

Resettlement of Prussian Mennonites to Russia under Alexander I

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Comments by the Editor:

Names of most locations, people and other Russian terms have been transliterated from the original Cyrillic, and no attempts have been made to convert these to their English equivalents.

Italics are those found in the original text.

Parentheses are those of the author. Anything added by the translator or editor are in square brackets.

Page numbering of the original are indicated in square brackets.

Footnotes/references have been renumbered.

Footnotes/references have been completely translated – including the titles of Russian language publications.

Some terms defined:

Sazhen – length equal to 7 ft. or 2.13 m.

Arshin – length equal to 2 $\frac{1}{3}$ ft. or 71.1 cm.

Desyatina – area equal to 2.7 acres or 1.09 hectares.

Resettlement of Prussian Mennonites to Russia During the Reign of Alexander I¹.

The first Mennonite settlements in Russia have been founded during the reign of Catherine II, when two waves of resettlement, one after the other (in 1788-1789 and in 1793-1796) from West Prussia to Novorossia².

During the short reign of Paul I, the desire for Mennonites resettling to Russia did not die [pg. 4] in government circles. In February 1797 the Russian councillor in Königsberg Ivan Leontiyevich Isakov reported to vice-chancellor duke Kurakin that “a few Mennonite families have expressed to him the wish to resettle to Russia.” According to the vice-chancellor’s report, this was followed by Emperor Paul granting his permission, and the councillor was directed “not to deny such offers, and to covertly, without making the matter public, encourage and aid those Mennonites, who wished to resettle, going as far as to use some, although not a great, amount of money to help them.” The government could not trust the letter from the vice-chancellor to Isakov (dated February 28th), which contained these directions, to the postal service, fearing that the correspondence might be checked in Prussia. Instead, they ordered the Kurland Governor Lamsdorf to deliver it “when the opportunity is right” and thus keep the whole matter secret. On March 15/26th 1797, the letter has been delivered to the councillor by state councillor Kokh.

Having received the letter, the councillor immediately summoned Mennonite commissioner Michael Mierau, who lived in Königsberg, and “after reading to him the relevant information from the letter, asked him to notify his fellow Mennonites of this with the first *post*, as well as to advise everybody not to delay their departure, so as, while there is still time, they would be able to cultivate their future lands.” In response to this, the commissioner said that since it will be impossible to sell their property quickly the first group of Mennonites, numbering 12 families, would depart no earlier than on May 1st, and the second group, numbering 17 or more families, would leave no earlier than on June 1st. He also said that most of these settlers “will not need any assistance from the state,” except for some, who “might need some money.” To disperse any doubts and indecision among the Mennonites, at Mierau’s request, Isakov provided him with a special certificate, written in *German* and signed by Isakov, which contained “the reassurance in His Majesty’s favour and patronage.”

Notifying, *once again, by post*, the vice-chancellor of his actions in a letter dated March 20/31st, the councillor also demanded clarification as to how much money should be given to

1 I. Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, II, 1, 1797 (and following years), #1 “On Settlement of Prussian Mennonites and Various German Craftsmen in Russia.”

II. Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture:

a) Case #812/2246– “On Resettlement of Elbing [Elbląg] and Marienburg [Malbork] Mennonites, and on Expression of Royal Good Will towards the Expedition of State Property and the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers for Good Management of Foreign Colonies” 1802-1803

b) Case #1934/2252 “In Relation to State Councillor Vorontsov, with Declaration of Royal Decision in Regards to Councillor in Danzig Trefurt’s Report about Mennonites, who Lived near Elbing and Marienburg, Leaving the Country, about Given Directions to Admit Them, about the Loan Given to Them, and About the Royal Permission to Take 13404 Desiatinas of Land away from Captain Vukovich to Settle there the Foreign Settlers, and about Building Homes for said Mennonites at Molochnyye Vody,” 1802-1805.

c) Case #2060/2302 “On Resettlement of Mennonites from Prussia to Novorossia.”

d) Case #2156/2330 “In Relation to the Letter of General Councillor in Gdańsk [Danzig] State Councillor Trefurt about Mennonites Preparing to Leave Prussia to Settle in Russia.”

e) Case #2016/2284 “In Regard to the Relation of the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers Concerning Money for Fodder and a Loan Provided for Starting Households, Given to the Mennonites, who Came from Prussia.”

2 On this, see G. Pisarevskiy *From the History of Foreign Colonies in Russia in 18th Century*, Chapter 10, pg. 290-338, “The Summoning of Mennonites to Russia.”

the Mennonites, and asked [pg. 5] to either send a trustworthy man from Libava [Libau/Liepāja], or to permit him to escort the Mennonites to the border “both to help their departure” and “to protect them along the course of the journey.”

Both providing a written certificate and the use of postal service by the commissioner and the councillor himself compromised the secrecy of the intended resettlement of the Mennonites. In order not to compromise themselves by luring away foreign subjects, the government saw it necessary not to proceed with the course of action that was already coming together.

However, this was a temporary delay, caused by the diplomatic agent’s lack of finesse³; the desire for Mennonites resettling to Russia was not abandoned.

On September 6th, 1800 Emperor Paul granted Mennonites a charter, which was countersigned by count Rostopchin⁴ and applied not only to the Mennonites, who have already settled in Russia, but also to those “that wish to settle in Novorossian guberniya from now on.”

“Responding,” the charter said, “to the request of the Mennonites settled in Novorossian guberniya, who, as witnessed by their administrators, can serve as an example of diligence and virtue to other foreigners settled there, and thus merit special attention, We have most graciously desired with this Our Imperial Charter not only *to confirm all their rights and advantages* discussed in the previous agreements made with them⁵, but also, to encourage in them an even greater zeal for labour and improving their households, *to grant them further advantages.*”

Thus, the Charter *confirmed*:

1. Mennonites’ freedom “to practice their faith in accordance with their religious regulations and customs with no obstacle,” including the permission to take an oath in the court of law [pg. 6] “with just a spoken statement, as is their custom;”
2. freedom from compulsory military and civil service for the Mennonites who have resettled and were to resettle to Russia, as well as for their children and descendants, in which they have been solemnly “reassured by the Emperor’s word;”
3. freedom from “any sort of stays,” “providing quarters,” and “any public works,” except for temporary lodging of military units passing through, as well as the responsibility to maintain bridges, crossings, and roads in their lands, and to cover some of the costs of postal service “on equal grounds [with everybody else];”
4. freedom to leave the country⁶ after repaying the debt to the Treasury and a three-year tax from the capital gains made in Russia “as will be declared by the person departing and the administration of the settlement, where he resided;” the same tax is taken out of the inheritance left by Mennonites, if this inheritance is being sent abroad;
5. the right to build factories in their own colonies and in all of the cities of the Empire⁷, to practice crafts and commerce, to join guilds and workshops as per the existing state laws;

3 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow: a letter from vice-chancellor duke Kurakin to Nikolay Petrovich Arkharov dated February 27th, 1797; a letter from Isakov to the vice-chancellor dated March 20/31st of the same year; “a note about Mennonites.”

4 In the *Complete Collection of Laws*, vol. XXVI, #19546, the words “countersigned by count Rostopchin” are omitted.

5 See G. Pisarevskiy *From the History of Foreign Colonies in Russia in 18th Century*, pg. 299-304, where these agreements are printed in full.

6 It was granted to all colonists by the 9th item of the manifesto from July 22nd, 1763. However, according to the manifesto, the colonists returning abroad paid a part of capital gained while in Russia based on the number of years they have spent there: one fifth, if they spent in Russia one to five years, and one tenth, if they spent there five to ten years or longer.

7 Not only in the “Yekaterinoslav Regency or Tavricheskaya oblast,” as the Mennonites have been requesting themselves during the reign of Catherine II.

6. the right of a 10 year relief from taxes, which “also applies to those, who are yet to settle in Novorossian guberniya;”
7. the right to pay, after the period of tax relief has passed, 15 kopeikas per family per desyatina for 65 desyatinas of land provided to each family, as long as they are relieved “from any other levies;”
8. the right to use, as the owners, all the resources in their lands, and to fish there.

[pg. 7] Besides confirming the rights and freedoms previously granted by Catherine II, the Charter instated new, just granted to Mennonites by Emperor Paul himself, or confirmed de facto existing old exemptions and privileges, namely:

1. “in respect to their poverty and lack of funds,” “resulting from droughts and death of livestock that happened during some years” Mennonites received a new five year extension of land tax relief;
2. those Mennonites, who “due to the lack of space in Khortitsa” were to be resettled to new locations, received instead a ten year extension of land tax relief;
3. after the stated years of tax relief, the repayment of loans provided to the Mennonites was done over a period of *10 years* for the Mennonites remaining in Khortitsa, 20 years for those being resettled; furthermore, the repayment was to be made in equal parts;
4. the 65 desyatinas per family plots of land were provided to the Mennonites “as unarguably and forever inheritable property,” although on the condition that “not even the smallest plot of land” shall be transferred to outsiders “without the will of the administration;” as to the other property, they were granted the right to “use it freely”, “according to each one’s will and consideration;”
5. Mennonites were permitted to “make beer and vinegar [in their lands], distil vodka, both for their own consumption and for sale in their lands;” due to this, outsiders were prohibited from building “pubs and drinking houses” in Mennonite territories, and “licensees [from] selling alcohol and keeping taverns” without the permission of the owners; finally,
6. Mennonite colonies were granted the freedom to “choose according to their own rules the wardens for the properties of minors left after the deceased.”

This legislation, not so much on its own, as by contrast with the opposite limiting legislation passed a year later by the Prussian government (December 17th, 1801), played a great [pg. 8] role in increasing Mennonite emigration to Russia and spreading there Mennonite agriculture.

Mennonites ended up in Prussia as a result of the first and the second Partitions of Poland. By the 19th century their numbers there approached 3000 families. The existence on its territory of subjects, who did not serve in the military, went against the militaristic and constabulary spirit of the Prussian state. Therefore, the Prussian government had quickly began to constrain and limit Mennonites’ rights to drive them to serve in the military. The “privilege” granted on March 29th, 1780 substituted conscription with a five thousand (5000) thalers levy, which went to support the Cadet Corps in Kulm, and nine years later, a decree from July 30th, 1789 limited and put under a number of conditions the obtaining or increasing of real estate by Mennonites. Mennonites, who owned land, now had to pay all Lutheran ecclesiastical levies. The purchase of estate by Mennonites from non-Mennonites was permitted only on the condition that part of the sold plot of land remained in the hands of a non-Mennonite (subject to military service), or if such a transaction saved a non-Mennonite from bankruptcy. New settlement of Mennonites in East and West Prussia, as well as in Lithuania, was now forbidden⁸.

8 S. D. Bondar. *Mennonite Sect in Russia*. Petrograd [St. Petersburg], 1916. Pg. 201.

Pressured by such policy, some Mennonites began joining the military. The experience has demonstrated that they can be made into good soldiers, and this encouraged the Prussian government to continue on its chosen course.

On December 17th, 1801 was published a royal declaration, which introduced new, and quite significant, limitations on Mennonite land possession. The declaration followed from these two main regulations:

1. Mennonites, who serve in the military “deserve to be equal with all other Christian subjects of similar standing in regards to obtaining real estate,” and
2. [pg. 9] those, on the other hand, who are avoiding the “common duty to protect the fatherland in times to come,” must be deprived of the right to “multiply” their holdings or “to further their vastness and enjoy the advantages connected to freedom from conscription, which lead to the oppression of the other Christians useful to the state.”

Developing these regulations, the declaration proclaimed:

1. Those Mennonites, who declare that they agree to be conscripted like all other subjects of the same standing and do not demand freedom from conscription, shall be free from all the conditions and limitations in regards to obtaining or increasing real estate (Grundstücken), which were introduced for people of their faith by a decree from July 30th, 1789. Instead, they should be on equal grounds with other Christians of their standing (ihres Standes).
2. When accepted into military service, with respect to his understanding of faith, a Mennonite conscript (Cantonpflichtige) does not have to swear an oath of allegiance, and the required promise is instead taken through “striking hands” (mittelst Handschlag).
3. The levy, which is paid by those Mennonites, who are free from conscription, towards the Kulm Cadet Corps, should not be paid by the Mennonites (zu der Abgae... sollen diejenigen Mennonisten beizutragen nicht verbunden sein), who, by accepting conscription, are equated in their rights to obtain and increase real estate with other Christians.
4. In contrast, from now on not a single Mennonite, who is not demonstrating willingness to sacrifice his freedom from conscription, should be under any guise permitted to obtain such real estate, whether in country side or in towns, as were not owned by Mennonites at the time this legislation (Verordnung) was published. Consequently, the existing exceptions shall be removed, so that the present number of the holdings of the Mennonites free [pg. 10] from conscription did not, under any circumstance, later grow, and their area (deren Umfang) was not increased.
5. Mennonites, who owned real estate at the moment this legislation was published, shall have their sons free from military service as long as they belong to that denomination and retain possession of their real estate. Accordingly, they should precisely (überall genüge) follow lawful conditions, under which this freedom is granted.
6. Freedom from conscription shall persist, when at the death of a current owner the real estate is being passed down to Mennonites, who are the last owner’s lawful male inheritors (Intestat–Erben⁹).
7. Except for this case, where the real estate is transferred to male Mennonite inheritors by the right of blood, freedom from conscription expires at the first change of ownership, and whoever obtains such real estate through purchase, trade, will, religious record (Vermächtniss), marriage to the last owner’s widow, daughter, or female relative, or by any other means, cannot claim freedom from conscription.

9 Intestat–Erbe – an inheritor by the right of blood, a person, who inherits by law, as opposed to a will.

8. 5000 Reichstaler levy collected towards the Cadet Corps in Kulm and established by the privilege from March 29th, 1780 for freedom from military service shall be still collected and paid in full by the Mennonites free from conscription. Only if the number of Mennonites free from military service becomes lower, than it was on March 29th, 1780, can this levy be appropriately lowered.

