

NEWSLETTER

THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

**Fresno Pacific University
1717 S. Chestnut Ave., Box 2204
Fresno, California 93727
January 2004**

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The year 2003 has again brought a number of positive developments in the Polish-Prussian Mennonite saga. As a result of earlier projects, several promising possibilities are open to us. I think they all represent opportunities for us to build even stronger ties with our friends in Poland, as well as our partners in the Netherlands and Germany. In addition, we continue to work with Polish, Dutch, German and North American groups and individuals who share a deep interest in the Polish-Prussian Mennonite story.

1. Street named for Mennonites

In the resort town Stegna (Steegeen), local officials have named a street *ulica Mennonitów*, in recognition of the significant role of Mennonites in its history. Readers of this newsletter will recall that in 2002 our

association, together with the Klub Nowodworski and the two universities in Gdańsk, sponsored a scholarly conference in Stegna. A number of initiatives for research and teaching Mennonite history in the area were adopted on this occasion.



This attractive street sign bears witness to the growing interest in the Mennonite story as part of the history of the Vistula-Nogat Delta.

2. Book on Tales of the Żuławy (Vistula Delta)

A three-person editorial group has been gathering materials for a book on sagas and tales of the Vistula Delta. They have gathered several dozen such accounts, and are preparing to publish their findings. A local artist has drawn sketches for the book. Our association has contributed \$1000 for this fascinating venture. The book is being published in Polish; the editors hope local schools will find it a good medium to increase interest in local history. We need to remember that times prior to World War II were largely

neglected in Polish school curricula, and so very little, if anything, was taught about Mennonites until very recently. As you know, *Homeland for Strangers* has been translated into Polish and is now being used in local schools.

3. Continuation of Mennonite Cemeteries Restoration Efforts

During the past year, restoration of former Mennonite cemeteries has been extended to Rudnerweide (Rudniki) and Tragheimerweide (Barcice). The mayor in the nearby town, Rehhof, has become involved in the restoration; in addition, local school children have also helped in removing weeds and brush. Similarly, the Tiegenhagen cemetery is in process of being restored as a result of a local mayor's support. You will recall that last year the Mayor of Nowy Dwór personally led the restoration of the Rosenort cemetery.

Now, a question to all who are interested in maintenance of these restored cemeteries: The Klub Nowodworski is willing to coordinate efforts to maintain the cemeteries, and estimates that about \$75 annually will cover expenses for maintaining a cemetery. Eventually, it is expected that local tourist and government agencies will take care of the cemeteries, but until such procedures are in place, we may wish to consider helping.

If you would like to underwrite a cemetery for a year or more, please send designated funds to one of the two addresses listed below. Our association last year contributed \$500 for cemetery maintenance.

4. Update on the former Mennonite Church in Gdańsk

I visited the church this past summer. Pastor Ropiejko told me that his church's efforts to acquire possession of the former hostel adjacent to the church, which was also once church property, look promising. He noted that government bureaucracy moves slowly, but he is confident that eventually his church will gain possession of the building. He is of the opinion that such an outcome is fully in accordance with Polish law.

5. Exchanges of School Children and University Students

Several Dutch churches have been very involved in building connections with Poland, especially the Vistula Delta. Plans are now underway to have groups of children exchange visits. This will involve a school in Leek, The Netherlands, and the Nowy Dwór Gimnasjum Nr. 1, where Marian Kwoczek is director. Albert Bolt is leading the Dutch group that is arranging events in the Netherlands.

In addition, I have been approached by university representatives both in Gdańsk and Toruń, seeking ways to have their students spend a year at a Canadian or American university. The problem in such a project is usually the question of finances; if any of you wish to pursue this possibility, please contact me and I will provide further information.

**Membership fees (\$20.00 per annum) as well as support for specific projects may be sent to:
Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, Fresno Pacific University, 1717 S. Chestnut Ave.,
Box 2204, Fresno, California 93727 or**

Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 Canada

Also, feel free to contact me directly: Peter J. Klassen, 1838 S. Bundy, Fresno, CA 93727
Phone: 559-255-6336 E-mail: peterk@csufresno.edu

Blessings for the New Year,

Peter Klassen