**76. September 3, 1708.** *Letter[[1]](#footnote-1) from the Mennonites at Germantown in Pennsylvania to the Zonist Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam as answer to a letter of April 16, 1707, with a report that their older leader, William Rittenhouse, has passed away, but new ministers have already been chosen. They request Bibles, Psalm books, and question books, since there and in New York only English materials are printed, and the printing would be too expensive for them. They report that there are people there calling themselves “Mennists,” who desire that the articles of faith would be printed in English. The letter is not written in German, but in the native Dutch of the immigrant writers.*

[page 1]

Germantown,[[2]](#footnote-2) September 3, 1708.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Highly esteemed and heartily beloved friends, Hermannus Schijn and fellow ministers of the Mennonite congregations in Holland and wherever else this letter may come, who are united with us in one faith, workers in the spiritual vineyard of Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace be to you from the merciful God in unity with the Holy Ghost, and to all those who fear the Lord, be salvation and comfort and the eternal inheritance of the life everlasting.

Your very welcome letter, written by the ministers at Hamburg and Altona and signed by you, as concurring with its contents, dated April 16, 1707, has come safely to hand.[[4]](#footnote-4) We have thoroughly understood your good instruction contained therein, and it has given us a satisfactory solution and was received with joy by our elder preacher, William Rittenhouse. Consequently, it was fully resolved to give baptism upon request to those who were asking for it and to those who had already asked. But at this time the Lord laid him with his wife on a sick bed, and in a few days [they were] taken from us. This was a painful departure for us. Yet about two or three hours before his death he held a short exhortation and, taking leave of the brothers, fell asleep in the Lord, he being 64 years of age and [she] 66.[[5]](#footnote-5) This was a painful farewell for us. [page 2] But we may say as it is written in the Revelation of John 14:13, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord,” and, as a certain poet says “Sleep then, my friend, in God who lives, until that joyful day when God, who can do all things, will give you life again.”

We had, then, only one[[6]](#footnote-6) who served us by reading a sermon. This caused us further grief, and having called upon the Lord concerning this, and on the advice to choose in the hope that the Lord would again raise one up, [we] again chose two as preachers[[7]](#footnote-7) and two as deacons.[[8]](#footnote-8) From these one has already delivered two sermons for us to the satisfaction of the brotherhood. The Lord will, I hope, grant His further grace and blessing. [We] have also gone ahead with administering of baptism to those who had requested it. There were eleven men and women who have been added to the congregation by baptism.[[9]](#footnote-9)

We earnestly and kindly request (as we hear from the brothers who have come here[[10]](#footnote-10) that there is a preacher[[11]](#footnote-11) who is inclined to come over) that you will keep them[[12]](#footnote-12) and us in mind and be helpful on their way to the advancement of the congregation here, which, in time, should increase greatly. We will gratefully acknowledge the love and kindness, as we understand from the brothers that he was touched by such zeal

and earnestness upon the request of the ministers at Hamburg that Peter Kolb be named as elder elect.[[13]](#footnote-13)

We also intend to write to the ministers at Hamburg.

Now our loving and friendly request of the ministers would be for some question booklets for the children and some small testaments for the young people. [page 3] The people[[14]](#footnote-14) here are poorly supplied with Psalm books, and we have no Bible in the meetinghouse here. Some have a Bible each, some a small Bible, so that each has not more than one Bible and cannot easily spare any. We dare not suggest a number to you but leave it to your inclination and love. The congregation here is still rather weak, and to have printing done here would cost a great deal of money. Here and at [New] York they do printing in English. So our old friend and minister William Rittenhouse wrote to [New] York to have the articles of faith printed in English as there are some people[[15]](#footnote-15) here who call themselves Mennists who would like to have our articles translated into English. But the printer demanded so high a price that our congregation could not raise the amount.[[16]](#footnote-16)

When people arrive here from Germany they have spent everything on the journey and must make a new start. At first this is very hard. Some purchase a piece of land, must build a house on it, and all have to work to pay for whatever more they need for their advantage. If the ministers kindly send over some books, whatever comes from [that request] they want to give to the poor.[[17]](#footnote-17) We, on behalf of the poor, will

be grateful. Now time and opportunity oblige me to shorten this, as a friend is waiting to take his departure. We heartily request then that the brothers may be pleased to include us in their sincere prayers [page 4] that the Lord may be present with us by his grace in these foreign regions and strengthen us with His Spirit to building up the congregation and to the salvation of our souls. With this we close and, with sincere greetings from us all, commend the ministers and brothers to the keeping and protection of the Most High God.