The prohibition to obtain real estate, in particular land, which was introduced by the above declaration, [pg. 11] was quite burdensome for Mennonites due to the conditions of their economy¹⁰. The Prussian government realized that it was to cause great discontent among them, and even emigration to other countries, especially to Russia, where their brethren's colonies already existed. Losing wealthy subjects and regular taxpayers, of course, was not easy, but the notions of national defence and simple fairness in regards to the rest of the subjects, who had to provide extra recruits in place of Mennonites, took precedence over economic considerations. There were no other motives for passing new limiting legislation, especially any sort of nationalist tendencies. The fact is that the Mennonites, who resettled to Prussia from Holland in the 16th century, became thoroughly German, and could only be distinguished from the rest of the population by greater prosperity and privileged position in regard to conscription. They spoke the same Low German (Plattdeutsche Sprache) as the surrounding population, while the standard literary German was their language in the Church, in schools, and in writing. In the latter were published for them advertisements praising life in Russia and inviting to emigrate there, in that language Prussian and Danzig Mennonites exchanged letters with their brethren, who settled in Novorossia during the reign of Catherine II. In agreements made with the Russian government, the latter specifically requested a surveyor, who spoke *German*¹¹; books and pamphlets on faith in morality [pg. 12] were also printed by the Prussian Mennonites in German. Let us take as an example a reference book, which was intermittently published in Danzig and contained a list of all Mennonite communes in the world and their preachers: "Namenverzeichniss der sämmtlichen remonstrantischen Professoren und Prediger, wie auch derjenigen aller andern Mennonitischen Gemeinen in- und ausserhalb der Batawischen Republick." This reference book was more accurate and complete than a similar annual publication by the Holland Mennonites in Amsterdam¹². It had a foreword, and some sort of a literary supplement. In the three year period after the publication of the aforementioned declaration it was published twice: in 1802 and in 1805. Since the situation created by this declaration was the subject of a heated discussion among Mennonites, and many saw emigration as the only option, the initiators of the reference book's 1805 publication wanted to supply as a supplement a brief history of Mennonite emigration (eine kruze Geschichte der Auswanderung mennonitischen Glaubensgenossen), which they promised in print. However, the Prussian government did not allow to do so, so as not to fuel the Mennonites' desire to emigrate. Therefore, the publishers, speaking in the foreword about being unable to fulfil their promise, diplomatically let the readers to guess the reasons behind it on their own: "whether it is because it is too early to discuss this matter, or because one should stick to a good saying

10 See G. Pisarevskiy *From the History of Foreign Colonies in Russia in 18th Century*, pg. 292 and 293.

11 Mennonites, who settled in Russia at various points in time, both during the reign of Alexander I (at Molochnyye Vody, modern Tavricheskaya guberniya), and during the reign of Catherine II (in Yekaterinoslavskaya guberniya) were Germans in both their language and customs. Although Georg Trappe, who recruited Mennonites during the reign of Catherine II, negotiated with Mennonites from Holland (Trappe's letter to vice-chancellor count Osterman from April 22nd/May 13th, 1788 in the Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow; see also G. Pisarevskiy *From the History of Foreign Colonies in Russia*, pg. 324-325, where the translation of this letter to Russian is printed), these negotiations have not led to anything, and not a single Mennonite from Holland resettled to Russia at that time.

12 Da die jährliche Amsterdammer Ausgabe desselben vor wie nach fehlerhaft bleibt und von Druckfehlern wimmelt, so haben wir es für nöthig erachtet, uns dieser Bemühung aufs neue zu unterziehen und hoffen damit den Dank unsrer Glaubensbrüder zu verdienen.

‘stay in your country and earn honest bread’; we, too, shall refrain from this risky enterprise with all the more willingness, since most of our brethren spend their days enjoying the highest patronage and the greatest freedom of conscience”¹³.

[pg. 13] Nonetheless, not every Mennonite, by far, was willing to remain under the Prussian regime, before or after their leaders’ statement.

As soon as the declaration from December 17th, 1801 was published, Mennonites sent their deputies to Berlin, to plead if not for it to be revoked, but at least softened. However, their pleas (for a long time) had no success.

Russian councillor in Danzig Trefurt wrote about it in an August 13/25th, 1802 report to his government:

“Mennonite deputies still remain in Berlin, pleading there to alleviate the extent of the edict that is so harmful for their denomination, but His Majesty the King has not as of yet changed his decision in any way; if the edict in question (l’edit en question) remains in force, most of them will leave the country; even though Prussia does not lack population, it will nevertheless suffer from the loss of these farmer subjects, who pay to the state a lot of money; here only this instant’s profits are considered, disregarding the future, amply (de la bonne façon) burdening the subjects with levies and constraining trade with great taxes only to increase an already large army by forming new and new regiments.

“Prussia deserves to be called a purely military state, and this is no exaggeration, since every tenth man there is a soldier”¹⁴.”

This Prussian militarism did not give Mennonites much reason to hope for the success of their deputies’ mission, and even before the final result of their pleas became known, some members of the denomination have already resolved to resettle to Russia. According to Trefurt’s report from May 5/17th, 1802¹⁵, this decision was greatly influenced by the presence in Prussia of two Mennonites from Khortitsa, Novorossia, in summer 1801. Having come for personal reasons, [pg. 14] they spoke much about the prosperity and privileges enjoyed by Mennonites under Russian rule, and these stories were, in the eyes of their brethren, a convincing argument in favour of resettling to Russia.

Two hundred Mennonite families from around Elbląg [Elbing] saw it fit to notify the Russian government of their wish to resettle to Russia by two ways at the same time: through councillor Trefurt¹⁶ and through the district department of the Khortitsa Colony¹⁷. Asking for the sovereign’s permission for this resettlement, they also wanted to know whether they can count on receiving the same privileges and the same loan, as their brethren, who settled in Russia before them.

Trefurt’s message came first and was received by Emperor Alexander with great pleasure. Stating his general consent to the resettlement of Mennonites to Russia, he ordered to “provide the councillor with the appropriate directions.” The emperor was especially pleased by the following fact reported by Trefurt: “the Mennonites settled in Novorossian guberniya are so pleased with the decisions of the Expedition of State Property and of the local administration, that they encourage their other brethren to resettle to Russia.” Touched by this, the sovereign expressed his pleasure with and good will towards both the Expedition and the Novorossian Office. More than that: on July 3rd, 1802 a secret imperial letter was written to the chief judge of the Novorossian Office, Collegiate Councillor Kontenius:

13 Namenverzeichniss der sämmtlichen remonstrantischen Professoren und Prediger... Verbesserte Ausgabe vom Jahre 1805. Danzig gedruckt mit Müllerschen Schriften.

14 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #1934/2252.

15 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow.

16 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow: Trefurt’s report from May 5/17th, 1802.

17 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #812/2246, report of the Novorossian Office on Behalf of the Foreign Settlers to the Expedition of State Property from June 6th, 1802.

“Collegiate councillor Kontenius! Expedition of State Property testifies to your zealous work towards development and improvement of the state of Mennonites settled in Novorossian guberniya, who were put under your administration. Paying [pg. 15] special attention to these foreigners, *I wish* both to reaffirm and improve the state of those already living on Russian soil and *to attract through this a greater number of them to settle currently vacant lands*. Therefore, I direct you not only to keep up, but also to apply even greater diligence towards making the Mennonite settlers placed under your care flourish, all the while, reasonably and without making My will or the task I put before you public, solely through their own prosperity, encourage them to induce their brethren and compatriots still remaining abroad to resettle to Russia, reassuring them of their own prosperity and thus giving them hope to reap here various benefits, both due to the quality of land, the loan provided to all settlers, and the government’s protection. I hope that through careful attention to this matter and diligent work towards fulfilling the task you have been charged with, you will justify the trust put in you¹⁸”.

Khortitsa District Department was charged with notifying the Elbing Mennonites of the sovereign’s consent to their resettlement. Meanwhile, it was decided to observe complete secrecy in communications with them, taking all the precautions possible.

“I think it is important to observe,” the Minister of Internal Affairs count Kochubey wrote to Kontenius¹⁹, “that all the possible caution is applied, so as not to alert the Prussian government with the correspondence, both yours and that of the elders (of Russian Mennonites), with their brethren in Elbing, especially when the postal service is used, and thus not to make the resettlement itself more difficult.” Kontenius responded to the minister: “I shall not cease to take the same precautions, with which I already wrote to preacher Warkentin in Elbing, [pg. 16] whom I asked to reveal the subject of our correspondence to the people, who deserve his trust, and only in as much, as is required, sending the response not to my own address, but to the address of a local Mennonite elder. When further need shall arise for me or for the local elders to write to Prussia, the letters, written with appropriate caution, shall not go directly to our correspondent, but will be delivered to him covertly [or, literally “in an envelope”] by another trusted foreign intermediary²⁰”.

Before the Mennonite resettlement itself could begin, three issues had to be solved: 1) concerning the lands for settlement; 2) concerning the conditions, on which the resettlement will happen (the issue of loans, as well as food allowance and money for travel); and 3) concerning the route and arranging the transportation from Russian borders to the place of settlement.

At the beginning of the 19th century there was still a lot of vacant state-owned land in Novorossia. However, almost all of the best lands, irrigated by rivers and streams passing through them, as well as lying on the shores of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, were already given away. What remained in the hands of the state were mostly arid steppes. Russian landlords gladly took these lands from the state on the conditions that existed at the time and made sizeable profits for themselves. The Expedition of the State Property describes the exploitation of these lands by the landlords thus:

“Having taken a few thousand desyatinas of land and established by a small stream or spring a tiny village, which mainly engaged in animal farming, they reap all their profits from that. Meanwhile, they cultivate very little land, only as much, as is permitted by the local proximity to water.”

18 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #1934/2252, in a secret proposition of the Expedition of State Property to the Minister of the Internal Affairs count V. P. Kochubey from Oct. 7th, 1802.

19 See the above source: Kochubey’s letter to Kontenius from Oct. 10th, 1802.

20 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #1934/2252, Kontenius’s letter from October 31st, 1802, sent from Novorossiysk (Yekaterinoslav).

Expedition of State Property thought that settling in such lands Mennonites, “who are not given a large plot of land (65 desyatinas) per family,” and “who are more used to cultivating land,” [pg. 17] was counterproductive and not beneficial neither for the settlers themselves, nor for the state, especially since the new colonizers of the area were meant to “provide an example of better household management through their diligence and their way of life²¹.”

In the opinion of the local organ reporting to the Expedition, the Novorossian Office, the lands provided to the Mennonites had to satisfy the following conditions:

1. “to be in close proximity to this area’s (Novorossia) cities or ports[”]
2. to have inside them: healthy river water, or to be adjacent to such, flat and not bumpy proper steppe for cultivation and hay fields, or such lowlands, as could replace those;
3. to have springs in their steppe;
4. if possible, they should not be too far from the Dnieper river, so that it is easy to ship wood there, or to be near forests, which arrangement would not only serve to the benefit of the foreigners themselves, but would also speed up their settlement and lessen the “expenses associated” with shipping wood over a great distance; and, finally,
5. “should the quality of the land itself” be coupled with reeds growing “in its waters,” “or should there be bushes growing in the steppe, then such a plot would have all the advantages, as can be hoped for in the steppes²².”

At one point, Kontenius has summarised these requirements in a letter to the Novorossian governor by saying that for successful colonization the Mennonites should be given “not the lands, where industry is being thwarted, but the lands, where the nature itself would assist their labours, helping the colonists in breeding livestock, especially sheep, where cultivating orchards, vineyards, linen, silk [pg. 18] and practising other trades could be comfortably done²³”.

“Mennonites,” the Novorossian Office echoed its chief judge, “are renowned across the world, including Russia, for their diligence and excellent household management, which is why they should be settled in places, where, not having to struggle against nature, they could serve as an example to their neighbours in all aspects of agriculture”.

Lands suitable for settling the Mennonites there were meant to be obtained by expropriation from landlords, purchase from private owners, or finding them among the vacant state-owned lands. All three methods were employed almost simultaneously, so as not to lose time in vain.

Expedition of State Property directed the chief judge of the Novorossian Office Kontenius to start correspondence with the Novorossian civil governor “in regards to making note of state-owned lands suitable for settlement in case of a fast arrival... of new Mennonites to Russia” as early as on May 26th, 1802. However, since determining whether these lands are suitable could take significant time and lengthy correspondence with general administration, it was decided not to lose any time and move onto the landlords’ lands, as those were more familiar.

At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, the rights to own land were not particularly firm in Novorossia: large amounts of state-owned land would be given to one landlord or another, or an immigrant, or they would be taken away from them, or returned to the previous owner, or expropriated again. Expropriating land would be justified by the owner

21 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #812/2246, a note “about taking land away from captain Vukovich for the benefit of foreign settlers,” from June 20th, 1802.

22 Novorossian Office’s report to the Expedition of State Property from April 30th, 1803 (Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #812/2246).

23 Translation of a letter from the chief judge of the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers collegiate councillor Kontenius to the assistant head of the Expedition of State Property privy councillor and cavalier Gablits from June 20th, 1802 (Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #812/2246).

failing to settle it as per the conditions, on which it was given, not paying land tax, or, finally, directly by the considerations of the interests of the state.

