



# COLONY *to* COMMUNITY

## The Story of New Sweden

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This exhibition is organized by the  
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by Carrie Hogan, Curator, in conjunction with the  
Delaware Historical Society and the New Jersey State Museum.

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# Sweden in the Age of Empire

The story of New Sweden begins in Old Sweden, which in the early 17th century ruled a Baltic Sea empire that stretched across Finland to parts of present-day Poland, Latvia, Estonia and south into northern Germany.

The empire grew from Sweden's involvement in the Thirty Years War, which had been politically prosperous for the country and its king, Gustavus Adolphus. King Gustavus Adolphus, widely admired and known for his bravery and leadership on the battlefield, was referred to as "The Lion of the North" by other Europeans. During his reign—from 1611 to his death in the Battle of Lützen in 1632—Sweden became one of the great powers of Europe.

Inspired by English and Dutch success at colonial ventures in the New World, in 1624 King Gustavus Adolphus tried to found a joint Swedish-Dutch trading company to exploit the resources of North America. The venture failed from lack of capital in Sweden and a lack of enthusiasm among Swedes to support it. Nonetheless, Sweden's interest in a New World colony continued. After the King's death, Axel Oxenstierna, Chancellor and Regent for the late king's daughter, Queen Christina, founded the South Company—later called the New Sweden Company—with heavy Dutch financial support. With the New Sweden Company, Sweden's leaders joined

the European effort to extract riches from the New World. They hoped to found their colony in the Delaware Valley of the Middle Atlantic seaboard, and gain riches from trading furs and growing tobacco.

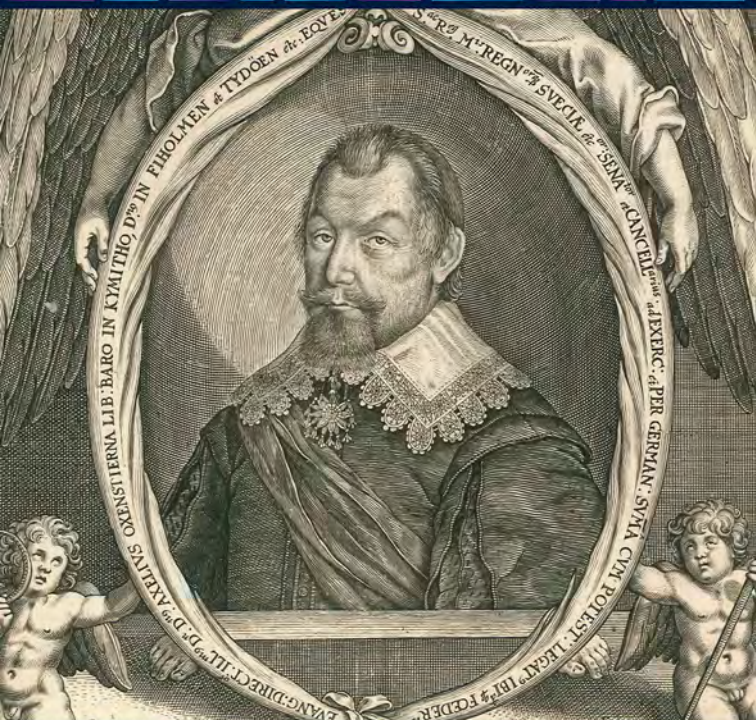


Queen Christina  
c. 1640  
Courtesy of the  
National Museum,  
Stockholm



King Gustavus Adolphus  
c. 1630  
Courtesy of the  
National Museum,  
Stockholm

Axel Oxenstierna  
c. 1620  
Courtesy of the  
National Museum,  
Stockholm





# New Sweden Begins

In 1637 the New Sweden Company, sent two ships, the *Kalmar Nyckel* and *Fågel Grip*, to North America.



