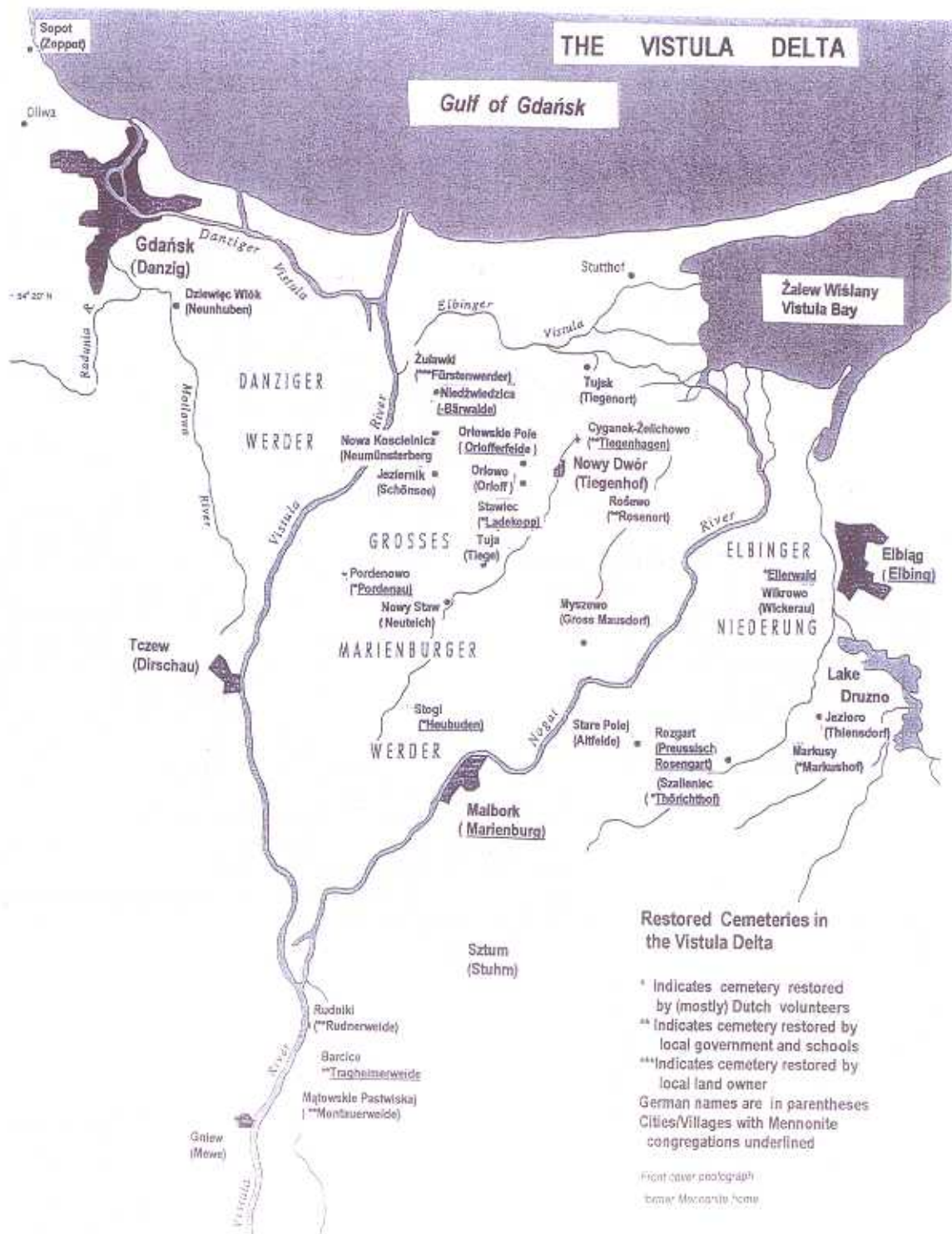


LEGACY RECOVERED



The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association

Peter J. Klassen
Fresno, California
2004



THE VISTULA DELTA

Gulf of Gdańsk

Żelazny Vistula Bay

Elbiąg (Elbing)

