

# The *SWEDES* in New Jersey

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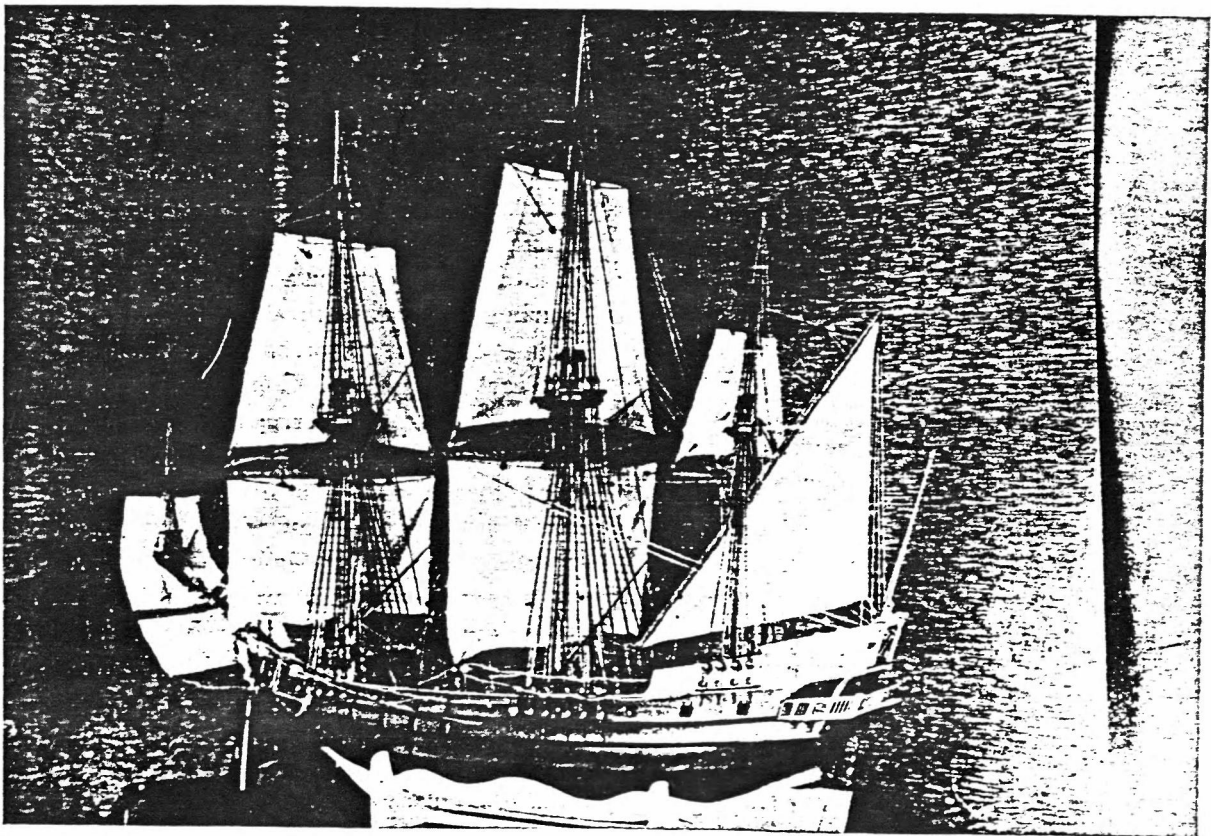
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## *The Founding of New Sweden*

MARSHES and woodlands along the shores were showing the first faint coloring of Spring as two little vessels came to anchor in the lower reaches of the Delaware River. From their mastheads flew proudly the royal cross of Sweden, and from their decks crews and passengers alike were anxiously scanning the shore line for a trace of Indians or

ferocious beasts. Many a fabulous tale of this new world had they heard by their firesides during the cold and stormy winters along the Swedish and Norwegian fjords—tales of the uncivilized inhabitants, of their clothes made from the skins of animals, of their strange customs, of their reverence for white men and of great wealth that might be amassed in trade with the child-like savages.



"THE SWEDISH MAYFLOWER"

(Model of the Kalmar Nyckel)

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### Pioneers Reach Delaware River

It was in the Spring of 1638. Only 18 years earlier the Pilgrims had landed at Plymouth Rock. Now the Swedish Mayflower, the good ship *Kalmar Nyckel* (Key of Kalmar), with her companion tender, the *Fogel Grip* (Bird Griffon), sailed up the Delaware River in charge of Peter Minuit, the famous Dutch mariner who had founded the colony of New Netherlands on the Hudson in 1625 for the Dutch West India Company. Now, in the service of the crown of Sweden, he was bringing a company of traders and soldiers to establish a settlement.

