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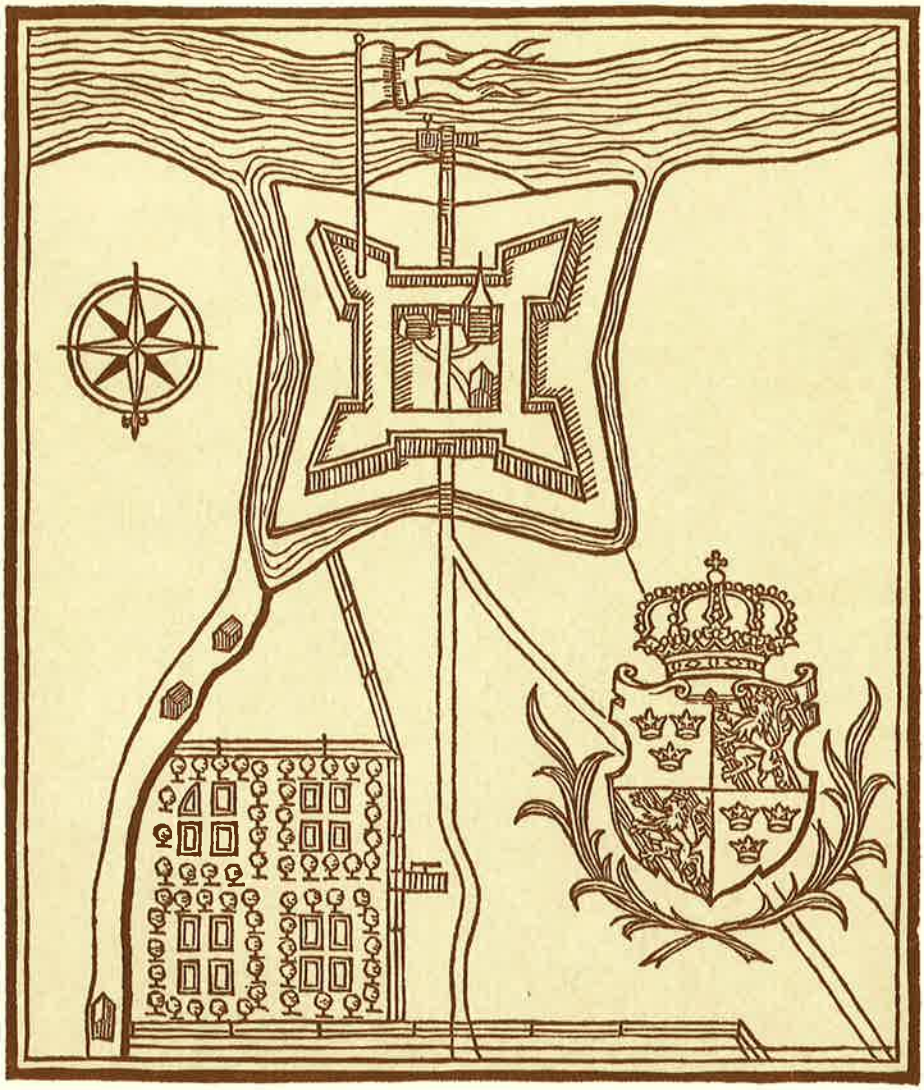
PARADISE POINT



NEW SWEDEN ON THE DELAWARE

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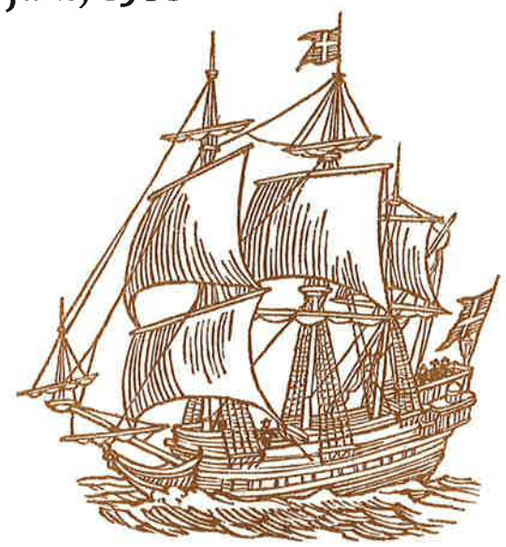
PARADISE POINT

