

# Seeing Poland through Mennonite Eyes 2013



*Photography by Jeanie Peters*

## ***A Tour of Poland From a Mennonite Perspective June 22 through June 29, 2013***

*(With an optional Kraków extension from June 29 through July 3)*

*Sponsored by the California Mennonite Historical Society*

*Tour Leader: Alan Peters*

*Tour Coordinator: Beverly Reimer*

*Arrangements in Poland: Travpol Travel Agency, Warsaw*

## Tour Overview

Poland was the homeland and refuge for generations of Mennonites, during the chaotic years after the Protestant Reformation. As a result, the history of Poland is part of the history of many American and Canadian Mennonites.

As early as the 1530's, Anabaptists from Holland and the lowlands of the Rhine and North Germany found a sanctuary in the Kingdom of Poland. Unlike the other countries of Europe, Poland rejected the brutal religious persecutions plaguing Western Europe.

Observing the religious horrors after the Reformation, the King of Poland himself declared that religious toleration would be observed throughout the Kingdom. As a result, many Dutch and German Mennonites settled in Poland, and remained there until later migrations took some to South Russia and others to the American Midwest. Many Mennonites remained in Poland until the end of the Second World War.

Surprisingly, many Mennonites have overlooked these centuries in our own history, despite the fact that the years of refuge in Poland constituted a much longer stay than the later years of residence in South Russia and Ukraine.

This tour is designed to reacquaint persons of Mennonite descent, and other interested persons, with the country that provided their ancestors a safe and secure homeland for so many years from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. We will visit the significant sites of both Polish and Mennonite history, discovering the quintessential beauty of Poland as seen through the lens of Anabaptist/Mennonite history.

Get ready to experience the amazing beauty, and the astonishing significance, of Poland as the homeland of our Mennonite ancestors.

# ***Itinerary***

*(Subject to minor changes based on participant interest and shifts in the tour schedule)*

Day 1 - June 22, Saturday - Our tour begins in Warsaw, the capital city of Poland. After checking into our hotel, we will plunge into Polish history with an afternoon city tour of Warsaw, visiting the marvels of the rebuilt historic Old Town, walk through Łazienki Park, with its spectacular memorial to Frederic Chopin and its lovely royal palace “on the water.”

We will revisit the sobering site of the former Jewish ghetto, reliving some of the horrors of the Nazi oppression of Jews and other Polish citizens during the Second World War, and see many other significant sites of historic interest in the capital city. Our “Welcome to Poland” dinner will be held in the evening after the city tour.

Day 2 - June 23, Sunday -- After breakfast, we leave Warsaw and drive northward through the scenic and picturesque country-side along the Vistula River on our way to the Mennonite sites to the west and north. We visit the former Mennonite settlements of Deutsch Kazun and Deutsch Wymyśle, where Mennonite villagers lived until the Second World War.

Later, we also stop at the former Mennonite Church at Nieszawka (formerly called Obernessau) on our way to the delightful and ancient city of Toruń, the birthplace of Nicholas Copernicus, the precedent-shattering astronomer. In this beautiful city, largely undamaged by the war, we will enjoy a walking tour of the city on our way to our restaurant, itself a historical site, where we will enjoy a delightful dinner before we retire for the night at our Toruń hotel.

Day 3 - June 24, Monday -- We continue our drive to the north, passing through the old walled city of Chełmno (formerly called Culm), on an intriguing visit through the regions where Mennonites formerly lived. We focus on the villages in the Vistula Valley where ancestors of persons on the tour lived, and their churches at Przechówka (the ancestral home church of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church in Ukraine and Kansas), and the areas of the Montau, Tragheimerweide, and Schoensee Mennonite churches.

We will visit many villages along the way, emphasizing those villages where ancestors of those of us on the tour lived and worshipped. When possible, we will even explore some of the Mennonite church cemeteries which still exist. After our action-packed day, we will arrive in Gdańsk (called “Danzig” during the years our ancestors lived there) just in time for dinner.

Day 4 - June 25, Tuesday - In the morning, we experience the glories of the city of Gdańsk, both on foot and by bus. We walk through the old city, strolling through the High Gate and down the Long Market, just like our ancestors did in days past. Along the way, we visit the old city hall, with its spectacular “Red Room”— the city council meeting room, with its spectacular furnishings and painted ceiling. Outside we will see the Neptune Fountain, and then enter St.

Mary's Cathedral, the largest brick cathedral in the world— first Catholic, then Lutheran, and now Catholic once again.

