

THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

December 2005

Dear Members and Friends,

This past year has again seen our Association involved in a variety of activities that should continue to help strengthen ties between Mennonites and Poles who since World War II have come to live in homes and lands once held by Mennonites. In that context, it is well to remind ourselves that these Poles, in many instances, had themselves been expelled by Stalin from areas in eastern Poland that he seized during and after the war. So, one refugee moved into the home of another, and we are trying to build more understanding and goodwill.

In this context, it is well to remember that tensions still remain as a legacy of past wars and policies. Bridge-building needs to continue, and our Dutch friends are inviting us to join them in a marvelous venture.

This year, the Dutch completed an excellent historical exhibition of the Mennonite story, especially as it relates to the Netherlands and Poland/Prussia. I saw the display in the Haarlem Mennonite Church at a meeting sponsored by the Dutch and German Mennonite Historical Societies when I was there in May to present an invited lecture. That exhibit is now being permanently installed in the Mennonite Museum in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof). The Dutch covered the cost of creating the exhibit, but moving it to Poland and installing it will cost about \$10,000. We have been invited to help. If you want to participate, please fill out the form at the end of this letter. All gifts will be receipted for tax purposes.

Another Mennonite Study Tour this past year

From June 14-23, 34 participants from Canada and the United States toured the areas along the Vistula River and Delta to experience the excitement of walking where, for many of us, our ancestors had lived. We began in Warsaw, then continued down the river, to the former Deutsch Kazun, Deutsch Wymysle, Obernessau near Toruń, Montau, Montauerweide area, Marienburg, numerous villages in the Delta, where many tour members had ancestral connections, Gdansk, and much more. Here are some highlights:

- Visiting Gimnazjum 1 in Nowy Dwór, where students study the Mennonite story. We heard a number of readings from students who had prepared reports of their findings. It was very satisfying to see students share what they had learned.
- Joining some Dutch and German Mennonites in a special commemorative celebration at a modern pumping station near the Vistula Lagoon, next to the Bay of Gdansk. Here we could see how the windmills once brought to Poland by Mennonites in the 16th century have now been replaced by electric pumping stations. Thus, the old water engineering system has been modernized.

- Paying tribute to victims who drowned while fleeing. In spring 1945, near the end of the war, several large passenger ships carrying thousands of people were sunk in the Bay of Gdańsk by Soviet submarines. Our hosts had arranged for a motor boat to take us onto the water, where we were able to drop a floral wreath into the lagoon in memory of the dead. Bolek Klein, friend of many years and former mayor of Nowy Dwór, now director of the Mennonite Museum in that city, had made these arrangements.
- A remarkable "recovery" related. Many of you know that it was customary for Mennonite churches to have a home near the church where needy people could be given housing. It was



Pumping Station in the Werder *Photo: Robert Friesen*

It was a pleasure to see the current pastor of the former Mennonite church in Gdańsk, Tomasz Ropiejko, give us a warm reception, tell us about the work of his church, then also thank the MPFA for the role it played in helping the church regain ownership of the former hostel next to the church. Government authorities wanted a statement of affirmation from an external body, but one that was part of the "Mennonite story." Our association provided the requested formal support.

- A Chopin Concert in Gdańsk. Well-known pianist and composer Larry Warkentin favored our group with inspiring music by the great Polish composer. For the occasion, we had reserved the Palowa Restaurant, located beneath city hall. The management provided us with a stately, beautiful setting. Thanks, Larry!

New and Continuing Opportunities

Soon after we returned home we received a rather unusual offer. A Polish friend of our association is moving to Germany, and would like to donate his small pension (inn) near Graudenz to someone who will use it to bring Poles and Mennonites together. Since this would require a resident manager and some financial outlay, we have declined the offer. I should point out that current laws make it difficult for foreigners to own property in Poland.

Bolek Klein, local mayors and our Dutch friends, as well as others, are taking the lead in maintaining Mennonite cemeteries as well as the museum in Nowy Dwór. Our association gave Bolek \$1000 during our visit; also \$200 for Mennonite studies in schools.



Larry Warkentin playing Chopin *Photo: Anna Mazurkiewicz*

In the past, our association has given awards for student papers written on the Mennonite story in Poland. Polish professors have judged the papers. Now, we have received another suggestion, and perhaps some of our members would like to be involved. The University of Gdansk would welcome stipends for students who include Mennonite research in their university program. Monetary awards of \$100-\$400 could be made available. If you wish to support this effort, please send your designated gift to one of the addresses below,

Maintenance of the cemeteries also requires financial support. Perhaps you have special interest in a particular cemetery. If so, designate your gift accordingly.

Remember, this newsletter, as well as earlier editions, are available online. Just go to <http://calmenno.org/mpfa>. Also, if you would like a hard copy of our 15th anniversary brochure, please let me know.

An Invitation

The MPFA is open to all who support the association's goals. Memberships are \$20.00 per annum, and 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. Receipts for tax purposes are issued by the centers.

If you wish, please check, detach and return:

Annual dues (\$20.00)

Support for () cemetery maintenance; () student awards; () university stipends; () museum exhibit

Please send me a copy of **Legacy Recovered**, our 15th anniversary brochure.

Have a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

On behalf of the MPFA

Peter J. Klassen

1838 S. Bundy, Fresno, CA 93727

Phone: 559-255-6335; e-mail: peterk@csufresno.edu