New Sweden on the Delaware. An essay by Earl Schenck Miers, with woodcuts by Fritz Kredel. Issued for the friends of The Curtis Paper Company of Newark, Delaware, in June, 1968



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Introduction

THE SEVENTEEN YEARS that New Sweden existed on the Delaware (and in parts of present-day Pennsylvania and New Jersey) were a unique chapter in the colonization of the New World. True, the English and Dutch possessed prior claims to the territory, but this fact, in the end, simply added spice to the historical drama about to unfold.

When in March of 1638 the Swedes and their Finnish friends nosed their two little ships up the Delaware River and planted their flag upon soil where Wilmington now stands – tradition insists that they named the place Paradise Point, creating one of the greatest misnomers in the recorded story of man – they were thirty-eight years in advance of William Penn, the first British colonial governor who would function over those regions that became known as Pennsylvania and Delaware. Even in New Jersey in such place names as Swedesboro, Finns Point, the Mullica River and Steelman's Landing the mark of their brief stay in America endures.

It was still the custom in those days to refer to the colonizing country as Sweden-Finland. Whereas 1350 is the approximate date historians give for the inclusion of Finland into the Swedish Kingdom, the courtship of these two peoples may have been going on among the wild up-

per provinces for two centuries; and the match would not be broken (although the relationship was often sorely strained) until 1808-09, when Russia conquered Finland. Just how many of those who came to America were Swedes and how many Finns is impossible to say, for all records were kept in Swedish. Thus the reputed ninety-two Finnish settlers bore such Swedish names as Eskil Larsson, Klement Jöransson, Evert Hindricksson and Knut Martensson.

At the time the Swedes decided to adventure in colonizing, tempers were becoming short toward the Finns, who were prodigal in destroying the native forests of the Swedish homeland. In conscripting settlers for the Delaware, the Swedes used language that indicated they were likewise engaging in a certain amount of domestic housecleaning. Thus "poachers and deserted soldiers should be condemned to serve in the colony for a number of years." Also: "Finns . . . known to be destroying the forests and doing damage to the woods at the [copper and iron] mines [where charcoal was very much needed]." Also: "Citizens . . . who could not pay their debts." Others who had broken hunting laws were packed aboard the little ships that were buffeted by the Atlantic gales. Two of New Sweden's governors would die at sea – the first in a hurricane, the second in a naval battle.

If the Swedes and Finns during their seventeen years in colonial America numbered more than one person in two hundred among the total settlers of the New World,

that fact would be astonishing. Yet their influence was large, whether it involved spreading the Lutheran religion or teaching the art of fishing by spearing and eel-traps, methods to which they were raised.

The first Swedish trading company, the South Company, was established in December of 1624; ultimately it would have ten names and authority to trade in "Asia, Africa, America and Magellancia [the world discovered by Magellan]." Its founder – no surprise in Sweden-Finland – was a Netherlander, Willem Usselinx, who was also involved in the Dutch West India Company. King Gustavus Adolphus pledged 450,000 *dalers* (about $360,000) to launch the new venture. There was only one flaw in this generous gesture.

Gustavus Adolphus did not possess the money.

EARL SCHENCK MIERS

Edison, New Jersey
January, 1968

I

Still Some Other Dutchmen

For a decade, while Usselinx may have come close to losing his mind, the Swedes hemmed and hawed and achieved absolutely no progress with their South Company. Happily other Hollanders appeared on the scene. One, Samuel Blommaert, who was well tutored in the West Indian trade, knew that the New World across the Atlantic offered the best market for Swedish iron and copper. A new company was organized, called, with inspired imagination, the New Sweden Company. Then onto the scene, unbidden but determined, wandered the former director-general of New Netherland, willing to sell his talents if not his soul to the Swedes.

