

# THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

December 2006

Dear Members and Friends,

The "Mennonite Story" continues to become an increasingly important aspect of Polish historical and cultural awareness in the Vistula Delta and beyond. During the past year, a number of events demonstrated that religious, political and cultural leaders, as well as the general public, realize that an important chapter in local history has too long been neglected. Interest has grown in a number of remarkable ways.

## Opening of a Mennonite exhibit in the museum in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof)

On July 1, 2006, a permanent exhibition on Mennonites opened in the museum. Coming from Haarlem, the Netherlands, where it had been for a year, the display included various photographs, charts, books and artifacts to portray Mennonite beginnings during the Reformation. Persecution, martyrdom, the role of Menno and the quest for a safe homeland were prominent themes.

Bolek Klein, a long-time friend of Mennonites and a former mayor of Nowy Dwór, presided at the opening functions. The local mayor, as well as guests from the community, the Netherlands, Germany and North America participated in the celebration. Later an ecumenical worship service was held in a village church.

Events such as the opening of this display have stimulated interest elsewhere as well. The village of Tiegenhagen, situated near the Tiege River, was once home to a thriving Mennonite community. The church is now gone, but the cemetery remains. It forms part of an outdoor museum currently being created.

Another demonstration of a growing awareness of the Mennonite role in the history of this region is the declaration by museum authorities in Kwidzyn, the former Marienwerder, that a Mennonite component will be added to the displays in that museum as well.

## Continued educational interest in the Mennonites

This past year, two students from the University of Gdańsk were each awarded \$250 for having written winning essays about Mennonite life in the region. This competition was conducted by two professors teaching in the department of history; the contest has been continued for the next year.

In addition, \$200 was given to Gimnazjum No. 1 in Nowy Dwór for continued instruction in Mennonite history. The students have also written reports about what they discovered, and have assisted with cemetery maintenance.

## Exhibition in the National Ethnographical Museum in Gdańsk

Last spring the National Ethnographical Museum announced that on June 30, 2007, it would open a major exhibition on the Mennonite contribution to life in the Vistula Delta and beyond. I have been asked to write a historical introduction. Professor Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen (Washburn University) is preparing an article on Mennonite material culture. Professor Edmund Kizik, well known to readers of our *Newsletter*, is writing on recent Mennonite history in Poland. Should any of you be in Europe in June 2007, I invite you to join in the celebration. Several museums and libraries are sharing various artifacts, writings and photos.



Top: Bolek Klein opens the exhibition  
Bottom: the opening displays

## Planning for Next Year

The photo at the right shows some of the persons who met in summer 2006 and planned further projects such as:

- (1) an open air museum in Tiegenhagen
- (2) a response to the Marcusy town council; it has invited Mennonites to establish a museum in the former Mennonite church in Thiensdorf (Jezioro).
- (3) expansion of joint educational and cultural projects.
- (4) support of the exhibition opening on June 30, 2007.



*Planning group with international representation*

## Thanks for your generosity!

During the past year, your generosity has made possible the following grants/awards:

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| - Moving the exhibit from Haarlem to Nowy Dwór | \$1000.00 |
| - Helping with the installation                | \$1000.00 |
| - Maintenance of cemeteries                    | \$1000.00 |
| - University scholarships                      | \$500.00  |
| - School projects                              | \$200.00  |
| -Total   | \$3700.00 |

All gifts are receipted. If you made a gift but did not receive a receipt, please let me know.

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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 and designated for the MPFA. 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:peterk@csufresno.edu)