144. March 18, 1711. Letter from Runckel to the Committee for Foreign Needs: He proposes that he himself or some trusted person make a trip through the Bernese countryside in order to track down the Mennonites and to persuade them to depart, who in spite of the amnesty are not yet reporting. Further, George Ritter, merchant at Bern, who made the trip to Holland the previous year and is well known to the Committee, would accompany the refugees to Holland, if so approved by the Committee.

 Everything would be at the expense of the Committee. An enclosure presents a reckoning of the supposed costs for passage of 500 Mennonites and suggestions about appointment of a leader and who should obtain passports, etc. Thus, Runckel gives a glimpse of complications of travel down the Rhine River to Holland through various sovereign states and the practical problems of such a trip in that era. He explains why it would be advisable for someone from Holland to meet the ships part-way.

[page 1]

Bern[[1]](#footnote-1) the 18th of March 1711.

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

Since my highly honored Sirs’ very valued letter directed to me on the 10th of the past month in which you acknowledge the receipt of my letters of the 24th and 28th of January, I have gotten nothing further. In the meantime I would hope that since then, those letters of the 18th, 21st, and 25th of last month, as also that of the 11th of the present month, which I have had the honor to address to you, all have been properly and safely delivered, although somewhat slowly because of the bad roads and flooding. My highly honored Sirs will have learned from them what has occurred in the case of the poor local Anabaptists from time to time and how finally with the help of God and by His grace, both the release of the unfortunate prisoners and the proclamation of the amnesty have fully brought about the long desired situation. [page 2] Also, I hope that what has further been done by me for the advancement of this whole affair will flourish to the full satisfaction of my highly honored Sirs.

Especially from my last letter of the 11th of this month, my highly honored Sirs will have learned that I have finally in the highest name of God resolved not to depart from here before all will have been put completely in

order and the poor local Anabaptists will have traveled out of the land.

For it is very important from the present forward that someone will provide punctually everything necessary for the departure of these good people—in particular the ships. Completely new vessels must be prepared because in this country nothing, or only what is of little value, is ready for so long and extended a journey, and the ships need to be made on time. With this, my highly honored Sirs, after I have investigated everything very exactly, I shall send a provisional estimate of the very necessary costs of the transportation required perhaps from here to Rotterdam for your maturer consideration. Then you can very soon perhaps take measures, at your pleasure, concerning the moneys required for this.

These good people are scattered far and near [page 3] in the land, and practicality demands knowing as nearly as possible the number of the departing persons so that both the preparation of the needed ships and also other matters might be settled. I consider it very necessary for the above reason, as well as to persuade also those Anabaptists as yet unknown to me to a complete removal, that I have a word on behalf of these people with their government officers, the Reformed clergy, and other officials to render the release of their possessions so much easier, and that I otherwise facilitate all which can be done.

I am either going to make some excursions into the countryside myself, or at least send someone in whom I can confide, so that I might be best and most surely informed. However, since these excursions may occasion moderate costs and extra expenses, I shall offer them as a suggestion, my highly honored Sirs, for your deliberate consideration. Then you can let me know your opinion about it, and in case the proposed trips are agreeable to you, you can provide the necessities in a timely fashion.

I have observed much from association with the Anabaptists imprisoned here, that they are for the most part good, simple people, [page 4] inexperienced with travel on water and what is connected with that. For that cause I do not unreasonably fear that such persons might be saddled with all kinds of advances of money and annoyances during the journey either by blustering sailors, by the leaders themselves appointed to oversee each ship, or by the rough customs officers, and money-hungry soldiers along the route. [This could happen] if they were not sent under the general oversight of one who is experienced on this route and acquainted with everything, also in addition a sensible, firm, imposing figure, a man sufficiently established here on account of the money to be entrusted to him. He could handle and fix everything along the way, manage matters, also do all the talking at customs and otherwise, give answers, present the passports at customs and otherwise work things out where necessary. Also upon the arrival of the poor Mennonites in Holland, he could explain to my highly honored Sirs both all that has happened along the way and what was consumed and otherwise paid out, a complete accounting.