Peter Minuit was born at Wesel, then in the Duchy of Cleves, sometime in 1580. Some sources give his name as Peter Minnewit, others as Pierre Minuit, suggesting that he may have been of French or Walloon descent, but he wrote almost faultlessly in the Dutch language. For a time a deacon in the Dutch Church at Wesel, he left in 1625 "for foreign parts" – probably Holland, since the Spaniards captured Wesel – and the following year sailed for the New World.

Apparently Minuit played hopscotch across the Atlantic, but was back in Manhattan in time to succeed Willem

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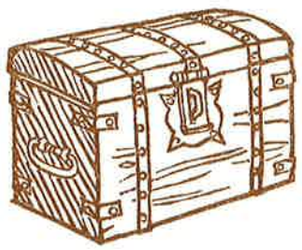
Verhulst as governor on September 23, 1626, a fact that encouraged him to invite his wife to join him. Since the Dutch West India Company's records have been lost, much of the early history of Manhattan must be accepted in blind faith. Among Minuit's first acts, it would seem, was to buy Manhattan Island from Indian sachems for trinkets worth sixty gilders, or twenty-four dollars. Otherwise the story of his administration belongs to the shadows of legend. He was a man of peace and tact, but a quarrel with the secretary of the Dutch Church, Johan van Remunde, ultimately led to Minuit's recall to Amsterdam and dismissal by the West India Company. He had returned to the Duchy of Cleves when Samuel Blommaert, who served both for the Dutch and the Swedes, recommended him as the very man needed by the New Sweden Company.

Meanwhile Gustavus Adolphus plunged Sweden into the Thirty Years' War and with only 13,000 troops crossed the Baltic to Germany. In September of 1631, winning the Battle of Breitenfeld, he soon became the master of Germany. Enheartened, the king rushed on to oppose the imperial general, Albrecht von Wallenstein, in a counter-offensive against Saxony the following year. For centuries Swedish schoolchildren read how Gustavus Adolphus fell in a cavalry battle at Lützen. The picture was heart-rending – the hand-to-hand clash of sabers, the king dismounted in death, his riderless



horse returning across the plain. Fortunately Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, who took over Sweden's destiny – Queen Christina at the time was only six years of age – proved to be an extremely wise man. He supported wholeheartedly the establishment of New Sweden on the Delaware.

On a chilly December day in 1637 Peter Minuit sailed from Gothenburg for the New World in two Swedish ships, the *Kalmar Nyckel* [*Key of Kalmar*] and the *Fogel Grip* [*Griffin*]. The ships' crews were largely Dutch, who likely looked with suspicion upon the twenty-two Swedish soldiers under Måns Nillson Kling sent to man the fort Minuit expected to build until a second expedition of settlers could arrive. Supplies to trade with the Indians, wines to sell in the West Indies, constituted his cargo. Minuit, no blusher at the thought of nepotism, named as commissary one of his relatives, Hendrick Huygen.

No account of the journey across the Atlantic exists. By March, 1638, Minuit reached Jamestown, Virginia, where he put in for a ten-day stay "to refresh with wood and water." Then, sails puffing, the ships started up Delaware Bay. Apparently a second stop was made at the Dutch settlement of Zwaanendael or the "Valley of Swans" (Lewes); and insofar as the Swedish engineer, Peter Lindeström, called the whole region around Lewes by the name of Paradijset or "Paradise," there is some confusion over precisely where Paradijsudden or "Para-

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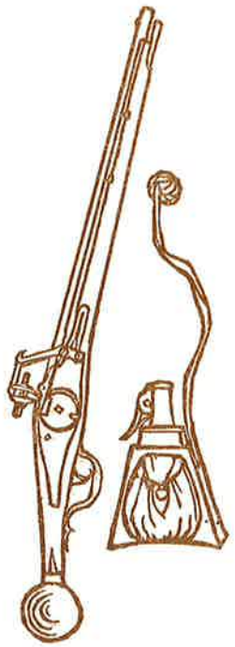


dise Point" stood. Lindeström placed it at a point south of the Murderkill.

At any rate, within a day or so Minuit reached the Minquas Kill, a stream flowing into the Delaware at Wilmington, which was promptly renamed Christina Creek. Indians glided down the stream with their canoes laden with pelts, promising Minuit a rich cargo for his homeward voyage.