Then walking along Mary Street, with its distinctive “porches” (copied by Mennonites later in Ukraine), we will pass through one of the many gates to the historic Motława Canal, with its quaint waterfront featuring the famous medieval crane. We will also step inside the old Mennonite Church, now a Pentecostal Church, and visit the sites made famous by Solidarity and Lech Wałęsa, including the former Lenin Shipyards, where the Iron Curtain began to crumble.

In the afternoon, we will begin our excursions to the Mennonite villages of the Vistula Delta, eating lunch at Nowy Dwór (formerly Tiegenhof), and visiting our first selection of villages in the Gross Werder, as time permits.

Day 5 - June 26, Wednesday - After breakfast, we travel to the massive castle of the Teutonic Knights at Malbork (Marienburg). This is the largest brick castle complex in the world, which served as the headquarters for the Teutonic Order until its defeat in 1410. Virtually within sight of the castle is a cluster of Mennonite villages, and we will visit a number of them— including their churches and cemeteries— including Heubuden, Ladekopp, Tiegenhagen, Orloff, Baerwalde and Neu-Muensterberg.

We arrive back in Gdansk in plenty of time to have a luxurious dinner at the elite “Pod Łososiem” restaurant (formerly known as “Zum Lachs”), founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century by the same Mennonite family which developed the distinctive Polish liqueur known as “Goldwasser.”

Day 6 - June 27, Thursday - In the morning, our excursions continue to the city of Elbląg (formerly known as Elbing), where we see the old Mennonite Church building, dating back to the 1590's, and the later Mennonite Church, now a Polish Catholic church.

We visit the villages in the Elbing vicinity, especially those in the so-called “Klein Werder” including the Thiensdorf and Preussisch Rosengart Mennonite Churches. As time permits, we will also visit other former Mennonite villages in the eastern part of the “Gross Werder,” focusing on those of interest to those on the tour. We return to Gdańsk and enjoy our final dinner in this wonderful city of such importance to our history.

Day 7 - June 28, Friday - After breakfast, we bid farewell to Gdańsk and begin our trip back to Warsaw. On the way, we stop at the Stutthof Concentration Camp and Museum, which was a Nazi prison camp on the Baltic Coast near Gdańsk.

We then travel back to Warsaw, where we finish the main tour with a scintillating Chopin piano recital, followed by our farewell dinner in Warsaw, and spend our last night in our Warsaw hotel.

## ***The Kraków Extension***

**Day 8 - June 29, Saturday** - After breakfast, we check out of our Warsaw hotel. Those choosing to end the tour at this time will begin their further journey back to North America. Those opting to continue on to Kraków, the ancient capital of Poland and one of its most beautiful and historic cities, will catch the morning train to Kraków.

Upon arrival, we will check in at our hotel, and take a walking tour to the old city center of Kraków, visiting the magnificent city square with its wonderful “Cloth Hall” marketplace and historic St. Mary’s Basilica, where we will hear the centuries-old hourly trumpet call from the church steeple, broadcast throughout Poland every noon, in memory of the city’s defenses during the Tatar invasion of Poland in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

We will also walk to the “Wawel,” or castle hill, and visit the oldest part of the city, including the great Cathedral, where the early kings of Poland were crowned, and where they and the country’s subsequent notable persons are buried. Kraków is one of the few ancient European cities that were not seriously damaged during the war, making it a prime example of an original medieval city.

**Days 9 and 10 - June 30 and July 1, Sunday and Monday** - We will continue our exploration of Kraków and its environs on these two days, visiting the Wieliczka Salt Mines, and the Oskar Schindler factory (now one of Poland’s finest museums, presenting the Second World War experience of Kraków). We will also see the sobering Auschwitz and Birkenau Concentration Camps.

Time permitting, we will also try to visit the Czartoryski Art Museum, which houses the famous portrait by Da Vinci, “Lady with an Ermine” (described by many as his finest portrait, along with the “Landscape with Good Samaritan” by Rembrandt, considered by many to be his greatest landscape painting.

We finish off our Kraków extension with a glorious evening of food and music in the Kazimierz district of Kraków, which has resumed its former prominence as the center of Jewish life and culture in the city.

**Day 11 - July 2, Tuesday** -- After breakfast, we check out of our Kraków hotel and travel by train back to Warsaw, where we will have free time—a chance to see those sites in Warsaw that we didn’t have time to see during our earlier brief stay there. We spend the night at our Warsaw hotel.

**Day 12 - July 3, Wednesday** - With breakfast, our “Kraków Extension” ends, and we say our farewells to each other and begin our homeward journeys, savoring all the wonderful sights, sounds, and memories of our memorable tour of Poland, one of our most beautiful ancestral homelands.

