

THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER
December 2004

A year of Celebration

Some of the members of this association will recall that we have completed fifteen years of involvement in the life and goals of the MPFA. A commemorative brochure has been printed; it is available at calmenno.org/mpfa or in hard copy at the address of the MPFA shown at the end of this newsletter. Many of you have traveled and visited here; you would be surprised at what has been accomplished since we began this journey together.

Celebration in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof)

On May 28, 2004, the Gimnazjum 1 of the city of Nowy Dwór had a rather unusual celebration. Students of the 11th school year presented a report that would have impressed all of you. During the past year, under the direction of two of their teachers, Janina Kwoczek and Katarzyna Petelicka, the class conducted a study of the history of Mennonites in the Delta (Werder). The director of the Gimnazjum, Tomek Kwoczek, has been a staunch supporter of efforts to rekindle interest in, and awareness of, the Mennonite story in this region. Now, he presided over a delightful session in the courtyard of the school as a student choir sang and students gave reports in Polish and German.



Student choir singing in Polish and English

It was a pleasure to hear students report on what they had learned. Through interviews with some older citizens, research in libraries, reading a Polish translation of *Homeland for Strangers*, and searching on the internet, students produced remarkable results. Here are a few comments by the students:

---“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).

---“We learned that the Mennonites. . . arose in the 16th century. Menno Simons became their leader. They rejected infant baptism, but retained adult baptism, as well as the Eucharist!” (Karolina Nakoneczna).

---“I never thought that Mennonite history might interest me, . . . I have found. . . how much we received from them. . . I experienced great satisfaction in exploring this history” (Katarzyna Balbuza).

---“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 found that the Mennonite faith was derived from the Bible” (Marteusz Szczeptura).

---“We have learned very much from Mr. Bolek Klein [Director of the local museum, emphasizing Mennonite history]. Another person. . . from Warsaw. . . was surprised by our huge interest in Mennonites. We liked the idea of having freedom to gain knowledge about the Mennonites” (Barbara Szydzik).

A number of educators, city officials and museum personnel came from towns and villages from as far away as Toruń. It should also be noted that the mayor of Nowy Dwór has been a staunch supporter of this project, as well as of the efforts to restore local cemeteries. Peter Klassen had been invited to attend and address the gathering, and it was gratifying to see this kind of result from years of involvement by our association. On behalf of the MPFA, Peter presented awards totaling U.S. \$600, to be used to continue this work, and other projects.

Student Exchanges Between Dutch churches and Polish Schools

During the past year, members of Mennonite churches in the Netherlands have begun an exchange of high school students to build friendship and understanding between Dutch Mennonites and Poles. Dutch churches are cooperating in this project involving students from Nowy Dwór and participating Dutch schools.

Moving up the Vistula

Thanks to the support of Mayor Józef Gutowski of Ryjewo, his assistant Teresa Ruszczak and teachers at the local school, cemeteries in Tragheimerweide, Rudnerweide and Montauerweide have been attractively restored. Historical markers have been placed at each of the three cemeteries. All inscriptions are in Polish, German and English.



Ryjewo mayor Józef Gutowski and his assistant, Teresa Ruszczak displaying the marker they have placed at a restored cemetery.

Thanks and Appreciation to Peter Foth

One of the founding members of the Advisory Board of the MPFA, Pastor Peter Foth of the Hamburg Mennonite Church and prominent leader of German Mennonites, died suddenly on April 1, 2004. He was an avid supporter of closer ties between Poles and Mennonites, and was in the midst of trying to establish a sister organization of the MPFA in Germany. He and his wife Elke were dear friends and wonderful co-workers in the MPFA.

Mennonite History Tour of Poland, June 14-23, 2005

The California Mennonite Historical Society is sponsoring a Mennonite History Tour in the coming spring. Areas of interest along the Vistula between Warsaw and Gdańsk will be highlighted, with emphasis on the Delta. For details, contact Peter Klassen at peterk @ csufresno.edu or phone at 559-255-6335; or Beverly Reimer at bevstravel @ yahoo.com or phone at 559-251-2714. Reservations should be made by January 31, 2005.

An Invitation

The MPFA is open to all who support the association's goals. Memberships are \$20.00 per annum. In Canada checks may be forwarded to the **Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4**; in the United States, to the **Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1717 South Chestnut, Fresno, CA 93702**. In both cases, checks should be made out to the respective centers. Further details are available at www.calmenno.org/mpfa

Have a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year, Peter Klassen, Chair, MPFA