Hammers pounded, axes rang as Fort Christina took form. The Swedish flag was hoisted on the shores of the Delaware. The New Sweden Company extended its claim some forty miles along the Delaware north of Christina Creek, or about as far north as the Schuylkill River. Later purchases would carry the Swedish claim to the "Falls" at Trenton, New Jersey. That future trouble was being courted with both the Dutch and English did not seem to bother any of the new colonizers, even if these thoughts entered their heads.

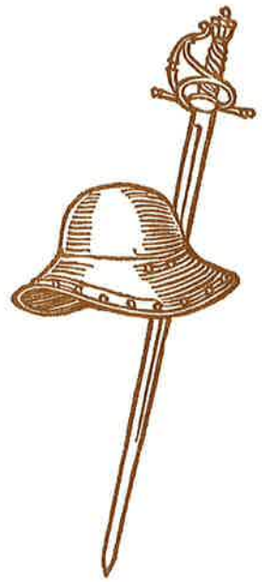
Minuit, busy assembling his furs for the return voyage, sent the *Fogel Grip* on a second trading expedition. That the Dutchman never enjoyed the praise he must have believed was richly deserved was a pity. But, returning to Sweden, Minuit took his cargo of wine for sale in the West Indies. Off St. Kitts a hurricane swept the ocean; Minuit was blown overboard and drowned. Even his papers were lost.

Perhaps, as some said, Minuit was "a slippery fellow who, under a painted mask of honesty, was a compound

of all iniquity and wickedness." One who probably believed so was Willem Kieft – Washington Irving called him "William the Testy" – who succeeded Minuit as governor-director of Manhattan and who protested vigorously at the appearance of the Swedes in the New World.

But William the Testy might as well have saved his breath. A second expedition, led by Peter Hollander Ridder in 1640, bought out all the Dutch shares and satisfied all Dutch claims, as far as the New Sweden Company was involved. With Ridder came Reorus Tokillus, the first Lutheran clergyman to serve in America. Fifty settlers had now reached the Delaware. There were farmers, wives, children. There were a bookkeeper, a tailor, a millwright, a blacksmith. There were cattle, horses, sheep, goats. There were grains, implements, building materials.

Houses clustered around Fort Christina. The minister built his church. The clergyman was no accident upon the American scene; the Swedes took an enormous pride in education, requiring that all should be capable of reading and writing their native language and insisting that Reorus Tokillus serve as both preacher and teacher. An early command to the New Sweden Company, issued in the name of young Queen Christina, stated that "the patrons of the colony shall be obliged at all times to support as many ministers and schoolmasters as the number of inhabitants shall seem to require."



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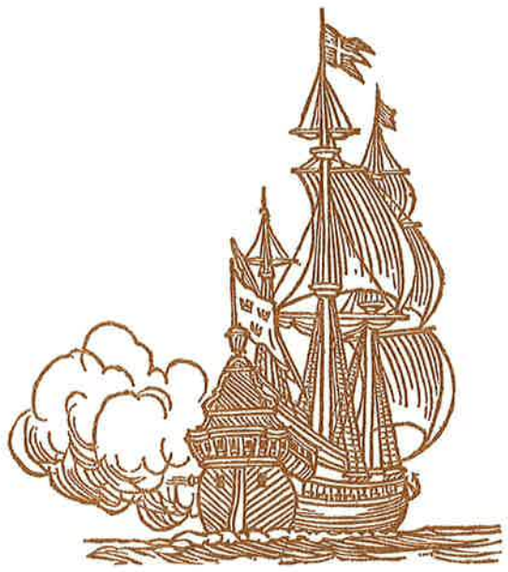
No small part of the Company's success stemmed from Klas Fleming (some sources spell the first name "Clas"), who had been director of the New Sweden Company from the outset. Untiring in his efforts in behalf of the colony, when war broke out between Sweden and Denmark, Klas Fleming's first duty was as admiral of the Swedish Fleet. He was killed in a naval engagement.

The tragedy would have seemed even more devastating in New Sweden if Klas Fleming had not already appointed the greatest governor the Delaware colonists ever would know. In fact, some may question if colonial America ever again met the equal of the personality of Johan Printz.