Lake Druzno

Restored Cemeteries in the Vistula Delta

- Indicates cemetery restored by (mostly) Dutch volunteers
 - ** Indicates cemetery restored by local government and schools
 - *** Indicates cemetery restored by local land owner
- German names are in parentheses
 Cities/Villages with Mennonite congregations underlined

Front cover: postgraph
 back: Meconite home

LEGACY RECOVERED: MENNONITES ALONG THE VISTULA

- *Fifteen Years of the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association*

In 1988, when the *Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association* (MPFA) was established, ties between Mennonites and the regions of Poland where Mennonites had lived for four centuries were few. The tragic events of World War II and its aftermath had created barriers of alienation, distrust and disinterest. In addition, many of the post-war inhabitants of what had been called West and East Prussia were newcomers to the area. Many had themselves been expelled from former Polish lands that had been seized by the Soviet Union.

It is not surprising that in such a setting, there was little knowledge of, or interest in, the Mennonite aspect of local history. Yet, Poland had provided a home for persecuted Mennonites during the Reformation era. Prosperous communities and large churches arose, especially in the Vistula Delta. This development continued when Poland was partitioned among its three neighbors, Prussia, Russia and Austria, 1772-1795. Although numerous Mennonites left this region and founded new settlements in Russia in the latter part of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, strong Mennonite communities remained in the former Polish Vistula Delta and along the lower Vistula River until the end of World War II. During and after the war, Mennonites fled or were expelled from the region. It was a sad end to centuries of development along the Vistula, an end made even more tragic by the sense of loss, deprivation, expulsion and alienation.

The MPFA was founded to find ways to bring mutual acceptance and understanding between Mennonites and Poles, to bear witness to a past when different cultures and religions existed peacefully side by side. Over the centuries, Catholic kings and bishops, Lutheran rulers and city councils had welcomed Mennonites and others who chose not to adhere to the approved state religions. People of different faiths lived side by side, prospered in the same communities, shared the same schools or built their own. Such a legacy could not simply be discarded and forgotten. And so, for the past fifteen years, the MPFA has built bridges of respect and understanding, and has helped to develop friendship and mutual support.

The following pages provide a brief glimpse of efforts to restore a legacy that had been largely forgotten and neglected.



A former Mennonite house-barn in Orloff (Orwowa), near the former Orloffsfelde cemetery.

THE MENNONITE STORY IN POLISH SCHOOLS

On May 28, 2004 the inner court of Gimnazjum 1 in the city of Nowy Dwór, formerly Tiegenhof, was the scene of a remarkable dream fulfilled. Here, with the director, teachers and students of the gimnazjum (classical secondary school), city officials from as far away as Toruń, as well as numerous guests from the community in attendance, students of the gimnazjum presented the results of a year's study of Mennonites. A subject which had been virtually ignored for decades suddenly became a topic of major study in the curriculum. Now, on a beautiful day in May, students and teachers reported on the first systematic effort to incorporate Mennonite life and culture in the Vistula Delta into the school curriculum.



The School Choir which celebrated the occasion with songs in Polish as well as in English.

Here, in a program enriched by songs performed by the student choir, students presented their findings. Alternate readings in Polish and German provided a fascinating array of discoveries and impressions. Repeatedly, students stated that they knew virtually nothing about the Mennonite presence in this area until they undertook this study. During the entire year, however, they had learned about Mennonite life and faith, and at the same time came to see

how remarkable Poland's tolerance had been in an age when religious persecution was common. Many Mennonites were executed, drowned, burned or expelled by many countries, but this was not the policy of Poland. Instead, the Polish king actually invited Mennonites to come and settle in the marshy delta and make it productive.

Under the leadership of Tomek Kwoczek, director of the gymnasium, two teachers, Janina Kwoczek and Katarzyna Petelicka, teachers of the two eleventh-grade classes, guided their students in learning about Mennonites. A Polish translation of Peter Klassen's *A Homeland for Strangers: An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia*, and other writings served as basic reading. In addition, students conducted oral interviews with elderly citizens.

Hearing students read reports about their findings was a thrilling experience. Tomek Kwoczek presented the students and the teachers who had led the classes. Guests included the mayor of Nowy Dwór, representatives from the cities of Elbląg, Malbork and Toruń, Bolek Klein, former mayor of the city and now director of the Żuławy Museum, as well as many other guests.



