In 1988 the people of the United States, Sweden, and Finland celebrated the 350th anniversary of the founding of the New Sweden colony on the banks of the Delaware River. The Swedish colony included parts of the present states of Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. New Sweden did not last very long as an independent outpost of Sweden: first settled in 1638, the Dutch took it over in 1655. Only nine years later, in 1664, the Dutch lost control of the area to the English. After 1776, when the Americans declared their independence from England, the lands once included in New Sweden became part of the United States.

Though New Sweden survived as a separate colony for only seventeen years, the Swedes and the Finns who inhabited the colony remained as residents of the Delaware River valley under Dutch, English, and American rule. The Swedish presence and the Swedish influence persisted long after New Sweden came to an end. Descendants of the original settlers still live in the area today.

This booklet tells the story of the New Sweden colony and of the Swedish-Finnish settlers who settled on the east bank of the Delaware River in what became, under English rule, New Jersey. This is the story of little-known people and their way of life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Swedes and Finns—along with the Dutch, English, Germans, Scots, and others—made New Jersey into a multi-ethnic colony. They began the process of bringing together people of many different nationality groups in a state whose citizens today represent over one hundred different ethnic communities.

Christina (1626-89) was Sweden's queen between 1632 and 1654.

**The Origins of New Sweden**

New Sweden had its beginnings across the Atlantic Ocean on the continent of Europe. In the early seventeenth century people in several European Countries wanted to establish colonies in the New World that Christopher Columbus discovered in 1492. Spain, the nation that sponsored Columbus' voyage, was the first European country to establish a colony in the Americas. The Spanish settled in South and Central America, and had outposts of settlement as far north as California and Florida. Portugal followed the Spanish example by establishing a colony in Brazil. England, France, Holland, and Sweden also created colonies in the New World during the seventeenth century.

The leaders and people of these countries saw the New World as a way to wealth. European explorers returned home from America with observations and samples of such New World treasures as precious metals, furs, and timber. The Europeans established colonies in the Americas to obtain these valuable resources. By 1638, when the New Sweden colony began, the English, French, and Dutch had small colonies of their own in North America.

New Sweden originated as an idea in the minds of a group of Dutchmen who were familiar with the Dutch colony of New Netherland in what is now New York and New Jersey. Peter Minuit, one of these Dutchmen, had been governor of New Netherland. Minuit and the others, aware that the land contained resources enough to make them...
In 1637 the Swedish government authorized the creation of a New Sweden Company. Organized by Dutch and Swedish businessmen, the company proposed to plant a colony on the banks of the Delaware River, an area claimed by the Dutch but then largely unoccupied by any European people. The company hoped to make a profit from obtaining furs by trade with the Indian inhabitants there and from tobacco grown by Swedish and Finnish settlers sent there for that purpose. At that time the Europeans valued furs as material for clothing and they used tobacco when smoking their pipes.

The Swedes and Other Europeans

At the time of the arrival of the Swedes the Dutch already obtained furs from the Indians along the Hudson River to the north. To the south, the English grew tobacco in the colonies of Virginia and Maryland on Chesapeake Bay. New Sweden's leaders hoped that they would benefit from combining these two activities. According to the plan, the New Sweden Company's owners would become rich and Sweden would join the other nations of Europe as a colonial power in the New World.

The Swedish dream, however, did not last for long. More powerful Dutch and English neighbors in the New World gained control of the fur trade with the Indians. Not enough Swedes came to the New Sweden colony to grow tobacco in profitable quantities. The mother country did not provide regular or adequate support to its colonists on the Delaware. To the other European colonial nations, the Swedish presence was a nuisance. So the Dutch conquered New Sweden in 1655.

New World colonization must be seen as part of the competition between the various nations of Europe. The fortunes of the parent states in Europe determined the fate of the New World colonies. Just as the Dutch took New Sweden, in 1664 the English conquered the Dutch colony of New Netherland. One hundred years later the English became the dominant European power in North America when they took over the French lands in Canada. Even though control of the land passed from one nation to another, the colonists of the several nations stayed on. The result in North America was a land of many different people.

The New Sweden Colony

By the early seventeenth century Sweden emerged as a major power on the Baltic Sea in northern Europe. The Finns—the people of modern Finland—came under the control of Sweden. When the Swedes colonized their New World colony, the colonists included Finns as well as Swedes. The Finns, a people of the forest, lived in woodlands and skillfully worked with wood for many centuries. Finnish pioneers brought the log cabin to America. In the Delaware River valley, a place of extensive forests, the Finns' woodland background proved very useful and helpful to the Swedish colony.