In addition to the Swedish traders and soldiers, the ship carried six passengers who were to join the New Netherlands settlement. The cargo consisted of a wide variety of goods—hatchets, axes, knives and hoes, that would be of use in building homes in the wilderness, as well as cloth, chains, rings and other ornaments to be used in trading with the Indians.

### Land Bought from Indians

At Minquas Kill, now Christina Creek, five sachems appointed by the assembled tribes, on March 28 (old style calendar), 1638, sold as much "of the land on all parts and places of the river and on both sides as Minuit requested." Minuit had been ordered by the Swedish crown to be fair in all his dealings with the Indians; and so, for what they considered value received, the natives transferred all the land extending along the creek, as far north as the Schuylkill River and stretching westward indefinitely.

The little company of traders and soldiers landed on "The Rocks" near where Wilmington, Delaware, now stands. There, under the guarding cannon of their vessels, they set up their first settlement, surrounded it by a palisade against any surprise visits by an Indian war party, and called it Fort Christina, in honor of the young queen of their home country.

### Trading Begins: Settlements Made

Soon the Swedes extended their trading and settlement to the opposite bank of the Delaware. With them went their families. Along the eastern bank and following its many tributaries inland, their scattered settlements sprang up until by 1750 perhaps

the greater part of the population of New Sweden became established on the Jersey side of the Delaware River.

It had taken more than 600 years for the tales of Leif Ericson to bear fruit. Before ever anyone had dreamed that the world was anything but a flat disk the daring Vikings had ventured far out on the dark ocean in their double-prowed, oared ships and had landed on the American mainland. The profusion of wild grapes that covered the trees along the shores so impressed Ericson that he called it Vinland.

For centuries the Norsemen had been adventurers, roaming far and wide in search of new territory. Their seafaring prowess had been hailed as early as 98 A. D. by Tacitus, the Roman geographer. He spoke of the "Suiones" (Swedes) as a powerful people, strong in their possession of weapons and ships. Early medieval histories echo with the exploits of the mighty men of the North, who came down again and again in their fast vessels from the strongholds of their inaccessible peninsula to ransack the coasts of France, Spain and even North Africa.

### The Power of Sweden

When Minuit set out for the Delaware in 1637 Sweden had become one of the most powerful nations of Europe. Her rulers had been able to forge Sweden into one Scandinavian union with the other Baltic countries—Finland, Estland, Latvia (at that time called Ingermanland, Estland and Livland). During the sixteenth century the kings of the House of Vasa had rebuilt the whole nation from its very foundations. Copper and iron mined in the rocky interior was carried to foreign lands to exchange for gold, silver, silks, spices and valuable furs, but the supplies at home grew faster than they could be carried away to be exchanged or sold. Storehouses began to bulge with reserve stocks of refined ore. Surpluses were stored in friendly foreign countries. Sweden was powerful among the nations of the world, and rich in materials but her supply of ready cash was deplorably low.

Under Gustavus II, who came to the throne in 1611, the Riksdag, the Swedish parliament, that had been established in 1435, was enlarged to admit the peasantry. The privileges of the nobility were curtailed and even peasant boys could hold crown offices or become officers in the army. Gustavus