Organizers and supporters of the celebration: Bolek Klein (far left), Janina Kwoczek (third from left), Tomek Kwoczek (third from right), Katarzyna Petelicka (second from right).

What a dramatic change from two decades earlier, when the Mennonite story was largely unknown, forgotten or ignored! This moving public presentation on Mennonite life by gymnasium students, the first of its kind, marked the culmination of years of effort to make the Mennonite story once again a part of the history of the Vistula Delta; indeed, of Poland and Prussia.

Here are some excerpts from student papers:

-- "It's amazing to see what Mennonites contributed to development of Żuławy. Who knows how long this area would have remained a marshland, but for them!" (Bogna Kociumbas).
 -- "In Stegna we found a street named after the Mennonites. . . . When we talked with the mayor, he told us much about the history of Mennonite settlers in the region" (Karolina Krawczak).
 -- "We have put our hearts and much work into this project, so I hope somebody will appreciate what we have done"

(Olga Adamkiewicz).

-- "We learned that Mennonites, a group of Anabaptists, arose in the 16th century, especially in Frisia.

Menno Simons became their leader. They rejected infant baptism, but retained adult baptism, as well as the Eucharist. They did not hold political offices, or serve in the army. . . . Unfortunately, at the time of World War II, Mennonites had to leave Poland" (Karolina Nakoneczna)

-- "I never thought that Mennonite history might interest me. . . . but because of the projects about Mennonites, I have found out who they were, how they lived, and how much we have received from them. . . . I experienced great satisfaction in exploring this history" (Katarzyna Balbuza)

-- "I am very happy that I can remind people about the Mennonite presence in Żuławy. All these trips were important for me and my class. I am glad for what Mennonites have done for our homeland" (Dominika Olczak)

*"I never thought
 . . . Mennonite
 history might
 interest me."*

"[Mennonites] used to live on our land. They cultivated it and took care of it, so we should be thankful to them. Most of the people in Pomorze do not even know such people ever lived here" (Kamila Kocko)

-- "I went to ask my aunt for help. She was interested in Mennonites and gave me much information about these religious people" (Jacek Tkacz).

-- "We have learned very much from Mr. Bolek Klein. Another person, Mr. Lega from Warsaw, visited us and asked questions. . . . He was very surprised by our huge interest in Mennonites. We liked the idea of having freedom to gain knowledge about the Mennonites and the history of our small Żuławy homeland" (Barbara Szydzik)

-- "We want to learn more about Mennonites and their religion, and why they came to Polish territories" (Tomasz Wisniewski).

-- "When I look at the writing on the tombstones, I try to imagine how these people lived. . . . I think about human life that goes by and about the things that we may leave when we die, just like the Mennonites" (Krystian Kubaszewski).

-- "We found that the Mennonite faith was derived from the Bible. They had two sacraments, adult baptism and the Lord's Supper" (Mateusz Szczeptura).

FOUR CENTURIES OF MENNONITE LIFE ALONG THE VISTULA

I. A Forgotten and Neglected Past

During the upheaval of the Reformation, when religious wars and persecution were very much a part of European life, Mennonites in the Netherlands and northern parts of Germany, then known as the Holy Roman Empire, were subjected to pressures that often brought imprisonment, loss of property, expulsion, or death. Some of the stories of the heroes of the faith are told in court documents and martyrologies, such as the *Martyrs' Mirror*.

Not all political and religious authorities, however, supported such practices. Poland presented a notable exception, where a number of civil and religious powers expressed a willingness to permit Mennonites to settle in their territories. Thus, as early as the 1530s, a number of Mennonite refugees found new homes in parts of Poland, especially in the northern areas, such as the Vistula Delta, or up the river all the way to Warsaw. In many instances, these newcomers were invited because it was hoped they would drain marshlands and make them productive. At the same time, some landowners of property near cities invited Mennonites to establish themselves on the city outskirts and build shops, provide skills as merchants, artisans and laborers. By the middle of the 16th century, a number of Mennonite shops could be found in places such as Altschottland (Stare Skoty), just outside the walls of Gdansk, then known as Danzig. Other settlers had established farms in the marshlands of the delta, where their skills brought with them from the Netherlands led to the construction of networks of dikes, canals and drainage ditches, often accompanied by windmills. Gradually, prosperous farms arose in what a grateful Polish king, Wladyslaw IV, described as formerly “barren, desolate and unusable land.”