WOODCUTTING

Thomas Paschall, who lived near Scandinavian settlers in Pennsylvania, commented in 1683 on the Swedes' and Finns' skill at working with wood:

"As for the Swedes, they use but little Iron in Building, for they will build, and hardly use any other tool but an Ax; They will cut down a Tree, and cut him off when down, sooner than two men can saw him, and rend him into planks or what they please; only with an Ax and Wooden wedges [hammered into the wood to split it]."

When the Swedes first arrived in the Delaware River valley in 1638 the Lenape Indians inhabited both sides of the river. On the west side, farther inland along the Susquehanna River, also lived the Susquehannock Indians. Both groups of native Americans lived by hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming. These Indians greatly outnumbered the colonists of New Sweden, but the Swedes lived in peace with the native inhabitants. The Dutch had a much different experience with their Indian neighbors: the Indians destroyed a Dutch settlement on Delaware Bay (in the present state of Delaware) earlier in the 1630s. The Dutch also had trouble with the Indians in their settlements in what is today New York and northern New Jersey. The Indians on the Delaware and Susquehanna rivers did not see the small Swedish colony as a threat; so the Swedes and the Indians usually lived together in peace.

The Swedes bought the land on which they settled from the Indian residents and maintained trade relations with them to obtain furs. The first ships carrying Swedish colonists arrived in New Sweden in March 1638. The Swedes' first settlement—named Fort Christina after Sweden's Queen Christina—was at today's Wilmington.
Delaware. Ships continued to bring more Swedish and Finnish colonists to the Delaware River in the following years. Swedish settlement spread from Fort Christina to other locations in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and eventually New Jersey. Most of the Swedish and Finnish settlers in New Jersey, however, did not come there until after the New Sweden colony fell to the Dutch and the English.

An official list of the land belonging to the New Sweden Company in 1653, just two years before the colony came to an end, noted the absence of Swedish-Finnish settlement in New Jersey: "On the east bank of the Delaware from Cape Henlopen [a mistake; the writer probably meant Cape May] to Fort Elfsborg [near present Salem, New Jersey] uninhabited land and from Fort Elfsborg to the Verkerte Kill at Ermewa, . . . uninhabited land." This report also said that some land had been cleared at Fort Elfsborg and that it had been "cultivated by the English a short time ago." Clearly, then, except for a short-lived settlement of Englishmen from Connecticut, the New Jersey side of the Delaware River was without settlement by Swedes before the fall of New Sweden.

In 1643 Johan Printz, the governor of New Sweden, ordered the construction of a fort on the eastern shore of the Delaware River. Called Fort Elfsborg, this first Swedish habitation in New Jersey stood watch over the small band of Englishmen who had recently settled there from Connecticut. The Swedish governor also built the fort to stop Dutch ships from sailing up the Delaware River. Fort Elfsborg, erected near present-day Salem, New Jersey, defended it by 1650. Its early abandonment resulted, in part, from the mosquitoes that pestered and plagued the fort's defenders. Fort Elfsborg gained the nickname "Fort Mosquito" for this reason. The construction of a fort by the Dutch at modern New Castle, Delaware, also made Fort Elfsborg less effective as a defense against the Dutch.

Though the New Jersey side of the Delaware had few or no Swedes and Finns before 1655, New Sweden's governors Peter Ridder and Johan Printz purchased land there from the Indians. The Swedes bought all the land between modern Cape May (named after Dutch sea captain and explorer Cornelius Mey) and Trenton (named for a later English resident, William Trent). From New Jersey the Swedes obtained some tobacco grown by the English settlers near the fort, furs, and wood.

When New Sweden came to an end in 1655 the entire colony had no more than 500 Swedish and Finnish inhabitants. Few Swedes or Finns in Europe wanted to come across the Atlantic Ocean to live in the New World wilderness. Those who came brought with them their language, their Swedish Lutheran religion, their agricultural and wood-working skills, and other Old World customs. European colonists found a new way of living in the New World, but they tried to maintain their comfortable and familiar Old World traditions. They did not think of themselves as a new and different people called Americans; they were, instead, simply Swedes and Finns who had transplanted themselves to a new land across the ocean. Over time, with the passing of the years and the coming into contact with other European nationalities, this changed. The changes, however, came slowly and sometimes regretfully.

