

creased, and the Guardians' Committee was considering other areas for Mennonite settlement. One of those areas was a tract of over eight hundred desyatin of swampy land around St. Petersburg. City authorities wrote about this offer to elder Peter Froese of Tiegerweide, Prussia. Only two people, Peter Dyck and Peter Berg, volunteered to go. The Guardians' Committee opposed this idea, because two Mennonites would not make any difference economically. What was needed was a colony. In addition, without any prayer houses or cultural activities, these two would quickly lose their Mennonite identity. Therefore, the Committee advised that Dyck and Berg be settled in Southern Russia, where they would be closer to their co-believers.

Another alternative for Mennonite settlement was made available in the Samara region. With the founding of the Trakt (1853 ff.) and Alexandertal (1859 ff.) colonies, Mennonites who wished to emigrate from Prussia had new options available to them.

Annual Meeting to Feature Mary Sprunger

The California Mennonite Historical Society Executive Committee is pleased to announce that Dr. Mary Sprunger, Associate Professor of History at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, will be the featured speaker at our annual meeting.

This event is scheduled for Saturday, April 15, 2000. Watch for further details early next year.

The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association

One of the organizations involved in strengthening understanding between Mennonites and Poles is the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association (MPFA).

In 1987, following discussions with a number of persons, a letter was sent to a broad spectrum of potentially interested persons and agencies. The purpose was to determine the level of interest in building bridges of understanding between Mennonites and those Poles now living in areas once home to hundreds of Mennonites. Sensitive issues associated with the Danzig Free State, World War II and the eventual flight/expulsion of Mennonites from lands along the Vistula demanded a careful, conciliatory approach.

Response to the letter was overwhelmingly positive. Representatives of the Mennonite World Conference and the Mennonite Central Committee viewed this as a promising development. Numerous historians, church leaders and persons who had lived in Poland or Prussia before World War II wrote to express their support.

Steps were taken to formalize this proposal. A statement of purpose delineated the goals and potential activities of the proposed organization. An international advisory board, with representation from Canada, Germany, Poland and the United States illustrated the desired diversity of those who might wish to support this effort. A three-member executive committee (Peter Klassen [Fresno], president; John Friesen [Winnipeg],

vice president; and Paul Toews [Fresno], secretary-treasurer) provided early leadership.

One of the first proposals discussed was a scholarly conference to examine various facets of Mennonite-Polish history and relationships. The idea received immediate support. Soon, the Centers for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno and Winnipeg, the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, as well as the Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference agreed to cooperate in planning such a conference. The resulting symposium was held on July 21-24, 1990.

In subsequent years, the MPFA has sponsored or helped sponsor a number of projects:

- Unveiling of a historical marker in the former Mennonite church in Gdańsk.
- Providing financial support for fencing and beginning restoration of the Mennonite cemetery in Heubuden (Stogi) in the Vistula delta.
- Giving financial support for Mennonite displays in the Elblag City Museum.
- Assisting in a cultural conference on Mennonite life in the Vistula Delta, held in Nowy Dwor (Tiegenhof) in celebration of the 1000th anniversary of Danzig/Gdańsk (1997).
- Providing financial support for the printing of brochures about Mennonite life in the Vistula Delta (1999).

In recent years, the MPFA has developed close working relationships with cooperating agencies in the Netherlands and Poland.