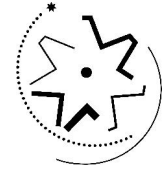


# Mennonite-Polish Studies Association Newsletter



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## The Mennonite-Polish Studies Association

This is the second issue of the *Mennonite-Polish Studies Association Newsletter*. Our association exists to encourage the study and awareness of Mennonites in Poland and the Vistula valley, to foster understanding between Mennonites and Poles, and to 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 (checks payable to Bethel College) to

Mennonite Library and Archives  
Bethel College  
300 E 27th St  
North Newton KS 67117

## Upcoming history conference

The Mennonite-Polish Studies Association is one of the sponsors of a conference on Mennonites and the Holocaust to be held March 16 and 17, 2018, on the Bethel College campus. Additional information and a call for papers is posted at

<https://mla.bethelks.edu/MennosandHolocaust>

## 150 Years Ago

A series of unusual sesquicentennial events in Mennonite history will occur this year in October and November. One hundred and fifty years ago Mennonites were the subject of intense debate in a German parliament, a Mennonite delegation visited with King William I and many other officials in Berlin, and Mennonites in the Vistula River valley became subject to the draft in Germany on November 9, 1867.

Following a quick war between the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia in 1866, victorious Prussia formed a North German Confederation by annexing many of the northern German states that had fought on Austria's side and forcing the others to join the new polity. Along with Austria, only the three southern German states of Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria remained outside this new German entity. By 1871 those three had joined to form the German Empire. Elections for a new Confederation parliament were held on August 31, 1867, after Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of the Kingdom of Prussia and the new Chancellor of the Confederation, had a special assembly approve the constitution he wrote for it.

In October the Parliament debated a new military service law, attempting to standardize practices between the various states for the military. Since the individual states retained control over most domestic institutions, the military was the main focus of the Confederation's constitution, budget, and laws. The initial government proposal for regulating military service saw three classes of citizens who should be exempted. The first was the members of the ruling Hohenzollern family, with the King of Prussia himself serving as commander-in-chief. Members of the extended family served as officers and top generals, they could hardly be conscripted. The second category was for the ruling families whose territories had been annexed by Prussia in 1866, so that these former rulers would not be humiliated by the draft as simple soldiers. The third category was for Quakers and those Mennonites living along the Vistula River in the province of Prussia.

The debate over the Mennonite exemption on October 17 and 18 was particularly heated. Two prominent supporters were August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, the only two Socialist representatives. They proposed extending the Mennonite exemption to everyone by abolishing the army entirely, which they saw as an instrument of domestic oppression in any case. A large portion of the Socialist movement remained adamantly opposed to international bourgeois warfare and both of these men were later imprisoned for their opposition to war. But Prussian Mennonites did not feel comfortable with their support nor did it do any good, since the Parliament accepted the first two exemptions and rejected the third. National Liberals during this debate suggested that Mennonites

should leave Germany if they could not love and defend it.

The member of parliament from Elbing, Wilhelm von Brauchitsch, alerted the Mennonites to what had happened and already on October 23 five elders left for Berlin to try to repair the damage. The delegation consisted of Gerhard Penner, Heubuden; Johann Toews, Ladekopp; Johann Wiebe, Fürstenwerder; Peter Bartel, Gruppe; and Johann Penner, Thiensdorf. They eventually met with King William I, the Crown Prince Friedrich, and most of the cabinet members. Even the Minister of Agriculture promised to be helpful, although one wonders what he really thought of these farmers showing up in Berlin with such an odd request. He knew, of course, that at least they were supportive voters. The main crux of the visit was that Bismarck would not see them either in October nor in February 1868 when they made a second trip. He blocked all attempts at leniency in the cabinet. The delegates did surprisingly have a warm conversation with von Roon, the Minister of War, who was really the most accommodating member of the cabinet. The Crown Prince told them not to go to Russia since the draft would soon be imposed there, an early warning of trouble there.

Despite the King's promise to do what he could for them, he regretted that circumstances, like a constitution and a parliament, tied his hands and he could no longer protect them entirely from the draft as he and his forefathers had done in the past. On November 9, 1867, he signed the new military service law, putting it into effect.

Sources: See Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010),

193-200, and “‘Whoever Will Not Defend His Fatherland Should Leave It!': German Conscription and Prussian Mennonite Emigration to the Great Plains, 1860-1890,” *Mennonite Life*, 58, no. 3, <https://ml.bethelks.edu/issue/vol-58-no-3/article/whoever-will-not-defend-his-homeland-should-leave/>

Mennonites as Patrons of a State Protestant Church in Palczewo/Palschau : The Legal Status of Mennonites under Catholic and Protestant Church Law

by Johann Peter Wiebe

In July 2016 I visited the village of Palschau in the Greater Vistula Delta as part of a tour group. The village had a simple wooden church building. The weathered siding indicated a long history. The church had been built in 1712 as a branch of the neighboring church in the village of Barendt.



