

## **Georg von Trappe's invitation to the Mennonites of the Danzig area (1786)**

Taken from the translation (by Tim Flaming and Glenn Penner) of the [\*Molotschna Mennonites\*](#) by Franz Isaac:

Since I have been informed by Her Imperial Majesty, the Russian monarch, by means of a Most High Imperial Cabinet Resolution, which in Russian is called ИМЕННОЙ УКАЗЪ [a similar decree], which is the Most Gracious Imperial Confirmation, issued by His Serene Highness the Imperial Prince Potemkin Tavricheskoi, to the Mennonites of the Danzig region, who has graciously appointed me as the Director and Curator over the colonies to be established by the Russian government. I am quite aware of how much malice, cunning, deceit and envy against Russia has occurred in my absence. Those against emigration will take every opportunity to frighten, threaten and scare my dear and esteemed Mennonites. Before my departure I consider it not only the duty of my heart, but also that of Russia's great and faithful monarch, that I try to reassure honest and innocent people, some of whom have already sold their belongings and are ready to travel, as much as I can, and I will do this conscientiously and honestly.

Above all, from the bottom of my heart I wish all brave Mennonites from the Supreme Giver of all good, grace, salvation and blessing, both in the spiritual and in the earthly realms, that he may bestow happiness and blessing on everyone for his purpose according to His holy will and good pleasure. You, my beloved ones, who have overcome all partiality and malicious lies, and persist in improving your present oppressed and depressed condition by moving to Russia. You, my friends, know how often I have advised you openly and faithfully, to bring the whole matter to God in daily prayer to see if this is His will. If it is man's doing then drive it back and change your minds. Since you are steadfast in your resolve and determined before God to go to Russia, I believe, as you do, that this is God's will, which he will execute it for the glorification of his praiseworthy name and to the shame of all adversaries. I publicly wish you happiness in your resolution, and out of good faith I advise all you who want to become landowners in Russia to come, see and experience what that would mean. How extraordinary it is to live happily, quietly and contentedly under the benevolent government of Catherine, the great and good mother of the country. In addition, you will have ten years of exemption from all taxes, with all possible freedom in regard to every necessary provision and in the peaceful inheritance and proper possession of the four Hufen of land that you have been given.

Then you will have to pay the very small annual tax of 39 Quarter Rubles, that is, not yet the full 10 Rubles. If two years ago Quakers from America, which had been liberated by France, were able to move to France, without diminishing the role that France played in the liberation of America. This should encourage you to choose Russia as your second fatherland, where foreigners can find freedom of conscience and happiness to a much higher degree than in France. There is no other monarchy in this world that has done more for foreigners than the miracle of our century, Russia's wisest monarch, Catherine the Great.

Malicious and treacherous people, who now live in Danzig, freely and publicly show their ingratitude toward Russia without any restraint. How little they deserve the never-ending but undeserved kindness that Russia's great monarch has shown them. They want to make it a crime

that you, dear friends, have sent deputies to the Empress in order to improve your condition, in order to obtain land, which they do not want to give you in the Danzig region even though you are willing to pay for it. How calm, how silent, the same incompetent rabble would have remained, if you good Mennonites would have taken refuge with a different monarch, who would have had less concern than the Empress to give free people a hearing and to grant them privileges.

You are free men, or all concepts of freedom cease altogether. A free man has the right and the ability to improve his condition. So do you. Who can, who may, who will deny you that? The troublemakers in your hitherto free city? Who gave them the right and the power to do so? No one, they should not, they must not make slaves of free people. The well-known, insightful, famous French Count Mirabau gave the present King of Prussia Frederick William, at the beginning of his government, in his printed decree, the advice that His Majesty should release the those who want to emigrate. I think the advice is good and think that if King Frederick William, the much beloved, continues to rule so kindly and lovingly all his subjects as he has begun, there should be nothing to fear from emigration in the Prussian states in the future, to your greatest reassurance. And so that you, dear friends, can all the more safely dismiss the rumors, the people here are spreading every day because of the war. I am publicly reporting to you that everything is ready in Riga for your reception, according to the contents of the privileges, and that I have made arrangements that you shall be transported from Riga to Dubrovna in White Russia and for the time being no further, all where you will await the order of Sr. Highness, General Field Marshall Tavritcheskoi, Prince Potemkin, appointed by Her Imperial Majesty as Governor General, in order to know when you should move on and arrive at the place of destination. You, my friends, will be quite safe, which you, brave and sensible people, have never doubted. For only the stupid rabble of Danzig could think and say that you, good people, were sent to Russia at such great expense only so that you might become a prey of the enemy. In Dubrovna, a nice little town in White Russia, you will be under the protection of the commander there, the Lieutenant Colonel Baron v. Staal, Adjutant General of Taurida. This excellent man, of good German character and good heart is, as your deputies know quite well, a good Mennonite friend and patron and knows you from the Seven Years' War. I give you my word that he, the noble, knowledgeable man, who knows very well how well the Mennonites will get on in Russia, will tell and write the truth to the General Governor, looking out for your good in the same way that I would.

Now I ask three things of you, dear friends, that you make as much effort as possible to find good preachers, shepherds of souls, who will care for the salvation of your souls and for a pious way of life, so that you may also let your light shine before the people in Russia, so that they may see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven. Secondly, I ask you, my friends, to be as careful as possible that no mangy sheep come among the flock, that bad people living in obviously gross sins and vices, e.g., those very devoted to sin, do not come into your company and do not defile the good Mennonite name in Russia. Thirdly, I sincerely ask you to keep your love and trust in me in my absence and to believe that I will be a true friend and promoter of all good Mennonites until my last breath of life. I confess that I was moved to tears that so many of you testified your true love for me when saying goodbye. As soon as my most gracious monarch

allows it, I hope to be reunited with you in love and peace, and then I wish to meet you happy and healthy and in such a way that it can be said of you with truth that you are walking before God and are pious and diligent. For this I wish you God's assistance and happiness and blessings for your journey and settlement, and I will die with the deepest love and affection.

Your true friend and patron **Trappe**,  
Director and Curator of the Mennonite Colonies,  
confirmed by Her Most High Russian Imperial Majesty