

RELATION OF THE SURRENDER OF NEW SWEDEN, BY GOVERNOR JOHAN CLASON RISING, 1655

Relation concerning the unexpected and hostile Attack on the Swedish Colony in Nova Suecia, by the Dutch, under the Command of P. Stuyvesant, Governor of the New Netherlands, wherefore the Faithful Subjects of His Royal Majesty of Sweden,¹ who have endured such Violence, do most humbly appeal to His Royal Majesty's Most Gracious Shelter and Protection, to the Intent that they may be sustained and indemnified for the Wrongs and Injuries which they have suffered.

IN the year 1655, on the 30th day of August, the Dutch from the North River, where Manhattan or New Amsterdam is situated, with seven ships or vessels, under command of the said P. Stuyvesant, having on board 600 or 700 men, arrived in the South River, where N[ova] Suecia lieth, and anchored before the fortress of Elfsborg, which then lay in ruins; the next day, they passed Fort Casimir, and bringing to a little above, they landed, and immediately summoned Swen Skütche, who was in command, to surrender the fort, enforcing their summons both with menaces and persuasion; and proceeded to throw up some works. And although some time before this, when we learned from the savages that the Dutch were about to assail us, we had caused Fort Casimir to be supplied with men and munitions to the best of our ability, and had drawn up a resolution in writing to defend the fort in case the Dutch should attack it, ordering Captain Schütche, the commandant, to send on board their ships, when they approached, and demand of them whether they came as friends, and in any case

¹ King Charles X. Gustavus, who had succeeded Queen Christina upon the latter's abdication in 1654.

to warn them not to run by the said fort, upon pain of being fired upon, (which in such case they could not reckon an act of hostility); but if they were minded to treat with us as friends concerning our territory and boundaries, he should compliment them with a Swedish national salute, and assure them that we were well disposed to a fast friendship; nevertheless, Captain Swen Schüte not only suffered the Dutch ships to pass the fort without remonstrance or firing a gun, whereby they gained the command both of the fort and of the whole river, and cut off the communication between the forts, by posting troops between them, as high up as Christina Kill, but also surrendered the fort to Stüvesant by a disadvantageous capitulation, in which he forgot to stipulate a place to which he, with his people and effects, might retire; he also subscribed the capitulation, not in the fort or in any indifferent place, but on board a Dutch ship. So Stüvesant detained the people, and transported most of them to Manahatans, whereby we were greatly reduced in strength and left destitute, and not even knowing as yet that Fort Casimir had so suddenly fallen into the enemy's hands, we had sent thither in the mean time, September 1, nine or ten of our best freemen to strengthen the garrison. This detachment, when they had crossed Christina Kill betimes in the morning, found the Dutch posted there, who immediately attacked them, fifty or sixty men strong, and summoned them to surrender; but they put themselves in posture of defence, and after a skirmish with the Dutch, were all taken prisoners, except two, who retreated to the boat, the Dutch firing many shots after them, but without hitting. Upon this we fired upon the Dutch from the sconce, with a gun, whereupon they retired into the woods, and afterwards treated harshly and cruelly such of our people as fell into their hands.

The same day the factor Hendr. Elzvii¹ was sent down from Fort Christina to Stüvesant to obtain an explanation of his arrival and intention, and to dissuade him from further hostilities, as we could not be persuaded that he seriously purposed to disturb us in the lawful dominions of His Royal Majesty and our principals. But as Stüvesant had so cheaply obtained possession of Fort Casimir, whither we before had

¹ Hendrick Elswick.

