201. September 22, 1711. A letter to the Committee for Foreign Needs from Michael Reusser, Hans Anken, Daniel Rychen, Christen Steiner, and Melchior Zahler, now living in the Netherlands. They request to remain in this country and not to go to Prussia and think they can soon earn their living without any longer being a burden on the Committee. They thank them heartily for the assistance they have enjoyed.

[recto]

To[[1]](#footnote-1) the Committee Members of the Mennonite churches for our Swiss affairs in their meeting at Amsterdam.

Honored friends, all manner of health in soul and body is wished for you, and again our most friendly thanks to you for all the help and good deeds received.

We want to let the dear friends know that we have received your letter of the tenth of this month and from it, as further from the report of Bendicht Brechtbühl, have understood the project of the friends and the opportunity concerning the land in Prussia. We have also informed our friends about the matter of traveling to Prussia and, after deliberation and inquiry, have found very few persons, or no one, inclined to go there. We, for our part, consider this matter burdensome, alas, hard to recommend, for we have found by experience what hardship was caused by entering onto a long journey with wife and children. This indeed is in part not unknown to the friends. To recommend this goes too much against the grain because it has always been represented to our friends[[2]](#footnote-2) that they should not need to travel to Prussia if they did not desire, nor have inclination to do so. It is also known to our friends that Mr. Runckel has advised against this journey.

[We are] pleased to report to the dear friends that your undertaking has been very great and unique in dealing with our affairs and providing us with such great help to bring us into a land where there is freedom of conscience and to help us to a location where we can honorably earn our keep with our hands and eat the bread earned by our own hands. Such is very pleasing to us, and we have much reason to show ourselves ready to thank you heartily for help already received. We also agree completely with the view that for the first time so far we have complete satisfaction, nor can we imagine that we need to travel elsewhere to get more freedom of conscience.

Now concerning the second issue: we hope and think that it is true that after a passage of time we will be able to get places to live and then to earn our living and to eat our own bread. What the dear friends were pleased to advise about lack of familiarity with the land[[3]](#footnote-3) we cannot deny. But we also cannot think that there would be a land familiar to us outside of our fatherland. Accordingly, it does not appear to us that land in Prussia would be better. However, it may be in one respect true that the inhabitants of this land [the Netherlands] should be so much more knowledgeable and competent than we as strangers. We have also indeed heard say that in the Province of Holland[[4]](#footnote-4) there are very skilled and industrious farmers. Although it is not suitable for us to cherish high opinions of ourselves, but we can just as well think that were the land in Switzerland not worked better than we see in many places here, the farmers there could not survive. It is indeed true that the present inhabitants (especially in the beginning) do have a great advantage as farmers (which we do not have) since they were born here. But we hope that we in contrast also have something of an advantage, which consists of this, that many of the farmers here are accustomed to run up unnecessary expenses in eating and drinking, clothing and superfluous tobacco smoking, which among some is very popular.

[verso]

Accordingly we hope, if we wait a while until this land is a little better known to us, that affairs will turn for the better, should it please Almighty God. As for ourselves in the past famine in a foreign land (that is, in a French-speaking land)[[5]](#footnote-5) where the common speech was unknown to us, [it pleased God] to give us enough that we had food and shelter. Thus we still have steadfast trust in Him that His hand is not shortened to help us to [earn] our own bread in an honorable manner.

We want to make this brief and leave the remaining troubles which burden us unreported because we cannot bring our people to the point that they would prepare themselves again for such a far journey. In fact, we find that some would rather return to the Palatinate than move to Prussia.

We thank the friends again for all the good efforts expended on our behalf and the burden of [helping] us, and that (since the friends have not complained) [the burden] actually does not exist. [We recognize] that the friends have chosen it out of love without our request. And if the friends

themselves at this time wish to stop, and be released [from helping] us, we

have no reason to complain, but much more, for such as we have already enjoyed, to say a hearty thanks (because much more has been done for us than we had expected). We do that easily, again in the friendliest manner. That it has pleased the friends to write that they do not want to be always burdened with such a load is easy to believe. It is no small matter. We believe also that if such would need to happen [again],[[6]](#footnote-6) it would be even more burdensome for us. Regarding the prospect for our removal, we can say this: Already some opportunities have been offered, but as the matter was still so new and actually some time was needed to think and investigate, we wish to postpone it to another occasion.

With this we commit the friends together into the protection of the Almighty. Dated September 22, 1711.

Michael Reusser[[7]](#footnote-7)

Hans Anken[[8]](#footnote-8)

Daniel Rychen[[9]](#footnote-9)

Christen Steiner[[10]](#footnote-10)

Melchior Zahler[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. 201 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 232-234. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Here he refers to the Swiss brothers. Sometimes “friends” means the Swiss brothers and sometimes the Dutch. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Perhaps he is referring to the report of Bendicht Brechtbühl, Hans Ramseier, and Ulli Baur. See Document 195, August 12, and Document 200, September 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Swiss refugees were not located in the Province of Holland, but in Groningen and other places. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is probably referring to the time when Daniel Rychen was exiled to the French-speaking Canton of Neuenburg (Neuchâtel). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vorsterman here adds weder (“again”). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Since the sixteenth century there were Anabaptist Reussers in Steffisburg near Thun. They belonged to a network of influential Anabaptist families. Michael Reusser’s father Stefan moved to Hilterfingen where Michael was born in 1683. At his Reformed baptism, Jakob Amman’s wife, Verena Stüdler, was god-mother. Kirchenbuch Hilterfingen 3, 144. Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,” pp. 163-164. Michael Reusser (1683-ca. 1759) of Heiligenschwendi, near Hilterfingen, at the time of his emigration from Switzerland in 1711 was a preacher and later became a preacher and elder (bishop) of the Nieuwe Zwitsers (Amish) in the Netherlands. Members of this family also migrated to the Palatinate and some went from there to the New World. ME IV, 340; Abels, V, 2654 f. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hans Anken, born in Spiez, Bern, was preacher and elder (later of the New Swiss). ME I, 123; Isaac Zürcher, “Die Ammann-Reist Kontroverse” and “Brief-Sammlung” Informations-Blätter of the Schweizerischer Verein für Täufergeschichte (Nr. 10, 1987), 61, 71, 72. Visser, “Some Unnoticed Hooks and Eyes,” p. 102. Abels, I, 159 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Daniel Rychen, later leader of the Old Swiss. See note in Document 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Christian Steiner (1650/51-1735). Abels, V, 2812 f. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Melchior Zahler, a deacon from Frutigen in Bern, was imprisoned and deported in 1710. ME IV, 1016; Müller, p. 284, ff.; Abels V, 3098. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)