

# THE MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

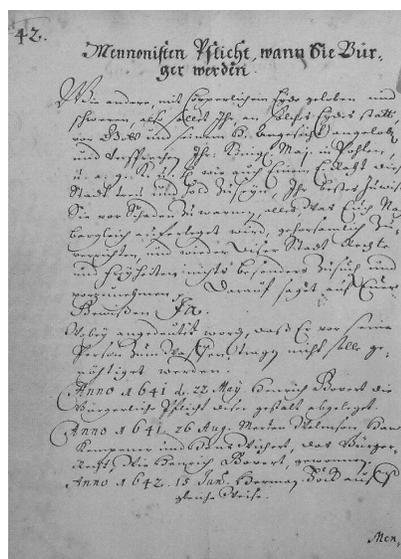
December 2007

Dear Members and Friends,

The past year has seen a remarkable expansion of interest in the Mennonite story in Poland. Several events and developments demonstrate that interest in this chapter of Mennonite history is becoming part of the recognized cultural landscape of this region. This was apparent in media coverage, both in newspapers and on television, as well as in several significant events.

### Exhibition on Mennonite Life in the Vistula Delta

On June 30, representatives from Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and United States joined to celebrate the opening of an exhibition in the National Ethnographical Museum in Gdańsk/Oliva. This exhibition featured many aspects of Mennonite life in the delta, beginning with the coming of the Mennonites during the Reformation, as well as their religious practices, cultural contributions and economic achievements over the span of four centuries. The collapse of Mennonite communities during World War II was also noted. Another part of the exhibit depicted the international and global aspects of Mennonite life today. A number of dignitaries, including the ambassador of the Netherlands, spoke about the important and lasting contributions made by Mennonites. Fittingly, the opening of the exhibition was preceded by an ecumenical worship service in the former Mennonite Church, in Gdańsk where a local Catholic choir, as well as the tour group choir, led by Bill Reimer, opera singer from Hanover (formerly from Yarrow, B.C.), sang.



Citizenship for Mennonites (exhibit)

### Mennonite Study Tour

Under the auspices of Tourmagination, another group from Canada and United States visited places associated with Mennonite life in the region. After visiting several historic sites in Warsaw, we began a drive down the Vistula. We stopped at the former Mennonite Church in Kazun, and found it in an increasingly deteriorated condition. As we drove on to Wymysle, we found that the village has some new homes, but the former church is in very bad condition. Part of the roof has already collapsed, and the windows have been removed. The nearby cemetery is desolate and neglected.

As we continued on to Toruń (Nieszawka), we found the former Mennonite Church in very good condition, with the grounds attractively maintained. As usual, the local priest welcomed us. On the following day, we drove to Montau, where the church was being prepared for a wedding. Again, we found a warm reception. After a short visit here, we drove on to Ryjewo, where the mayor invited us into his board room and gave a short speech. On behalf of the MPFA we gave him five hundred dollars to help in maintaining Mennonite cemeteries. After these formalities, the mayor sent two of his aides to take us to nearby Mennonite cemeteries in Tragheimerweide

and Montauerweide. Both cemeteries, as well as the one in Rudnerweide, are maintained by the mayor's office. Stone markers, with Polish, German and English inscriptions, have been placed there. On the following day we began with a walking tour of Gdańsk, then drove into the *Werder*. In Neumüsterberg we were welcomed in a stately, arcaded home, formerly owned by a Claassen family and now owned by the former mayor. We visited several cemeteries, such as Heubuden and Ladekopp, as well as Fürstenwerder, where the former church was destroyed by fire in 1990. On subsequent days we visited more villages and cemeteries, saw one of the last windmills still standing (in Palschau), saw the fine displays in the museum in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof), and sometimes made special discoveries, as when having refreshments in a home in Tiegenhagen, only to learn that some friends of members of our group had once lived in that house.



*Meeting with mayor of Ryjewo*

### **A New Venture in Warsaw**

Some historians and ethnographers living in Warsaw, Toruń and nearby areas, have become very interested in Mennonite life in the region between Warsaw and Toruń. One of their most active participants is Jerzy Szalygin, an ethnographer living in Warsaw. He and his associates have organized a "Foundation for Protection of the Common Cultural Heritage." Members of this group have visited former Mennonite churches in Kazun, Sady and Nowe Wymyśle, and are pursuing possible strategies for preservation and use of those structures.

### **An Invitation**

The MPFA is open to all who support the association's goals. Dues are \$20.00 per annum. Checks may be forwarded to either the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1717 S. Chestnut, Fresno, CA 93702. Checks should be made out to the respective centers, and designated for the MPFA. The centers issue receipts.

If you wish, please check, detach and return:

\_\_\_\_\_ Annual dues (\$20.00)

\_\_\_\_\_ Support for ( ) cemetery maintenance; ( ) museum exhibits; ( ) student awards

If you would like a copy of the MPFA financial report, please check here. ( ).

All expenditures must be approved by the executive committee.

For the MPFA,

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Previous reports are available online: [calmenno.org/mpfa](http://calmenno.org/mpfa)