Life was not easy in New Sweden. Much hard work had to be done. Homes and forts had to be built. Lands had to be cleared of trees for farming. Relations with the Indians and other European neighbors had to be conducted. Language, religion, and education had to be maintained. Accidents and illnesses had to be treated. Survival in the New World, thousands of miles away from the homeland in Europe, was a constant struggle.

1638: Swedes and Finns come to the Delaware Valley

1640-1641: Swedes buy land in New Jersey from Indians

FORT ELFSBORG

The Dutchman Adrian van der Donck described the purpose of Fort Elfsborg in the following passage:

"The Swedish governor ... has built a fort called Elsinborg [a variation of the name Elfsborg; there is an Elsinboro Township in Salem County today]. There he holds a high hand over each and all, even over the vessels of our Trading Company [the Dutch West India Company which controlled the Dutch colony of New Netherland], and all those who sail up into the South River, compelling them to strike their flags, without exception. He sends two men on board to inquire where they come from."

Peter Lindeström, a Swedish engineer, made this report of his visit to Fort Elfsborg on May 20, 1654:

"We arrived before Fort Elfsborg, landed, finding the fort with the houses and ramparts totally in ruins. This fort had been abandoned on account of the mosquitoes, because there was such an immense number of them that they almost ate the people up there. In the daytime they had to fight continually with them so that they could not see with their eyes, and in the night they could neither sleep nor rest. The people were so swollen they appeared as if affected with a horrible disease."

No wonder that the Swedes abandoned this fort after a few years of occupation.
Swedish Settlers in New Jersey

In the middle of the eighteenth century, over one hundred years after the New Sweden colony began, a traveler from Sweden passed through the Delaware River region of Swedish settlement. Peter Kalm, a naturalist, came to observe and study nature in the New World. The plant known today as the laurel has a special scientific name: called *Kalmia Latifolia*, it is named after Peter Kalm. This scientist had curiosity not only about wild plants and animals, but also about the descendants of the original Swedish and Finnish settlers. He wanted to know how they lived and how much they had changed over the years since their arrival.

Kalm described the Swedish-Finnish residents of southern New Jersey in 1750 as living not close together in towns but rather on scattered, isolated farms. "The farms are most of them single, and you seldom meet with even two together," he wrote, "therefore there are but few villages. Each farm has its own corn-fields, its woods, its pastures and meadows." Kalm noted that "now and then you see a single farm, and a little corn-field round it."

A half century earlier, about the year 1700, another observer noted that "nearly half of them [the Swedish settlers on the west side of the Delaware River] moved to the other side, up and down, hither and thither, in what is called West Jersey." The words are those of Andreas Rudman, a Swedish Lutheran minister in Pennsylvania, who added that the New Jersey Swedes were relatively isolated from their countrymen across the river, especially during the winter. "During the winter," Rudman said, "only a few of these people are able to come to church... The people who live on the other side cannot come over without being in gravest peril from the floating ice which follows ebb and flood and sometimes breaks large boats right in two."

A robe worn by a Swedish Lutheran priest, 1761.

1643: Johan Printz arrives as governor of New Sweden

The Swedish Lutheran Church

The Swedish and Finnish farmers in New Jersey tried to solve the problem of going to church by building their own churches. Just after Rudman wrote of the difficulties of traveling to church on the Pennsylvania side, the Swedes built two churches in New Jersey, one at Penns Neck in Salem County and another at Raccoon, now Swedesboro, in nearby Gloucester County. These two Swedish Lutheran churches were less than fifteen miles apart, but they were erected because, as Rudman explained, "the weather and the roads are altogether different from those in Sweden." He probably meant that in America the weather was wetter than in Sweden and that the rains turned roads into rivers of mud. Travel, then, even over a short distance, was difficult. Each church served its nearby neighbors in this land of scattered settlement.

A view of Swedesboro (originally known as Raccoon) and its church in the 1840s.

Swedish settlers found it difficult to obtain the services of trained Lutheran ministers for their churches. These church officials had to come from Sweden or from the Swedish Lutheran churches in more heavily settled Delaware and Pennsylvania. The shortage of ministers in this wilderness caused the Swedes to do without the services of ministers for years at a time. The Swedes shared this problem with neighboring non-Swedish colonists: Englishmen of the Anglican faith (these were members of the Church of England) faced a shortage of ministers, too. Sometimes people of different nationalities and religious faiths had to share ministers. English Anglicans living at Colestown in Gloucester County described this sharing of clergymen in a document written in 1728. It read: "This is to certify that the Revd. [Reverend] Mr. Lind- man missionary to the Swedish Congregation at Wicacoe [now Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], has preached to our Congregation here in Jersey, four Sermons within this Year, namely 1726, the 18th day of August, the 19th day of September, the 9th day of October and the Eleventh day of November."