And so the saga of four centuries of Mennonite life in the Vistula Delta, up the river to Warsaw, and some other places began. This was a story that was largely forgotten and neglected in the tragedies created by World War II. By that time, Poland had been partitioned in the late 18th century among its neighbors, Austria, German and Russia. Most of the northern part of Poland, including the Vistula Delta, fell to Prussia and much of this territory became the new state of West Prussia, eventually to be part of the German nation that was established in the 19th century.

Mennonites in the region participated in the political, cultural, educational, economic and religious changes that occurred. They also were part of the saga of war, upheaval, flight and

expulsion that characterized dramatic historic change in mid-nineteenth century Europe. Mennonites and other non-Polish people of the region were forced to find new homes in other countries; at the same time, many of the newcomers who settled where Mennonites had once lived had themselves been driven from their homes in that part of Poland seized by and incorporated into the Soviet Union.

The new settlers had their own history; at least for a time, little attention was paid to the history of those who centuries earlier had come here to enjoy religious freedom. The violence of war and the forced relocation of populations left little time or interest for the study of a distant past.

Only gradually did this situation begin to change.

As some visitors returned to the land of their parents or, more often, distant ancestors, interest grew in seeking to preserve artifacts, buildings, documents and other bearers of memory. In response to a perceived need to create some means for recovering and maintaining a greater interest in and awareness of the past, the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association was created in 1988. With members drawn from Europe and North America, this body began to consider ways whereby the Mennonite story of Poland/Prussia might be revived and kept alive. At the same time, the group recognized that political and personal considerations would demand that national sensitivities would need to be respected. (Note: The MPFA Statement of Purpose, as well its list of Advisory Board Members, is appended.)

II. An International “First”

After the MPFA had been founded, one of its first concerns was to enhance awareness of the “Mennonite Polish/Prussian Story.” In response to that concern, a scholarly conference was planned to highlight the significance of this chapter of Mennonite history. Originally planned for Fresno, the conference was moved to Winnipeg, since that was the selected site of the Mennonite World

Conference in 1990. The MPFA then joined with other historical societies in carrying out this goal.

From July 21-24, 1990, scholars from Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and United States met to analyze issues of Mennonite history and culture, and also to examine current situations in those parts of Poland where Mennonites had lived for centuries. Participants were not able to find any evidence of a similar earlier scholarly conference called to discuss this topic, and so, a precedent was established. Most of the papers presented at the conference sessions were later printed in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

III. "Bonding" with a Congregation in a Former Mennonite Church

On June 25, 1991 members of a historical study group, together with the congregation of the former Mennonite Church in Gdańsk, presented a service of song, prayer, and reflection by representatives from Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and United States. At the conclusion of the service, a bronze plaque was unveiled just inside the main entrance to the church. The inscription, in **Polish, Dutch, German and English**, was read by representatives of the respective countries. The English version of the statement, designed to show how the present reclaims the past, reads as follows:

With thanks to God and in grateful memory of our friends in this area for providing a homeland for Mennonites for more than four centuries;
for granting religious toleration when religious persecution was common;
for restoring this church, built in 1819, but badly damaged in World War II;
for seeking to overcome the tragedies of war, flight and expulsion with love and reconciliation.

Gdańsk, June 25, 1991

During the dedication service, a joint American-Canadian choir, under the direction of Gerald Berglund from Clovis, California, provided a fitting choral setting. One of the local pastors, Anatol Matiaszuk, expressed the local congregation's appreciation to the visitors for their interest in, and support for the Pentecostal congregation now worshipping in the former Mennonite church.

