War II. Germans, Latvians, Russians, Swiss and people of other nationalities are buried here. Walking through the Cemetery and looking at the monuments, one can read the names and surnames of many notable personalities. They have contributed not only to the development of engineering sciences but also to medicine, education and other sciences, as well as culture.

At the Riga City Council meeting on 12 June 2010, a decision was made to allow urn burials at the Mārtiņš Cemetery. This decision was taken after a petition to the Riga City Council by one of the authors of this article – Valdis Gavars. In 2015, a special memorial was created here for people who donated their bodies to medicine and science after death at Riga Stradiņš University, located near the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga.

The first chemist of Latvian origin, David Hieronymus Grindel (1776–1836) [1], Professor at the University of Dorpat (now Tartu), is buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga. JSC «Grindeks» is named after him, and in 1995, it established the D. H. Grindel Prize, which has also been awarded to RPI lecturers and graduates.

The continuator of the traditions and activities of the RP / RPI – Riga Technical University (RTU) family has a tradition every year in October, when the anniversary of the university's founding is celebrated, to lay flowers at the graves of former rectors – at Meža Cemetery, Matīsa Cemetery and Great Cemetery in Riga. On 10 October 2024, on RTU History Day, participants of the Section «History of Engineering Sciences and Institutions of Higher Education» of the RTU 65th International Scientific Conference gathered at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga for a moment of remembrance. At the memorial event, the authors of this article spoke to participants about the «polytechnicians» buried in the cemetery. At that time, the research was still in progress, and historians of science continued their work in identifying these «polytechnicians».

The Thilo Family and Engineering Sciences

In 1833, Georg Adolf Thilo (1789–1854) purchased a cloth manufactory in Zasmusiža (present-day Zaslauks District, Riga, Pārdaugava). By modernizing it, he provided jobs for about 100 people, including women. The manufactory was inherited by his son Carl Adolf Thilo (1817–1887). In the mid-19th century, the Thilo family also purchased adjacent land plots, which were needed to expand production. Their company was profitable and developed into a kind of «factory town» [2]. With the rapid development of industry and the introduction of new technologies and equipment into production, educated specialists were needed, who

were not being prepared in Riga. Therefore, C. A. Thilo was involved in the establishment of the first technical university in the Baltic provinces – Riga Polytechnicum, and in 1858, as a representative of the Riga Bourse Committee, he was elected to the commission that organized the establishment of this educational institution. Together with other influential Rigans, C. A. Thilo achieved that in May 1861, the Russian Tsar approved the regulations of the new educational institution, and the governing body of the university – the RP Council – began its work. The elder of the Riga Merchants' Association, the manufactory's advisor – C. A. Thilo [3] was elected and worked there for ten years (1861–1871). In 1864, he was one of the initiators of the establishment of the Analytical and Agricultural Chemistry Experiment Station and allowed the Zaslauks Manor (Sassenhof) he owned to be used for practical demonstrations by the RP Department of Agriculture [4]. This was a great support for the Department founded in 1863, because the university, located in the centre of Riga, did not have land for agriculture; only in 1877, did RP lease land in Pētermuiža (Peterhof) near Olaine.

C. A. Thilo is buried next to his father, G. A. Thilo and his mother Charlotte Thilo (1800–1884) at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga, near Slokas Street. He is the only known co-founder of RP and one of the Council members who rest in this Cemetery. The son of C. A. Thilo, a graduate (1869) of the University of Dorpat, lawyer Ernst Thilo (1847–1884) taught courses (1875–1879) at RP related to commercial, bill of exchange and maritime laws, agricultural rights, and property management [5]. He passed away at the age of 37. The Thilo family tombstone also contains the names of his two brothers – Adolf Thilo (1843¹–1921), who had studied chemistry at the University of Dorpat and was engaged in trade in Riga, and Otto Wilhelm Thilo (1848–1917), a graduate (1875) of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Dorpat, an orthopaedist, and one of the pioneers of biomechanics [6]. It should be noted that he had studied drawing and drafting privately with the RP lecturers.



