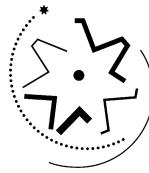


Mennonite-Polish Studies Association Newsletter



*Bethel
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The new Mennonite-Polish Studies Association

The story of Mennonites in what is today Poland (primarily the Vistula Delta) is one of the less well-known chapters of Mennonite history, especially in English. As one of the longest-lasting European Mennonite communities and the point of origin for the Russian Mennonite experience, which features so prominently in the North and South American Mennonite story, the history of Mennonites along the Vistula river and elsewhere in Poland deserves more intense cultivation.

The Mennonite-Polish Studies Association emerges out of two previous efforts. In 1991, Peter J. Klassen started the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association to place a historical marker on the former Mennonite church building in Gdańsk, at the request of the congregation currently using the building, and to foster other interest in Polish Mennonite commemoration. In about 2002, John D. Thiesen and Mark Jantzen at Bethel College began the Vistula Mennonite Studies Project to collect archival materials and publish translation and research about the Mennonites of the Vistula region.

With the retirement of Peter J. Klassen,

these two previous efforts are being merged into a new Mennonite-Polish Studies Association, which will continue to encourage the study and awareness of Mennonites in Poland and the Vistula valley, to foster understanding between Mennonites and Poles, and inform an English-reading audience of activities related to the Polish/Prussian Mennonite story, such as museum exhibits and research projects.

To support our work via annual membership and to be added to our contact list, you may send annual dues of \$25 to

Mennonite Library and Archives
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Make checks payable to Bethel College.

German Mennonite Working Group on Poland

The German Mennonite Working Group on Poland (Mennonitischen Arbeitskreises Polen) (MAP) has seen a change in leadership this year. The new chairman is Johann Peter Wiebe of Leopoldshöhe. He was born into a West Prussian refugee family in 1952 in West Germany. One of their new

projects is to work at restoring the tombstone of Cornelius Warkentin in the Suchow/Rosenort cemetery. In 1787 Warkentin traveled to Berlin with Elder Heinrich Donner in an attempt to get property right restrictions lifted. When that failed and migration to Russia began, in 1794 he accompanied Cornelius Regier to Chortitza colony to help organize the new congregations there. Now his tombstone is laying in a couple of pieces on the ground and the hope is to get it restored and replaced on its base.

MAP also organized two trips to the Vistula Delta this year. In June a group of about forty visited Gdańsk/Danzig and Kaliningrad/Königsberg. The tour visited the Mennonite church in Gdańsk, the church buildings in Elbląg/Elbing and the town of Nowi Dwor Gdańsk. They also spent time in Königsberg, where there was less Mennonite presence and thus fewer remains to see, but it was an interesting place to think about Mennonites rubbing shoulders with many prominent former residents.

The second tour group was a project of the Mennonitische Jugend Norddeutschland, the Mennonite Youth of North Germany, the combined youth work of north German congregations. From July 27 to August 6, a group of twenty-two youth and four sponsors visited the Vistula Delta and met with a local youth group. MAP paid a significant portion of the costs for this group.

Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen

The Dutch group Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2013 with a number of special

events. They are planning a trip to Poland June 15-25, 2016 and are looking at doing a trip in 2017 as well. Their 2015 newsletter reports that in 2014 three tombstones were transported from the Cisy/Stadtfelde cemetery to the Stogi/Heubuden cemetery. They now lay on a small plot of gravel right inside the gate. The tombstones have the names Gerhard Dyck 1783-1868, Abraham Sudermann 1763-1840, and Heinrich Entz 1837-1873. Their newsletter concludes with many thanks to Peter Klassen for his various initiatives on Mennonite history in Poland.

Klub Nowodworski

The Klub Nowodworski is an important partner for Mennonite Polish studies. They organized and run the museum in Nowi Dwor Gdańsk that includes many displays about Mennonite history and culture in the Vistula Delta.

Martin Opitz is the president of the club; Łukasz Kępski is the vice-president. Łukasz reports that club members are doing research and writing on Mennonite cheese production and distilling in the area among other on-going projects. For those of you who read Polish or wish to see photos of some of their activities and displays, see
<http://www.klubnowodworski.pl/>

They have also participated with a project of Europe Mennonites that resulted in a number of videos and a new website about Mennonite history and immigration. An overview of these topics is provided in eight European languages at see
<http://eumen.net/en/>.