Among such lands that frequently changed owners the Expedition of State Property had first of all paid attention to [pg. 19] the land of captain Vukovich located in Tiraspol'skiy uyezd, 20 versts from Odessa, between the Baraboy river, Gaparka ravine, Dalnitskiy liman and the Black Sea. In 1792, when giving out the lands gained from Turkey, the ruler of Yekaterinoslav guberniya Kakhovskiy gave this plot to said Vukovich (then poruchik [lieutenant]), so that he would settle it with his people and other foreigners. The future settlers would receive ten years of tax relief, after which they would pay 5 kopeikas per desyatina to the Treasury; the lands, orchards and forests cultivated by them would remain in their perpetual and hereditary possession. Since three years later Vukovich has not done anything to settle the land provided to him, in 1795 the land was given to the city of Ovidiopol. On April 14th, 1797, on the orders of the Yekaterinoslav military governor Berdyayev, the land was transferred to the Greek division, which, a little later, by the decree from May 20th of the same year, was disbanded, and the land was left without an owner. Next year, in 1798, Berdyayev's successor count Kakhovskiy (who now had the title of the *Novorossian* military governor) put a plea before emperor Paul, asking for the land's return on the original conditions to its first owner Vukovich, who promised to bring from abroad 80 families of his people and other foreigners, even asking for foodstuff for the initial period and seeds for sowing to be provided to the latter.

Kakhovskiy's plea was satisfied, and Vukovich once again was the owner of an enormous plot of land, and once again he did not fulfil his responsibilities. "Up to this point," the Expedition of State Property wrote in its note from May 20th, 1802, "he has not settled there anybody, and many say that he will never be able to do so. In all of that land there is nothing, except for a khutor. He does not sow, does not cultivate orchards, simply cuts the hay for sale. Leaving so much land, which is needed in that area, in such unreliable hands is condemnable." The Expedition suggested to the prosecutor general [pg. 20] to put a plea before emperor Alexander regarding taking the land from Vukovich and giving it for settlement if not to Mennonites, then to Greeks, "who now began leaving Turkey." Prosecutor general, in turn, offered the Expedition to collect additional information about Vukovich's land. As it was examined by the zemstvo police chief, it turned out that there were no buildings in it except for two sod houses; one of them was occupied by the owner's nephew Semyon Vukovich, and the other, standing on the road from Ovidiopol to Odessa, was made into a tavern. The owner did not engage in agriculture, simply offering the land for rent to third parties for herding livestock and cutting hay. More than that, he did not pay the existing 10 kopeikas per desyatina tax, and now owed 1200 rubles to the Treasury, which led to the land being placed under receivership and trustees being appointed to collect the debt, but in the fall of 1802, it still was not repaid. This is why, for the second time, now before the Minister of Internal Affairs count Kochubey, the Expedition pleaded to request a decree to take the land away from Vukovich and provide him "with some reward appropriate to his standing."

Taking care to provide the arriving Mennonites with land, in a secret letter dated March 23rd, 1803 emperor Alexander suggested to Nikolayev the military governor Bekleshov to conduct a general expropriation of land from Novorossian landlords, who did not fulfil their obligations, and Vukovich's lands were to be among the first lands to be taken away.

"As it is known," the letter said, "that some landlords in Novorossian guberniyas have received their lands under the condition that they would settle them and still have not fulfilled their obligations, I charge you to immediately find all of the lands, for which the settlement deadlines have passed, yet they remain unsettled, and, making a brief description of these lands, when and on what grounds they were given away, to present the information on these lands to Me as they are being discovered, so that after examining this information it would be possible to begin expropriating them based on the conditions accepted and not fulfilled by their owners.

[pg. 21] Among these may be the land of captain Vukovich, located near Odessa, which I want you to investigate among the first.”

Even before that, other lands to be confiscated from landlords as they were not settled by their owners, or already confiscated for “non-payment of land tax” were considered for resettling Khortitsa Mennonites.

Among the many “unsuitable” lands like this, the following plots were “deemed to be the better ones”: Korsunovka in Bakhmutinskiy uyezd (6500 desyatinas of suitable and unsuitable land), belonging to lieutenant general Lvov; major general Tolstov’s plot in Yelizavetgradskiy uyezd; state councillor Bakunin’s plot in Olviopolskiy uyezd; and praporschik Chut’s plot in Mariupolskiy uyezd; 26450 desyatinas in total. However, since “the best parts of Korsunovka and of the lands confiscated from Tolstov” were “still under dispute,” being taken over by the neighbouring landlords Oposhnyanskiy (up to 800 desyatinas) and Bogayevskiy (4800 desyatinas), Kontenius thought that it is better to obtain the land for settling Mennonites by purchasing it from landlords, as it would allow more freedom in picking suitable locations.

By the royal decree from July 24th, 1802, such a purchase was made for the Khortitsa Mennonites, who resettled to Russia during the reign of Catherine II and now felt cramped in their lands: a neighbouring plot known as Nizhnaya Khortitsa [Lower Khortitsa] was bought for them from privy councillor Miklashevskiy, and 65 Mennonite families were resettled there.

“Wouldn’t it be better,” Kontenius wrote before this purchase to Gablits (assistant head of the Expedition of State Property), “if the Treasury *purchased good lands* to settle Mennonites there, such as those of duchess Vyazemskaya, for example, or Grushevka that, as they say, belongs now to collegiate assessor Shtiglitz, which lies on the banks of Dnieper, where there is plenty of water, places for fishing, wood, and plenty of reed beds, and where more than 1000 Mennonite families could comfortably settle and practice all of the trades suitable for the region.” Let us say, Kontenius developed his thought, that “the purchase of this land (without [pg. 22] the peasants living there, whom the landlord would have to move to a different plot or to sell) would require a considerable amount of money,” but this expenditure would still be more productive, than, after spending as per the conditions 500 000 or 1 000 000 rubles for each 763 Mennonite families, settling them on “unsuitable or poor” state-owned lands, where “due to them being barren, no other trades besides breeding livestock or sowing rye and millet can be undertaken, and due to lack of reed beds, water, and other benefits the colonists will be forced to remain idle and become completely incapable of engaging in any useful and appropriate to the local (climate) agriculture, much less to repay to the treasury 1 000 000 or 500 000 rubles spent on them.”²⁴

Already preparing to receive the immigrants, the Expedition of State Property once again gladly listened to Kontenius’s suggestion, and by a decree from April 13th, 1803, ordered the Novorossian Office “to immediately contact the (Nikolayev) military governor in regard to purchasing land for the resettling Mennonites.” Furthermore, the Office had to explain to the governor how much land is required “what advantages it should poses in the opinion of the Office, and what should be its location;” if the Office itself “has a suitable plot of land in mind,” the Expedition ordered, “it should be immediately presented for his (military governor’s) consideration.” On the other hand, the Expedition deemed it necessary that, in their own turn, the military and the civil governors, “should they find land suitable for settling there the foreigners, which could be purchased, must first notify the Office and provide the land’s description and conditions, so that the Office, having considered the local conditions, could provide its opinion as to whether that land is suitable for the proposed use or not.”²⁵

24 Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture, #812/2246: translation of a June 20th, 1802, letter from Kontenius to Gablits.

25 See the above source: an April 30th, 1803 report of the Office on Behalf of Novorossian Foreign Settlers.

[pg. 23] In the end, state-owned land had to be used for settling the Mennonites. The efforts to find vacant and suitable state-owned lands began right after receiving the news of the coming Mennonite resettlement and proceeded in parallel with the attempts to expropriate or purchase land from landlords. At the same time, at the directions of the Expedition of State Property the chief judge of the Novorossian Office Kontenius had a meeting with the Yekaterinoslav civil governor M. P. Miklashevskiy concerning providing vacant state-owned lands for Mennonite settlement, where he also indicated the conditions these lands must satisfy.

In response to Kontenius's proposition, the governor has indicated two districts suitable for settling there foreigners in general and Mennonites in particular: 1) "vacant plots in Khersonskiy and Olviopolskiy uyezds along the rivers Bug, Visuna, Dobraya, Gniloy Yelanets, Gromokley and others, which comprise a sizeable area and, besides many of them being suitable for cultivation and cutting hay, lie between the towns of Nikolayev, Kherson, and Berislav; 2) "vacant state-owned plots in Mariupolskiy uyezd along the rivers Berda, Molochnaya, and others, which amount to 277 500 desyatins of suitable land only."

At the same time the governor reported to emperor Alexander that he deems the second district specifically, lands along the rivers Berda, Molochnaya and others, to be suitable for settling foreigners.

This report resulted in a royal decree from July 24th, 1802 sent to the Expedition of State Property. The decree ordered to "send a member of the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers to examine the specified lands," and, once they are found to be acceptable for settlement, *prepare a proposition in regards to transferring part of that area, which is now vacant, to the jurisdiction of the Office* in an amount deemed by the Office to be required *for the current and possible future settlement*. For the stated measures to be carried out "most conveniently" [pg. 24] the Novorossian military governor cavalry general Mikhelson was ordered "by a royal decree" to "send one of the surveyors working under the guberniya administration with the member of the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers."

Fulfilling this decree, on July 28th of the same year the Expedition ordered the Office to send the assistant chief judge collegiate assessor Pisemskiy to examine the lands along the rivers Berda, Molochnaya, and others, and to present a detailed account of how suitable these lands are after the examination, selecting "a prospective... amount for [the Office's] use."

Having sent Pisemskiy to examine the aforementioned lands along the rivers Berda, Molochnaya, and others, the Office simultaneously sent another of its members (also assistant chief judge) Brigontsi to examine the vacant state-owned lands in Khersonskiy, Yelizavetgradskiy, and Olviopolskiy uyezds.

After examining all of the lands assigned to them, both assistant chief judges provided their descriptions. Pisemskiy also provided a plan "made by the surveyor sent with him."

Out of all of the plots of land examined by him, Brigontsi only deemed "somewhat suitable for settlement" one, with the area of 12 000 desyatins, located in Khersonskiy uyezd and called Kurakinskiy; in regards to the rest of the plots indicated by the civil governor he said that "although they also have their advantages, being located in different places and far away from each other, they cannot provide the [logistical] convenience required to ensure that the settlers' efforts and labours will not be in vain: these can be settled as a last resort..."

For people... who must cultivate land after accepting a predetermined amount of it and feeding off of that these lands are not beneficial."

On the other hand, for other kinds of settlers they can be very suitable and beneficial, especially for [pg. 25] landlords, who, having settled a small number of peasant families in one convenient place "use the rest of the land as pastures not only for their own livestock, but also, for a fee, other people's."

As for Pisemskiy, he has found plenty of land suitable for colonization along the rivers Berda, Molochnaya, and others, although it did not provide equal advantages everywhere: "in

many places the steppe” turned out “to have no water.” He deemed two plots of land near Molochnaya, totalling 120,000 desyatinas, to be “the best and most advantageous,” but these plots were already occupied by nomadic Nogais, who received them from the guberniya government “in exchange for their lands that were handed over to count Denisov.”

Pisemskiy thought that the following steps had to be undertaken to make the settlement of Mennonites there possible:

1. move the Nogais to their kin, who were roaming in the same uyezd;
2. “fix” poruchik Varlamov’s plot, which was sold to madam secretary Granobarskiy
3. demolish “farms built by Tokmak settlers on the left bank of the Tokmak river,” as well as windmills.

Having received Brigontsi and Pisemskiy’s messages, and “considered both of these relations,” the Novorossian Office left the decision in choosing the place “to the Expedition of State Property’s consideration,” providing it with the description of examined lands and the plan prepared by Pisemskiy. Based on this, the Expedition chose the plot near the Molochnaya river, which was indicated by Pisemskiy, and resolved “to contact the Tavricheskaya guberniya governor, asking him whether it is possible to provide to Nogais the required amount of land from the nearby vacant plots, which might be suitable for nomadic life.”

However, the Expedition was in doubt as to whether the Mennonites would be able to settle in those lands without any issues and establish good relationships with their immediate neighbours, Nogais and Russian peasants, since the interests of both these groups were infringed upon by the introduction of foreign settlers.

[pg. 26] “Suppose,” the Expedition wrote, “that the Nogais cannot be transferred; then settling there the Mennonites is connected with a great inconvenience for the latter, however advantageous may be the location. Nomadic people, having a habit of stealing livestock, will never give any peace to them, the new people, who do not know the local customs and have no ways of protecting themselves, despite all the strictest calls to maintain order. *The Russian peasants themselves*, settled next to these lands and being the emigrants from various places in Russia and from abroad, *having no habits usual for honest and good people, would put [the Mennonites] under the constant risk of losing their property.* The Expedition cannot be sure that the Mennonites who are to arrive will be able to live in that area peacefully, and the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers will not be always able to fully protect them.”

Although the Expedition expressed concerns regarding the suitability of the indicated location, in the end it was not the Expedition that would be responsible for making the final decision.

At the beginning of the matter of resettling the Mennonites, on May 9th, 1802 prosecutor general Bekleshov suggested that the Expedition should entice the Khortitsa Mennonites to elect two or three men from among themselves, who would be the deputies of the foreign resettling Mennonites, as if they were authorized by the latter, and who would take up the responsibility of selecting the location for their settlement. Based on his previous experience, prosecutor general considered this measure to be necessary so as to “avoid displeasure and complaints in regard to the disadvantages of the land chosen for their settlement by the administration, when the new Mennonite settlers arrive.²⁶”

In the same year the indicated lands near Molochnaya were in fact examined by the Khortitsa deputies “elected on behalf of the Elbing and Marienburg Mennonites,” and in summer of 1803 – also [pg. 27] by the five deputies, who came from Prussia specifically for that. Both groups of deputies found the lands they examined in Mariupolskiy uyezd to be “acceptable for Mennonite settlement,” while the foreign deputies also returned home convinced that these will indeed be the lands that they shall receive. However, the upper

26 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246.

echelons of power could not decide where to settle the Mennonites for a long time, and even on June 28th, 1803 an imperial letter sent to the Kherson military governor Bekleshov II ordered him, in accordance with his own opinion, “to choose the land needed for the settlement of Elbing Mennonites in Kherson guberniya... selecting the most suitable plots along the river Visun, as judged by the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers;” meanwhile, Bekleshov suggested to give the lands around Molochnyye Vody to “the deputies of the Slavs residing in Montenegro and Herzegovina, sedar Mina Nikshich and obervoyevoda Tioti. The Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers had to stand up to the Expedition of State Property for the Mennonites’ rights for the lands that their deputies liked, stating that betraying their expectations was unacceptable. In the end, these were the lands, where the Mennonites arriving from Prussia would settle²⁷.

