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continued from page 7

Mennonites had made in Poland were forgotten and all German-language relics—churches, cemeteries, businesses, historic accounts, and memorials—were relegated to oblivion.

At the same time, Mennonites themselves tended to forget their years in Poland. Many had left generations ago, migrating to South Russia—now Ukraine—and the memories of their former haven in Poland faded from their minds. Russian, and later North American, memories crowded the older history out of its rightful place of honor and distinction.

Our own Peter J. Klassen is one of a handful of scholars who began to call for the rediscovery of our Mennonite roots in Poland. Now we see Poland, after years of oppressive occupation, reliving the memories and reviving its factual history. The Polish nation is restoring the churches and the cemeteries while it is coming to terms with the impact of its own multicultural and multiethnic history. Mennonites are part of that rediscovery.

For a number of years, Peter Klassen led tours back to Polish locations important to Mennonite

history. He also retold the stories of Poland’s own history, how it created the “safe haven” for Mennonites and gave them a rich cultural environment to adopt as part of their own heritage. Many traditional Mennonite dishes that we thought to be Ukrainian in origin are actually Polish. At one time Poland extended to the Black Sea so the cultures were mixed. According to our Polish sources, foods such as borscht, varenyky, and pirogi/bierocks originated in Poland. Our Low-German dialect, so dear as our “Mennonite” tongue, was spoken as a dialect by most of the inhabitants of the Vistula delta region, and is often referred to as “Werder Platt” because it was the informal language of the “Werder”—or delta—region.

The tours of Poland have continued over the years. The California Mennonite Historical Society sponsors a tour called “Seeing Poland Through Mennonite Eyes,” which retraces the Polish roots of Mennonites in Poland. The latest tour visited Poland in July 2012, with 37 participants. The next tour is planned for June 2013. Those interested may contact Alan Peters, (559) 222-5554 or at: LNPTRS@comcast.net for further information.

The California Mennonite Historical Society

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Annual membership dues: \$25
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Center for MB Studies Becomes “Mennonite Library & Archives”

The historical library and archives collection at Fresno Pacific University, formerly known as the “Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies,” has recently changed its name to “Mennonite Library & Archives.” The name was changed to avoid confusion with the recently-established “Center for Anabaptist Studies” at the seminary, and also because the new name more clearly describes the functions of the historical library and archives programs. The old CMBS name will still exist for publishing projects, but will no longer be attached to the historical library and archives.