In addition to the videos there, the club has also produced short overview video introducing Mennonites to a Polish audience

that is available on YouTube with English subtitles here,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=834ctBzCFcw>

and German subtitles here,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B50qKlYGO-c.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B50qKlYGO-c)

Mennonite Property and Inheritance Records in Polish Archives

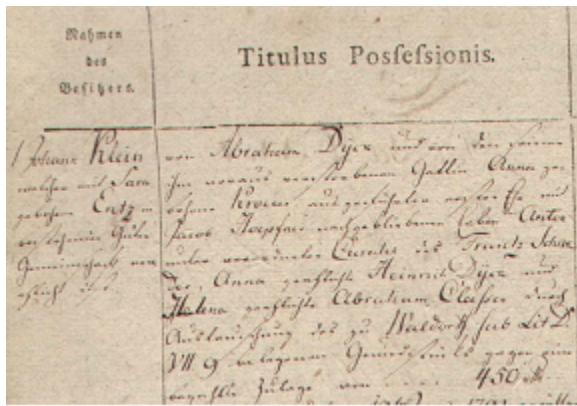
by Glenn H. Penner

Over the last four years I have made four trips to visit Polish archives, which included three visits to the Malbork (Marienburg) archives and two visits to the Gdańsk (Danzig) archives and one visit each to the archives in Toruń (Thorn) and Bydgoszcz (Bromberg). I am hoping for a fifth trip in order to visit the archives at Warsaw and Płock. The primary purpose of these trips is to copy property and inheritance records from the Prussian era in Poland. After about two hundred years of living under various Polish kings the majority of Mennonites found themselves in the new province of West Prussia after the partition of 1772. In 1783 the Prussian government started a standardized system of keeping property and inheritance records. Many of these records have survived and are found in the collections of various Polish archives. These records consist of large ledgers called *Grundbücher* (with one or more per village) and collections of documents for each property called *Grundakten*. For a more detailed description of these records and how they should be used see[1]. We have photographed at least 20,000 pages of documents so far. These are arranged according to village and are available online [1]. These records have a goldmine of

genealogical information buried within them! However, proper extraction of this information will be a challenging and time consuming task. Below is an example of a typical *Grundbuch* entry.

A page from the *Grundbuch* of the village of Klein Mausdorferweide is shown. It indicates that Abraham Dyck of Klein Mausdorferweide exchanged his property with the property of Johann Klein (a very rare Mennonite name!) and wife Sara Entz with Klein paying an additional 450 Reichsthaler. Important here is that Dyck's deceased wife, Anna Kroeker, was the last wife (and widow) of the late Jacob Hoeppner. When this transaction took place the surviving children of Jacob Hoeppner and Anna Kroeker were entitled to a share of the money. These children were Anton (1762-1806), a minor, who was represented by Franz Schroeder (of Waldorf), Anna, the wife of Heinrich Dyck, and Helena, the wife of Abraham Classen. One can see that Jacob Hoeppner's children Jacob (the deputy, 1748-1826), Peter (b. 1752) and Catharina (b. 1757) are not mentioned. This is because they were not children of Anna Kroeker, but from an earlier wife of Jacob Hoeppner Sr.

The archival system in Poland has undergone massive changes since 1989. The Polish archival system is centralized (unlike in North America). A web page is available for the Polish archives [2]. The archives have wired and/or wireless connections and on-site access to their electronic databases. Most of these databases and many lists of their holdings are also available online [3]. A new archive was built in Gdańsk just this past year. A down side to all of this renewal is that archives may be closed or collections may not be available during construction. In



Taken from the Grundbuch for Klein Mausdorferweide, Blatt 1. State Archives of Malbork, Poland, Fond 341, File 354.

the end the Polish archival system will be comparable to, or better than, any European or North American archive.

This work has been generously supported by the D. F. Plett Foundation [4].

- [1] http://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/V1_53.html
- [2] <http://www.archiwa.gov.pl/en/state-archives.html>
- [3] <http://baza.archiwa.gov.pl/se zam/?l=en>
- [4] <http://www.plettfoundation.org>

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Vistula document in Swedish archives

Some archival records from the Vistula Delta have scattered to distant locations over the centuries. In fall 2014 we acquired scans of a 1590 "Revision" of the Marienburg royal territory. The document is now located in the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm. In 1686 this document, along with others, was donated by Swedish count Magnus Gabriel del Gardie to the Swedish Collegium of Antiquities, shifted in 1742 to the Royal Library which was later the National Library of Sweden. Presumably Gardie acquired these documents as war booty during the Swedish invasion of Poland 1655-1660. The document is an inventory or appraisal of

rents, dues, and other income owed to the Polish king from his territories in the Marienburg "Economy," royal lands near what is now the city of Malbork. It contains entries like the following:

Pasture Campenau. On it the Dutch have established themselves. They have a confirmation from King Stephen and pay, under the contract they concluded with the late Lord Treasurer, 2400 marks per year to the treasury.

