

# *Seeing Poland through Mennonite Eyes*

## *2017*



*Former Deutsch Kazun Mennonite Church -- Photography by Jeanie Peters*

*A Tour of Poland from a Mennonite Perspective*  
*June 9 through June 17, 2017*  
*(With an optional Kraków extension from June 17 through June 21)*

*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 refuge and homeland 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 Mennonites around the world. 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, along with others seeking religious freedom, 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. A large number of Mennonites remained in Poland until the end of the Second World War. Surprisingly, most Mennonites have overlooked these centuries in their 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 9, Friday** – Our tour begins in Warsaw, the capital city of Poland. After our arrival through private travel arrangements to Warsaw from many directions, we will check into our wonderful Warsaw hotel. We begin with a special "Welcome to Poland" dinner, at which we will get acquainted with each other and begin our visit to Poland.

**Day 2 – June 10, Saturday** – After breakfast in the hotel, we will immediately plunge into Polish history with a city tour of Warsaw. We will visit the marvels of the rebuilt historic Old Town, walk through Łazienki Park, with its awe-inspiring 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.

**Day 3 – June 11, Sunday** – After breakfast, we leave Warsaw and drive northward through the scenic and picturesque countryside along the Vistula River (now known by its Polish name: the Wisła) on our way to the Mennonite sites to the north and west. We visit the former Mennonite settlements of Deutsch Kuzuń and Deutsch Wymyśle, where Mennonite villagers lived until the Second World War. After a lunch stop in Płock, we will drive to the former Mennonite Church at Nieszawka (once called Obernessau) on our way to the delightful and ancient city of Toruń. This is the birthplace of Nicholas Copernicus, the

precedent-shattering astronomer, who daringly proclaimed that the earth and planets orbited around the sun. In this beautiful city, largely undamaged by the war, we will enjoy a walking tour of important sites 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 4 – June 12, Monday** – We continue our drive to the north, passing by the old walled city of Chełmno (formerly called Culm), as we make our intriguing way through the Wisła valley regions where Mennonites formerly lived. We will focus particularly on those villages where persons on our tour have roots, visiting the regions of the former churches at Przechówka (the ancestral home church of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church in Ukraine and Kansas), Montau/Mątawy, Tragheimerweide/Barcice, and Schoensee/Sosnówka. We will pass by many villages along the way, stopping wherever we see something of interest. 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 to check in to our hotel and enjoy another spectacular dinner.

**Day 5 – June 13, 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, splendidly decorated with spectacular furnishings and its painted ceiling. Outside we will see the Neptune Fountain, and enter St. Mary’s Cathedral, the largest brick cathedral in the world—first Catholic, then Lutheran, and now Catholic once again. We will walk along Mary Street, with its distinctive “porches” (copied by Mennonites later in Ukraine), and 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 (and its wonderful new Solidarity Museum), where the Iron Curtain first 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. We return to Gdańsk and enjoy a dinner featuring local Polish cuisine in this wonderful city of such importance to our history.

**Day 6 – June 14, 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 church sites and cemeteries—at such places as Heubuden/Stogi, Ladekopp/Lubieszewo, Tiegenhagen/Tujusk, Orloff/Orłowo, Baerwalde/Niedźwiedzica, and Neu-Muensterberg/Nowa Kościelnica. We return once again to Gdańsk in time to enjoy another spectacular dinner at a local restaurant.

**Day 7 – June 15, Thursday** – In the morning, our excursions take us across the delta region to the city of Elbląg (formerly known as Elbing), where we see the old Mennonite Church building, dating back to 1590, and the later Mennonite Church, now a “Polish Catholic” church (not to be confused with “Roman Catholic”). We also visit villages in the Elbing vicinity, especially those in the so-called “Klein Werder” including the areas once served by the Thiensdorf, Marcushof and Preussisch Rosengart Mennonite Churches. As time permits, we will also visit other former villages in the eastern part of the “Gross Werder”, focusing on those of interest to members of the tour. We arrive back in Gdansk in plenty of time to have our last Gdańsk-based dinner—a luxurious feast 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 8 – June 16, Friday** – After breakfast, we bid farewell to Gdańsk and begin our journey 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 (a “command performance” just for us, followed by our farewell dinner in Warsaw. We then spend our last night in our Warsaw hotel, savoring the memories of our journey through Mennonite—and Polish—history!