## ***Tour Leaders***

This tour is led by Alan Peters, President of the California Mennonite Historical Society. He is continuing this remarkable tour, founded by Dr. Peter J. Klassen, the acknowledged expert on Polish Mennonite history. Mr. Peters accompanied Dr. Klassen on a number of earlier Poland Mennonite study tours, and has also led a number of tours to Poland himself, including the last three California Mennonite Historical Society tours.

He is also a well-known Mennonite genealogist, and he will explore the Polish Mennonite roots of tour participants, preparing an ancestral report on each tour participant, if possible, and make arrangements to visit many of the villages where ancestors of tour participants once resided.

The Tour Travel Coordinator is Beverly Reimer, an experienced travel agent now retired, and Poland traveler herself, who will coordinate the travel arrangements and accept all payments for the trip.

## ***Tour Information***

The cost of the tour is for the “land portion” only. Since most tour participants in the past have made this tour a part of a larger European experience, visiting other parts of Europe on their own either before or after the tour, we ask that tour participants make their own travel arrangements to and from Warsaw. If you need advice regarding your own arrangements, Beverly Reimer, the Tour Coordinator, can provide information and advice to assist you.

The tour will be limited to 35 persons, due to bus, hotel, and restaurant limitations. Once the quota of 35 persons has been filled, any additional reservations will be placed on a waiting list, in the order received, in case of cancellations. The minimum number of participants required for the trip to take place is 25 persons.

Virtually all tour-related communications are made by email. If you don't have an email address yourself, please indicate the email of a nearby relative or friend that we can use to send tour newsletters and other correspondence to you.

# **Price List per Segment**

## **Tour Costs -- Mennonite Tour (June 22 to 28)**

US\$ 1695 per person, double occupancy  
US\$ 400 single supplement

This price includes lodging for 7 nights, half board, travel by motor coach, entry fees where required, English-speaking Polish guides, and all gratuities for organized group activities. Additional private excursions, and the gratuities associated with them, would be an additional personal expense.

## **Tour Costs - Kraków Extension (June 28 to July 3)**

US\$ 950 per person, double occupancy  
US\$ 200 single supplement

A minimum of ten (10) persons is required for this extension.

This price includes train fare to and from Krakow, lodging for 4 nights (3 nights in Krakow and 1 night in Warsaw, half board, entry fees, English-speaking Polish guides and all gratuities for organized group activities.

As mentioned above, these costs do NOT include air fare to and from Warsaw. Also not included are any travel insurance protection that you may want to secure.

## **Schedule of Payment**

A deposit of US\$250 is due no later than February 1, 2013. Remember, however, that the submission of a completed reservation form and a deposit is required to reserve a spot in the tour group. Our past experience has been that the tour does fill up reasonably quickly. After a full tour group of 35 persons has submitted their deposits, a "waiting list" will be established, in the order that their reservation forms are received.

The balance of the cost is due by April 1, 2013.

In order to receive a registration form, contact Beverly Reimer at the email address below. All registration forms, deposits, and payments should be sent to the Tour Coordinator, Beverly Reimer. She can be contacted by email: [bevreimer63@yahoo.com](mailto:bevreimer63@yahoo.com) or by phone at (559) 251-2714.

## **Additional Information**

Those traveling alone should be prepared to pay the appropriate costs for the “single supplement” portions of their tour costs, or make arrangements to room with another person traveling alone to qualify for the “double occupancy” rate. If you have no preferred roommate, we will attempt to pair you with another single traveler, but we cannot guarantee that a roommate will be available.

Once reservations have been made, and a deposit has been received, additional information, including a suggested reading list, informative maps, travel suggestions and information, genealogical assistance, and periodic newsletters will be sent by email to all tour participants by the Tour Leader, Alan Peters.

Since much of the tour information is provided by email, you should indicate your own email address, or find a relative or friend that will be willing to receive such emails on your behalf. If you have any questions about the itinerary or other tour related questions, please contact Alan Peters by email at: [LNPTRS@comcast.net](mailto:LNPTRS@comcast.net) or by phone at (559) 222-5554.

The tour does involve walking tours through a number of the cities and the various sites visited. You should be able to manage a moderate amount of walking.

The local arrangements have been managed by the Travpol Travel Agency in Warsaw. This organization provides a wide range of excellent tours in Poland, and is particularly experienced in Mennonite tours. You can visit their website at: [www.travpol.pl](http://www.travpol.pl)