Since I should explain this suggestion further, my highly honored Sirs, [I ask] whether you could not find it advisable that I work this out concerning Mr. George Ritter,[[2]](#footnote-2) citizen and spice merchant of this city, who a year ago [page 5] made this journey with the poor Anabaptists banished at that time and for this reason will already be somewhat known to my highly honored Sirs. [I would] arrange that he might take up the general oversight of the matter in return for an honorable recognition and refunding of the travel expenses back from Holland to here. This gentleman, as I personally know, is quite well acquainted with Mr. van Gent of Rotterdam,[[3]](#footnote-3) and with

Mr. Jean Jacques Caille at Amsterdam; also this man brought the latter persons to a meeting with my highly honored Sirs about a year ago, who may certainly be remembered yet. In case my highly honored Sirs find this suggestion acceptable and Mr. Ritter is willing to undertake this matter, the cares of the director could be handed over to him in a manner, however, acceptable to me and on the condition that he will be instructed by me in the matter.

Of the Anabaptists who have slipped out of the country and otherwise are hidden, as far as I personally know, very few have appeared, besides Daniel Rychen and his brother-in-law; however, such persons may make their appearance very soon in a greater number.

With this, in expectation of a speedy decision, besides a mutual commitment to God’s mighty, gracious protection, [page 6] as also best commendation of myself and mine to your devoted prayer, I remain continually,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

[page 7]

An approximate and a provisional estimate of those expenses

and extra costs for the transportation of the local Anabaptists

from here down to Rotterdam, the necessary provisions,

and what belongs to that, not otherwise accounted for,

which may be required:

And first of course for only one ship, which can com- ... rxdlr.[[4]](#footnote-4) -- btz.[[5]](#footnote-5)/

fortably transport one hundred persons, children and

adults, with their few possessions, because the larger

vessels are found to be quite unserviceable for this

journey.

Such a ship now costs by purchase with complete

equipment about 36 rixdollars up to ---- ---- ---- ---- 40--”--/

To such a ship belongs an experienced steersman

with at the least four oarsmen; such workers are

paid according to regulations here for a day per head

one half rixdollar for their wages and for their sus-

tenance both on the outward and the return

journey, which usually is reckoned for such a journey

approximately fifty days there and back,

thus for 5 persons ----- ----- ----- ---- ---- ---- 125--”--/

Further, a general overseer would be necessary

on such a ship, who would talk and give answers

at the tax offices, fortresses, redoubts, etc., present

the passports, bring foodstuff onto the ship, procure

wood, charcoal, straw, and other necessities at con-

venient places, instruct the sailors, and whatever

more would perhaps be connected, that is, to this

would be added expense and wages for the trip

there and back one rixdollar for 50 days 50--”--

subtotal 215

[page 8]

rxdlr.—btz.

The previous page comes to: 215 -- --

Further for a ship from here down to Rotterdam,

for tax for the ship and head tax, the passage to

Lauffenburg, transportation of personal effects

there. Also for tips at customs, passages,

redoubts, also for pilots from place to place and

what such matters may further require

more or less -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 100 -- “ --

For a ship with 100 persons loaded, but

without foodstuff for the travelers, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

this comes to -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 315 -- “ --

Now suppose there were of these altogether 500 persons

(although I believe there would be rather more

than less) so for this would be required

five ships, would make altogether 1575 -----

All these ships at Basel must be covered with good

pine lumber in order to protect these

good people both against heat and

rain and other inclement weather

required for one ship approximately 3 --

dozen boards 18 foot long or planks

a dozen at 4 rixdollars, makes 5 a ship 15

dozen, and here -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- -- 60 -- “ --

For slats,[[6]](#footnote-6) poles, and nails as also

wages for work to finish the work on the roof

amounts to approximately -- -- -- -- -- -- 16 -- “ --

These boards, slats, etc.

could be sold again in Holland

for reuse.

also of necessity there must be a small, yet good, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1651

[page 9]

rxdlr. -- btz.

new lead ship for reconnoitering, landing, etc.