Figure 1. Tombstone at the resting place of the Thilo family at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga. 2025.

¹ The tombstone indicates 1844–1921.

The Activities of the Swiss Engineer Rudolph Heinrich Mantel in Riga

In November 1875, the Swiss engineer Rudolph Heinrich Mantel began work at RP. In RP, he was known as Heinrich Mantel, and he also signed documents related to his work at the university with one name [7]. R. H. Mantel, a graduate (1875) of the Zurich Federal Polytechnicum from Winterthur, Switzerland, lectured on geodesy, road, railway and waterworks construction [8]. He left the university in 1878. For a short time, he worked as an engineer in a factory in St. Petersburg, then in 1879, he returned to Riga and turned to business.

Together with mechanical engineer Mathias Salathe (?-?), R. H. Mantel founded a technical office, opened a machine factory and a foundry. At the beginning, the factory was small – just a small carpentry workshop, mechanical workshops with five lathes, a planning machine, two drilling machines, small forges, foundries with a cast-iron standing furnace and a ladle furnace. It employed about 40 workers [9]. Gradually, the company expanded, and in 1899, it was transformed into the Mechanical Engineering Joint Stock Company «R. H. Mantel» [10]. It was possible to buy steam engines, lifting equipment, pumps, turbines and other goods. The metal foundry cast the large lampposts with lamps that are still located on Jēkaba Street near the Saeima building. In 1910, the company employed around 550 workers and 50 civil servants. Initially, the company built small steamboats, as well as manufactured various metal goods and made improvements to surrounding factories. Before World War I, it manufactured steam engines and boilers, mills, machines for cellulose, cardboard and paper production, and turbines. By 1910, R. H. Mantel's company had built 18 steamboats and also produced other goods [8], some of which had won recognition at various exhibitions. For example, in 1888, at the Exhibition of Crafts, Industry and Agricultural Products in Jelgava, R. H. Mantel was awarded a silver medal for achievements in mechanical engineering, especially for the manufacture of a butter churn [11].

During World War I, the engineer and his company were evacuated to the city of Yekaterinoslav in Russia (now Dnipro, Ukraine), and its operations in Latvia were not resumed. After the war, he returned to Riga. In addition, he owned two pasteboard factories in Vidzeme – in Bormaņi (now Trapene Parish) and in Grūbe (Ape Parish) [12]. They had been damaged during World War I, and it was planned to restore them. Whether this was implemented, the authors do not know.

R. H. Mantel was also a well-known public figure. In 1897, the Swiss Government appointed him as its Consul in Riga, and after the establishment of the Republic of Latvia (LV), the engineer was the

Honorary Consul of Switzerland in Latvia until 1923. At the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on 21 October 1921, R. H. Mantel was confirmed as the delegate of Latvia to the League of Nations International Labour Conference in Geneva, but already at the meeting of 3 November, the decision was amended, approving agronomist Jānis Apsītis (1886–1952) in his place [13].

In addition, he was a good organizer and was highly regarded in the Latvian engineering community. He was one of the organizers of the Bureau of the Congress of Engineers and Technicians of Latvia, who helped create the program of the 2nd Congress of Engineers and Technicians of Latvia (1922) and presented two reports on issues of Latvian industrial renewal [14]. He took an active part in the Riga Technical Society (being an Honorary Member of it), at the Manufacturers' Society [15], and the Riga Literary and Practical Citizens' Union. The engineer and industrialist R. H. Mantel was respected by Latvians, Baltic Germans, and the few Swiss living in Riga.

