

MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER
JANUARY 1994

Greetings to all Members and Friends

Perhaps you have been wondering why this newsletter did not come to you earlier. By way of explanation, let me share some comments sent to me in recent months. I had sent letters to members of the Advisory Board, asking that they indicate to me how we might best strengthen interest in the Mennonite story in Poland. Since the membership is scattered in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and United States, consultation by mail (perhaps soon by email) seemed most practical. I'd like to share some of the suggestions relayed to me.

Suggestions from the Advisory Board

1. Continue and strengthen current efforts (e.g., contacts with scholars in Poland; support of the Heubuden (Stogi) cemetery, encourage visits to former Mennonite centers in Poland, etc.).
2. Recognize that some contacts (whether personal, social, scholarly, or ecumenical) with interested persons in Poland are best handled by local or national groups.
3. Try to ensure the continuation of some international events, such as the dedication of the plaque in the Gdansk church.
4. Explore the possibility of joint Mennonite-Polish conferences, e. g., perhaps a special meeting in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Menno Simons.

Recent Events (not necessarily related to the MPFA)

1. Visits to Poland

-- This past June a group of 36 visitors, again led by Paul Toews and Peter Klassen, renewed acquaintances in former Mennonite centers along the Vistula. Beginning in Warsaw, the group visited the former (Deutsch) Kazun community, the church in Obernessau, the Przechowka settlement, the church and villages of the Montau (Matawy) lowlands, Elblag, Gdansk, Malbork and the villages of the Vistula-Nogat Delta. Again, the reception in all areas was most cordial.

-- Another large group, led by Pastor Peter Foth of Hamburg, and Eckbert Driedger of the Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, visited the Gdansk area and participated in a symposium held in Tczew on September 4, 1993. The event was largely organized by Dr. Roman Klim, director of the Maritime Museum in Gdansk.

-- Also, Dr. John Friesen conducted some research in the Gdansk area in September 1993. He reports that he found Dr. Rybak excited about expanding efforts to preserve what remains of the Mennonite tradition in the region. One of his current concerns is to bring gravestones from isolated and neglected cemeteries to the fenced and maintained cemetery in Heubuden (Stogi). Many of you contributed funds for that project.

2. Cultural and Scholarly Efforts in Poland

(a) the Elblag Museum.

This summer our tour group was invited to see the Mennonite exhibit in the Elblag Museum. A large room has been reserved for an impressive display of Mennonite material culture. The director, Kazimierz Solak, was most cordial; sadly, we have just learned that he has died of a heart attack. I am glad to report that the MPFA will be sending some funds (designated) for the work of the museum. Some of you may wish to participate. After considerable reflection, some of us have concluded that support of this museum is a promising way to encourage understanding of the Mennonites. Elblag is a growing city, an administrative and business center, well-situated, easily accessible. Persons of non-Mennonite background would be more likely to visit displays here, rather than in somewhat remote villages.

(b) Polish research on Mennonites

✓ -- Recently, a young Polish scholar, Dorota Popowska, completed a master's thesis on Mennonites once living near Warsaw, especially in Deutsch Kazun. She also presented a small exhibit in Warsaw; remarkably, the exhibit was financed by the Dutch government.

(Letter from Dorota Popowska)

✓ -- Dr. Edmund Kizik, of the University of Gdansk, has written several significant pieces on Mennonites. Funding is needed for publication. Also, he has transcribed the Heinrich Donner chronicle. He estimates that \$1000 would make publication (in German) possible. (Letter from Edmund Kizik)

-- In Warsaw, Wojciech Marchlewski is continuing his studies on the Mennonites in Deutsch Wymysle. (Report from John Friesen)

If any of you are especially interested in any of the above-listed projects, or would like more information, please write me at the address listed below, or call me. (209) 255-6335.

Annual dues

Annual dues may be sent to either of the addresses listed below. Checks should be designated for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association.

Annual dues (\$20) _____

Special projects (please designate) _____

Note: We are aware that interests change. If you do not wish to be on our mailing list, please let us know.

For the Association,

Peter J. Klassen
Mennonite-Polish
Friendship Association
Center for MB Studies
4824 E. Butler
Fresno, CA 93727

Mennonite-Polish
Friendship Association
Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, Canada R3P 0m4