The Swedes and Their Neighbors

Sometimes the Swedes and Finns cooperated in other ways with their English and German neighbors in New Jersey. They no doubt helped each other in clearing land and farming. They traded or exchanged goods with each other. They sometimes worshipped together. The Swedish Lutheran church at Raccoon, for example, had some English members. In 1704 a Swedish minister visited some Swedes who lived near the New Jersey shore at Egg Harbor. He held a religious service in one of their homes: "thither gathered all the Swedes," wrote the Reverend Andreas Sandel, "and as there were some English also present, I made some remarks in their language." Six years later, this same clergyman returned to Egg Harbor, where he preached two sermons, one in Swedish and one in English.
Over the years the Swedes and Finns intermarried with their non-Scandinavian neighbors. The Swedish-born Moravian minister Abraham Reincke described the results of intermarriage in 1745: "I found in this country scarcely one genuine Swede left, the most of them are either in part or in whole on one side or other descended from English or Dutch parents, some of them have had a Dutch, German or English father, others a Swedish mother, and others a Dutch or English mother and a Swedish father. Many of them can just recollect that their grandfathers or mothers were Swedish. In general there is such confusion in their lineage, that they themselves can't tell, if they spring from English or Dutch, Swedish or German parents."

The relations between the Swedes and their foreign neighbors were not always cooperative or peaceful when it came to matters involving religion. Conflict resulted, in part, from a shortage of Swedish Lutheran ministers for the Swedish-Finnish congregations. In 1743, for example, some of the Swedish members of the Raccoon church invited Paul Daniel Bryzelius, a missionary of the Moravian church (a Protestant church created in Germany and based in America at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), to preach to them. Other Swedish members of the congregation opposed Bryzelius's preaching in their church. To them, Bryzelius threatened the true faith and teachings of the Swedish Lutheran Church. The conflict between the two sides became so heated—with lots of yelling and one group even locking the other out of the church—that the Gloucester County Court had to intervene. The court forbade Bryzelius from preaching in the Swedes' church at Raccoon. The matter did not end here, however, for Bryzelius and other Moravians continued to serve various Swedes and Finns in Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland counties.

The church leaders also disliked the intermarriage of American Swedes with non-Swedes. They noted with unhappiness that gradual disappearance of the Swedish language. "The English are evidently swelling up the people," complained Abraham Reincke in 1745, "and the Swedish language is so corrupted that if I did not know the English, it would be impossible to understand the language of my dear Sweden." Based on the evidence provided by the Swedish minister at Raccoon and Penns Neck, by 1786 only one-third of those with Swedish names could understand the Swedish language. For the Penns Neck church alone, only 8 percent of the members understood Swedish and less than 7 percent spoke Swedish.

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A SWEDISH FAMILY

Early Swedish families tended to be larger than modern families. Andreas Rudman, a Swedish Lutheran minister in Philadelphia, described one of the New Jersey families that was part of his congregation. He gave the names and dates of birth of the children of Peter Matson and his wife, Catharine Rambo, who were married on February 16, 1674. Their children were:

- Eliza—born February 7, 1678
- Catharine—born December 29, 1679
- Maria—born May 11, 1682
- Peter—born May 27, 1685
- Matthias—born August 12, 1688
- John—born June 14, 1694
- Jacob—born May 25, 1697

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17th-century Swedish wooden plate and bowl with ceramic cup.

Some of the colonists agreed with the ministers' point of view, but others saw change as necessary for survival. To live in the New World required a certain acceptance of change. When a Swedish Lutheran minister left the Raccoon church to become pastor at the Christina church in Delaware, some of the Raccoon Swedes felt deserted and abandoned. In disgust, they resolved "that they would never more have anything to do with any Swedish Pastor." It is understandable then, that some Swedes and Finns found spiritual assistance and church fellowship by joining Anglican, Moravian, and other congregations.

Moravian ministers sometimes preached to their Swedish followers in their native language. In 1735 Moravian missionary Ernest Gambold made a visit to the Maurice River in Cumberland County where a number of Swedes had settled. Gambold recorded in his diary that "we had a few of our Friends together to whom Br. Abm. Reineke [Brother Abraham Reineke, a fellow Moravian missionary] preached a very hearty discourse in Swenska [Swedish]."