Editor: Drawing of an Indian Family  
The illustration  
1635  
Drawing of the  
Dutch South Sea  
Company, Sweden

The ships carried about 60 sailors, soldiers and workman. Most of the sailors were Dutch, the soldiers and workers Swedish and Finnish. They were led by Peter Minuit, a Rhinelander whose experience as Governor of the Dutch West India Company's colony of New Netherland from 1626 to 1631 made him ideal for the job of Commander and first Governor of New Sweden. Minuit led the Swedes to the Delaware—or the South River as the Dutch called it—and began the first community of New Sweden at the site of present-day Wilmington, Delaware.

Minuit was familiar with the area. He knew that the land was suitable for tobacco farming and that it provided access to both the Lenape Indians, who lived along both banks of the river, and the Susquehannock Indians of the Susquehanna River valley. The location was crucial because it gave the Swedes access to furs from both Indian groups and furs were particularly prized in Europe. Minuit also knew that although the Dutch claimed all of the lower Delaware Valley, the West India Company's focus on Manhattan Island and the Hudson River meant that it lacked sufficient strength to mobilize and prevent the Swedish settlement. New Sweden settlers, it would seem, had a fighting chance.



Editor: Map of the Delaware Valley  
The illustration  
1631  
Drawing of the  
Dutch South Sea  
Company, Sweden



Signification of these marks,  
To the crosses hath bin discovered  
what beyond is by relation  
Kings howses 2 ————  
Ordinary howses 2 ————

# Settlement and Trade in the Colony

When the Swedish ships *Kalmar Nyckel* and *Fågel Grip* landed at present-day Wilmington in March 1638, the settlers built Fort Christina, a small blockhouse, to offer protection against attack by Indians or rival Europeans such as the Dutch and the English.

The Delaware Valley proved to have good soil on both sides of the river for growing tobacco and the Indians were eager to trade their furs and share their land in return for Dutch- and Swedish-made goods such as copper cooking pots, axe heads, clay smoking pipes, and brass wares that the Swedes brought.

The settlers established a peaceful relationship with the Lenape and Susquehannock because of the mandate from the Swedish Crown to cultivate American Indians as trading partners. New Sweden colonists were few compared to the large number of Dutch and English settled in what became New Jersey and New York. These peaceable relationships allowed the Swedish and Finnish settlers to spread out and start farms along the west bank of the Delaware.

After completing the fort and leaving a subordinate in charge, in June 1638 Minuit sailed to the Caribbean to trade a cargo of wine, brandy, stockings and shoes for tobacco. While visiting a Dutch merchantman in St. Christopher, he drowned when a hurricane struck the island, sinking the ship he was aboard. Peter Minuit's leadership and expertise were lost to the New Sweden Company. In 1641 the second governor of New Sweden, Peter Hollander Ridder, purchased the entire eastern side of the Delaware River from Raccoon Creek to Cape May. With this land purchase, the New Sweden Colony expanded its territory and its trading prospects.



**Flower of the Tobacco Plant**  
From a manuscript copy of  
under the direction of  
Leander Palmer (1815-1881)  
The Herbarium of the  
University of Michigan  
Library of the  
Natural History Society

**Sketch of Fort Christina**  
Per Understen  
1683  
Courtesy of the  
National Archives





# A New Governor Tries to Preserve the Colony

When Governor Johan Printz, or “Big Belly” as the Indians called him, arrived in New Sweden in 1643, he found a situation of great potential, but one lacking support from the home country.



Portrait of Johan Printz  
Governor of New Sweden  
1643-1655  
Source: Swedish National Archives  
Public Domain

Many settlers were sick and they had little food to eat. Additionally, Governor Printz, a soldier in the Swedish army, did not think Fort Christina was well positioned to control the river. He built new forts, Fort Elfsborg, New Korsholm, and New Göteborg.

The colony progressed and settlers produced tobacco and furs to send home, but Sweden sent few ships to provision it. Twelve expeditions set out for New Sweden, but only ten of them arrived. Those failed expeditions meant a shortage of basic supplies for the settlers and a lack of goods to trade with the Indians. The colonists were forced to depend upon Dutch and English traders to supply

their needs. After *Svanen*, the last ship stocked with adequate provisions, came from Sweden in 1648, the colony was largely on its own.