A local newspaper, *Gazeta Gdańska*, carried a report and photo of the unveiling of the plaque (June 27, 1991). It is worth noting that the inscription evoked various sentiments. While the text was under discussion, several groups and individuals were consulted. We were well aware that German-Polish relations were delicate and sensitive; we therefore wanted wording that would reflect a concern for different viewpoints. Thus, we consulted the German *Mennonitischer*



Unveilers of the plaque. l. to r.: Anatol Matiaszuk, Peter Klassen, Arkadiusz Rybak

Geschichtsverein, some of whose members were on the Advisory Board of the MPFA. In an effort to be sensitive but also historically accurate, we inserted the work “expulsion” into the text, since Germans wanted some recognition of the tragedies associated with this grim reality. Simply to speak of “flight” did not accurately portray the grief and injustice that characterized so much of the war and its aftermath. Polish participants expressed their appreciation of the conciliatory stance taken toward their country. Eventually, we were gratified to see strong affirmation from all groups represented at the unveiling of the plaque.

Some expressed surprise and pleasure to see the inscription in four languages. This also reflected historical reality: most of the early Mennonite settlers came from the Netherlands, then adopted German as the region became part of Prussia. Local persons who would see the memorial were Polish, and many of the descendants of early inhabitants here now lived in English-speaking North America. Thus, the inscription embodied a hope for reconciliation and understanding, and at the same time, carried rich memories of the past.

Reaching Across Centuries

A few years later, another opportunity for demonstrating cooperation with the Gdańsk congregation presented itself. On April 17, 2002, the MPFA received a remarkable request from the church in Gdańsk. The congregation was seeking to gain ownership of the red brick building near the church. The building had once served the Mennonite congregation as a hospice, a home for people in need. Now, the current congregation was requesting the government to return the structure to the church, to be used for purposes similar to the original uses. We were informed that the government wanted a Mennonite body to confirm that “our church [the present Pentecostal congregation] shares the same spiritual heritage and continues the kind of “religious” activities as

Mennonites did.” We felt it would be appropriate to contact German churches, since many Mennonites who had once lived in Gdańsk were now members of churches in Germany. Responses to our request were cautious, and reflected that even today such questions raise sensitive issues. After further discussion, the MPFA agreed to support the request from our Polish brothers and sisters. We wanted to strengthen bonds of Christian fellowship, even if some political concerns still remain. We have since been informed that the government has indeed transferred ownership to the local congregation.

IV. Beginning a Program of Cemetery Restoration

In the decades following the end of World War II, many Mennonite cemeteries were neglected, overgrown and vandalized. Many gravestones were removed and used for other purposes. In an effort to preserve some evidence of the historic nature of these cemeteries, the historical preservation office in the city of Elbląg initiated a program of photographing a number of the grave markers. This project, carried out in the 1970s, preserved some evidence of historic stones that subsequently disappeared. The decline of cemeteries continued, with some serving as pasture lands, others simply allowed to be overgrown and abandoned. Not a single Mennonite cemetery was being cared for when in the late 1980s the MPFA embarked upon a program of restoring at least some of the most prominent cemeteries.

The MPFA was fortunate to secure the enthusiastic support and guidance of Arkadiusz Rybak, retired director of the Agricultural Experimental Station in Stare Pole (Altfelde). Dr. Rybak was immediately supportive of the cemetery restoration proposals; he approached local government officials to have the Stogi (Heubuden) cemetery placed under

historic preservation guidelines. The cemetery was now removed from use by a neighboring collective farm, which had pastured its cows among the graves. Together with the MPFA Dr. Rybak gained approval for fencing the cemetery. The MPFA supplied the funds for the project, and in 1991 the cemetery was enclosed by a fence that was modeled after the original one. Dr. Rybak supervised the operation, hired local workers for the task and secured the necessary materials.



Cemetery restoration has been a uniting and international project.

On June 26, 1991 the international group that had earlier dedicated a historical plaque in the former

Mennonite Church in Gdańsk now held a service of dedication and remembrance for the restored cemetery.

The service was held in the recently-built Catholic Church adjacent to the cemetery. The local priest welcomed the guests, and was most gracious to the visitors. The service, conducted by Alan Peters, consisted of words of greeting from the priest, a response by Peter Klassen, of the MPFA, songs by the choir, prayers, and a poem written specifically for this occasion by Jean Janzen.

Heritage

And so it is inscribed into
the cells of our bone and blood,
his swamp reclaimed, this sky,
this northern sea.

Stranger, the land wrote deep, even
as it held our people
in its fertile bloom, as they bent
over it with sweat and gratitude.

and as it opened its lap
for their bodies finally at rest.
And the sky echoed, Pilgrim,
even as it stretched its canopy

over cottage and fire,
as it rinsed and seared by turns.
Defenseless, echoed the sea, cold
and ceaseless, pressing at the dykes.