We ask that you sometime send us a letter, which would be very agreeable and welcome to us.

Your friends and brothers in Christ,

Isaac van Sintern Jacob Godtschalck

Conrad Jansen Harman Kasdorp

Martin Kolb[[18]](#footnote-18)

[at right angles: address]

Honorable, Discreet Hermannus Schijn Doctor at Amsterdam.[[19]](#footnote-19)

1. **76** 1 For a discussion of events connected with this letter see Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, pp. 81-83. This is related to Documents 70 and 72. Cf. Brons (1912), p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are two other English translations of this document. One appeared in the *Mennonite Year Book and Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1910*, pp. 24-25; the other by Harold S. Bender in “Was William Rittenhouse the First Mennonite Bishop in America?” *MQR* (Jan. 1933) pp. 44-46. De Hoop Scheffer discusses this document in “Vriendschapsbetrekkingen tusschen de Doopsgezinden hier te lande en die in Pennsylvanie” in *DB* (1869), pp. 3-4. Samuel Pennypacker translated De Hoop Scheffer’s discussion in “Mennonite Emigration to Pennsylvania: Friendly Relations Between the Mennonites in Holland and Those in Pennsylvania” in *The Pennsylvania Magazine* (1878), pp. 120-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This letter is referred to in the record book of the Zonist congregation, which says, “February 6, 1709, the ministers met as usual and prayed.... Second, a letter was introduced by Harman Reynskes, and read. It came from Pennsylvania, being addressed to Dr. Hermannus Schijn, in which they request some question booklets and Testaments, etc. This shall be considered more closely.”

   On the front cover of the record book is written “Resolution Book of the Preachers & Deacons, Beginning July 25, 1703, and Ending May 13, 1715, D.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is referred to in Document 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Instead of supplying the word “she,” Bender supplies “between” in front of 64, saying that Rittenhouse himself was between 64 and 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jacob Gottschalck [note in the English translation of 1910]. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Herman Kasdorp, Martin Kolb [note in the 1910 *Year Book*]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Isaac van Sintern, Hendric Cassel, Conrad Janz [note in the 1910 *Year Book*, which has misread the original as three instead of two; but cf. Bender, p. 47]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This baptism was administered by Jacob Godtschalck on May 9, 1708 [note in the 1910 *Year Book*]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Ruth identifies these brothers as Martin, Johannes, and Jacob Kolb, who came in 1707. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship,* pp. 81, 546 n. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. John Ruth believes this was Henry Kolb, who came in 1709. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship,* pp. 81, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Perhaps referring to the prospective minister and his family. The meaning is obscure. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ruth gives the possibility that he was named to choose the elder. Ruth, p. 83. Here Bender adds the following footnote: “Peter Kolb, brother of Martin Kolb, was Mennonite minister at Mannheim, Germany, where he died in 1727.” About this passage Bender also says, “It is not clear whether Peter Kolb was appointed to select a bishop [elder] or whether he had been chosen to be a bishop himself.” Bender, pp. 45, 46. De Hoop Scheffer (p. 3) believes that Kolb was chosen elder; but Pennypacker in his translation (p. 120) suppresses this eldership.

    However, Peter Kolb was at Kriegsheim in 1702 (Document 71) and in 1709 (Document 77). He was addressed in a letter of 1731. See Document 73 n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Bender translates this word as “members,” but when the same word occurs several lines below concerning those “who call themselves Mennists,” he translates it as “people.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. De Hoop Scheffer (p. 4) speculates about who these people might have been. See the Pennypacker translation page 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. An English translation of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith was printed four years later (in 1712) at Amsterdam for the American Mennonites. Harold S. Bender, “William Rittenhouse, 1644-1708,” *MQR* (Apr. 1934) p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is a literal translation of an obscure sentence. The 1910 *Year Book* gives, “If the ministers would kindly send over some books, whatever they send will be appreciated by the poor.” Bender renders it, “As ministers, we wish that what comes from [the sale of] the books that are left over be given to the poor.” Both of these alternative translations make good sense, but do not reproduce the original Dutch. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For these five names, see Robert Ulle, “Materials on Mennonites in Colonial Germantown: Second Installment,” *MQR* (Apr. 1985), pp. 150-153, 158-159, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The 1910 *Year Book* translation closes with this note: “This copy is made by the Assistant at the Library and Archive Room of the United Anabaptist Congregation at Amsterdam. Amsterdam, April 23, 1909. C. J. STRÖER.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-19)