In 1879, Swiss engineer R. H. Mantel married Anna Luise Brieger (1856–?), daughter of Heinrich Adolf Brieger (1823–1904), founder of the soap and perfume factory «H. A. Brieger». Their daughter Anna Luise, born in 1880, married merchant Robert Biedermann (?–?) from R. H. Mantel's hometown of Winterthur in 1901 [16]. The engineer's sons, Jacob Hans Heinrich (1883–1943) and Heinrich Adolph Mantel (1888–1960), were also born in Riga. The eldest of the engineer's sons – J. H. H. Mantel – studied at the Federal Technical University of Zurich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich), obtaining a diploma in mechanical engineering (1908), and managed a paper mill in Worblaufen in the Canton of Bern. His brother, the youngest of engineer R. H. Mantel's sons – H. A. Mantel, studied law at the University of Zurich and obtained a doctorate (1912) in this field of science, and a few years later founded his own firm in Switzerland.

R. H. Mantel's company was located in Pārdaugava, on Daugavgrīvas Street, where the Riga Agricultural Machinery Factory later stood, opposite the RTU Campus in Ķīpsala. The Mantel family also lived next to the company in Pārdaugava, and engineer R. H. Mantel was buried in the nearby Mārtiņš Cemetery. Representatives of the Union of Industrialists and Craftsmen and the Union of Latvian Merchants were invited to the funeral. The farewell speech at the grave was delivered by Vilis Vilhelms Cipste (1881–1930), a graduate (1914) of the RPI Department of Engineering [14]. Latvia had become R. H. Mantel's second homeland, where he lived for almost half a century.

The Contribution
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Mārtiņš Cemetery,
Riga, to the
Development of
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Figure 2. Monument to R. H. Mantel at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga. 14.09.2017.



Figure 3. Title page of the 1901/1902 annual report of the Mechanical Engineering Joint Stock Company «R. H. Mantel».



Figure 4. Advertisement for the Mechanical Engineering Joint Stock Company «R. H. Mantel». Rigasches Adressbuch, 1911.

The engineer's wife, Swiss citizen A. L. Mantel, left Latvia for Switzerland in 1925 and settled in the town of Worblaufen with her son J. H. H. Mantel. In 1926, she came to Latvia for three months to improve her health, staying in Riga and Jūrmala [17].

RPI Students

During the research, four former students and two graduates of RPI, buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga, were identified. The eldest of the two graduates, Karl Pohl (1877–1938), graduated from the Department of Agriculture in 1904, receiving an agronomist diploma. His first job was in Kurzeme – K. Pohl was authorized to manage the property «Jaunmokas», which at that time belonged to the Mayor of Riga George Armitstead (1847–1912), a graduate (1868) of the RPI Department of Engineering. From June 1904 to the end of March 1908, the young agronomist worked as a sworn appraiser, valuing agricultural land in Vidzeme. In the summer of 1908, he began working at the RPI as an assistant [18]. K. Pohl performed his work duties at the RPI experimental farm in Pētermuiža near Olaine, and he also had to supervise the development of students' diploma theses in crop production. Before World War I, courses on bog culture and grassland cultivation were organized in Pētermuiža, and agronomist K. Pohl gave a course on seed material to the participants. During World War I, when RPI was evacuated to Moscow, K. Pohl taught students a course in general crop production. In 1918, he returned to Latvia and was invited to lecture in agricultural accounting at the Baltic Technical University, which was established based on RPI. This university was closed in January 1919, but in the autumn of 1919, the Latvian Higher School (from 1923 – the University of Latvia) began its work, which included the technical faculties of RPI, and K. Pohl continued to work at this university. He taught agricultural accounting at the Faculty of Agriculture until he died in 1938 [19]. In science, K. Pohl focused on crop production, mainly on the study of seeds; he is the author of two brochures: «Determination of the Most Common Grasses (Gramineae) in the Flowerless State» (1934) and «The Most Common Herbs and Their Seeds» (1936).