Love, they call together, submerged
and glistening like a pearl.
Our heritage: irritant, and luminous,
Hope,
as we ride the scouring tides of our
world.

Jean Janzen, June 1991

At the conclusion of a moving service, the visitors proceeded to the graveyard and once again reflected on the centuries of Mennonite history represented by the lives of the hundreds of persons buried at the site. Many, perhaps most, of the participants had ties of kinship with those who had once been part of the thriving Mennonite community and its church. Now, only memories and tombstones remained. And yet, as we joined in the majestic hymn, "Grosser Gott, wir loben dich," (Holy God, We Praise Thy Name), past and present united in praise to God.

A year earlier, the MPFA had presented Dr. Rybak with financial support so that the work of restoration could be begun. At the time of our meeting of commemoration, work on the rebuilding of the fence according to the style of the earlier one had already begun. The task was soon completed.

V. The Dutch to the Rescue

Soon after the conclusion of this tour, a remarkable building of a bridge across centuries occurred. Dr. Piet Visser, archivist of the Mennonite Archives in the library of the University of Amsterdam, together with Professor Sjouke Voolstra of the Mennonite Theological Seminary in Amsterdam, suggested that in the Netherlands there should also be a foundation that would support development of ties between Mennonites in the Netherlands and Poles living in areas once home to many Mennonites, especially in the Vistula Delta. Early in 1993 Margreet Stubbe preached in the Aalsmeer Mennonite Church and asked for help to restore Mennonite cemeteries in Poland. Soon an association was formed for the restoration of Mennonite cemeteries, and also to build friendship and understanding between the two groups. Eventually known as the "Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen" (Mennonite Foundation Netherlands-Poland), this

body was chiefly responsible for bringing numerous groups to Poland to engage in restoration work. Every year, from 1993 until 2001, a group of 8-13 persons, drawn mostly from the Mennonite congregation in Aalsmeer, but also from elsewhere, came to Poland to clean cemeteries, set up and glue broken gravestones, provide protective fencing, set up historical plaques, provide some roadside indicators of where cemeteries were located, and meet with local officials, teachers and school children to share aspects of Mennonite history. In many instances, teachers and pupils volunteered to help take care of the restored cemeteries.

For a decade, Mennonite leaders such as Pastor Arno Thimm of the Aalsmeer congregation, active supporters such as Henk Maarse, Maarten 't Hart, Margreet Stubbe, Albert Bolt and Jan A. Broere from the Netherlands, as well as Dorota Popowska from Warsaw have given hard work, guidance and inspiration.

A personal and historical touch has been added to this preservation project by a careful deciphering and copying of the tombstone inscriptions. In addition to names, as well as dates of birth and death, the stones often also carry references to the profession or vocation of the deceased, offices held in the church, as well as messages of hope and comfort for the living. Here, again, the painstaking copying of these inscriptions by Dutch volunteers has added significantly to our understanding of the central role played by the church in the lives of members of the Mennonite communities. The Dutch prepared inventories of inscriptions on numerous cemeteries.

VI. Supportive Leaders in Poland

From the beginning of the Mennonite "rediscovery" of the significance of the Polish chapter in the Mennonite story, Polish leaders have played a crucial role in all aspects of the

development of closer Mennonite-Polish ties and understanding.

One of the early leaders, who continues to play a significant role in this development, is Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak. A retired director of the Agricultural Experimental Station in Stare Pole, he has long championed the view that Mennonites played a vital role in the development of the agriculture riches of the Vistula Delta. He has studied and written about water engineering, drainage of excess water, use of canals, dikes and windmills to maintain appropriate water levels, types of grains and grasses that are best suited to the area, etc. Many visitors to the region have been delighted to hear a wide range of accounts of aspects of former Mennonite life.

Another energetic, informed community leader who has worked tirelessly to awaken greater interest in Mennonite culture is Bolek Klein, former mayor of the town of Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof) and now host to many Mennonite visitors. He is also the director and chief architect of the Żuławy Museum, located in Nowy Dwór and devoted to the history of the region, with special emphasis on the Mennonite story. Klein is also a prime mover in organizing conferences that focus on Mennonite culture and history.

