

The
Delaware Indians
A History

C. A. Weslager



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PRESS

New Brunswick, New Jersey

other lesser rivers, which discharge themselves into the greater . . . the Country is very well replenished, with deere and in some places store of Elkes.¹¹

When Cornelius Hendricksen came into the river, later submitting to his merchant employers in Holland the first known map of the Delaware River, he wrote that he "did there trade with the inhabitants, said trade consisting of Sables, furs, Robes and other skins."

Other Dutch traders came for the same purpose, bringing cargoes of Dutch merchandise and returning to Holland with bundles of pelts, especially the skins of the beaver, to satisfy Europe's voracious appetite for furs. Adriaen Van der Donck, writing in 1656, said that eighty thousand beaver pelts were being shipped *annually* from the New Netherland to Holland.¹² Consistent with their ideologies, the Delawares extended warm hospitality to their Dutch guests, welcoming them to their wigwams and inviting them to share their other domestic resources. Daniel Denton wrote that one could travel from one end of the New Netherland to another in safety, "And if you chance to meet with an Indian-Town, they shall give you the best entertainment they have, and upon your desire, direct you on your way."¹³ During the early period, the river of the Sickoneysincks at Lewes, Delaware, received a new and vulgar name—Hoeren Kill (Whore's Creek)—which originated, according to an early Dutch account, "from the liberality of the Indians in generously volunteering their wives or daughters to our Netherlanders at that place."¹⁴ Evidence of miscegenation was soon to be seen in some of the Delaware villages when dusky-skinned females gave birth to lighter-complexioned, blue-eyed infants. The process of Europeanizing the Indians had a subtle beginning, and unplanned cross-breeding preceded the technological changes.

Meanwhile, England was busy colonizing Virginia and New England. From a New World base on Chesapeake Bay, Henry Fleet was trading with local tribes; and William Claiborne had gone up the bay from his headquarters on Kent Island to make contact with the Minquas on the Susquehanna, where he initiated a profitable trade in beaver skins.¹⁵ Claiborne built a trading post on Palmer's Island in the Susquehanna, stocking axes, hoes, duffels, and other merchandise in demand among the Minquas. Beavers were not only vastly more numerous along the Susquehanna and its tributaries than along the