II

"Big Guts"

THE INDIANS had two names for Printz. Some called him the "Big Tub," others "Big Guts." Johan was a giant of a man, weighing over four hundred pounds and standing well over six feet. When he rode a horse, his feet dragged on the ground. Some said that he "ate and drank like a hero out of Rabelais." Others declared that "his profanity was famous from Massachusetts to Old Point Comfort [Virginia]." But still others described Printz as "a gentleman born and bred, an intrepid soldier, an intelligent, versatile, energetic administrator, and a wily diplomat."

Possibly Johan Björnsson Printz deserved all these epithets. He was born on July 20, 1592, the son of a minister, but borrowed the name of his maternal grandfather, who had been raised to nobility by Sweden's King John III. Printz was a prodigious student who studied at many universities in Sweden and Germany (Leipzig, Wittenberg, Helmstedt, Jena).

Fate changed the course of his life when, seized by a band of roving soldiers, Printz was forced into a regiment bound for Italy. Johan thought war, then considered an honorable profession, was a wonderful experience. He loved being a "mercenary" – for the Archduke Leopold of Austria, for Duke Christian of Brunswick, for King

Christian IV of Denmark. He served Sweden during the Thirty Years' War. He married and remarried.

Raised in rank to lieutenant colonel, Johan Printz was knighted by Queen Christina when in April of 1642 he was named the governor of New Sweden to succeed Peter Hollander Ridder. In February of the following year his ships, the *Fama* [*Fame*] and *Swan* [*Swan*] dropped anchor two miles up the Delaware at Fort Christina.

Printz, the military man, apparently came as much to conquer as to settle. Among his early acts was the building of Fort Elfsborg on the New Jersey side of the Delaware below the entrance to Varkens Kill (Salem Creek). His plan, clearly, was to control all trade and traffic on the Delaware.

A third fort, New Gothenburg, rose "about three Swedish miles from Fort Christina" on Tinicum Island, the site of Printz's own residence (called Printzhof or Printz Hall). The Indians had named the place Matinicunk, meaning "at the water's edge," and why the Swedes picked this marshy land – except for the fact that, like the Dutch, they were great dike-builders – is difficult to explain.

Printz, who along with other Swedes and Finns, would give the log cabin as a lasting contribution to America, raised a two-story residence. The French stood their logs on end, as in a stockade, but not so the Swedes and Finns. Logs, mortised at the corner, were laid one upon the

other. Sawed lumber supplied interior fittings; imported brick built fireplaces and chimneys; windows were glazed. Many homes simply had openings in the roof to emit the smoke from the walled-in fireplaces in the middle of the livingroom. Few had beds at first; the inhabitants slept on the ground. Chairs "were made from trees, mostly puncheons fitted with legs." *Pennsylvania Cavalcade,* a project of Pennsylvania Writers' Project Administration (1942), draws a telling paragraph of life on Tinicum:

"The garments worn by the settler were of woolen cloth, linen, and frieze shipped from the homeland. In keeping with the social custom of Sweden, Norway, and Finland, the Swedes of Tinicum built a public bathhouse of round logs with a large central fireplace. The bathers undressed and climbed upon the balconies, built around the walls, to perspire in the heat from the huge fireplace. Water was poured upon hot stones to raise steam, while the bathers switched themselves with bunches of birch twigs. As the bathhouse was built near the river, the bathers finished with a cold plunge, and in winter they rolled and waded in the snow."

The self-indulgent Printz, by other accounts, gave Tinicum "a pleasure house for the entertainment of the people," which, when later transferred to Christina (or Wilmington) was described as an alehouse, inn, and "place for singing and folk-dancing."