Such [a ship or boat] costs 4 to 5 rixdollars here 5

1651

Total 1656

Included in this 1656 rixdollars, all of which is roughly estimated;

however not yet in the bill, if the general director should

have as his preference, would be still other foodstuffs, wine,

spirits, medicines, and other small necessities, which perhaps

might be found advisable for these poor people on their

trip to be supplied for their health and best benefit, but

such would be left to my highly honored Sirs’ generous

preference.

If it should be found advisable to send someone to meet these good

people as far as Mannheim, Mainz, or Cologne in order to

bring them the rest of the way into Holland and to accompany

them, the general overseer and other overseers from here,

as well as the sailors, would be hired only as far as one of these

places mentioned and then from there be sent back again.

But this must be indicated to them immediately when they

are hired so that they would know how to plan accordingly.

I have supposed that a less expensive charge could be secured

perhaps if a bargain is reached generally concerning the

transportation of these people for avoiding all further care

and confusion with some sailors. However, after an exacter

inquiry I have discovered that adult or minor persons and

the ship are delivered tax-free from here to Rotterdam, and yet

the baggage, which must be paid as something separate, and

not reckoned with the rest, will take not less than 4 to 5

rixdollars, and so that would make, for 500 head, 2000 to 2500

rixdollars and that would be if the sailors and the ships

[page 10]

take as little as they can. If [the ships] were overloaded with all kinds of passengers and, because of that, they would hasten day and night, and this [haste] would subject these good people to a thousand dangers to life and limb plus twice as many vexations and adversities. Whereas in the first [arrangement] this would not to be feared because the overseers are and would remain masters of the ships.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Passports will be necessary from his imperial Majesty and General Commander-in-chief[[8]](#footnote-8) on the Rhine, from his royal Majesty of France, which the illustrious Canton of Bern will obtain; from your High and Mighty Lords; from the illustrious Canton of Bern; and then from the imperial Minister in Switzerland. My highly honored Sirs will know how to obtain the first, as also the fourth. I will take responsibility for two others, and in case of need also for the second. In order that the [exiles] would not be held up so long at customs, I suggest that my highly honored Sirs consider whether they could not find it advisable also to procure some passports from the Electorate of Mainz, the Electorate of the Palatinate, the Bishopric of Cologne, as also the Electorate of Brandenburg. Yet, because these poor people will take no merchant’s goods and very few personal effects with them, this may not be so necessary.

If my highly honored Sirs should approve that Mr. Ritter manage the suggested general oversight and he is disposed to accept it, the passports will be most suitably directed to him.

Runckel.

Bern, the 18th of March 1711.

1. 144 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 158-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kirstin Bentley, “Täuferexodus und Gründung der Kolonie New Bern 1710 in Spiegel von Christoph von Graffenrieds ‘Amerikarelation,’” Mennonitica Helvetica 34/35 (2011/12), p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jan van Gent was a member of the Mennonite church council and deacon in Rotterdam. A. van Gulik, “Uit de geschiedenis van de overkomst der vervolgde Zwitsers in 1710 en 1711,” DB, XLVIII (1908), p. 92; Nanne van der Zijpp, “Doopsgezinde emigranten reisden via Rotterdam,” Rotterdams Jaarboekje,” (1959), p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. rixdollar. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. batzen. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The word in the original is Ramschenckel, a rare word, variously defined in carpenter’s manuals, etc. as “thin wooden bars” used for a pergula, or in a shed for drying tobacco, or “carpenter’s panel” or “stud.” Rahmen+Schenckel. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. If general overseers were not in charge, others might take on other passengers informally to increase the profit. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. General Commander-in-chief (French and German), apparently a specific official. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)