

THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

4824 East Butler, Fresno, California 93727

January 1996

Greetings!

I hope the new year finds you well, ready for the challenges and rewarding experiences that lie ahead. The world is changing so rapidly that a sense of historical perspective and cultural roots seems more important than ever. Perhaps our Association can help to enrich our understanding and appreciation of the various strands -- historical, spiritual, ethnic, literary, artistic and other -- that have been woven into the tapestry that is our heritage.

Some Current "Happenings"

During the past few years, a number of organizations, informal groups and interested individual persons have begun a variety of efforts designed to strengthen ties between Mennonites and our Polish friends. I have reported on several of them in the last few newsletters; fortunately, interest and activities continue to expand. We applaud such endeavors, whether or not they are related to our Association.

Here are several items of interest:

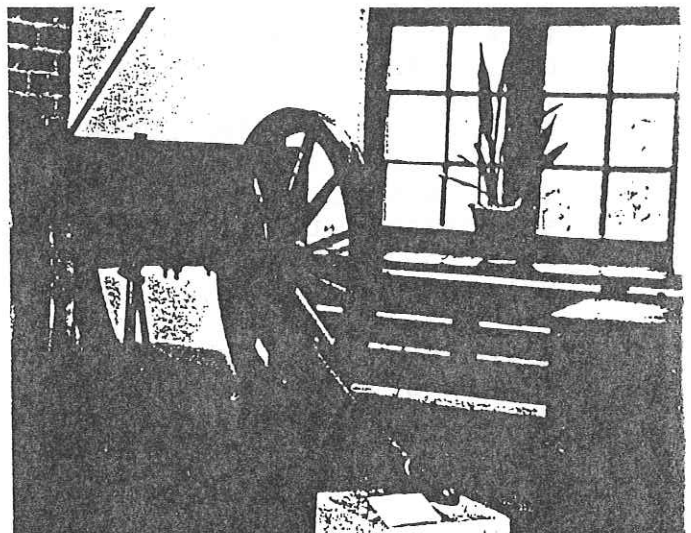
1. The Heubuden (Stogi) Cemetery

Dutch Mennonites in particular have restored tombstones and gravel boxes for many of the graves. Henk Maarse, from Zeist, The Netherlands, has written a fascinating account of this undertaking. He has noted the work of the Association, groups of Dutch and other Mennonites, as well as Mennonite Voluntary Service, in transforming an overgrown cemetery once used as a cow pasture into the remarkable historical monument it is today. Maarse has also compiled a partial inventory of tombstones, together with inscriptions, of a number of cemeteries.

A suggestion: as persons become interested in these and other efforts, coordination becomes ever more desirable. The Historical Preservation Office in Elblag, for example, has already photographed dozens of tombstones throughout the delta; I have found persons in this office most cooperative, very willing to share the results of their efforts with us.

2. The Elblag Historical Museum

As you know, our Association donated \$1000 to assist with restoration of Mennonite artifacts. I have received pictures of restored farm implements, once used in the "Werder." The museum is well worth a visit; the curators are very appreciative and helpful.



A restored "Werder" plow

3. The Museum in Tczew

Dr. Roman Klim, Director of the Maritime Museum in Gdansk, has also developed a small museum in Tczew. Artifacts and documents there reflect "Dutch" influences in the delta. Klim has also prepared a number of guides (in Polish), including his "Paths of the Mennonites in the Delta (Zulawy)."

4. Other Related Organizations

The "Dutch-German-Swedish Cultural Association" has recently been established to "care for the deserted and desolate cemeteries of Dutch, German and Swedish" persons who used to live in northeastern Poland. Headquartered in Bialystok, the organization is led by Mgr. Ing. Eugeniusz Choroszuca and Dr. Marian Chomonic. I have received a letter from them, outlining their plans and requesting financial support. Please contact me if you are interested.

The "Foundation for the Preservation and Development of the Dutch Mennonite Relations in Poland" has been established to organize support for preserving Mennonite historical sites in Poland. Piet Visser is chair; Henk Maarse is also working with this group. For details, contact Piet Visser. Universiteitsbibliotheek, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam.

On the Horizon

1. Menno Simons Anniversary

The 500th anniversary of the birth of Menno Simons is being widely celebrated by our Dutch Mennonite friends. Dr. Piet Visser, curator of the Mennonite Historical Library, University of Amsterdam and a "Menno Simons 500 Committee," as well as other Dutch leaders, have planned a series of expositions, conferences and other special events to celebrate this quincentennial. For details, contact the Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit, Singel 454. 1017 AW Amsterdam. Fax: 020-627 89 19

2. Historical Tours

Mennonite historical sites in Poland, especially in the Vistula Delta, continue to draw visitors. Peter Foth, Hamburg, has continued to take large groups to the delta and other sites of Mennonite history. Last summer, he and his fellow-visitors placed a memorial plaque on the former Mennonite church in Obernessau (Wielka Nieszawka), Torun. Peter's great-grandfather built the church in 1890, and was the "Aeltester" there.

Coming tours: Abe Dueck, Winnipeg, will take a tour group to Europe, April 29-May 1996. Sites to be visited include Gdansk. Veteran tour leader John Friesen will again take a group to places associated with the Mennonite heritage, including Gdansk. Dates: July 15-29, 1996.

Details: Assiniboine Travel Service, Winnipeg (204) 775-0271

A Conference in Gdansk?

Please give us your advice!!

Recently, the University of Gdansk extended an invitation to us to

have a historical conference in Gdansk in 1997, the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the city. A number of special events are being planned; a scholarly conference could be a significant addition. Should we move ahead with plans? Is it realistic for us to help sponsor an event where we are the guests, but where we would need to cover the costs? I expect the University would host a banquet and provide rooms for the sessions. Participants would need to find their own support (perhaps from their institutions?).

Some of us have discussed this possibility, but we feel we need a broad response. Would you be interested in going? Participating? If so, in what way? We could have an opening banquet, followed by a day of papers/presentations, then have opportunities for spending a few days visiting Mennonite sites. Perhaps some tours could plan to coordinate their stay in Gdansk with the dates of the conference. The University suggested early October for the time; by then, professors and students would be back. Some might wish to participate.

We still have enough time to plan for this special event, if we wish to proceed. Please write. fax or telephone me to let me know your opinion; I will then share these sentiments with a larger planning body.

I hope to hear from you.

SPECIAL NOTE TO MEMBERS/FRIENDS IN THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY:
Your advice is especially needed. Would you or your friends/associates be interested in participating?

Annual Dues (\$20)

These, as well as designated funds, may be sent to either address below. Checks should be made out to the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association.

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