Former Protestant church in Palschau



Plaque on back of organ

The little tower was added in 1786. Earlier there was supposed to have been a little apartment for the pastor, attached to the back with a separate entrance. Mrs. Krystyna Kamińska opened up the building for us. We were astonished at what we saw inside. There was a typical Protestant village church with a decorated baroque interior including numerous paintings. The theme of the altar painting was lowering Jesus from the cross. A hovering angel points to the laurel crown so the assembled congregation does not miss it. The wreath is a symbol of victory and peace, and evergreen leaves a sign of eternal life. Numerous biblical characters are represented. The captions are all in German. On the balcony is a small baroque organ set with a colorful facade. On the back of the organ the sponsors of the organ that was installed in 1909 are listed. Almost all of them were Mennonite farm owners in the village of Palschau.

Why are so many Mennonite farmers listed as sponsors of a Protestant organ? The Marienburg Delta area belonged by church law to the diocese of Kulm. The bishops of Kulm lost a lot of income in the wake of the Reformation and with the settlement of Mennonites in the delta. An increasing

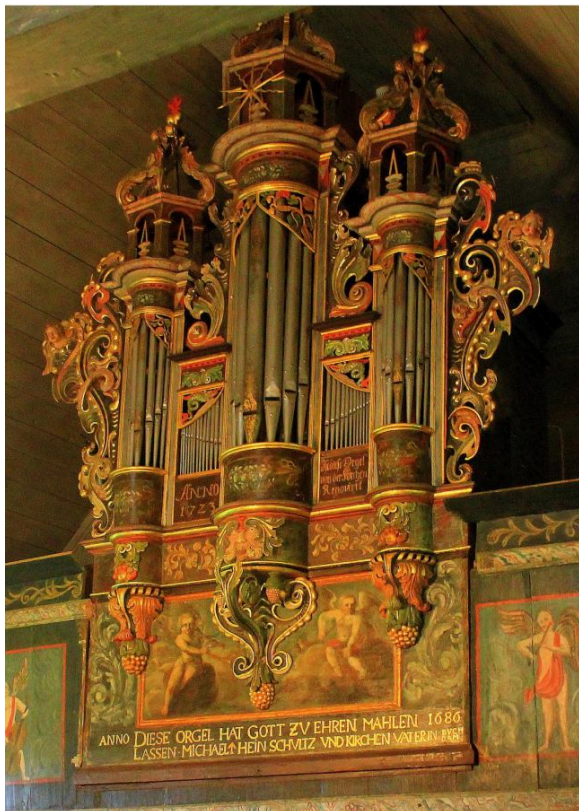
number of farmers were becoming Protestant or Mennonite. The remaining Catholics tended to belong to the poorer segments of rural society. But the church needed revenue. Initially both Mennonites and Lutherans were counted as members of the Catholic parish since the Catholic Church was the state church in Poland. They had to pay annual taxes in kind, such as grain, sausage, and other farm products, to the local priest, and also pay the customary fees for births, weddings, and deaths.

The church law regulations varied widely in the Mennonite settlement areas. To start with, there were two different dioceses. That of Kulm was responsible for the area east of the river, the bishops of Kujavia for land west of the river. The major cities of Danzig and Elbing included a lot of rural territory around them and here the Protestant church administrators were in charge. In the Greater

Delta region sometimes the Protestant churches would demand that Mennonites pay them as much as they were required to pay to the local Catholic churches, so that they had to pay a double tax. In the Elbing Delta region, taxes only went to the Protestants. And in some of the other areas of Mennonite settlement, they were freed from paying church taxes entirely.

There was a continual conflict over paying parish fees to Catholic priests. On January 11, 1677, a contract was signed between the representative of the Bishop of Kulm and Mennonite representatives from the Greater and Elbing Deltas. It stated in paragraph five that, "The delta inhabitants promise to pay the fee known as Kalende at Christmas on the traditional day according to the old custom, which is that each eligible priest receives a dried pig's head, a Bratwurst, a pig's foot, a bowl of peas, a half bowl of salt, a loaf of bread, and fifteen candles. Easter noon for each priest fifteen eggs and a loaf of bread and for the Catholic schoolteacher, half of all of these on the respective days."

