

**The MENNONITE-POLISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER
December 2011**

Dear Members and Friends,

Thanks to all of you who continue to build bridges of friendship and understanding with our friends in Poland. The Mennonite story in that beautiful country continues to attract a variety of events.

Events in 2011 and Projections for the Future

A Special Proposal from the Canadian Polish Embassy

On October 25, 2011, I received a remarkable letter from the Polish embassy in Ottawa. Mr. Jaroslaw Kurek, Minister Counselor, Head of Political and Economic Unit, wrote that he had learned about projects supported by our organization. He specifically cited the open-air museum in Cyganek (just north of Nowy Dwor (Tiegenhof) and museum exhibits in several Polish centers. You will remember that over the years we have financially supported a number of exhibits in a number of locales.

In his letter, Mr. Kurek proposed a display of Mennonite art and artifacts that would be made available to citizens of Poland and North America. His suggestion was for a museum exhibit, photographic display, or film production. In subsequent correspondence, we have discussed a traveling exhibit that would be a joint project. The minister suggested contacting Marek Opitz, who has organized exhibits in Gdansk, and is the leader in creating the Open Air Museum in Cyganek. I have contacted John Friesen, MPFA vice-chair, Paul Toews, MPFA secretary-treasurer, and Alan Peters, currently leading tours to Poland, and have received only positive responses. Our hope is to encourage the embassy to initiate this venture, in consultation with our association and to invite Mr. Opitz, as a Polish citizen, to take the lead in developing this project, with major funding coming from the Polish government. The MPFA would, we hope, be willing to give financial support and advice. What do you think? Drop me a note if you have suggestions.

Historical Presentation at Elblag High School

Two high school teachers in Elblag are currently preparing a class project featuring the Mennonite role in the life of their community. Students are preparing papers and developing photographic displays to be presented in March. The MPFA is providing \$200 in support for this venture and has been invited to send a representative. Our organization does not pay travel expenses for our members, but if someone plans to be in Poland this spring, Elblag would welcome participation from our association. If this happens to match your travel itinerary, let us know and arrangements will be made.

Supporting the Open-air Museum in Cyganek

Our very good friend, Marek Opitz, is making great progress in the development of this project. Those of you who have visited this site will know that he is building a typical Mennonite home, rescuing grave markers from desolate cemeteries, and preparing descriptive historical accounts to be displayed on this site.



Open Air Museum in Cyganek

“Seeing Poland through Mennonite Eyes”

The MPFA is pleased to announce that the California Mennonite Historical Society will be sponsoring another tour based on the Mennonite Story in Poland. We are fortunate that Alan Peters again will serve as tour leader and that Beverly Reimer is making travel arrangements.

Dates: **July 7- July 14, 2012** (with optional Krakow extension, July 14-July 18). For details, contact Alan Peters (lnptrs@comcast.net; 559-222-5554) or Beverly Reimer (bvreimer@yahoo.com; 559-251-2714).

Event at Gdansk Mennonite Church

On several occasions, members of our association have participated in services at the former Mennonite church in Gdansk. You will be interested to know that the tradition continues: on Tuesday, July 3, 2012, visitors from Germany and the Netherlands will meet at the church at 9:00 a.m. for a commemorative service. If you should be in the area on this date, you may wish to join our friends for this service.

Revised edition of A Homeland for Strangers

A newly-revised 2011 edition of the book *A Homeland for Strangers: an Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia*, originally written to introduce visitors to Poland to Mennonite sites and to provide historical background for the Mennonite presence in Poland, is now available from the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies for \$19.95. Contact Paul Toews at the Center in Fresno, California.

In addition, a history of the Mennonites in Poland from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is available in the volume *Mennonites in Early Modern Poland and Prussia*. Copies are available from Johns Hopkins University Press or from Amazon.com.

The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association (MPFA)

The MPFA, founded in 1988, is open to all who share the association's goals of building friendship and understanding between Poles and Mennonites. Its Advisory Board has members from Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and United States. The executive committee consists of Peter Klassen, Fresno (chair); John Friesen, Winnipeg (vice-chair); Paul Toews, Fresno (secretary-treasurer).

Gifts for projects in Poland and annual dues (\$20.00) may be sent to the addresses below. Previous reports of the MPFA are available at calmenno.org/mpfa

Checks for the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association should be made payable to the MPFA, and sent to one of the following agencies:

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

In the United States:
Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies
1717 S. Chestnut Ave.
Fresno, CA 93702

For further information regarding the MPFA:

Peter J. Klassen
1838 S. Bundy
Fresno, CA 93727
Phone: 559-255-6335; email: peterk@mail.fresnostate.edu