**Day 9 – June 17, Saturday** – This is a day of transition. After one last breakfast at our fabulous Warsaw hotel, those who are saying "farewell" to the tour will check out of the hotel and begin their homeward journey. But many others will begin a new and exciting part of our program:

### *The Kraków Extension*

**Day 9 – June 17, Saturday** – After breakfast, we check out of our Warsaw hotel and continue on to Kraków, the ancient capital of Poland and one of its most beautiful and historic cities. We catch the morning train to Kraków, and watch the changing Polish landscape through our train windows. Upon arrival, we will check in at our hotel, enjoy lunch together, and take a walking tour of 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 10 and 11 – June 18 and 19, 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. Later in the afternoon, you will have free time in the city center to see other sites on your own. You might visit the old Castle once again to see the famous portrait by Da Vinci, “Lady with an Ermine” (described by many as his finest portrait). You can stroll on your own—or even ride in a splendid carriage, to see the sights of this remarkable city. You might do your last-minute shopping for Polish souvenirs at the Cloth Hall or other fine shops in Kraków. We spend our last night in the city with a glorious evening of Jewish food and klezmer 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 12 – June 20, Tuesday – After breakfast, we check out of our Kraków hotel and travel back to Warsaw, perhaps stopping on the way to see the ancient monastery at Częstochowa and its most famous artifact, the awe-inspiring icon of the "Black Madonna", one of the most holy relics in Poland. When we arrive back in Warsaw, 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 13 – June 21, Wednesday – With breakfast, our “Kraków Extension” ends, and we say our farewells to each other and begin our homeward journeys, cataloguing 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, long-time officer and board member of the California Mennonite Historical Society. He is carrying on the tradition of leading this remarkable tour, originally led 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 led the last seven of these California Mennonite Historical Society sponsored tours. He is also a well-known Mennonite genealogist, and he will explore the Polish Mennonite roots of tour participants, preparing a genealogical report for each tour participant with roots in Poland, 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, now-retired travel agent, and Poland traveler herself, who will coordinate the travel arrangements and accept all payments for the trip.

The local Polish arrangements have been managed by the Travpol Travel Agency in Warsaw, directed by our long-time friend, Andrzej Puchacz. His agency provides a wide range of excellent tours in Poland, and is particularly experienced in arranging Mennonite tours. You can visit their website at: [www.travpol.pl](http://www.travpol.pl). Our local guide and interpreter during the tour will be Ewa Hajnych, our thoughtful and beloved guide for many years on the tour.

## *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*

*(IMPORTANT NOTE -- The prices below are the prices that were charged on the 2016 Tour. We hope that these prices will also apply to our 2017 tour. However, hotel rates have not yet been finalized for 2017, so there may be minor changes in the final rate. In addition, currency exchange rate changes could require later adjustments, but our goal is to keep the 2017 cost at or near that for 2016.)*

### **Tour Costs – Mennonite Tour (June 9 to 17)** *(a minimum of 25 tour participants is required)*

US\$ 1850 per person, double occupancy  
US\$ 475 single supplement

This price includes lodging for 8 nights, half board, travel by motor coach, entry fees where required, English-speaking Polish guides, and all gratuities for organized group activities. Any additional privately-arranged excursions, and the gratuities associated with them, would be an additional personal expense.

### **Tour Costs – Kraków Extension (June 17 to June 21)** *(a minimum of 16 participants is required)*

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

This price includes transportation costs 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 on your own.

### **Schedule of Payment**

A nonrefundable deposit of US\$250 per person (or US\$350 if you are also reserving a spot on the Kraków extension) reserves your spot on the tour. If past experience is any indication, the tour group will fill rather quickly, with those submitting the deposit earliest added in the order they register. Since there is the possibility that this tour may be the last one led by Alan Peters, the tour might fill more quickly than usual. Once the tour group maximum of 35 persons is complete, additional registrants will be placed on a waiting list in the order that their registrations and deposits are received.

All remaining costs are due by April 1, 2017. All questions regarding tour payments, registrations, and assistance with travel issues should be brought to the attention of our 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 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 related questions about the tour program, 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. Many of the "old town" portions of ancient cities are not accessible by bus, with many streets and city squares reserved for pedestrians only. We also leave the bus to visit historical sites, remote old cemetery locations, etc. Tour participants should be able to manage a significant amount of walking.