2. The question of the conditions, on which the new resettlement of Mennonites to Russia would happen also was the subject of rather long preliminary discussions and became the topic of new negotiations with their representatives.

Submitting the request to grant them the permission to resettle to Russia, the Mennonites inquired whether privileges previously granted to their brethren would also apply to them, and “whether they will be given a loan, same as was given to those, who arrived before them?” Essentially, by asking this question they humbly expressed the wish to be admitted to Russia [pg. 28] following the same rules, as were previously approved by Potemkin and confirmed by Catherine II²⁸.

The estimate prepared by the Novorossian Office based on these rules showed that resettling each Mennonite family, numbering 4 persons, will cost the Treasury 1309 rubles 20 kopeikas, specifically:

“for starting a household	500 rub.
“for a house, 120 4-sazhen logs, assuming each to cost 3 rub., delivery included	360 rub.
“for each family wishing to come to Russia, for travel and travel expenses, 20 rub. per person, for 4 persons	80 rub.
“assuming travel money and food allowance to be 25 kop. for each adult and 12 kop. for the minor, for 60 days	52 rub. 20 kop.
“after they arrive to the place of settlement, food allowance until the first harvest, 10 kop. per person per day; as it happened before that the colonists coming to the Novorossian guberniya could not settle for a long time, we assume it to be 2 years, i. e. 730 (days)	292 rub.
“for various seeds of spring and winter crops estimating each family at	25 rub.
Total: 1309 rub. 20 kop.	

Beyond that, the cost of building mills for all of the resettling Mennonites was estimated at 2000 rubles.

Prosecutor general Aleksandr Bekleshov, however, found the rules established by Catherine II in regards to resettlement and settlement of Mennonites to be no longer appropriate

27 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #1934/2252, a September 3rd, 1803 report from the Office to the Expedition of State Property.

28 See G. Pisarevskiy, *From the History of Foreign Colonization in Russia in 18th Century*, pg. 299-304.

for the contemporary conditions of colonization of Novorossia: they “were established by the empress as much [pg. 29] due to the complete emptiness of those lands, when the resettlement happened, as to encourage others to follow this first example; now that area is much more settled than before, there are many of their compatriots there, in whose prosperity the foreigners have been assured, not even taking into the consideration that those Mennonites received the promised loan not according with the rules, but in the smallest parts, which served only towards their meagre subsistence, not the establishment of strong economy; more than that, these same brethren can, and, according to their rules of morality, will, help them with their needs.” With regard to the listed circumstances, on July 9th, 1802 prosecutor general suggested that the Expedition of State Property should “begin,” with the deputies from among the Khortitsa Mennonites, “working out more moderate, if at all possible, and more advantageous for the Treasury conditions,” putting the resolution of the issue of the loan’s size, as well as the whole matter of resettlement up to the discretion of chief judge Kontenius.

The latter also realized how excessive the spending on Mennonite resettlement for the Treasury would be, were the rules established during the reign of Catherine II to be followed. Which is why, at the first hearing of the news that Prussian Mennonites want to resettle to Russia, he expressed doubts that “the Treasury would agree to admit many [of them] on the conditions that entail such great expenses.” Khortitsa Vorsteher responded that “due to the unfortunate circumstances that the Prussian Mennonites are under, those wanting to move to Russia will be satisfied with a half of the stated sum, or an even smaller amount, as long as there will be a few hundred thousand desyatinas of land with enough low places and water for their settlement; in such a case,” he thought, “many families will move to Russia with their own capital, not asking for any aid.” Vorsteher asked to keep his opinion a secret, “so as not to raise his brethren’s anger against him.” Because of this, and also to “preserve” a level of “Mennonites’ trust,” Kontenius [pg. 30] did not relate this to the Expedition in a report at the time, instead notifying it with a private letter from June 20th, 1802 sent to privy councillor Gablits²⁹. After receiving the Expedition’s directions regarding working out “more moderate and advantageous for the Treasury conditions” of resettlement, Kontenius tried to reach agreement on this matter with the aforementioned elected representatives from among the Khortitsa Mennonites. To prove the need to lower their demands from the government, Kontenius referred to the example of Greeks and Bulgarians arriving from Rumelia, for whom the cost of settling one family was less than 300 rubles, indicated the possibility, should Mennonites lower their demands, to lower the spending on each family to less than a quarter of 1309 rubles (the expenses on each Mennonite family from the previous groups), “to make it easier both for themselves, when they have to repay the money, and for the Treasury.” In the end, Kontenius convinced the representatives that “the arriving (Mennonites) should be broken into three categories: 1) destitute; 2) average, requiring a smaller loan from the Treasury than the first; 3) wealthy, who do not need anything besides the land.” “The most moderate” estimate presented by the representatives set the expenses for settling one poor family (from the first category) at 560 rubles, but on the conditions that the Mennonites will be settled on the banks of Dnieper, “because if the wood is transported down the river, each log will cost at the location no more than 3 rubles, but if the distance to Dnieper is 200 versts or more, 200-300 rubles above the stated sum will be required, since then each log will cost 6-7 rubles; besides, in the steppe all the agricultural and household needs cost twice the normal price or more.” The representatives also noted that they cannot promise that “everybody who wants to resettle will agree to such a moderate sum”.

29 Assistant head of the Expedition of State Property.

[pg. 31] As for Kontenius, taking into account how expensive the wood was, he suggested to the deputies to advise “their compatriots to build houses out of rock, and where it is not available, to build *wattle and daub houses as is the custom in Novorossia*³⁰.”

The Expedition of State Property also stood for adjusting, where necessary, to the local conditions and what experience indicates, rather than always following the example set by the way previous groups of Mennonites were settled. In its relation to the Minister of Internal Affairs V. P. Kochubey it wrote on the matter:

“In general, when it comes to their settlement and providing them with everything needed for their economy, the Expedition does not see the need to follow the exact agreements, as were made with the first Mennonites.

“The loan provided to them was very large and ended up only burdening them. It reached up to 1309 rubles per family. The 120 logs given to each family were used to build enormous homes, and their maintenance, as these homes get old, will require great expenses on their parts in that unforested area and will entail great difficulties.

“The newly arriving Mennonites can settle in much smaller houses, *adjusting to the customs of the land, where they will be settled*, which will be just as advantageous and convenient, while maintaining good order and cleanliness³¹.”

The Expedition also hoped that the Mennonites will bring along enough livestock from Prussia and will either “have no need in a loan [to procure it], or only need a minimal loan.”

Kontenius wrote to the Mennonite elder (preacher) Warkentin about the possibility of lowering the Treasury’s spending on the loan and on the Mennonites’ travel expenses, and the latter agreed that [pg. 32] the Mennonites “can be satisfied with a smaller sum (compared to the previous settlers), especially since by taking the shortest road, the way can be made 100 miles shorter³².”

The Expedition saw it necessary to provide food allowance to each Mennonite family that arrived to the Russian border from the moment of arrival to the end of travel to the place of settlement, in the amount of *25 kopeikas a day to each man and woman older than 15 years old, and 12 kopeikas a day to those younger than 15*, as it was established during the reign of Catherine II. As for *the food allowance received at the place of settlement* until the first harvest, the Expedition left this matter to the discretion of the local office, “expecting that for the first time they will need to be *given 10 kopeikas a day*, if they demand it, which means following the norm established during the Catherine’s reign;” “but once the Office provides them with means of feeding themselves with their own labour, for example by spinning and weaving, that amount can be lowered.”

According to the agreements made during the reign of Catherine II, the Treasury had to “provide enough horses and wagons” to all Mennonites, who have reached the Russian borders, so that they can proceed to the place of settlement. Now the Expedition expressed hope that “these people will have enough of their own horses and wagons, on which, one must think, they would arrive to the border;” but it expected the expenses “on fodder for the horses and various unexpected needs that arise on the road, which would require no more than 50 rubles per family[”] to be covered by the Treasury.

As for the Mennonites, who did not have their own wagons and horses, the Expedition intended to send them on “commoners’ [wagons] with a plakat [travel document for people,

30 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #1934/2252: Oct 7th, 1802 proposition from the Expedition of State Property to the Minister of Internal Affairs.

31 See the above source: the Expedition’s proposition from April 3rd, 1803. The above excerpt from the proposition is literally repeated in the Expedition’s orders to the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers from April 13th of the same year (Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246).

32 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #1934/2252: a copy of a letter from a Mennonite elder and preacher Kornelius Warkentin, dated October 8/20th, 1802 and sent from Rosenort near Elbing.

who belong to the taxable estate, according to V. Dal's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language*],” depriving them in that case of the aforementioned 50 rubles for “travel expenses,” but the Minister of Internal Affairs deemed this solution to be unlawful, “as it constituted a tax against commoners,” [pg. 33] and thought that “such poor colonists should be transported on hired wagons, which should not come to a great expense, especially if the governors take care to make the payment for hire as small as possible, and will only provide wagons to carry property (and to provide necessary help along the way to minors)”³³.

Now the government also saw it fit to convince the Mennonites themselves in the idea that “the less debt they will have, the faster and with less worries they will be able to prosper,” which Kontenius explained in his letter to Warkentin.

3. The Mennonites who agreed to these “most moderate” conditions were to head from Prussia to Grodno. The royal supervision over their admittance and equipment for the remaining way through Russia was laid on the shoulders of the Lithuanian military governor baron Benigsen by emperor Alexander's letter from March 28th, 1803. The same letter ordered him:

1. to order the Grodno civil governor “to make sure that these colonists are admitted at the border in the spirit of care and good will;”
2. himself, “to send one or more special officials to escort them to Novorossia, providing this person with both explanations regarding the guidance and protection [of the colonists] on the way and directions... for the administrators of the guberniyas, through which they will pass, so that when it is necessary [the administrators] would provide them with assistance and favour;”
3. should there be families that cannot continue the travel “without financial aid” among the arriving Mennonites, they should be provided with “required financial assistance,” and “entrusted to a specially assigned official;” the money required “to this end” were to be provided by the Expedition of State Property³⁴.

However, a quick assessment soon revealed that the Expedition of State Property “only has [pg. 34] its regular funds, used for its usual operational expenses.” Before, it had used special funds it had for settlement of foreigners, namely: *promissory* funds, “which it accumulated by printing promissory notes,” and the so-called *colonist* funds, “which it collected from the colonists as a payment on the debt they owed to the Treasury.” As was arranged by the ministries, the first fund, “along with the matter of promissory notes,” was put under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, and the second, as was agreed by the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Finance, now “as it was coming in” was sent out “each time to be added to general state income.” Thus, each time there were extra expenses, the Expedition had to ask for a royal decree. According to the Minister of Internal Affairs' report from April 10th, 1803, “after a rough estimate” the crown ordered the Expedition to issue 15,000 rubles from the Treasury to the Lithuanian military governor for the expenses on Mennonite resettlement³⁵. The Mennonites were to receive food allowance for 40 days out of this money in Grodno, and should they spend longer on the road, the Novorossian Office would pay them an appropriate additional sum once they arrive.

The Expedition of State Property deemed it necessary to arrange the transportation of Mennonites from Grodno so that the local governor would send them in small groups of 10, and no more than 15, families each, since “larger groups would inevitably encounter everywhere difficulties finding fodder and lodging.” However, in that case “the official assigned by the royal decree sent to general baron Benigsen” would not be able to “carry out

33 See the above source.

34 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246.

35 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246.

his responsibilities exactly,” which is why the Expedition thought it more appropriate to “escort” the Mennonites “from town to town under the protection of several men from staff teams with an open order to all administrators to aid them with assistance and recognition.”

[pg. 35] Meanwhile, the Expedition made it the responsibility of the Grodno governor: 1) to notify in advance the governors of the guberniyas, through which the Mennonites would pass, so that they could, in turn, give appropriate orders to the local authorities in regards to providing the settlers with “good will and patronage;” 2) as soon as each Mennonite party departs, to send by mail to the Novorossian Office “a list of all people in it, indicating their age and when the food allowance started being paid to each one, and what was given to whom, so that the Office would record this in new accounting books³⁶.”

Finally, should the Mennonites arrive to Yekaterinoslav [Novorossiysk] “before it is determined in what land they should settle,” the Expedition permitted the Novorossian Office to “lodge them among their brethren³⁷.” Thus, the Russian government has been preparing for almost a year to admit the foreign guests.

Now, let us see what happened at that time in Prussia, and how the Mennonite departure was being arranged there.

There were two issues that delayed the immediate departure of Mennonites from Prussia: first, the Russian government itself, not being ready to admit them, suggested that they should not rush the departure and postpone it until the following year, 1803; second, Mennonites had to resolve their relationships with the Prussian authorities one way or the other: either to achieve the mitigation of the Royal Declaration from December 17th, 1801, or to receive a permission to depart to Russia. The Prussian government, in turn, offered them the third option: to settle in “South Prussia” near Kalisz and Gniezno on then uncultivated lands, on the condition of being freed from all levies for five years and free from having to supply recruits until a new decree.

[pg. 36] Prussia extracted everything it could extract out of Mennonites for the country’s culture where they were settled, and now did not mind using their labour to cultivate untouched swampy areas in the former Polish lands without taking up any binding responsibilities: freedom from conscription was only offered until the next royal decree; as for the mitigation of the declaration from December 17th, 1801, the Prussian government did not even want to hear about that: it would rather “sorrowfully agree” to permit the Mennonites to depart, than make this concession, thinking that the intransigent elements among the Mennonites will not be satisfied by any compromise, while the majority will, in time, become accustomed to the new circumstances and, in the end, agree to military service. Under such circumstances intransigent Mennonites had only one option: to resettle to Russia. “The Mennonites,” Trefurt reported to the chancellor on June 17/29th, 1803, “preferring in general the lands in Southern guberniyas of Russia to the very swampy land around Kalisz, stand by their decision to depart to Russia, despite the obvious concession that was offered to them, although without recalling the decree.”