Karl-Heinz Ludwig used this document in his book *Zur Besiedlung des Weichseldeltas durch die Mennoniten* [On the Settlement of the Vistula Delta by the Mennonites] (Marburg: Johann Gottfried Herder Institut, 1961). The entries give very few names of individuals, but offer a general picture of the economic level of various villages as of 1590



Title page of 1590 revision document

and a few clues as to where Mennonites ("Dutch") might have been living at that time. The scans at the MLA are in electronic records accession 531 with paper documentation in SA.I.370.

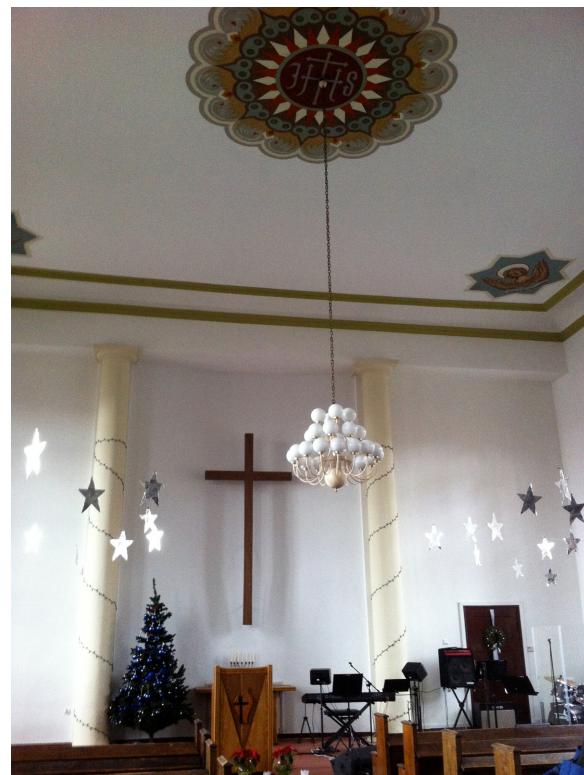
Bethel College Tour, Jan. 2015

Mark Jantzen, Professor of History at Bethel College, led a group of students to Europe in January 2015 as part of his class on the History of East Central Europe. The class spent several days in Gdańsk. We toured the city with Dr. Anna Mazurkiewicz, who teaches American Studies at the University of Gdańsk, and some of her students. As it turns out, the Bethel students were surprised to find that they were prime source material for the Polish American Studies students, who asked many questions about American culture and also introduced us to Polish culture. Meeting with these students was a highlight of the trip for the Bethel students.

We spent a little time during our tour of Gdańsk with Pastor Tomasz Ropiejko for the Pentecostal congregation that now owns and meets in the former Danzig Mennonite Church building. Most of the Polish students



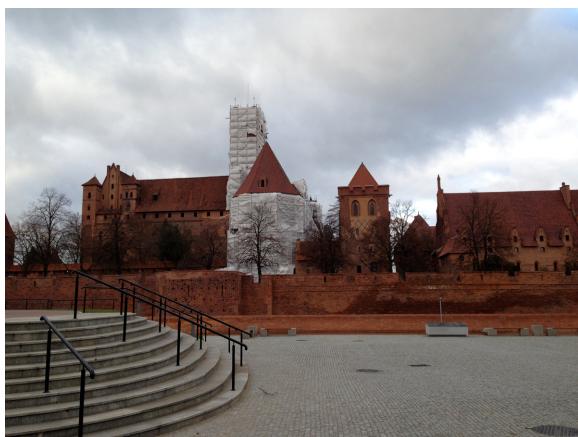
Mennonite street sign in Gdańsk



Pentecostal church in Gdańsk, formerly Danzig Mennonite Church

who were with us had never heard of either Pentecostals or Mennonites, so both Polish and American students together learned about the current situation of the congregation as well as some of the history of Pentecostals under communist rule in Poland and during the transition to democracy.

The group also visited the castle at Malbork/Marienburg. The museum had just opened a new gift shop and entrance outside of the main grounds and the old outer courtyard is now closed to car and bus traffic. We had a delightful tour with Łukasz Kępski from Klub Nowodworski.



Malbork castle



New entrance to Malbork castle museum



Bethel and Gdańsk University students

Upcoming Tours

Mennonite Heritage Tours, a Dutch endeavor, is running a tour to Berlin and Poland from June 18-30, 2016, <http://www.mennoniteheritagetours.eu/tour3>.

Len Loeppky of Steinbach, Manitoba, is leading a tour to Mennonite sites in Poland July 4-17, 2016. The tour is listed with Canada One Travel out of Winnipeg, <http://www.canadaone.travel/packages/europe/poland/7c1llmhpol/>.



Mennonite distilling display at the Nowi Dwor museum