Some Swedes tried hard to uphold Swedish traditions in a place so far away from the mother country. The Raccoon church records reveal that in 1765 "did the Revd. John Ab: [Abraham] Lidenius keep Swede and English School in Repapa [Repauo, a Swedish settlement near Swedesboro] and the children were greatly profited by his teaching especially in the Swede Tongue."
By the end of the eighteenth century, Swedish culture, traditions, and institutions had almost disappeared in southern New Jersey. Nicholas Collin, the last Swedish Lutheran minister in colonial and revolutionary New Jersey, remarked that at Penns Neck "the English congregation is much larger than the Swedish" and that he held Swedish services only once every third Sunday. At Racoon he observed that "both Swedish and English sermons are often preached on the same day." In 1772 Collin wrote that he "held Swedish funeral service, which is very rare." Just after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) he noted that a Swedish service, which is very rare. "Just after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) he noted that a Swedish family left the Swedish Lutheran church and joined the Moravians; he also pointed to a Swedish woman who married an Englishman and became a Methodist. Both of the Swedish Lutheran churches at Racoon and Penns Neck became Episcopalian churches by the end of the century.

If the Swedes were a minority among the residents of South Jersey, the Finns were an even smaller minority. Only a few references exist to the Finns as an ethnic group separate and distinct from the Swedes. A settlement of Finns once existed in New Jersey. In 1676, soon after the first English Quakers came to the colony and settled at Salem, English land records referred to people living at "ffynne Town Hook," located northwest of a place called "Finns Town." A 1688 record noted a strange event at Finn's Point—when questioned about giving birth to a child, a woman resident replied that "she had a young Youdas, which is by interpretacon [interpretation or translation] a divil in finns language."

Swedes and Finns used iron axes for cutting wood.

**Life Among the Swedes and Finns**

Finns and Swedes alike found ways to make a living from the land on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. Although most observers reported that the soils were less fertile than on the Pennsylvania side of the river, nevertheless the settlers planted, raised, and harvested various grains and vegetables for food. They had orchards of fruit trees and turned some of the fruit into cider. Swedish-Finnish farmers raised livestock, particularly cattle and hogs. These animals ran free and obtained food—such as grasses and acorns—for themselves in the meadows and forests. In comparison to their English neighbors, the Swedes and Finns in southern New Jersey raised many fewer sheep.

Swedes and Finns made the most of the forests of conifers, especially cedar, and hardwoods. They used the wood from these trees for fuel in their fireplaces and as building materials for their houses, barns, and other buildings. They made the earliest snake or worm rail fences found in America. Some used wood to make bowls and spoons for kitchen cooking. They operated sawmills to cut trees into boards. The Swedish-Finnish settlers shipped wood and wood products—such as boards, charcoal, and tar—to market in Philadelphia. They built and owned wooden boats to carry these and other goods on South Jersey's many waterways. Some experts believe that the Delaware River's famous cargocarrying Durham boats and the keelboats on western rivers developed out of Swedish boat types. Working with wood was an important part of the lives of early Swedes and Finns.

Other activities included hunting and trapping wildlife. The settlers hunted deer, bear, geese, and other animals. In Salem County they caught muskrats: "The skin is sold," said Peter Kalm, "and this is an inducement to catch the animal... The skins are chiefly used by hatters... The muskrats are commonly caught in traps, with apples as bait." When the Englishman Gabriel Thomas surveyed southern New Jersey in 1698 and discussed the Maurice River, he noted that there "the Swedes use to kill the Geese in great numbers, for their Feathers only, leaving their Carcases behind." Perhaps these feathers provided warmth when stuffed into cases to make bedding. The Swedes and Finns made good use of the natural resources of their New World home.

More than 350 years separate us from the Swedes and Finns who first set foot in America. Their descendants still live in southern New Jersey. Several places today bear names that serve as reminders of the early Scandinavian presence in the state. The Swedish settlement of Raccoon in Gloucester County is now Swedesboro. Running inland from the Atlantic coast, the Mullica River carries the name of Eric Mullica, an early Swedish or perhaps Finnish settler; the river is part of the boundary between today's Atlantic and Burlington counties. Gloucester County also contains a town called Mullica Hill, named after the members of Eric Mullica's family who settled there. Finn's Point, today a national cemetery, stands on the Delaware River in Salem County.