Many political, religious and educational leaders have also been crucial to the success of a variety of efforts to build understanding and support. Mayors of Nowy Dwór, Malbork, Elbląg, Ryjewo, Stogi, and many villages, academicians at the universities of Gdańsk and Toruń, secondary schools such as Gimnazjum I in Nowy Dwór and the Gimnazjum in Ryjewo, as well as a number of elementary schools have made significant efforts to study and understand the Mennonite contribution to this region. Several graduate students at universities in Gdańsk and other Polish cities have also conducted research on the Mennonite story of the region.

Mayors of towns such as Ryjewo and Nowy Dwór, working with local schools, restored cemeteries in Rożewo (Rosenort), Cyganek (Tiegenhagen), Barcice (Tragheimerweide), Rudniki (Rudnerweide) and Małowskie Pastwiska (Montauerweide). In another gesture of friendship and support, a local business person who owns the land where the largely-destroyed Mennonite cemetery of the Fürstenwerder congregation is situated, has transformed this into a beautiful park. Remaining grave stones have been restored and an attractive historical marker placed on the site, at the north end of Niedźwiedzica (Bärwalde).



Bolek Klein, former mayor of Nowy Dwór and now director of the local museum, has been a strong supporter of efforts to recapture the Mennonite story.

Other vital sources of support have been the priests who have welcomed Mennonite groups to former Mennonite churches, and have extended hands of friendship. Also, the pastors of the former Mennonite church in Gdańsk, now home to a Pentecostal congregation, have often invited Mennonite groups to hold services in the church, or to participate in regular worship there.

VII. Scholarly Conferences in Poland

Over the past decade, several scholarly conferences, conducted in Poland and under Polish direction, have brought together scholars from Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada and United States. Various aspects of Mennonite and Polish economic, social, political and religious life have been examined. Polish participants have come from universities in Gdańsk, Toruń and Warsaw, as well as from a variety of professional organizations, especially museums. Participants from other countries have come from various universities and professions. Guests have regularly included a broad spectrum of local populations, as well as a variety of visitors from abroad.

One of these conferences was held in conjunction with the 1000th anniversary of the founding of Gdańsk in 997. The MPFA participated in providing some financial support, and also through the presentation of a scholarly paper by Peter Klassen. The conference, held in Nowy Dwór, was based on the theme, "Everyday Life of the Mennonites in the Vistula Delta." It was interesting to note the rather prominent Dutch involvement in the anniversary celebrations. The Dutch consul came to the conference, and Queen Beatrix came to unveil a historical marker on the Great Square (Długi Targ) of Gdańsk and also to dedicate two renovated buildings which now house the Consulate of the Netherlands on the square. Some of the events were covered both by local and national media.

The *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw, 19 June 1997) wrote that Roman Klim [former director of the Maritime Museum in Gdańsk, now deceased] said he was fascinated by the delta, where there once

were flourishing farms, numerous churches, well-kept cemeteries, strong bridges, but much of this had been destroyed in the war, and now needed additional restoration. A local historian, Edward Krajewski, expressed his hope that Mennonites would return to the region and help restore its former prosperity.

In 2002, another conference was held, this time in the resort town of Stegna, on the Baltic. Press accounts reported that about 200 persons came to the event. Historical displays enriched the events as participants from Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada and United States shared three days of discussion, hearing scholarly papers presented by professors from three universities in Poland and United States, enjoyed social events, and several trips to churches, homes and businesses once part of local Mennonite life. Special recognition and plaques were presented to Peter Foth, pastor of the Hamburg Mennonite Church; Arno Thimm, pastor of the Aalsmeer Church, the Netherlands; and Professor Peter Klassen, California State University, Fresno, in recognition of their leadership in building understanding and cooperation between their respective countries and Poland.

A local newspaper, *Dziennik Bałtycki* (21 June 2002) quoted Professor Edmund Kizik, University of Gdańsk, "This conference is an important event for Mennonites and Vistula Delta residents alike. The ancestors of the Mennonites contributed so much to the economic development of this area." Bolek Klein, chair of the Klub Nowodworski, and one of the major leaders of the conference, noted that his organization wanted to raise awareness of Mennonite contributions to this important part of Poland.