To leave Prussia the Mennonites needed to receive the permission of the local state authorities as well as the corresponding travel documents [lit. “passports”]; the Russian government itself saw this permission as a *conditio sine qua non* of them becoming Russian subjects, which is what Trefurt was ordered to relate to them by the directions from March 7/21st, 1803. “Without delay,” Trefurt reported to the chancellor on April 9/21st of the same year, “I informed the Mennonites intending to resettle to Russia of His Majesty the Emperor’s

36 The governor also had to relate this information to the Expedition.

37 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2246, the Expedition’s orders for the Novorossian Office from Apr. 13th, 1803; the Expedition’s journal from Apr. 3rd, 1803; #1934/2252, the Expedition’s proposition to the Minister of Internal Affairs count Kochubey.

decision, who most graciously permits them free entry into his domain *on the condition that they will take care of procuring the Prussian government's permission for their departure on their own.*"

Generally, in the matter of Mennonite departure from Prussia, the Russian authorities took every precaution so as not to be somehow suspected in luring away foreign subjects. Mennonite resettlement were to be presented as an affair of the local Novorossian authorities, not [pg. 37] of the central government; Trefurt was wary of corresponding with the Grodno governor on the topic of Mennonites, so as his involvement in the matter would not be discovered due to the perustration at the Prussian postal service. However, all of this wariness turned out to be completely unnecessary. Prussia had no complaints about the upcoming departure of the most intransigent Mennonites and had no intentions of detaining them by force: it did not yet foresee the scale that their emigration would be able to reach. It had a reserve of other settlers, who were ready to replace the departing Mennonites and were better suited to the conditions of the Prussian state: colonists from other parts of Germany, in particular from the left bank of Rhine and from Württemberg.

"Thousands of German colonists," Trefurt reported to the chancellor, "from the left bank of Rhine and mainly from the Württemberg area arrive in Prussia and head for settlement to Prussian Silesia to cultivate there vineyards (pour y cultiver les vignobles³⁸). They were recruited by a Prussian financial advisor, who lived in the empire for that particular purpose. Several hundred families recruited by him settled, among other places, in West Prussia, a few miles away from Danzig."

The colonists received lands for cultivation and houses built at the expense of the Treasury; travel expenses were compensated at a rate of two good groschens (à raison de deux bons gros) per German mile. For this, these settlers' *children born in Prussia* were subject to conscription on par with the rest of the king's subjects³⁹.

Trefurt clearly understood the connection between the Prussian government's position in regards to the Mennonites and the increased influx of emigrants from other parts of Germany.

"Mennonite deputies," he wrote in a report from September 4/12th, 1803, "recently went to Berlin to plead once again for the royal decree [pg. 38] so harmful for their society to be revoked, but it remains to be seen whether the Berlin court will agree to that, seeing as their departure is fully compensated by a great number of colonists coming to Prussia from Southern Germany⁴⁰".

Thus, the Mennonites, who were not willing to come to terms with the new order, so far had only one option remaining: to resettle to Russia. Yet not all of them were ready to undertake a long journey to the "Southern guberniyas" of Russia: some did not mind settling closer to the Prussian border, namely in the Lithuanian guberniyas. However, the Russian government did not plan the colonization of Lithuania by Mennonites; therefore, under the excuse that in Lithuania there are no state-owned lands suitable for their settlement, a decision was made to dissuade the Mennonites from this, declaring that all they can hope for there is settling in private lands owned by landlords under special contracts made with the landowners. Trefurt received appropriate instructions in this regard, and he managed to convince all of the Mennonites preparing to depart from Prussia to agreed to settle in Novorossia⁴¹.

38 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246, Trefurt's report from June 17/29th, 1803.

39 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, Trefurt's report to the chancellor from June 13/25th, 1803.

40 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #1934/2252, translation of the councillor general Trefurt's report to the state chancellor sent from Danzig and dated September 7/19th, 1803.

41 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2252, count Kochubey's relation to chancellor count L. R. Vorontsov from March 10th, 1803; Trefurt's report to the chancellor from April 9/21st, 1803.

To dampen the emigration fever that took hold of some Mennonites the Prussian government set rather strict conditions for receiving the required travel documents: Mennonites had to pay a tenth of their movable and immovable property to the Treasury (*la dîme de leur bien meuble et immeuble*), and when selling land—to lose, effectively, a half of their fortune. “Their (Mennonites’) lot here is already quite regrettable,” wrote Trefurt to the Grodno governor Lanskiy, “in that that they loose half of their fortune when selling land, and give one tenth of their movable and immovable property to the Treasury⁴².”

[pg. 39] Yet these measures did not deter the Mennonites in their resolve to emigrate from Prussia, which was greatly helped by the sermons of Warkentin, their pastor from near Elbing, who, according to Trefurt, “deserved every manner of respect and enjoyed the deep trust of his parishioners.” He was at the head of the delegation that went to Berlin to plead for the restrictive decree (*declaration*) to be revoked and was at the same time corresponding with Kontenius as well as maintained contact with Trefurt, to whom he promised to “join his compatriots in Russia.” Intending to continue using Warkentin’s influence in the matter of resettling Mennonites to Russia, Trefurt advised emperor Alexander to take him “into good graces and under patronage,” and solicited for Warkentin to be awarded with a golden medal struck in memory of the sovereign’s coronation.

The Mennonites, who were preparing to resettle, began to liquidate their property well in advance, but the Prussian government only began providing them with the travel documents in summer 1803; at the same time began the movement of Mennonite transports into Russia, which we learn from Trefurt’s reports to the chancellor:

“Up till now,” Trefurt wrote to the chancellor, “only a few men have received the travel documents required to cross the border, and these have already departed to Russia, while the majority are still waiting for such documents,” (report from June 17/29th ⁴³).

“The Mennonites intending to settle in the South of Russia have now received the required documents on the king’s orders, and ninety one (91) families from around Elbing and Marienburg have just left, heading for the Russian border,” (report from July 13/25th ⁴⁴).

“As the Mennonites have already received the Prussian government’s permission to resettle to Russia, I rush [pg. 40] to inform Your Lordship that 148 of their families have already departed, namely to Grodno, having paid here a tenth of their movable and immoveable property,” (report from July 27th/August 8th ⁴⁵).

In a relation from November 10th, 1803 count Kochubey informed count N. P. Rummyantsev that already 162 Mennonite families have gone to Russia through Grodno⁴⁶.

Mennonite emigration, taking scales unexpected by the Prussian government, has finally forced the latter to make a compromise: the 1801 declaration concerning them (*La Déclaration de 1801 a leur égard*) was mitigated (*mitigée*), and “the king has most graciously relieved the Mennonites of their obligation to provide recruits” (*le Roi ait très gracieusement dispensé les ménonites des obligations de fournir des recrues*); thus, the labours of the Mennonite delegation were, in a sense, successful, and after returning from Berlin preacher Warkentin “has changed his opinion” and began “preaching against emigration.”

On the orders from Berlin, other measures were also taken against those wishing to depart.

42 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, copy of councillor Trefurt’s letter to the Lithuania-Grodno civil governor Lanskiy from July 4/16th, 1803.

43 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #812/2246, translation of Trefurt’s report from June 17/22nd, 1803.

44 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, II, 1, on the resettlement of Prussian Mennonites to Russia, Trefurt’s report from July 13/25th, 1803.

45 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #1934/2252, letter from councillor general collegiate councillor Trefurt from Danzig, dated July 27th/August 8th, 1803 (translation).

46 See the above source.

“Officials, and especially Prussian courts, where Mennonites wishing to leave the country have to request the travel documents,” Trefurt reported to the Minister of Foreign Affairs duke Chartoryskiy, “do everything in their power to dissuade them from emigration; they even have orders to do so and to delay the permissions [or “delay the resolution of the matter”] as long as they can.”

Trefurt believed that these measures would not achieve their goal. “There is no need,” he wrote in the same report (from April 4/16th, 1804), “the enthusiasm that these people feel towards the most august monarch of all Russia shall prevail and surely overcome all the obstacles put in front of the departure from the country of these people, gaining whom will be all the more beneficial to Russia, as their honesty and value are universally recognized. [pg. 41] I flatter myself (with the hope) to convince almost all of them to settle around Yekaterinoslav.”

Indeed, so far neither the mitigation of the Declaration of 1801, nor the deterring and prohibiting measures against Mennonite emigration were successful, but the reason for that was not the enthusiasm inspired in the Mennonites by the Russian monarch, as Trefurt himself well understood, but the desperate situation created by the initial uncompromising position that the Prussian government took towards them. Under its influence many Mennonites have already liquidated their property in Prussia, and now there was no other choice for them but to emigrate, unless they wanted to go bankrupt. Relating in a report from March 31st/ April 12th, 1804 the news of Mennonites being relieved of the obligation to supply recruits, Trefurt wrote: “however, there are many of those (Mennonites) here, who have not just sold their lands in advance, but also have already paid the tithe to go to Russia. The great loss they would inevitably suffer, should they remain here, leaves them no other choice but to join their compatriots in Russia⁴⁷”.

The Prussian government itself also recognized the full difficulty of these Mennonites’ circumstances and, starting June 1804, began providing the travel documents to those wishing to depart anew.

“I rush to inform Your Lordship,” Trefurt wrote to count Kochubey on June 13/25th of the same year, “that the Prussian government has already began handing out the travel documents to the departing Mennonites after taking a tenth of their property; their numbers, according to my sources, may reach 300 families or more...”

To dampen the emigration fever among the Mennonites and deter those, who have not yet sold their land and other property, rumours about the unfortunate lot that awaits the emigrants in Russia have been spread.

“I cannot keep silent,” wrote Trefurt in the same report to count Kochubey, “and not also inform [pg. 42] Your Lordship about the various measures employed here to prevent the emigration, especially since the ones leaving now are mostly the richest Mennonites, whose wealth reaches five, six, or more thousands gold pieces [lit. “chervonets”], namely: to this end were spread harmful rumours that the climate in Novorossian guberniyas is very unhealthy; that the location selected for the Mennonites on the Moloshnya river (Molochnaya) near the Sea of Azov belongs to Tatar dukes and therefore the Mennonites will be under a great threat of Tatar attacks; that the Mennonites who have emigrated last year (1803) still have to reside in Khortitsa due to the lack of proper measures regarding their stay (settlement), which led to their utter financial ruin and caused discontent.”

Trefurt refuted these “harmful,” but not completely unfounded, rumours to the best of his ability. He indicated that the Novorossian climate is healthy, that the land is quite fertile, that a great number of the zemstvo police has been added to the armed forces for the perfect safety

47 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, II, 1, #1 “On the Settlement of Prussian Mennonites in Russia”

of his “settlers;” “and the proof that the best and most timely arrangements have been made regarding providing them with land, wood for building homes and so on,” Trefurt told the Mennonites, “is the fact that an assistant of respected collegiate councillor Kontenius has been made court councillor; finally... the royal decree... given to the Lithuanian governor general regarding making appropriate arrangements and admitting them in Grodno and escorting them with every sign of care and goodwill shall serve as the best proof and rebuttal of all malicious rumours⁴⁸.”

Naive arguments that if the orders are made, then they must be fulfilled, that if an official advanced in rank, then everything is well in his department, could by themselves have had some success among the Mennonites, who were used [pg. 43] to the orderly, precise and accurate workings of the Prussian bureaucracy; however, the emphasis was not on that, but on the fact that the ones, who have already broken their financial ties to the motherland had no other choice but emigration, while the others, who have not yet sold their properties, but were connected to the former with various ties, could follow.

Emigration to Russia renewed as soon, as the Prussian government stopped delaying the issue of the travel documents. In July 1804 the number of emigrants reached 90 families (501 persons). “As the departure of Mennonites continues,” Trefurt reported to duke Chartoryskiy on July 3/15th of the same year, “I have a daily opportunity to give out the travel documents to them... the property, which they bring along, counting everything, both money and goods, approximately comes up to 100,000 Prussian thalers, based on [their] statements and other documents.” In a different report (from June 22nd/July 4th) Trefurt relates that “many of these Mennonites also bring along livestock of very good breeds, including cows, sheep, etc.”

In August of the same year another 76 families (401 persons) left for Russia, bringing along 112,719 Prussian thalers worth of property according to the official records, and in fact, like their predecessors, a much greater sum⁴⁹. The fact is, as was already mentioned, the Prussian government imposed on the emigrants a heavy ten percent tax on the exported property. The notorious Mennonite honesty did not withstand that test, and most families “agreed among themselves to only declare one half or one third of their real fortunes⁵⁰”.

“I dare to reassure Your Grace,” Trefurt reported to the Minister of the Foreign Affairs, “that the amount of money carried by the Mennonites, who recently departed to Russia, is more than 100,000 gold pieces, and consequently much more, than indicated by the lists, compiled based on [pg. 44] everybody’s statements... For example, Mennonite Klaas Wiens, who was entered into my first list as having 8,680 Prussian thalers, is taking with him, according to pastor Warkentin, 10,000 gold pieces. Obviously, the settlements made out of such colonists can only be very beneficial to the Empire⁵¹.”

The first, larger Mennonite trains⁵² [lit. “transports] were followed by the departures of smaller parties. In the beginning of September Trefurt sent to Russia three Mennonite families numbering 28 persons. Earlier, on August 2nd of the Gregorian calendar, 11 Mennonite families departed from Schwetz; in October they were followed by 7 more families from the same location. The latter 18 families from Schwetz belonged to a separate Mennonite persuasion and were known among other Mennonites as the *Old Flemish*. In a report to duke Chartoryskiy from March 31st/April 12th, 1804 Trefurt related the following information about the

48 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2060/2302, “On Resettlement of Mennonites from Prussia to Novorossia;” a draft of the translation of this report can also be found in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, II, 1, #1: “On Settling Prussian Mennonites in Russia.”