In addition to these in-kind taxes and fees for rites of passage, Mennonites were also required to pay for some of the building and maintenance costs of Catholic and Protestant church buildings. It was broadly typical in Poland after the Reformation that the local men of relative means were counted as patrons or sponsors of the church regardless of which confession they belonged to. One could therefore find this inscription on the church bell cast in 1755 for the Catholic church in Cyganek/Tiegenhagen, "Chairman, Jacob Classen, Peter Classen cum divino auxilio me fundit Joh. Gottfr. Anthony



Front view of organ

Gedani." (with the aid of God cast by me, Johann Gottfried Anthony, Gdansk). In this area after the First Partition of Poland in 1772 this practice changed and only the local Catholics were counted as sponsors.

Protestants wanted to base the claim that Mennonites should help pay for their buildings and maintenance on a sponsorship obligation that was tied to the land, not the owner. This condition was not finally corrected until the twentieth century. In 1920 the West Prussian Mennonite congregations formed a committee with the goal of ending this type of financial obligation. Gustav Reimer, Stogi/Heubuden, was the dynamic leader of this effort, with legal assistance provided by the Königsberg lawyer Professor Nottarp. The regional court in Marienwerder delivered a series of decisions, which were affirmed by the higher courts, that denied the Protestant parishes' demands that Mennonites pay. One of the rulings noted, "The idea that someone needs to pay for a church system of which he is not a member is incompatible with our current state of cultural development.

Johann Peter Wiebe is the president of the Mennonitischer Arbeitskreis Polen (German Mennonite Working Group on Poland). Translated by Mark Jantzen.

#### New encyclopedia article

An article on "West Prussia" in the online German Mennonite Encyclopedia has recently been published, written by Mark Jantzen.

<http://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=loc:westpreussen>



#### New book

A new book on Mennonites in the Vistula Delta will soon be appearing, sponsored by the Klub Nowodworski in Poland, with text in Polish, Dutch, German, and English.

The Mennonite-Polish Studies Association made a monetary contribution to this book project.

#### Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen Update

by Albert Bolt and Jan Broere

In a recent visit to the Mennonite library in Amsterdam, the Mennonite Foundation Netherlands-Poland donated two documents from the Prussian Mennonite experience: the

printed house rules for the alms house in Danzig, *Hausordnung für das Hospital der Danziger Mennoniten-Gemeinde, Danzig, den 3. Mai 1887*, and the 1925 version of the constitution of the Danzig Mennonite Church, *Statut für die Danziger Mennoniten-Gemeinde*.

The originals of these documents were brought to Canada by Joe Nighswander of Stouffville, Ontario, who was in Gdańsk after World War II as a seagoing cowboy bringing horses to Poland to restart agricultural production. According to the family story, he was housed in the former alms house of the Mennonite church there. Later his family hosted a Dutch girl as part of Mennonite Central Committee's International Visitor Exchange Program. Years after that, she visited the family again with her mother Gerda Rengers, who now lives in Leeuwarden. Gerda talked about the work of the Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen and these old documents were brought out and given to her. They are now in the Mennonite collection in Amsterdam.

Albert Bolt is secretary and Jan Broere is president of the Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen.

### Upcoming Tours

John Sharp, Hesston College professor, is leading a tour, Discover Prague and the Mennonite Sojourn in Poland, June 19-29, 2017, with TourMagination, see <https://www.tourmagination.com/tour/mennonite-history-tour-poland/>

Alan Peters, longtime officer of the California Mennonite Historical Society, is leading a tour, A Tour of Poland from a Mennonite Perspective, June 9-17, with a Krakow extension to June 21, 2017, see

<http://calmenno.org/SeeingPoland2017.pdf>

The Dutch group, Doopsgezinde Stichting Nederland-Polen, is taking a group of thirty-five people to Poland July 17-26. This visit is coordinated with a group of about twenty people from Germany organized by the Mennonitischer Arbeitskreis Polen. The German group will be in the area July 18 to 28. Both groups will participate in a Mennonite Gathering organized at the museum in Tiegenhof/Nowy Dwor on Saturday, July 23, with presentations given by Polish, Dutch, and German presenters. There will also be an ecumenical church service the following day together with the hosting Pentecostal church that now owns and uses the former Mennonite church building in Gdansk.

The radio station Segenswelle (Blessings Waves) in Detmold is run by Mennonites from Russia who settled in Germany in the last couple of decades. They are hosting a Mennonite heritage tour to Poland May 1-6, 2017, <http://www.sw-radio.com/reisen.html>. On their homepage you can find a button to click to hear a low German radio broadcast.

Mark Jantzen and John Thiesen are tentatively planning on leading a Mennonite-Polish Studies Association tour to Poland next year, June 29-July 7, 2018, with a Krakow extension to July 11. Details and registration information will be sent only to Association members who have an email address on file, so if you receive this newsletter in the mail and would like to have this tour information, please send your email address to [jthiesen@bethelks.edu](mailto:jthiesen@bethelks.edu)