The Contribution
of the
«Polytechnicians»
Buried in the
Mārtiņš Cemetery,
Riga, to the
Development of
Riga and Latvia

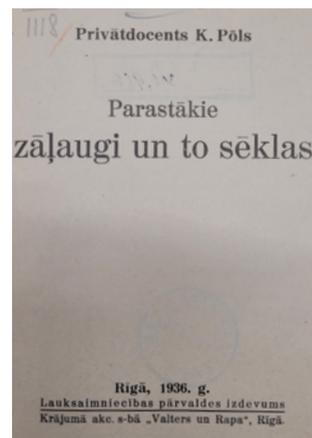


Figure 5. Title page of K. Pohl's brochure «The Most Common Herbs and Their Seeds». 1936.

Jānis Stalbovs (1886–1950) graduated from the RPI Department of Commerce in 1915. He came from a family of six children and, before his studies, worked in trade and industry, established a winery in his father's house in Kraukļi Parish and made wine for sale from fruits and berries grown in his own garden. Then, against his parents' wishes, he moved to Riga and, in 1909, began business studies. During his studies, he joined the Latvian student corporation «Talavija» [20]. He received a diploma from RPI in 1915. He worked as an accountant during his studies. He evacuated to Russia during World War I and returned to Latvia in 1920. He had held various positions, including being the Latvian Consul in Estonia. After that, his life was connected with banks: first, in 1925, he became the Manager of the Daugavpils branch of the Bank of Latvia, and in 1928, after becoming one of the Directors of the Bank of Latvia, he moved to Riga. It should be explained that at that time the Bank of Latvia was headed by a director general and three directors. J. Stalbovs served as director for many years, until 1940 and then from 1941 to 1944. J. Stalbovs' life ended in 1950, and he was buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery.



Figure 6. V. Remmerts' grave at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga. 2025.

One of the most recent burials (urn with ashes) at the Mārtiņš Cemetery is the grave of Vello Remmerts (1960–2001), a former student of the RPI Faculty of Civil Engineering (1978–1987). He is considered an Estonian living in Latvia because his father was Estonian. During his studies, V. Remmerts was the Commander of the Student Construction Unit

«Vēcrīga» of the RPI Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering and the Faculty of Civil Engineering [21]. After his studies, he was a senior expert at the Latvian Culture Foundation and, as the Head of the Foundation's Volunteer Centre, he encouraged people to participate in the cemetery cleanup campaign across Latvia on 7 and 8 May 1988. More than one service was organized, including at the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga [22], where both V. Remmerts and architect, RPI graduate (1979) Pēteris Blūms [23] contributed. In addition, V. Remmerts worked in the National Cultural Heritage Administration and, in the 1990s, in the Riga Restoration Bureau, first as a chief restorer, then as Chairman of the Board. He was active in the association «Latvia – Finland» and at the Riga Rotary Club, in which he also served as Chairman [24]. An engineer, restorer, public figure, patron of the arts, and opera lover, V. Remmerts' life ended at the age of 41.

Student of the RPI Department of Commerce, Kārlis Kaminskis (1889–1908) was born in Sloka, but the family soon moved to Riga, Kandavas Street in Zaslauks. His father, Kārlis Kaminskis (1852–1904), was a merchant and passed away in 1904, before Kārlis began his studies [25; 125]. Unfortunately, the student K. Kaminskis' life was cut short at the age of 19. He was buried next to his father.

It is known that Alberts Meldriņš (1886–?) is also buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga [26]. He studied at the RPI Department of Engineering (1906–1911) and the RPI Department of Agriculture (1912–1913) [25; 42]. The exact year of his death is unknown, but it must be assumed that it was after World War II.

