New Castle Tercentenary of Dutch Settlement, 1651-1951

Commemorating the Founding of New Castle and Delaware's Heritage from the Dutch

To the early Dutch Delaware owes its existence as a separate colony and state, one of the original thirteen, as well as the beginnings of self-government on its soil at the site of the delightful old town of New Castle on the Delaware River.

At New Castle, Saturday, June 16, 1951, Delaware will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the town by Peter Stuyvesant, the director general of New Netherland in America, and will pay tribute to the founders and the settlers under Dutch rule on the Delaware River.

The Dutch nation claimed all the territory of the Delaware and the Hudson River valleys by right of discovery in 1609. They named this whole region New Netherland in honor of their homeland—the United Netherlands (Holland). In 1626 they founded as their capital, New Amsterdam (New York) on their North River (the Hudson).

The Delaware was their South River. They had a fort on it opposite the site of Philadelphia in 1624, and in 1631 settled a colony at the site of Lewes on Delaware Bay. There, when the settlers were reaping their first harvest, the Indians fell upon them and killed all but one man who escaped. But it was this settlement and the cultivation of their fields by the Dutch that kept the Delaware territory separate from that of Maryland.

The Dutch made peace with the Indians, continued to control the river, and enjoyed a fine trade in beaver and other skins until the Swedes came to settle in 1638 at the present site of Wilmington. During the next ten years the Swedes captured the best of the trade on the Delaware.

This was too much for the vigorous Peter Stuyvesant, appointed governor of New Netherland, 1647, by the Dutch West India Company, the chartered agency for trade and settlement. In the summer of 1651, he came down from New Amsterdam with ships, men, and supplies, secured from the Indians the land from Christina Creek to Bombay Hook and built Fort Casimir on a then high point at the end of New Castle's present Chestnut Street.

With "Old Fort Casimir," the Dutch again controlled the river trade. Close by it they began to build the town. The Swedes seized this settlement in 1654, but the next year Peter Stuyvesant took it back and established Dutch rule on the whole river. The Swedish governor returned to Sweden, but many of the Swedes accepted Stuyvesant's offer of Dutch citizenship under himself and his deputy governor, Jean Paul Jacquet, at Fort Casimir.

Fort Casimir became New Amstel April 12, 1657, with the signing of a deed of transfer of the colony between the Christina River and Bombay Hook, from the Dutch West India Company to the burgomasters of the city of Amsterdam in Holland. Jacob Alrichs, the new director sent over by the burgomasters, arrived at New Amstel April 25, in the ship *Gilded Beaver* filled with colonists, men, women, and children, and the schoolmaster Everet Petersen. More people came later.

In spite of serious misfortunes: storms, sickness, and the luring away of some of his settlers to Maryland, Governor Alrichs could soon write home to Amsterdam, "This settlement is now pretty fine looking and convenient, with 110 houses built."

Director General Stuyvesant continued to control the rest of the Delaware region including the customs service of the whole river for the Dutch West India Company. Headquarters were at Fort Christina, renamed Altena, at the site of Wilmington.

At Fort Altena, William Beekman, ancestor of many distinguished families in America, represented the Dutch West India Company and its government under Peter Stuyvesant. He had a house there, near the fort, where two of his children were born; and also a house at New Amstel, where he stayed whenever a ship's cargo was to be inspected and duty collected. All ships, under whatever flag, were required to stop at New Amstel.

Under Dutch rule on the Delaware, the first courts of justice, the first public school, and the first elements of self-government were established on Delaware's soil.

When New Amstel became New Castle under the English, the independence of character born and bred in the Dutch people continued to influence life and government, and formed part of the independent spirit among Delaware's people that finally led to our becoming the First State.

Dutch magistrates continued in office in the English period; two of them were attorneys for the Duke of York to convey the territory of Delaware to William Penn, and among the members of the general assemblies under Penn that met at New Castle, the capital of the colony, were the early Dutch and their descendants.

Among natives and other residents of Delaware today are many descendants of the Dutch who were founders and early settlers during the Dutch period on the Delaware and on the Hudson.

The New Castle Tercentenary Commission was created by the 1949 General Assembly to plan a celebration by which the people of New Castle and the whole state may pay fitting tribute to the Dutch founders.

The Dutch embassy at Washington, in the spirit of the long continuing friendship between the Dutch and the American peoples, is co-operating with the commission in its plans. The commission hopes that all agencies and groups within the state, official and unofficial, and individual citizens, will be interested to have a share in making the Dutch Tercentenary celebration of 1951, an outstanding tribute to the Dutch founders.

Tercentenary Commission

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130 Delaware Street
New Castle, October 31, 1950