Greetings from a Former "Mennonite Homeland"

Exhibition Opens in Nowy Dwór (Tiegenhof), Poland

by Peter J. Klassen
Photos courtesy of Peter J. Klassen

Bolek Klein, director of the Zulawy Museum, speaks at the opening of the exhibition in Nowy Dwor, 1 July 2006.

On 1 July 2006 the Żuławy (Werder) Museum in Nowy Dwór celebrated the opening of a special exhibition on the early story of Mennonites in the Netherlands and in the lowlands of the Vistula River Delta. This exhibition was on display in Haarlem during the previous year; now it opened in the center of former Mennonite life in the delta.

Scenes from early Anabaptist-Mennonite persecution as depicted in the *Martyrs Mirror,* the life of Menno Simons, his letter to fellow-believers in Danzig, and excerpts from his writings formed part of the display. Then, the coming of the Mennonites to Danzig and the delta, their role in introducing effective water engineering and the creation of the "garden of Poland" formed another part of this overview. Homes of Mennonites and contributions to the economic life of the region in farming, commerce, crafts and a variety of trades were also shown. The emphases on faith and education was shown in illustrations of churches and schools.

The mayor of Nowy Dwór, school officials and other interested persons, as well as guests from the Netherlands, Germany and the United States joined in the festive occasion.

A special word of thanks is due the California Mennonite Historical Society, which contributed $2000 to this project.

The Tiegenhagen Mennonite cemetery, which will be part of the projected outdoor museum.

The Vision Grows

Impressed with what is happening in the rediscovery of the Mennonite story in Poland/Prussia, other groups are becoming involved:

- The National Ethnographic Museum in Gdańsk plans to create its own exhibition on the Mennonite story. Next year, Mennonite artifacts and furniture are to be featured.
- Supported with a grant of $1000 from the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, an open air museum is taking shape near the site of the former Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church. The building is long gone, but a number of cemetery markers, some of them actual large stones with chiseled inscriptions, are still there. Marek Opitz, noted photographer and writer, is leading this project.
- The historical preservation efforts in the delta have impressed persons associated with the European Union. The EU is making funds available for the restoration of the Rozgart cemetery, perhaps also others.
- Under the supervision of two professors at the University of Gdańsk, an essay contest on Mennonite life and culture has been launched at that institution. Prizes are cash awards of $250 each funded by the
- The Mennonite Polish Friendship Association gave two awards this year. It is expected that the essay contest will continue.