sent our best soldiers, thus depriving ourselves in a great measure both of men and munitions, he would give Elzvii no satisfaction, but claimed the whole river and all our territory, and had well nigh detained Elzvii as a spy. When we learned this we collected all the people we could for the defence of Fort Christina, and labored with all our might, by night and by day, on ramparts and gabions. The next day, being September 2, the Dutch shewed themselves in considerable strength on the upper bank of Christina Kill, but seemed to undertake nothing special. On the morning of the 3d, they hoisted a flag on our shallop, which lay drawn up on the beach, and appeared to be about establishing themselves in a house. We therefore sent over Lieutenant Swen Höök,¹ with a drummer, to find out what they purposed, for what cause they posted themselves there, and for what we should hold them. When he had nearly crossed the creek, he asked them from the boat, whether he might freely go to them? They answered yes; and whether, after discharging his commission, he might freely return? to which also they answered yes, as we could all hear in Fort Christina, and can bear witness accordingly. So the drummer rowed the boat to the shore, without beat of drum, because the lieutenant already had their parole, and knowing no cause of hostility, he supposed this ceremony to be unnecessary. They then both went on shore, and an officer met them, and conducted them some distance to a house, where the enemy had already taken up a position. The Dutch then sent our lieutenant down to Stüvesant, pretending that he was a spy, and Stüvesant arrested him and threw him into the ship's hold, but Captain Fridr. König detained the drummer and his drum in his own custody, and thus they treated our messengers, contrary to the laws and customs of all civilized nations.

On the night of the 4th they had planted gabions about the house on the opposite bank of Christina Kill, above [the fort], and afterwards threw up a battery under cover of them, and entrenched themselves there. Some of our people inter-

¹ Sven Höök came over from Sweden in the ship *Høj*, in 1653, and served as lieutenant in the colony. After the Dutch conquest he returned to Sweden and entered the navy, in 1658 commanding the vessel *Pöstrytlarens*. Amandus Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, pp. 596, et seq., 681.

puted all this as indicating the purpose of the Dutch to be to claim and hold all our territory up to the creek, and to construct a fort there, not yet believing that they would, in contempt of public peace, and without any known cause, commence hostilities against us, until they had set up some claim, or promulgated some protest against us, whereas up to this time we had received from them neither message nor letter assigning any manner of cause or complaint.

On the 5th, the Dutch ships went up to Third Hook¹ where they landed their men, who then passed over to Timber Island,² and thence over the great falls³ and so invested Fort Christina on all sides. They brought their ships into the mouth of the creek, and planted their great guns on the western side of the fort, and when we burnt a little powder in a couple of pieces to scale them, they fired several shots over our heads from Timber Island, where they had also taken post in a house, and announced to us, that they had taken up a position on the west side, by regular volleys. We continued to prepare ourselves to make the best defence which our strength would allow, if we should be attacked, for we were not yet satisfied what the Dutch intended; but in a short time an Indian came in to us with a letter from Stüvesant, in which he arrogantly demanded the surrender of the whole river, and required me and all the Swedes either to evacuate the country, or to remain there under Dutch protection, threatening with the consequences in case of refusal. Hereto I answered briefly, by letter, that, since so strange a demand was sent by him to me, I would reply by special messengers, and sent him my answer by the same Indian. We then held a general council of war, as to what should be done, if the Dutch assaulted us by storm or battery; and it was determined that we should in any case maintain the defensive, and make the best resistance we could, but should not commence or provoke hostilities, on account of our weakness and want of supplies; that we should wait until they fired upon us, or began to storm the works, and then de-

¹ An elevated piece of firm land on the north side of Brandywine Creek, below the railroad bridge in Wilmington, Delaware.

² Timber Island, on the north-east side of the Brandywine Creek, near Fort Christina.

³ Of Brandywine Creek, at present Wilmington, Delaware.

fend ourselves as long as we could, and leave the consequences to be redressed in the future by our gracious superiors.

The Dutch now began to encroach upon us more and more every day. They killed our cattle, goats, swine and poultry, broke open houses, pillaged the people outside the scone of their property, and higher up the river they plundered many, and stripped them to the skin. At Gothenburg they robbed Mr. Papegoija's wife of all she had, with many others, who had collected their property together in the Hall there. They daily continued to advance their approaches to Fort Christina, (which was a small and feeble work, and lay upon low ground, and could be commanded from the surrounding heights), and threw up two batteries besides those on the opposite bank and on Timber Island, and hoisted their flags on all of them, as well as on our ship in Fish Creek,⁴ all which hostile acts, injuries, and insults we were, to our great mortification, compelled to witness and suffer, being unable to resist them, by reason of our want of men and of powder, whereof our supply scarcely sufficed for a single round for our guns. Notwithstanding all this, we still trusted that they would at length be persuaded to hear reason, and accordingly on the 7th we sent messengers down to Stüvesant at Fort Casimir, with a written commission, whereby we sought to dissuade him from further hostilities, protesting against his invasion and disturbance of our proper territory without cause assigned, or declaration denying, as far as they could, our right of possession in the river; also suggesting to him the displeasure of our respective sovereigns, and other consequences of great moment which would ensue; that we were determined to defend our rights to the utmost of our strength, and that he must answer for all consequences, and finally required him to cease hostilities, and to retire with his people from Fort Christina. But all this availed nothing with him, and on the contrary he persisted in his claim to the whole river, and would listen to no terms of accommodation, declaring that such were his orders, and that those who had given them might answer for the consequences. He then wrote me a letter on the 9th, in which he anticipates all terms of accommodation, will not allow that we have any rights to the said river, seeks to refute our argu-