Through skillful political maneuvering Printz managed to maintain the colony's position, despite increasing hostility from the Dutch of New Netherland. But years of unanswered requests for men and supplies exasperated Governor Printz, and in 1653 he left the colony and returned to Sweden via New Amsterdam. Johan Rising succeeded Printz as Governor, but he would have only a brief period of leadership. In 1654, the *Örn* arrived with many new settlers, but few provisions. About 14 months after Johan Rising arrived to govern New Sweden, Peter Stuyvesant, New Netherland's governor, led a Dutch assault on the Swedes' colony and conquered it in September 1655. The *Mercurius*, the last ship from Sweden, made it to the fallen colony in 1656 and Governor Rising and some of his officers returned to Sweden. The majority of Swedish and Finnish settlers remained in the Delaware Valley and became citizens of New Netherland. Their land claims were left intact and many of the larger landholders served as leaders under Dutch rule.



Map of New Sweden and Dutch  
territories  
1655  
Source: Dutch National Archives  
Public Domain

Map of New Sweden  
1655  
Source: Dutch National Archives  
Public Domain



# Cultural Persistence of New Sweden

The Swedes and Finns numbered only a few hundred, but they were the majority European population in the Delaware Valley in the mid 17th century.

When the Dutch surrendered New Netherland to the English in 1664, New Sweden's settlers and their descendants remained in the valley. The English encouraged the Swedes and Finns to remain and recognized their claims to their farms. Relations with the Indians had remained peaceful so the farmers had spread along both sides of the Delaware River as far north as the falls at present Trenton, New Jersey.

By the end of the 17th century the Swedish and Finnish colonists and the Indians were pressured by an influx of mostly English Quakers on both sides of the river, who settled under the auspices of William Penn. The Indians moved westward or retreated to less desirable farming areas such as the New Jersey Pinelands. The Swedes and Finns looked to Sweden to sustain their cultural traditions, especially their religion. In 1693, they petitioned

Sweden's King Karl XI to send Lutheran priests from Sweden and Swedish hymnals and catechisms to help them keep their religion and language alive. In 1697, the first of a succession of Church of Sweden ministers arrived. They kept coming from Sweden until the last pastor from the Swedish Mission, Nils Collin, arrived in 1770.

Swedish artists Gustavus Hesselius (1682-1755) and Adolph-Ulrich Wertmüller (1751-1811) also came to live and work in the Delaware Valley. Hesselius painted the portraits of Lenape Chiefs Lapowinsa and Tishoochan. He was widely considered the leading painter of the Middle Colonies. In 1794 Wertmüller, a court painter in Sweden, painted General George Washington's portrait. These artists, with their Old World artistic techniques and sensibilities, helped establish a fine arts tradition in the New World.



Adolph-Ulrich Wertmüller (1751-1811)  
Oil on Canvas  
1794  
Gift of the  
Baltimore Lyric Opera  
Company of the  
Baltimore Swedish National Museum,  
Baltimore



Reconstruction of the  
Swedish Church, Burlington, NJ.  
The church was built in 1734.  
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# Adaptation, New Immigration and Colonial Revival

In the middle of the 18th century, descendants of New Sweden's settlers accommodated themselves to the sea of Englishness around them, and to the tens of thousands of German immigrants who came to Pennsylvania and the mid-Atlantic at this time.

Many Swedish descendents took English names, lost their Swedish language, and assimilated to the dominant culture. Other descendants moved westward as the United States expanded. Following the Civil War, the number of immigrants to the United States from all Scandinavian countries greatly increased. They were pushed by poor economic conditions in Europe and pulled by the opportunities the United States offered. Improvements in transportation made travel to the New World cheaper, easier, faster and safer.

By the early 20th century, immigrants from Sweden, and their sons and daughters, had made their mark on their adopted country. Economically, socially, culturally and politically, Swedes contributed to every facet of America's development. They also witnessed a great expansion of interest in the history of the United States. The early 20th century became an era of colonial revival when many ethnic communities began looking back to their early American roots.