II

"Big Guts"

Printz, as strong-minded as he was round-bellied, constructed a blockhouse at Upland (Optland in Swedish) on Pennsylvania's Chester Creek, to protect the settlers there and to attract other colonizers to the site. A kind of pendulum, swinging from bad to worse, characterized New Sweden. Its population in 1644 was 105; in 1647 the figure leaped to 183, including twenty-eight freemen; the following year the inhabitants had fallen to 83. Sickness cost the colony twenty lives in the fall of 1643, including that of its first Lutheran clergyman. Indian troubles were few – two soldiers and three civilians were killed, but the incident was covered by an "apology" – and yet the Swedes were not doing well. The Dutch, invading the territory, offered better trades for beaver pelts. In April, 1653, or about a year before the Swedes dispatched their tenth expedition to the New World, Printz spoke quite frankly in a letter to Stockholm:

"The people yet living and remaining in New Sweden, men, women, and children, number altogether two hundred souls. The settled families do well, and are supplied with cattle. The country yields a fair revenue. Still the soldiers and others in the Company's service enjoy but a very mean subsistence, and consequently seek opportunity every day to get away, whether with or without leave, having no expectation of any release, as it is now five and a half years since a letter was received from home. The English trade, from which we used to obtain good support, is at an end, on account of the war with Holland;

while the fur trade yields no profit, particularly now that hostilities have broken out between the Arrihoga and Susquehanna Indians, from whom the beavers were procured."

II

"Big Guts"

In a good year more than 2,000 beaver pelts were shipped to Sweden. The enterprising Dutch were alert to the profit in this trade and a New Netherland commissary, Andreas Huddle, appointed in 1645, built Fort Nassau across the Delaware and pushed out his traders in all directions. Printz grew livid with rage; some say that his face turned "purple." He tore the flag from the Dutch West India Company's trading post and trampled it on the ground. Huddle protested this somewhat precipitate action.

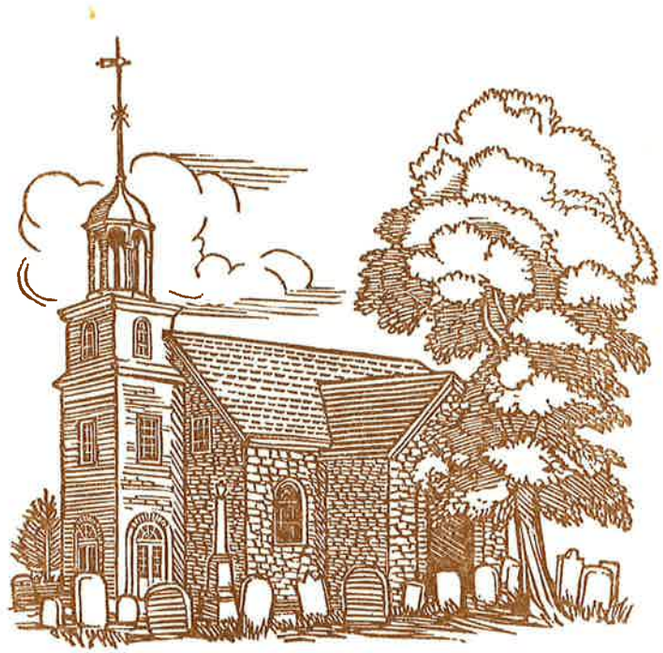
"There, take care of that!" Printz roared to an assistant, flinging Huddle's letter to the floor. Johan reached for a gun. Happily he was restrained from using the weapon, and at least for Printz the affair ended amicably.

Yet Printz well might be forgiven his outbursts of umbrage. Even peaceful years could be spoiled by torrents of rain. He told Stockholm how the river and creeks had frozen in 1647: "Nobody was able to get near us [on the island] . . . so that, if some rye and corn had not been unthreshed, I myself and all the people with me . . . would have starved to death. But God maintained us with that small quantity of provision until we

got the grain from the field and were again relieved. By this sad accident, the loss of the Company, testified by the annexed roll, is 4,000 rix-dollars [about $5,000]." Two years earlier at New Gothenburg, an outpost midway between Fort Christina and the Schuylkill, a gunner, Sven Wass, fell asleep at his post. A lighted candle fired the fort and the flames reached the magazines. The resulting explosion, which spared only the big barn, could be heard for miles around. In outrage Printz watched men, women and children fleeing for their lives in their nightclothes.