49 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow.

50 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2060/2302, Trefurt’s report to count Kochubey from June 13/25th, 1804.

51 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, Trefurt’s report to duke Chartoryskiy from August 23rd/September 4th, 1804.

52 They departed in the following order: 30 + 60 + 76 families.

Mennonites of this persuasion: “Among (the Mennonites) prepared to depart and having the royal permission to do so there are also several Mennonite families of unusual temper from the Jeziorken village near Schwetz, namely those, who stand out in their extremely strict mores and diligent devotion to the teachings of their founder Menno, and can be distinguished from the others by [performing] the Last Supper or the Washing of Feet when having communion during the Passion Week, as well as by their dress.

“These people are mainly weavers, and not wishing to come in contact with modern Mennonites, which is what they call the rest, insist on going to Ostrog in Volyn, so as to reunite there with their brethren of the old persuasion; they are even prepared, should the crown have no lands to give to them in Vloyn, to make special contracts with those, who rent starostvos, as long as our august court graciously compensates the travel expenses”.

[pg. 45] Trefurt convinced them to abandon the idea of settling in Volyn and to head to Novorossia⁵³.

It was as if the obstacles to the departure of Mennonites created by the Prussian government only stoked their desire to emigrate. Despite the concessions given and ill rumours about the situation of their brethren, who recently resettled to Russia, even some of the Mennonites who did not yet begin to liquidate their property were wishing to emigrate. Trefurt wrote about this category of Mennonites to duke Chartoryskiy in his reports from August 23rd/September 4th and October 11/23rd, 1804:

“Many families have to postpone their departure to Russia until the next year, as they did not manage to sell their real estates and to receive the travel documents in time. Despite all of the tricks employed here to keep them, so far very few families changed their minds and abandoned the emigration project.”

“Near Elbing, Marienburg, and Danzig there is also a number of those, who expect to depart next year, if only they obtain the Prussian government’s permission, as there positively exist secret orders not to let wealthy colonists out of the country. The latter, however, are looking for a way to circumvent said restriction.”

Besides the aforementioned 18 families of “Old Flemish,” 50 to 60 Mennonite families of this persuasion were preparing to resettle to Novorossia in 1805⁵⁴.

In the spring of 1805 “respectable pastor” Warkentin in fact notified Trefurt of the coming renewal of Mennonite emigration to Russia.

“Truly paternal care, with which these farmers are received in our country,” Trefurt wrote to duke Chartoryskiy [pg. 46] on May 1/13th of that year, “is a great source of encouragement for those, who still wish to change their place of residence. Pastor W(arkentin) told me about eight families prepared to depart, three of whom, put together, possess 13,500 Prussian thalers in cash.”

On June 3/15th Trefurt notified the Minister of Foreign Affairs about sending to Yekaterinoslav 6 Mennonite families “rather well endorsed by their parish,” who already received permissions to depart last year. They were followed by 9 more families going to Russia, who have obtained their permissions to depart only in 1805. These 15 families, numbering 98 persons, brought with them to Russia 23,528 Prussian thalers.

In a dispatch from August 9/21st Trefurt reported sending to Russia 6 more families, who possessed 11,000 Prussian thalers. However, it seems that the source of emigration was already depleting, and in a dispatch from July 20th/August 1st Trefurt wrote: “it feels that the emigration of these farmers, so valuable to Russia, is coming to an end.”

53 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, Trefurt’s report to duke Chartoryskiy from October 11/23rd, 1804.

54 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, Trefurt’s reports from August 23rd/September 4th and October 11/23rd, 1804.

The reason behind the fall of the rate of emigration was partly the obstacles created by the Prussian government, partly the ill rumours about the situation of the Mennonites, who have just moved to Russia.

In a report to the Minister of Internal Affairs from June 14/26th Trefurt related that “40-50 Mennonite families, most of them wealthy, both in terms of money and having Blaarkop cows and rams of a good breed, are waiting for the travel documents needed to depart to Russia for about eight or nine months now, but the government of West Prussia, on the court’s secret orders, is holding them up, in every way attempting to dissuade them from the undertaking, or, shall they remain intransigent, to inflict such a loss on them via delays and a number of unnecessary expenses, that besides paying a tenth of their fortune, they would lose a half of it before they obtain the permission to depart.” Our Ministry of Internal Affairs described such behaviour of the Prussian government [pg. 47] as “obviously unjust and, if one dares to say, disgusting.”

Among the works of sending out small parties of Mennonites, in summer 1805 Trefurt informed his government of the rumour passed to him by pastor Warkentin, but originating with the brother of the Elbing magistrate president Beym, whose brother was serving under the king of Prussia, which was “that many Mennonite families, who already departed to Russia, will return to Prussia due to being dissatisfied, and that, more than that, departure of Mennonite families will soon be completely prohibited by the Prussian government, as the court is convinced that the country suffers a significant loss from the departure of these farmers.”

At the same time Trefurt expressed doubt that the relayed rumour is true “judging by how willing and eager are those, who even now depart to Russia to share there in the happy lot of their compatriots;” at that moment he had five families ready to go to Russia, and he hoped “that these will not be the last, unless the king really decides to prohibit the departure of these wealthy and valuable farmers, acquiring whom in great numbers will no doubt be a source of prosperity for that part of Russia (Novorossia), where more farmers are so needed⁵⁵.” Trefurt’s report, passed on by the Minister of Internal Affairs, attracted emperor Alexander’s close attention, and he ordered to relay it with a courier to the Odessa military governor duc de Richelieu, demanding from the latter information, as to “whether this news has any foundation⁵⁶?”

“Although our Sovereign Emperor,” the Minister of Internal Affairs wrote to the duke, “deemed it that these rumours must, of course, be unfounded, still, always paying [pg. 48] special attention to the lot of people, who resettle to Russia, especially Mennonites, who are so valuable, He graciously indicated to me... that you, Dear Sir, should make arrangements to verify, if there is truly any discontent among Mennonites, and whether this talk has any foundation... I am also obliged to inform you that His Majesty wants you... to apply utmost efforts to make sure that the Mennonites have no need in anything and that they are fully convinced by the government’s care that it wants to aid their prosperity in every way possible.”

Mennonite colonization at Molochnyye Vody was under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its local arm, the Office of Novorossian Foreign Settlers. As a result, the task entrusted to duc de Richelieu by the will of the emperor put him in an awkward situation, but the duke masterfully resolved it. He responded to the Minister of Internal Affairs that *the colonies*, which are not under his supervision, such as in Crimea and *at Molochnyye Vody*, are in good condition, but *his colonies*, despite all the labour and best efforts, are constantly subject to diseases, and do not enjoy the desired success; he made sure that the

55 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2156/2330 “Case in Regards to the Letter from the Gdansk Councillor General State Councillor Trefurt about Mennonites Preparing to Leave Prussia to Settle in Russia. July 1st, 1805, Closed November 10th, 1805.”

56 See the above source, count Kochubey’s relation to the Odessa military governor Emmanuel Osipovich, duc de Richelieu from July 16th, 1805.

colonies on Molochnaya were in good condition back in spring, having “personally examined... Mennonite settlements... and investigated the details of their circumstances.” After receiving the minister’s relation that informed him of the royal will, he charged chief judge Kontenius with investigating the matter, that is to say: the person, who would bear the responsibility, should the rumours of justified dissatisfaction of the Mennonites with their lot in Russia be confirmed. The investigation’s results were what one might expect, although the very fact that discontent at all existed could not be hidden. “In this regard,” Richelieu wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs, [“]I received from him a report saying that so far only one Mennonite has declared the desire to return to Prussia, and even then: due to receiving an inheritance. Overall, no signs of them regretting that they have left their fatherland are seen, although [pg. 49] *they feel the difficulty of settling in unforested steppes.*

“Mr. Kontenius believes that those among them, who wanted to purchase Mr. Rozyanka’s estate called Volnenka for a million rubles, while not having enough money and flattering themselves with the hope to obtain it with the help of the Treasury, reassured their abroad kinsmen in this hope in correspondence, and when this failed, expressed their discontent to the latter⁵⁷.”

One of the reasons behind the discontent of the Mennonites, who have just resettled to Novorossia was the lack of wood. They did not want and did not know how to build homes similar to Malorossian wattle and daub houses, and believed that the local Russian authorities should provide them with the initial supply of wood, as it was done for their brethren during the reign of Catherine II. Besides, they also saw the example of the Prussian government, which provided its colonists from Württemberg with wood without even asking for a later repayment. In one of his reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs⁵⁸ Trefurt wrote in this regard: “the one thing that the Mennonites seem not to like in Russia is the complete lack of wood in the area, where they are settled. *In Prussia*, where, of course, there is much less wood, [the forest] is sparse there, *the crown provides new colonists from Württemberg with all the wood* required for the first time *without asking for compensation. All Mennonites receive a loan for building their homes, which they should repay.*”

There were also other misunderstandings and sticking points in the relationships between the Russian government and the resettling Mennonites. On February 20th, 1804, as per the most humble report of the Minister of Internal Affairs, new rules for admittance of foreign colonists were published and provided for the use of diplomatic agents abroad. According to these rules, the amount of food allowance given to the colonists during the travel from the Russian [pg. 50] border to the place of settlement was limited to 10 kopeikas per day for adults and 6 kopeikas per day for minors. The Lithuanian military governor and Trefurt understood the new rules to apply to all immigrants, making no exception for Mennonites. While Trefurt accepted that he was bound by these rules, he found them to be not quite fair and productive, when it came to Mennonites, “who both due to the benefits they bring and their exemplary behaviour, as well as due to their prosperity, could be deserving of a certain privilege over the others.”

If the norms stated in these rules were to be applied to Mennonites, that would mean that their food allowance would be cut by half for minors, and for adults it would even be two and a half times lower, than before. The Mennonites did not look forward to this.

“Lowering the food allowance as per the royal decree,” Trefurt reported, “made a bad impression on the Mennonites... Now they worry that they could be refused the 50 rubles for travel to the place of settlement, which were given to the Mennonites, who arrived to the border last year.”

57 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2156/2330, “excerpt from duc de Richelieu’s letter” and his response to the Minister of Internal Affairs from August 16th, 1805.

58 June 14/26th, 1805.

After the Minister of Internal Affairs reported the matter, the sovereign ordered to “reassure” the Mennonites through Trefurt that “they will be treated the same way, as their brethren, who departed earlier, and therefore they will not be deprived neither of the money for travel expenses⁵⁹, nor of the food allowance, and the Lithuanian military governor has been long ago⁶⁰ informed that *these people are not subject to the common rules*⁶¹.”

The same royal decree cleared up another misunderstanding created by the publishing of the new rules. Their seventh article read: “They (His Majesty’s ministers, residents, deputies, or councillors) [pg. 51] must make sure that those (foreigners wishing to emigrate to Russia), who appear before them, should provide [financial] statements or trustworthy witness accounts that they possess and take with them no less than 300 guldens worth of property or cash; those, who cannot provide them, shall not be admitted, for the experience has shown that those, who lack means, establish themselves slowly and have little success.”

There was a small percentage of less prosperous proprietors, who did not satisfy the stated property requirements, among Mennonites, as well as agrarian workers, without whom wealthy Mennonites with small families could not make do. Therefore, the above demands caused great worries for the future settlers, and preacher Warkentin wrote a special letter to Kontenius. In it he indicated that “sacrificing a tenth of their property” is already “too significant” for those departing, and “if they are also not admitted to Russia, that would make them extremely unfortunate.” Therefore, he relayed that the Mennonites hoped that “the Sovereign Emperor, moved by His philanthropy, would look kindly upon these circumstances and deign to grant them the freedom to *follow the wealthy* colonists, who take with them great capital, as *their workers and on their word* to the guberniyas, where just agrarian workers are needed.”

As for Trefurt, seeing no opportunity to enter long correspondence on this matter and taking into account the small number of poor Mennonites, he took it upon himself to admit those, who did not meet the property requirements, but “*on the condition that these workers will not ask neither for a loan, nor for land for themselves*, with the exception of the food allowance and the money to pay for travel to Yekaterinoslav.”

In the aforementioned letter from July 18th, 1804 count Kochubey wrote on the matter to Trefurt: “I deem it necessary to let you know that His Majesty approved your decisions in regards to the poor, and permits them to *follow the wealthy as workers*, without any aid from the Treasury, except for the food allowance and the money for travel.”

[pg. 52] Thus, the new rules for admitting foreign settlers to Russia, which instituted property requirements and lowered the food allowance, did not affect the Mennonites.

The instituted amount of food allowance, which was high at the time not only for Mennonites (25 and 12 kopeikas), but even for colonists (10 and 6 kopeikas), as well as calculating the amount based on the length of the journey, however many days somebody spends on the road, led to a surprising result for the government: having received food allowance for 40 days in advance in Grodno, and departed from there with one train or another, on the way Mennonites would end up being left behind without a good reason, and live for a long time in one place or another, awaiting the next train. Then, after arriving to Yekaterinoslav, they would demand from the Office to pay them food allowance for the whole time of their transit. Due to this, the travel expenses, especially when it came to large families, would add up to very large amounts, and often equalled, sometimes even exceeding, the total of 560 rubles,

59 In the summary of this case made in the Ministry of Internal Affairs there is the following note: “#13. Money for travel will still be given both to them and to colonists.

60 June 4th, 1804.

61 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2060/2302, count Kochubey’s letter to Leontiy Fyodorovich Trefurt from July 18th, 1804.

assigned for all travel expenses, food allowance at the place of settlement, and money for settlement.