The sentiment of "looking back" was promoted by national events such as the centennial celebration of 1876 in Philadelphia and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. On an individual level, it became common to explore one's cultural past through genealogy and by joining civic groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. Thanks to a Swedish immigrant named Amandus Johnson, Swedes and Finns who descended from the colony of New Sweden would soon have an opportunity to explore their own colonial history.



Amandus Johnson  
ca. 1910  
Courtesy of the  
National Society of Genealogists

Swedish Immigrant Family  
c. 1880  
Courtesy of the  
Historical Society of Pennsylvania



# Commemorating the Past

In 1907, Dr. Amandus Johnson met with Swedish cultural leaders in the United States to generate support for the creation of a national organization to commemorate the New Sweden Colony and promote its history.

Several informal meetings were held at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania with prominent individuals who shared Dr. Johnson's vision. On January 20, 1909, the first organizational meeting of the Swedish Colonial Society took place. King Gustav V of Sweden accepted the invitation to become the first High Patron of the Society. The Swedish Colonial Society is the oldest Swedish historical group in the United States and it continues to be an active leader in New Sweden education and history.



Official Seal of the  
Swedish Colonial Society  
Courtesy of the  
Swedish Colonial Society

By 1926 officers of the New Sweden Memorial Commission joined Johnson in founding the Chicago-based Swedish American Sesquicentennial Association. The Sesquicentennial Association conducted a nationwide fundraising campaign among Swedish-Americans to erect a permanent museum building on the grounds of the 1926 United States Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Amandus Johnson and his associates founded the American Swedish Historical Foundation along with a museum to give permanence and tangibility to the importance of the Swedish contribution to American life. Crown Prince Gustav Adolf of Sweden officiated at the ceremonies at which the building's cornerstone was laid. Named after John Morton, the Swedish-Finnish-American signer of the Declaration of Independence, the American Swedish Historical Museum is situated in South Philadelphia on land that was once given in a deed to colonist Sven Skute by Queen Christina.



The Sesqui-centennial Exposition  
Philadelphia  
Courtesy of the  
American Swedish Historical Museum

The American Swedish Historical Museum  
Philadelphia  
Photo: American Swedish Historical Museum  
Courtesy of the  
American Swedish Historical Museum





# Cultural Continuity

Today, the story of New Sweden lives on in historic sites, churches and organizations throughout the Delaware Valley.

From Northern Maryland to Trenton, New Jersey there are dozens of rich opportunities to trace the path of this unique colonial history. The spot where Peter Minuit came ashore in Wilmington, Delaware is memorialized by a monument designed by Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. The waterfront in Wilmington is the home port of the reconstruction of the flagship *Kalmar Nyckel*, which sails visitors up and down east coast waterways. The Queen Village neighborhood in Philadelphia, named for Sweden's Queen Christina, offers another bridge to the past. Gloria Dei Church and its historic cemetery are located here among the many restored 18th- and 19th-century houses.



Dancing around the May Pole  
Wilmington, Delaware  
Courtesy of the  
American Swedish Historical Museum,  
Philadelphia



Carl Milles Monument  
Designed by Giovanni B. Pannini  
New Sweden Historical  
Museum, Delaware  
2013  
Courtesy of Giovanni B. Pannini

The eight Old Swedes churches of New Sweden have endured centuries of change and yet maintain connections to their New Sweden heritage. Many host holiday celebrations with Swedish food, music and language and continue the tradition of interpreting New Sweden history through educational programs and events. Old Swedes Church in Wilmington has an annual Christmas celebration for Sankta Lucia. Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia holds a service in Swedish every month. The present Trinity Episcopal Church in Swedesboro, New Jersey, was founded as a Church of Sweden congregation in 1703. Swedesboro is centered in a diverse community known today—as it was during the early colonial era—for its rich farming tradition. Organizations such as the American Swedish Historical Museum, Swedish Colonial Society, New Sweden Centre, Old Swedes' Foundation, *Kalmar Nyckel* Foundation and many state and local history museums share in the mission of commemorating the past and educating future New Sweden discoverers.



Kalmar Nyckel  
Replica Sailing Ship  
Courtesy of the  
Kalmar Nyckel Foundation