The governor rebuilt New Gothenburg, buying fourteen oxen and a cow to go with two head of cattle that remained. Printz tried hard not to nurture his downcast moods. But his letters to Stockholm revealed a need for all manner of personnel, varying from locksmiths, potters and chamois-dressers for finishing buckskins to an "executioner." Another letter pleaded for "a good number of unmarried women for our unmarried freemen." He complained that Stockholm had not clarified how long criminals "must serve for their crimes." He ordered "Anders the Finn" imprisoned for nonpayment of debt, then acting as "prosecutor, judge, chief witness, and at least the better part of the jury," had poor Anders hanged.

As much as any incident, the Anders execution suggested that Johan Printz was outliving his usefulness in the New World. In October of 1653 he sailed home to Sweden, the last the Delaware would see of him. He lived another ten years and became commander of Jönköping Castle in his home district. His death resulted from a fall from a horse. His wife and his five daughters survived him.



III
The Conquering Dutch

PRINTZ HAD left a bad taste in the mouths of the Dutch at New Amsterdam, and it was not long after Peter Stuyvesant had become governor-director of Manhattan that Huddle was filling his ear with how Printz had misused the Dutch West India Company and its officers at Fort Nassau. Stuyvesant's upper lip stiffened; and, appropriately, Washington Irving gave Stuyvesant the nickname of "Peter the Hardheaded." With tongue in cheek, Irving described a Dutch military expedition against the Swedes:

"To this copper captain, therefore, was confided the command of the troops destined to protect the southern frontier; and scarce had he departed for his station than bulletins began to arrive from him describing his undaunted march through savage deserts, over insurmountable mountains, across impassable rivers, and through impenetrable forests, conquering vast tracts of uninhabited country, and encountering more perils than did Xenophon in his far-famed retreat with his ten thousand Grecians. Peter Stuyvesant read all these grandiloquent despatches with a dubious screwing of the mouth and shaking of the head . . .

III
The Conquering Dutch

"On arriving at the southern frontier, Van Poffenburgh [a general whom Irving once named "Pudding-head"] proceeded to erect a fortress or stronghold on the South [Dutch name] or Delaware River. At first he bethought him to call it Fort Stuyvesant, in honor of the governor, a lowly kind of homage prevalent in our country among speculators, military commanders, and office-seekers of all kinds, by which our maps come to be studded with the names of political patrons and temporary great men; in the present instance Van Poffenburgh carried his homage to the most lowly degree, giving his fortress the name of Fort Casimir, in honor, it is said, of a favorite pair of brimstone trunk breeches of His Excellency.

"As this fort will be found to give rise to important events, it may be worth while to notice that it was afterwards called Nieuw Amstel, and was the germ of the present flourishing town of New Castle, or, more properly speaking, No Castle, there being nothing of the kind on the premises." [New Castle, six miles south of Wilmington, is the oldest town in the Delaware River Valley. Fort Casimir now lies under water, but the Colonial Dames have erected a marker signifying where it once stood.]

Washington Irving, writing in 1848, might find high humor in "No Castle"; Printz, who had not yet returned home, found no reason for joviality in this Dutch militancy.

III
The Conquering Dutch

"It is," Johan wrote Stockholm, "of the utmost necessity for us to see how we can get rid of the Dutch from the river, for they oppose us on every side: (1) They destroy our trade everywhere. (2) They strengthen the savages with guns, shot, and powder, publicly trading with these against the edicts of all Christians. (3) They stir up the savages to attack us, which, but for our prudence, would already have happened. (4) They begin to buy land from the savages within our boundaries, which we had purchased already eight years ago, and have the impudence here and there to erect the seal of the West India Company, calling it their arms; moreover, they give New Sweden the name of New Netherland, and are not ashamed to build their houses there."

Johan Claudius Rising, who followed Printz as governor of New Sweden, wished he could turn back at once on the *Orn* [*Eagle*] that had brought him to New Castle. Fort Casimir still stood. There were twenty-two houses, arranged in two rows. The fort was "dilapidated." Washington Irving gave a description of how the commander "would strut backwards and forwards, in full regimentals, on the top of the ramparts, like a vainglorious cock-pigeon swelling and vaporing on the top of a dove-cote."