For example, Martin Hamm received 20 rubles in silver as food allowance for his family numbering 10 adults, when he was in Grodno from September 30th to October 8th, 1803; when he departed from there on October 8th, he received for 40 days in advance 100 rubles in silver for travel and 50 rubles in bills for the horses' fodder, in total receiving 170 rubles in Grodno, and then also receiving 245 rubles 50 kopeikas "during his stay in Berdichev;" "arriving to Yekaterinoslav on April 22nd he demanded from the Office additional money for staying, as he claimed, 98 days in Zhitomir." The Office only gave him "147 rubles 50 kopeikas for 59 days of travel[']" on top of that, which brought his total to 563 rubles, and if he were to be paid "for the stay" of 98 days at 15 kopeikas per person⁶², then he would receive [pg. 53] extra 147 rubles, which would add up to 710 rubles "without food allowance at the place of settlement and money for settlement."

Observing the Mennonites' and colonists' travel convinced the Office that "it is impossible to determine a set number of days traveled for everyone, since illness and other obstacles that detain people against their will happen on the road, and that the time of year should also make some difference," but at the same time it thought it both necessary and possible to fight against immigrants abusing the indeterminacy of the period required to travel the road from Grodno to Yekaterinoslav.

The Office asked the governors of guberniyas, through which passed the Mennonites' and the colonists' "high road," to put out orders that "as these people pass through, police officials in towns and local authorities in settlements should mark on their documents how much time they spent there, if they stay in any town or settlement, so that the number of days they traveled and stayed in towns or settlements can be known; if some of them shall be left behind their train due to illness or some other obstacles, and thus left without supervision, on departure each shall be given a note, specifying when he arrived, how many days spent in a town or settlement, and when departed, where (in the notes) the above information would also be entered in consequent locations along the road." However, the Office's request from the governors was fruitless: "this was never fulfilled."

Then, to end the abuse [of allowance] and to lower the Treasury's expenditures, the Office contacted the Ministry of Internal Affairs, offering the following measures:

[pg. 54] 1. To institute a set period for travel from Grodno to Yekaterinoslav, specifically 40 to 50 days in summer and 45 to 60 days in winter, and going forward to only give money for that period, while warning Mennonites and colonists that "should they tarry on the road and spend on the way more days than what they were given the food allowance for, they should pay the expenses for the extra days on their own, and they will not be compensated for them neither by the Office, nor by anyone else;" those, who spent more time on the way due to illness or other valid reasons could be provided with some financial help, as an exception, but definitely not the amount determined by the number of days of "travel" and "stay."

2. To take into account the level of wealth of Mennonites and colonists that arrive "to the Russian border" as they depart to Novorossia, and "not to give neither food allowance nor money for fodder to those, who can get to Yekaterinoslav on their own, especially if they themselves do not demand the money."

Supposed separation of Mennonites by their level of wealth into three categories or "sorts" (see above, pg. 30) only ever existed on paper, and in fact all Mennonites received in Grodno

62 The Office determined this size of food allowance for days of stay based on the directions given by the Minister of Internal affairs to the Volyn governor Reshetov regarding the tenth train of German colonists, who were resettling Novorossia at the same time as the Mennonites: this train stopped for lodging in Volyn guberniya, and for the duration of the stay the Minister gave orders to provide the colonists travelling with it with 15 kopeikas a day for adults and 10 kopeikas a day for minors.

both the food allowance and the money for fodder. The Mennonites believed (and the Grodno administration did not attempt to dissuade them) that food allowance and the money for fodder are provided to them as a subsidy that they will not need to repay, which is why everybody demanded it as it was their right, even though they had their own means. On arrival to Yekaterinoslav they would find out the opposite, and some of them said that “they were not inclined to accept travel money, food allowance, and money for fodder in Grodno, but they were told that they would not have to return these money⁶³.” Based on these statements, the Office had no doubts that in future those, “who will be able to come at their own expense[”] will also be found among Mennonites [pg. 55] as long as border authorities do not offer travel money indiscriminately⁶⁴.

The Minister of Internal Affairs agreed with the Office’s suggestion and suggested that the Lithuanian military governor baron Benigsen and Volyn civil governor Gavril Stepanovich Reshetov follow the measures proposed by the Office⁶⁵. Yet even upon arrival to Yekaterinoslav and then to Khortitsa, where the Mennonites were provided with lodging, only a minority of them refused food allowance, which was now 8 kopeikas per person per day, even though most settlers were wealthy people. Thus, at the end of 1803 “out of newly arrived Mennonites” 99 families (numbering 459 persons of either sex) “asked to be given 8 kopeikas per person per day of food allowance up to December 1st of this year, which request (was) satisfied, while 20 families among them declared that they can make do without these money⁶⁶.” The government’s past inconsistent policy in regards to the foreign immigrants gave the majority of Mennonites hope, that this debt to the Treasury, too, may be forgiven. Things were similar with the loans for settlement.

To establish themselves, each family was provided:

a) with 25 rubles “for making ploughs and other necessary agrarian equipment;” b) with 100 rubles for the purchase of seeds (to be sown in fall) and procuring livestock, and c) 100 rubles for building homes.

[pg. 56] It is important to note that all Mennonites, who emigrated to Russia between 1803 and 1806, numbering 364 (362) families⁶⁷ were divided based on the time of arrival into three categories: the Mennonites of the first, the second, and the third waves; a separate department was established to supervise each category and deal with it on the matters of the Treasury.

When such a “department established in the Khortitsa colony to supervise the Mennonites of the second wave” received the Novorossian Office’s inquiry as to “which proprietors, having no capital of their own, need a loan from the Treasury, who wants to be settled at the expense of the Treasury, and who does not need any aid from the Treasury,” then “after a gathering and discussion” on the topic said department decided to ask for permission to provide the required information after the question of Mennonites purchasing “Volynenkoye” estate was resolved. The resolution came soon, but it was negative: “civil governor von Berg relayed” to the

63 Councillor Izot was in charge of sending colonists out from Grodno; he probably did this to make his paperwork easier.

64 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, Case #2088/2313, “Regarding the Proposition of the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers Concerning Limiting the Provision of Travel Money and Food Allowance to Mennonites and Colonists on their Way to Novorossia for Settlement,” the Office’s proposition from August 4th, 1804.

65 See the above source, directions for the aforementioned governors from Sept. 8th, 1804.

66 Ministry of Agriculture Archive, #2016/2284, “Case Regarding the Proposition of the Novorossian Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers Concerning the Food Allowance and Loan Provided to the Mennonites, who Departed from Prussia, and Regarding Them Establishing Households.”

67 The numbers provided by Trefurt add up to 364 families, while according to the 1854 *Journal of the Ministry of State Property* 362 families resettled during the indicated three year period. (Establishment of new colonies during the reign of emperor Alexander I).

Mennonites “the royal decision to deny the Mennonites the permission to purchase the Volnenkoye estate;” then, they asked the governor to plead before the sovereign “for more advantageous land for their settlement, than on the Molochnaya river; and if, despite their hopes, their request shall be ineffectual,” they expressed hoped that [“]at least, by the sovereign’s grace” they will be “aided by a bigger loan or provided with a greater amount of wood required to build proprietors’ homes.”

The request for a better land, than that at Molochnyye Vody was denied, but the request for more wood was satisfied. The first time, 1600 3 sazhen logs, 116 4 sazhen logs, and 453 5 sazhen logs were bought from a Chernobyl resident Berka Mikhalevich at the rate of 67 ½ kopeikas per 3-arshin sazhen [an official 3 arshin long sazhen, ~213.36 cm, distinguishing it from other versions of a sazhen]. On September 28th, 1804 a new contract for supply of construction wood was made with the same supplier, [pg. 57] namely 2000 3 sazhen logs and 800 4 sazhen logs. In total, 4969 logs of construction wood were were purchased for the Mennonites by the Treasury, and with “roofing and patches” this number reaches 5852 logs. Delivery of one log to the Alexandrovsk docks by Dnieper cost 82 ½ kopeikas, and the total amount of wood acquired in two purchases cost 4827 rubles 90 kopeikas. The wood was transported from the Alexandrovsk docks to Molochnyye Vody by a “long cart driver,” which made it even more expensive. Second wave Mennonites, who received this wood in spring 1805, could no longer demand a hundred rubles loan “for building homes.”

Besides the aforementioned hundred rubles for seeds and establishing a household, a special sum was also given out to purchase the spring crop seeds. First wave Mennonites were given ten rubles per family, but did not purchase any seeds, having spent them “on subsistence;” all of them had to be given 1290 rubles to purchase the spring crop seeds again (same 10 rubles per family). Second wave Mennonites received already 15 rubles per family to this end.

All Mennonites, who arrived to Novorossia in 1803-1806 had to settle at “Molochnyye Vody” (Berdyanskiy uyezd, Tavricheskaya guberniya), even though a significant number of them wanted to settle on already cultivated lands that did not demand a great expenditure of labour. Here they founded nineteen (19) colonies⁶⁸, ten of them on the banks of the Molochnaya river, and the rest along the rivers Tokmak (3 colonies) and Kurudu-Yushanle (6 colonies). All of them were put under the direct supervision of the “warden of Molochansk colonies,” to which position was appointed baron Ikskul. The soil at “Molochnyye Vody” was made out of rough sandy earth mixed with chernozem; in low places along the Molochnaya river solonchaks [salt marshes] could be encountered, and in one colony, Munsterberg, even quicksand. [pg. 58] Developing these lands was no easy task, but the Mennonites of that wave accomplished this successfully and quickly, being not just hard working people, but also wealthy: they brought along a significant amount of cash⁶⁹, horses, Friesian cattle, Spanish sheep, and agricultural equipment worth in total 450 thousand rubles in silver.

In some 4-5 years they have already achieved notable prosperity, so that in the beginning of 1810 *Northern Post* [Severnaya Pochta] could print on their account the following “News

68 Halbstadt, Halbstadt Remeslenny [Craftsmen’s Halbstadt], Muntau, Schoenau, Fischau, Lindenau, Lichtenau, Blumstein, Muensterberg, Altonau, Orloff (1804), Tige, Tiegenhagen, Blumenort, Rosenort, Schoensee, Ladekop, Petershagen or Sladkaya Blaka [Sweet Creek] (1805, and Fuerstenau (1806).

69 On August 30th, 1801, asking for himself to be awarded a St. Vladimir Order, 3rd class in memory of ten years passing since the day he sent to Russia the first party of Mennonites, numbering 115 families (who now had to pay taxes, as the period of tax relief has passed), Trefurt wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs: “Vous n’ignorez point, Monseigneur. qu’outre mes fonctions diplomatiques j’ai procuré à la Russie successivement dans l’espace de dix ans plusieurs centaines de familles de colons menonites très riches, possédant des capitaux de 2,000, de 4,000, de 6,000, de 8,000, de 10,000 et un de 30,000 écus de Prusse en arpent comptant; de ces familles opulentes, établies en grande partie à la Moloschna sur la mer d’Azow, 167 n’ont accepté aucun secours pécuniaire de la part de la Couronne,” Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow, II, I, #1, “On the Settlement of Prussian Mennonites in Russia.”

from Simferopol” (January 8th): “the Mennonites, who recently settled in the Crimean steppe at *Molochnyye Vody* already begin to flourish, and so do the colonists, who came to that area from various places. Now they occupy 26 settlements in total, where the number of Mennonites is 1902, and the number of colonists is 998 persons of either sex. As is their custom, they have built good homes, and established their households; at the same time, they have a lot of land, which generously rewards a farmer’s labours, while requiring no fertilization. Their animal farms, bee keeping, and orchards are quite successful. By this year (1809) they already have twenty five silk plantations, which consist of 30,000 orderly planted trees. They take their produce to nearby towns and settlements, turning quite a good profit.

[pg. 59] Another part of the benefits that the settlers enjoy is that a house of prayer was built for Mennonites, while the orders are issued to build churches for the colonists at the expense of the state according to their various denominations, and Roman Catholic priests, as well as protestant pastors are already being issued, following the example of the Odessa colonies⁷⁰.”

Even greater economic success was achieved by that time by the Mennonites, who settled in Russia during the reign of Catherine II, then numbering 346 families⁷¹. The first decade of their stay in new places in Russia did not go well, but a number of projects enacted by the state during the reign of Paul I and in the first years of Alexander I’s reign rather quickly improved their condition. On April 6th, 1800, under emperor Paul, in the Senate’s report it was ordered: a) to resettle part of Khortitsa Mennonites (specifically, 150 families) to “more beneficial lands, purchasing them at the expense of the state;” b) to delay the payment of land tax and repayment of the loan by 5 years for the Mennonites, who remain in the old location, and by 10 years for the ones, who resettle, “counting from the time the initial period of tax relief expires;” c) after the period of tax relief passes, to only demand the stipulated 15 kopeikas per desyatina from the core plots of 65 desyatinas per family, while taking 2 ½ kopeikas per desyatina for any extra land, “following the example of the land tax paid by all of the state’s settlers in Novorossian guberniya;” d) once the years of tax relief pass, to spread the repayment of the loans over a period of ten years for the ones, who stay at the original location, and twenty years for the ones, who are being resettled⁷². These new benefits were confirmed in emperor Paul’s Charter granted to Mennonites on September 6th, 1800, which charter we provided earlier. Beyond that, “due to them being in poor state and in need,” repayment of the 22,738 rubles 12 kopeikas used to pay for the Mennonites’ travel was waived; [pg. 60] while the 358.237 rubles loan that was given to them was turned over to the Expedition of State Property, to improve its own condition”.⁷³

Per the same Senate’s report from April 6th, 1800, it was decided to “entrust the search for the land to be purchased to the Mennonites themselves, as the experience has already proven that choosing lands for foreign settlers without their consent always becomes a reason for complaints, no matter how advantageous it might be.”

Based on this, in 1802 “as per the Mennonites’ choice and their own request,” a plot of land, [“]numbering 11,755 desyatinas of suitable land” was bought for them from privy councillor Miklashevskiy for 24,000 rubles, this sum was added to the other Mennonite debts and was to be repaid according to the rules instituted by the aforementioned senatorial report. At the same time, 65 families, instead of the proposed 150, resettled to that land: “no further

70 *Northern Post, or the New St. Petersburg Newspaper*, #25, Wednesday, January 26th, 1810.