VIII. Student Exchanges

As a result of initiatives undertaken by the Dutch Mennonite foundation and other interested educators in Nowy Dwór, a student exchange was initiated in Fall 2003. As a result, some students from Poland spent several weeks in the Netherlands, and Dutch students spent a similar period of time in Poland. Students stayed with families, and thus were able to experience a different culture.

Plans were finalized at a series of meetings held in Utrecht and Haarlem in November 2003. Although MPFA was not directly involved in launching this venture, the association is delighted to see this kind of growing friendship and cooperation.

IX. A Financial Overview

The MPFA is grateful to its members and supporters for having provided funds for a number of significant ventures. Here are several illustrations:

- For the plaque in the former Mennonite Church, Gdańsk \$ 450
- For fencing the Heubuden (Stogi) cemetery \$ 2500
- For helping to fence the Markushof (Marcusy) cemetery fl. 1000
- For the Stegna Conference \$ 1000
- For scholarships (for research on Mennonites in Poland) \$ 500
- For Mennonite study in Vistula Delta schools \$1000
- For cemetery restoration and maintenance \$2400
- For publication of brochures in the Netherlands (depicting the Mennonite story in Poland) \$ 700

Note: All Executive Committee members serve gratis; also, travel costs are not reimbursed.

IN MEMORIAM

Members of the MPFA and other friends of Pastor Peter Foth, long-time pastor of the Hamburg Mennonite Church, were saddened to learn that he died on April 1, 2004. He was actively supportive of joint Mennonite-Polish projects, and was making plans to hold a meeting of German Mennonites who wanted to formalize efforts to enhance cooperation and support between German Mennonites and friends in Poland.

Since Pastor Foth has taken many groups from Germany to visit places associated with the Mennonite story in Poland. He has also participated actively in the scholarly conferences, as well as in projects such as renovating one of the walls of the Montau Church. Built in 1898, the church was badly in need of Partial renovation.

Pastor's Foth's ready smile won him friends wherever he went. His energetic involvement brought the successful completion of many joint projects in Poland and elsewhere. In all these endeavors, he was always strongly supported by his wife, Elke, herself a strong champion of building bridges to the land where she was born. Pastor Foth was an original and enthusiastic member of the MPFA. We will greatly miss his wise counsel, his creative involvement, his warm personality, and his strong friendship. Our world very much needs more people like our beloved Peter Foth.

For the Mennonite Polish Friendship Association

Peter J. Klassen



Upper left: Built in 1590, the Renaissance structure (upper left) served as the church of Elbing Mennonites until 1900. Upper right: The Heubuden (Stogij) cemetery has recently been restored. Below: The former Mennonite church in Gdańsk now is home to a Pentecostal congregation.



THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

International, inter-Mennonite, inter-confessional

Purpose (founded 1988)

- To foster better understanding between Poles and Mennonites
- To encourage study of Mennonites in Poland and Prussia
- To develop greater appreciation and awareness of Mennonite-Polish interaction
- To stimulate cooperation and reconciliation between Mennonites and Poles, especially in connection with the tragedies associated with World War II

Proposed Activities

- Placing appropriate markers and plaques on sites important to the Mennonite story when requested to do so by the local Polish community.
- Supporting Polish efforts to preserve tangible evidence of Mennonite history, such as caring for Mennonite cemeteries
- Encouraging Polish plans to display Mennonite art, artifacts and various memorabilia in museums and other designated centers.
- Facilitating collection, preservation and study of archival and other historical materials related to Polish-Prussian Mennonites.
- Assisting academic, cultural and social Mennonite-Polish cooperation and exchange.
- Developing other appropriate activities designed to strengthen Polish-Mennonite good will and support.

Membership

Membership in the Association is open to anyone supportive of the expressed goals. Institutions, church bodies, scholarly associations and other interested organizations are also invited to join.

Dues: Individuals: \$20 US; Institutions: \$50 US

In Canada, membership checks may be made out to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and mailed to: **Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4**. In the United States, checks may be made out to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, designated for the **Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association**, and mailed to the Association at the **Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1717 S. Chestnut, Fresno, California 92702**

Executive

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