The description was unkind; Rising was a brave man so surrounded by Dutch troops that he could not hope to survive. The war ended quickly. Fort Casimir and most of the town surrounding it was burned to the ground; Fort New Gothenburg was reduced to a shambles; otherwise Tinicum escaped practically unscathed. *Pennsylvania Cavalcade* may give the clue to why the tragedy was not too devastating:

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The Conquering Dutch

"... the Swedes and the Finns soon applied themselves to the task of rehabilitation, and their subsequent existence under Dutch domination was not too onerous. The conquerors divided the valley into a number of court jurisdictions under which the colonists enjoyed a form of local self-government."

William Penn, coming later into the Delaware Valley, spoke kindly of the Swedes and the Finns: "They have fine children and almost every house is full. Some have 7 or 8 sons. I have yet to see young men more sober and laborious."

Indeed, for all that many who were shipped to America were branded as "poachers, debtors and criminals," the Swedes and Finns made congenial neighbors, no matter what community absorbed them. By and large they were adored by the Indians. They clung tenaciously to their own religious customs of which Gloria Dei or Old Swedes Church, still standing in Wilmington, is a conspicuous example.

To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, perhaps America was never indebted for so much to so few as the colonizers of New Sweden on the Delaware. In time, their log cabins spanned a continent. A marshland became Paradise Point. When Hollanders stole the bell from one of their churches, the Swedes regained that object within

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The Conquering Dutch

two days – there were indignities for which these people, like old Johan Printz, simply would not stand. The grave of Catherine, the daughter of Andrew Hanson, the first on Tinicum Island, stands as a symbol of the hardship and grief these settlers often suffered (upon occasion the receding bank pushed other bones through the ground).

Both the United States House of Representatives and the Senate paid tribute on the tercentennial anniversary of what these Swedes and Finns contributed to the nation in their seventeen years in the New World (1638-55). Delegates from Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey all vied, quite honorably, for a place in that celebration. The governments of Sweden and Finland were invited to participate. For nearly thirty years a group of Swedes worked on the details of this anniversary.

No wonder these people were never to be forgotten in America!

Special gratitude is due the members of the Department of History of the University of Delaware who verified the numerous spellings of Christina appearing in the official records and other contemporary sources.

Postscript

The definitive work on the seventeen years of New Sweden on the Delaware is the two volumes by Amandus Johnson, Ph.D., published by the University of Pennsylvania for which D. Appleton & Company of New York acted as agents in 1911.

In compiling the foregoing pages, special mention should be given to these works:

Irving, Washington, *Knickerbocker's History of New York* (Philadelphia, 1892).

Myers, A. C. [ed.] *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey and Delaware, 1630-1707* (New York, 1912).

Wuorinen, John H., *The Finns on the Delaware, 1638-1655* (New York, 1938).

Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, *Delaware: A Guide to the First State* (New York, 1938).

————, *Pennsylvania Cavalcade* (Philadelphia, 1942).

Dictionary of American Biography, The.

Encyclopaedia Americana, The.

Postscript

Magazine sources generally duplicate these references. When in 1847 John Lofland, "the Milford Bard," described Delaware as "like a diamond, diminutive, but having within it inherent value," a romanticist like myself may be forgiven if there flashed across his mind the memory of those Swedes and Finns who, just two centuries before, had walked these shores on the Delaware. Ambition had beaten in their hearts. And bravery. And goodness.

E. S. M.

THIS BOOKLET is the fifteenth in a series of publications in Americana commissioned annually by the Curtis Paper Company of Newark, Delaware.

Mr. Kredel's woodcut on the cover is adapted from the contemporary map by Peter Lindeström of "Fort Christina and the Town of Christinahamn" (the present site of Wilmington) reproduced in *Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* by Amandus Johnson, courtesy of the library of the University of Delaware. Gustavus Adolphus is portrayed on page 5; Johan Printz on page 15; the "Old Swedes" Church in Wilmington on page 21; the "Gloria Dei" Church in Philadelphia on page 28. The remaining woodcuts, all historically accurate, do not require description.

The text has been set in Emerson monotype with shoulder headings in Palatino italic, and the title lines in Perpetua. The paper is Curtis Rag white wove; the cover is Tweedweave white, substance 80. The design is by Joseph Blumenthal.