71 314 families in Khortitsa colony, 17 families in the Schoenwiese village, Pavlogradskiy uyezd, and 15 families in the Kronsgarten village, Novomoskovskiy uyezd.

72 *Complete Collection of Laws*, vol. XXVI, #19372. The Senate’s Royally Approved Report from April 6th, 1800.

73 *Complete Collection of Laws*, vol. XXVI, #19372. The Senate’s Royally Approved Report from April 6th, 1800.

reason” to resettle a greater number “was found due to the fact that its (purchased land) proximity to the Khortitsa allows to use it without resettling.”

Lowering the population density at Khortitsa place did not pay off immediately. For some of the residents 1804 was the last year of tax relief and starting from 1805 they had not only to pay the land tax, but also to begin repaying their debt to the state, which “for some families reached more than 1000 rubles.” The Mennonites could not repay the debt on the conditions laid out in the law from April 6th, 1800: part of them were still “in a poor state” due to “the previous years’ unfortunate incidents” and “not in a state” to “repay the loan in the specified instalments on time.” Because of this, Mennonite elders and Church leaders came to the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers with a special proposition, where indicating these circumstances they asked it to solicit on their behalf for a permission “to pay annually 25 rubles per family instead of the previously determined amount, out of which 10 rubles 42 ½ kopeikas would count towards [pg. 61] the land tax, and the other 14 rubles 57 ½ kopeikas would count towards repaying the debt; they also promised to double the amount that they currently propose to pay towards repaying the debt as soon as their condition improves.” In their proposition the Mennonites also indicated the actions, through which they hoped to improve their economic state: “to achieve a better condition they resolved to build next spring a vessel for sailing along the shores of the Black Sea and along Dnieper, which the location of their settlements permits, as they stand downriver from the Dnieper’s rapids... with this planned, having built more vessels, if the level of success meets their expectations, they intend to sell their produce for a better price, than [is possible] in that area. Beyond that, they shall not neglect working to increase the number of mulberries and well-breed sheep, which they intend to procure from Prussia; while they are already acquiring experience producing cloth; with these measures, in time they hope to become able to repay their debt to the state more reliably and without being burdened by it.”

The Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers found the Mennonites’ request to be just and deserving most serious attention, since if the demands of the April 6th, 1801 law were to be insisted upon, some Mennonite families would annually have to pay very large amounts towards repaying the debt, namely: 100 to 120 rubles for those, who remained at the original location, and 50 to 60 rubles for those, who resettled to the land purchased from Miklashevskiy; on top of that, the land tax for the core 65 desyatinas plot is 9 rubles 75 kopeikas, plus 67 ½ kopeikas for the extra land they ended up with in the Khortitsa colonies; finally, all Mennonites had to contribute to the maintenance of the postal service. Even rich Mennonites would not be able to withstand this financial burden without a significant loss for their households, not to mention the average families and the poor.

With this in mind, the Office on Behalf of Foreign Settlers saw it fit to implement the following measures regarding the Mennonites:

1. “To have them pay 25 rubles per family annually, so that, as per their request, one [pg. 62] part of this amount would go towards land tax and the other towards repaying the debt, until they improve their state, and then the amount currently proposed towards repaying the debt can be doubled;”
2. the indicated 25 rubles per family should be collected from all Mennonites, whether they reside in Khortitsa or in two separate colonies (Schoenwiese and Kronsgarten), starting the collection from those, for whom the period of tax relief has passed from the current year, 1805, and from the rest, both staying at the original location and resettled to Miklashevskiy’s land, as the royally granted period of tax relief expires, “arranging it so that the families, for whom the 15 or 20 years of tax relief end, would each time become subject to the [proposed] payment as this happens;” finally,
3. to have the Treasury cover the 24,000 rubles expended for purchasing land from Miklashevskiy and added to the Mennonites’ debt, because if this money is repaid by

Mennonites “then they, seeing themselves as the owners of that land,” will see the collection of [“]the same 15 kopeikas land tax as from the other Mennonites, who received land from the state, [as a burden.] If, on the contrary, that amount is excluded from their debt, then through this consistency will be established both in terms of ownership, and in terms of taxes and levies.”

Emperor Alexander confirmed the Office’s suggestions after the Minister of Internal Affairs count V. Kochubey’s report on April 18th, 1805, and they were made law⁷⁴.

These new benefits and concessions gave the Mennonites an opportunity to realize their proposals in regards to developing trade and various branches of agriculture that they expressed in the above proposition to the Office; their prosperity quickly grew, and already at the beginning of 1801 *Northern Post* described the economic successes of the Khortitsa Mennonites in this way:

[pg. 63] “The Mennonites can especially boast their prosperity... they have planted good orchards, and some even vineyards; cultivate mulberries and even produce silk; have horses and livestock of the best breeds, which they originally brought along and order again for breeding almost daily; then they took to breeding sheep, in which the government especially helped them by gifting them with up to a hundred Spanish sheep. Beekeeping is also an important part of their agriculture. Beyond that, they have built a communal distillery, a brewery, and a malt house, as well as procured water- and windmills. As the years of tax relief passed, these Mennonites... began paying their taxes and repaying the capital that the Treasury provided to them as a loan; however, the amount of this payment is so small, that it cannot be compared to the usual levies, even before taking into account that they are free from conscription and providing quarters. They sell their products in the nearby towns for a rather good price. The Mennonite industry reaches so far that they already build vessels, on which they sail with their products on the Black Sea even to Odessa, which products they also transport by land to the port town of Taganrog, 500 versts away⁷⁵.”

Emperor Alexander’s wars against Napoleon paused the Mennonite resettlement to Russia, but starting in 1808 it renewed once again. That year, through Warkentin, who was already mentioned many times before, “several good Mennonite families” wishing to go to Russia asked the Russian councillor in Elbing Abegg to answer in advance the following question:

1. “Are Mennonites still admitted to Russia?”
2. “Are they provided with the travel documents and the usual financial aid at the border?”
3. “Will they be settled on the same conditions, as their brethren, who were admitted to the empire before [pg. 64] (Si on leur accorde des établissements aux mêmes conditions obtenues pour ceux de leur secte précédemment reçus dans l’Empire)?”

Abegg went to count Shtakelberg for answers to these questions, telling him that the positive response will result in not only “a considerable number of Mennonite families,” but also Prussian craftsmen resettling to Russia: “the poverty reigning in the Prussian provinces still occupied (occupées) by the French forces” has already caused several families of good craftsmen to come to him expressing their wish to resettle to Russia on the condition of some small financial aid in travel and settlement.

Shtakelberg, in turn, relayed this matter to count Rummyantsev in his report from July 13/25th, 1808, and the latter notified the Minister of Internal Affairs duke Aleksey Kurakin.

This time the conditions for admitting Mennonites remained the same, and in 1808-1809 99 Mennonite families arrived to Russia: part of them were sent by Trefurt from Danzig, where the local “Gdansk government” created obstacles “for their departure, same as the Prussian

74 “Saint-Petersburg Journal” 1805, #IX, September. In *Complete Collection of Laws*, #21909 this report is incorrectly dated September 9th.

75 *Northern Post*, 1810, #23, “News from Yekaterinoslav, January 5th.”

government, in every way possible.” Emigrants from Danzig were wealthy people. Speaking of sending four Mennonite families⁷⁶ numbering 21 persons to Russia, Trefurt wrote in a report from August 17/29th, 1809 that they “departed from here to Grodno on their own horses, taking (with) them two Blaarkop cows, several sheep of the Spanish breed, that they call here “fagas,” and around two thousand Prussian thalers in cash⁷⁷.”

However, widely attracting foreign colonists to Russia on the old conditions soon became hard to afford for the Russian Treasury. Russia’s participation in the continental blockade that resulted from the Treaty of Tilsit heavily affected our finances. Cessation of trade [pg. 65] with England resulted in the egress of metal money from Russia and the corresponding decline in the course of the bills: if in 1807 a ruble in bills was worth 67 kopeikas, in 1810, after three years of the continental blockade, it went down to 25 kopeikas. Accordingly, the real, not nominal, state income went down, and an enormous, by the standards of the time, deficit appeared, which reached almost 105 million rubles in 1810, with the budget of 230 millions. The amount of bills in circulation reached 577 million rubles. Taxes had to be immediately sharply raised, and the possibility of cutting the expenses had to be considered. In 1809 a “committee for reducing expenses for 1810” was created.

In a December 29th, 1809 meeting, examining the budget of the Expedition of State Property (under the Ministry of Internal Affairs), it resolved to exclude from there 10 thousand rubles assigned for the improvement of “facilities in Saratov colonies,[”] and to cut the amount assigned for summoning and settling colonists by 500 thousand rubles, specifically: to allow for it 2 millions instead of the planned 2.5 million rubles. In fact, the committee hoped to cut the expenses for this down to 1 million rubles, and only agreed to the aforementioned 2 million rubles amount at the insistence of the Minister of Internal Affairs, who argued that it is impossible to make do with a smaller amount in 1810 “due to the colonists, who are actually already arriving, or are expected.” Having made this concession, the committee still saw it necessary to attract the sovereign’s attention to the fact that going forward the Treasury cannot afford the expenses that are “so significant, though no urgent need for them exists,” and recommended the following measures to cut the expenses on this matter:

1. to immediately notify our missions and consulates abroad that from now on the government will not give any loans to colonists, obliging these offices to notify all foreigners, who come to them for travel documents that “all, who wish to come to Russia and settle there at their own expense [pg. 66] shall enjoy the government’s patronage, receive land, and be treated the same way, as their comrades previously were, except for financial aid, which going forward will not be given to anybody;
2. to only make an exception from this rule for weavers, “due to the pressing need in their products.”

The committee justified the necessity of these measures not only by the pressing need to cut the spending, but also by how “overly expensive the settlement of colonists was,” and cast doubt on the very usefulness of foreign colonization. “The information received from the Minister of Internal Affairs shows,” the committee wrote in its journal, “that one colonist family settling near the capital costs the Treasury more than 5000 rubles before they establish themselves, while peasants, the [country’s] own subjects, receive almost no loans, when they resettle from populous guberniyas to unsettled places, making up the most useful of the state colonies, and the aid given to a German family free from conscription and other obligations could probably be used to resettle 50 families of Russian peasants to the great benefit of themselves and of the state.”

76 Dirk Ginter’s, Dirk Dike’s, Dirk Albrecht’s, and Petr Kharder’s.

77 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow: report from the resident in Gdansk Trefurt dated August 17/29th, 1809.

In accordance with the committee's opinion, on February 25th, 1810, the royal decree to the Minister of Internal Affairs regarding the cessation of loans to the colonists was issued⁷⁸.

In 1811, 4 Mennonite families from near Marienburg in Prussia numbering 27 persons of either sex wanted to resettle on these new conditions⁷⁹.

The Patriotic War that then began in 1812 and the military events that followed it temporarily paused Mennonite resettlement to Russia; but starting in 1815, the desire to resettle to Russia renewed among Mennonites, and on the previous privileged conditions at that, [pg. 67] with a loan given for travel and settlement. That year, on September 4/16th councillor general in Koenigsberg Kotsebu notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that 40 Mennonite families from around Elbing wish to resettle to Russia on the condition that they will be given a loan for moving and for settlement. As soon as he received this report, the head of the State Collegiate of Foreign Affairs privy councillor Veydemeyer sent a letter from September 13th, same year to the Minister of Internal Affairs O. P. Kozodavlev, asking "whether this wish can be satisfied." The response to the request was negative, in the spirit of the February 25th, 1810, decree. In a letter from September 17th, 1815, the minister wrote to Veydemeyer: "the aforementioned 40 Mennonite families can only be given permission to resettle to Russia at their own expense, without any aid from the Treasury, whether on the way, or at the location of settlement. They should be satisfied with land being given to them, the general patronage, which is granted here to all foreign settlers, and especially with the privileges, which were granted to the immigrants of their denomination, which privileges are detailed in... the Charter, which was most graciously granted to Mennonite community.

"Their brethren in Novorossia are in a rather good state. Many other colonists before them refused the Treasury's assistance in establishing themselves, resolving to live in their colonies and earning their fortune there with their labour. Thus, I think that if strangers can find a place among Novorossian Mennonites, then all the more they will not refuse help to their own brethren, who settle there. Be it as it may, I humbly beg you, Dear Sir, to reiterate to the councillor general that he should not give them the permission and travel documents required to proceed to Novorossia for settlement, unless they sign official statements saying that they do not and shall not demand any financial aid from the state or the coverage of expenses for their settlement or subsistence, which [pg. 68] statements shall be delivered to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁸⁰"

In 1819 foreigners were prohibited from settling in Russia, but it did not affect Mennonites, and their resettlement on the conditions determined by the February 25th, 1810 decree continued until the last year of emperor Alexander's reign. 75 families arrived from Prussia in 1819, and 179 in 1820. "In respect of their excellent diligence and strong household management of all of the Mennonites settled in Novorossia," Resolution of the Committee of Ministries royally confirmed on November 18th, 1820 permitted their brethren "to come from Prussia and settle at Molochnyye Vody, until all of the land assigned to them is settled." The state assigned 300,000 rubles for the settlement of Mennonites, and the annual limit for letting them into Russia was set at 200 families, though in fact their influx was no greater than 20 families a year on average⁸¹.

During the reign of Alexander I the number of colonies in Molochanskiy district reached 40, and in Khortitskiy district – 18⁸².

78 *Complete Collection of Laws*, vol. XXXI, #24131.

79 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow: councillor Trefurt's report from Danzig, dated June 19th July 1st, 1811.

80 Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow: letter from the Minister of Internal Affairs O. P. Kozodavlev to Ivan Andreyevich Veydemeyer, dated September 17th, 1815.

81 Bondar. *Mennonite Sect in Russia*.

82 Klaus. *Our Colonies*, pg. 151.