⁴ Now Brandywine Creek, near the site of Fort Christina.

ments, and styles our possession a usurpation, and so interprets every point to his own advantage.

As we still determined to maintain our own defence, and abide the result, the enemy continued to carry on their approaches day and night, and with our little force of about thirty men we could make no sorties, or prevent him from gaining positions from which he could command the sconce so completely, that there was not a spot on the ramparts where a man could stand in security, and as he now daily advanced his works, and summoned us to capitulate, with threats of giving no quarter, our men proposed to us to go out and try to bring Stüvesant to reason, both on account of our want of supplies, and the advanced condition of the enemy's works, and especially because our provisions were scanty and would soon be exhausted. Besides, our few and hastily collected people were getting worn out, partly sick, and partly ill disposed, and some had deserted.—From these considerations, and the fear of a mutiny, it was agreed, that I and Elzvii should go out the next day and hold a parley with Stüvesant, and endeavor to restrain him from forcible measures, and to bring him to reason. We accordingly went out for this purpose on the 13th, and Stüvesant and Nicatius de Sylle¹ met us between the sconce and their most advanced work. We solemnly protested against his procedure and his hostile conduct, and replied verbally to his last mentioned letter, confirmed our title with the best arguments we could, and held a long discussion with them; but all this produced no impression upon them, and they maintained their first ground, and insisted upon the surrender of Fort Christina and the whole river; to which we replied that we would defend ourselves to the last and would await them, clearly showing them that they were unjustly invading our possessions, and declaring that we would appeal to our government to redress our wrongs, and protect our rights thus forcibly trencched upon,

¹ Nicatius de Sille (b. 1610), a member of the council of New Netherland, ranking next to Stuyvesant in the expedition, was a native of Arnheim, in the eastern part of the Netherlands, his father being a native of Namur, in Belgium. He had served as advocate to the court of Holland, and as captain in the forces of the States General. He came to New Netherlands in 1653 and was actively concerned in the governmental affairs of the colony until 1660.

and so we went back to the sconce, exhorted our men to a manly defence, and encouraged them as well as we were able.

As soon as the Dutch had nearly completed their works, they brought the guns of all their batteries to bear upon us, and on the 14th instant, formally summoned Fort Christina, with harsh menaces, by a drummer and a messenger, to capitulate within twenty-four hours. We then assembled a general council of the whole garrison, and it was found to be their unanimous opinion, that inasmuch as we had not sufficient strength for our defence, (the Dutch having completed their works against the sconce, and neither the sconce nor the garrison being able to stand an assault), and were in want both of powder and other munitions, and had no hope of relief, therefore they were all of opinion, that we should make the best terms we could obtain with the Dutch; all which may be seen by the documents. So the next day we announced to the enemy, that we would consider their summons within the time prescribed, and being now reduced, by our want of supplies and weak condition, to yield to the violence practised upon us, we concluded a capitulation with Stüvesant, as may be found by the original among the documents, and surrendered Fort Christina to him on the 15th instant, stipulating that the guns and all the effects belonging to the crown or the Company should be restored by the Dutch, according to the inventory, upon demand, and reserving the restitution of our sovereign's rights in time and manner fitting; providing also, that the Dutch should freely transport to Sweden both us, and as many Swedes as chose to accompany us, for we held it better that the people should be restored to their Fatherland's service than to leave them there in misery, without the necessaries of life, in which case they would have entered the service of the Dutch or English, and never again advantaged their country.