Gonestis (Honestis) Svīķis (until 1921 – Kuzņecovs; 1884–1936), son of the lawyer, publicist, and linguist Jūlijs Kalējs-Kuzņecovs (1843–1905), associate of one of the founders of the New Latvian movement, publicist, Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891), founder of the Ainaži Naval School, began studying mechanics at RPI in 1905 [27], but the 1905 Revolution began and the university suspended its work, leaving students in the dark about when their studies would resume. Gonestis went to Paris to study medicine, but studying far away from his relatives required money. Although he was supported by his relatives, after his father's death, he returned to his homeland. He then lived in St. Petersburg, but after World War I, he returned to Latvia. He worked for a short time in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. G. Svīķis was buried on the Slokas Street side, with only a wooden cross placed on the grave, which has since perished. His cousin, Vasilijs Kuzņecovs (1875–1943), a graduate (1898) of St. Petersburg University and graduate (1907) of St. Petersburg Mining Institute, a mining engineer and teacher, is also buried in the cemetery, and due to fabricated (forged?) documents, was considered his brother for a long time [28].

Conclusions

Church documents about those buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga have only been partially preserved, so it is believed that more than one polytechnician is buried there. During the research, the authors found out that the parents of RP / RPI Professor Georg Thoms (1843–1902) were also buried in the aforementioned graves – his father, English merchant Henry Thoms (1799–1846) and mother Emilie Sophie Hollander (1817–1876), who was married for the second time to Heinrich Eduard Gustav von Hollander (1820–1897), member of the RP Council (1867–1869), Chairman (1870–1890). Other relatives of students and lecturers are also buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery, such as Karin Hviid (1884–1892), sister of Danish former RPI student Niels Hviid (1882–1967), father Niels Christian Hviid (1854–1916) and mother Elisa Alexandra Caroline Hviid (1854–1926).

Although there are no documents, the electronic encyclopaedia «Timenote» (www.timenote.info) contains information about more than 300 people buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery in Riga. The list is constantly being updated, as monuments with personal data have survived, as well as obituaries published in newspapers and announcements from relatives about the passing of loved ones. Research on the buried continues.

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The Contribution of the «Polytechnicians» Buried in the Mārtiņš Cemetery, Riga, to the Development of Riga and Latvia

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Tīlo dzimtas kaps Mārtiņa kapos Rīgā. 2025. V. Gavara foto.

Figure 2. Pieminekļis R. H. Mantelam. 14.09.2017. A. Zigmundes foto.

Figure 3. Mašīnbūves akciju sabiedrības «R. H. Mantel» 1901./1902. gada atskaites titullapa. LNB.

Figure 4. Mašīnbūves akciju sabiedrības «R. H. Mantel» reklāma. *Rigasches Adressbuch*, 1911. LNB.

Figure 5. K. Pola brošūras «Parastākie zāļaugi un to sēklas» titullapa. 1936. LNB.

Figure 6. V. Remmerta kapavieta Mārtiņa kapos Rīgā. 2025. V. Gavara foto.

2025/9



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Mārtiņa kapos Rīgā apbedīto «politehniķu» devums Rīgai un Latvijai

Mārtiņa kapos Rīgā apbedītas daudzas ievērojamas personības, tostarp arī tādas, kas devušas ieguldījumu inženierzinātņu attīstībā. Ar Rīgas Politehnikumu (RP) / Rīgas Politehnisko institūtu (RPI) saistītas vairākas personības. Tie ir RP dibinātāji, Padomes locekļi, docētāji un bijušie studenti. Pētījuma gaitā apzināti deviņas personas: viens RP dibinātājs, divi docētāji un četri bijušie studenti, no kuriem viens bijis arī docētājs un divi absolventi. Pazīstamāko personību vidū ir Tīlo dzimta, kā arī RP docētājs un uzņēmējs Rūdolfs Heinrihs Mantels (*Rudolph Heinrich Mantel*; 1853–1924). Daļai no apbedītajiem saglabājušies pieminekļi, rakstā pievienotas to fotogrāfijas.

Atslēgvārdi: Mārtiņa kapi Rīgā, Rīgas Politehnikums, Rīgas Politehniskais institūts, Tīlo dzimta, Rūdolfs Heinrihs Mantels.

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