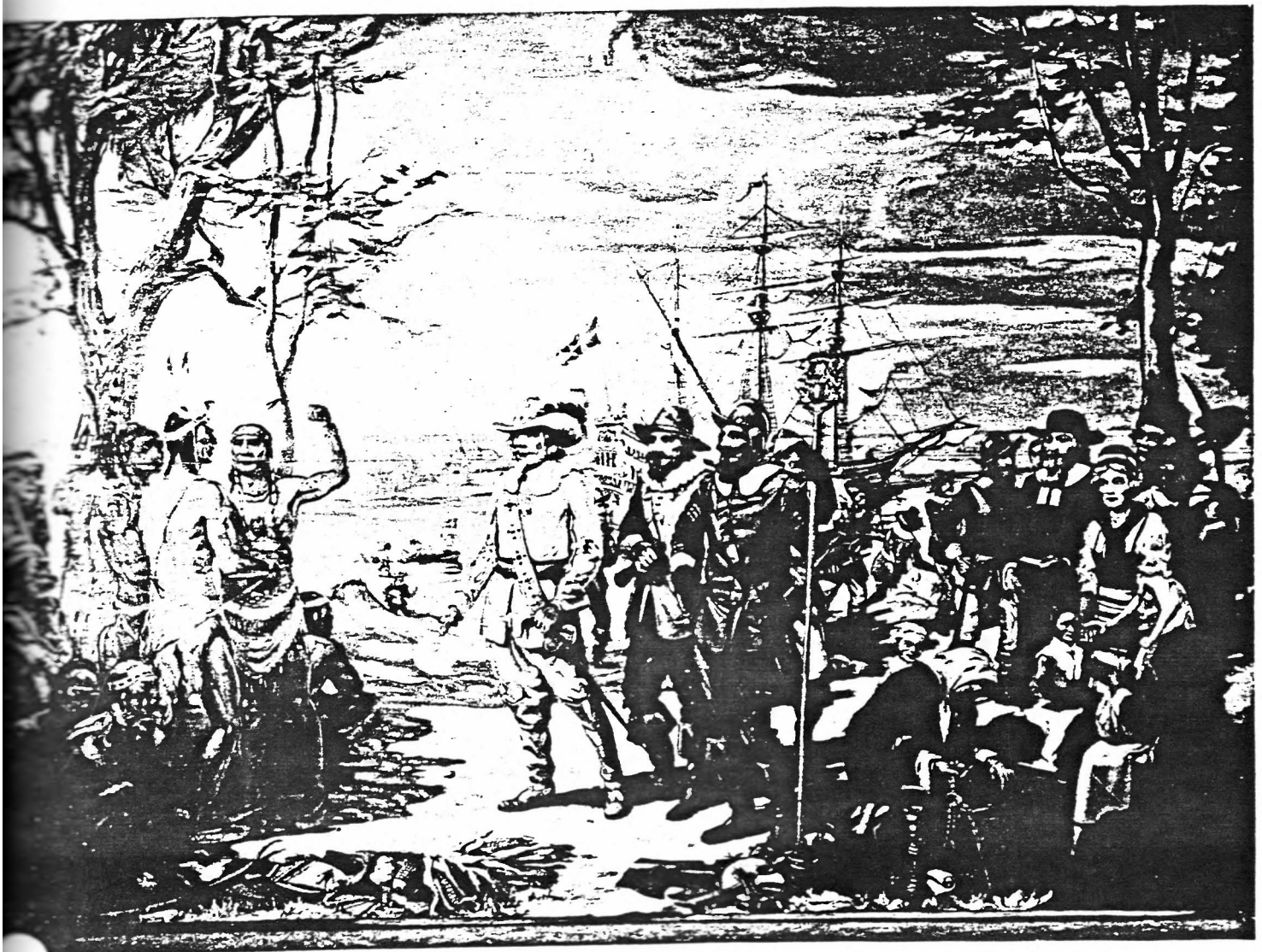
Adolphus was known as the "Father of Modern Warfare," because of his successful military operations, especially his development of artillery and new firearms.

#### Colonies and New Markets Needed

However, the King and his prime minister, Axel Oxenstierna, had not lost sight of their country's economic necessities. The expenditures for the almost never-ending wars were an incessant drain on the national coffers, and frugality had become an imperative need. Industry and trade were encouraged; the returning veterans of the army were given land-grants, and vast forests were cleared and the land put to the plow; Walloon iron workers were

brought from the Netherlands, until, under their skilled supervision, the ore production of the country was second to none; a great new port, Gothenburg, was constructed to give the Swedish shipping another outlet to the seven seas. No wonder, then, that the enterprising king of the Swedes should cast his eyes to the shores of the New World for colonies for the nation's growing population and for markets for its products.

Spain and Portugal had increased their national wealth by subjecting Mexico and the South American continent to their rule. Their galleons brought gold and silver back to the mother countries. England had explored the coast of North America and had settled Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, and Plym-



THE FOUNDING OF NEW SWEDEN

PETER MINUIT AND THE FIRST SWEDISH SETTLERS ARE BID WELCOME BY THE INDIANS  
(Painting in the American Swedish Historical Museum, Philadelphia, Pa.)



outh in 1620. The Dutch had built Fort Nassau on the Delaware in 1623, near Gloucester city.

Sweden again recounted the tales of Vinland that Leif Ericson had discovered, and Gustavus Adolphus is known to have made promises of royal patronage and financial assistance to any group of merchant-adventurers enterprising enough to send out an expedition to the New World.

### Two Colonizing Plans Fail

In 1626 the Swedish South Company was organized by William Usselinx, a Dutch promoter who had failed to get support in his own country. The scheme collapsed when the king and others failed to pay their subscriptions. Then the Ship Company for general trading was organized in 1629 solely by the Swedes. Like its predecessors and for virtually the same reasons, it failed; but in 1630 the South Ship Company resulted from a merger of the two defunct organizations. The plans for expeditions to the New World were dealt a severe blow in 1632 when news reached Sweden that Gustavus Adolphus had been killed in a battle at Lutzen, in Germany. His six-year-old daughter, Christina, succeeded to the throne, and Axel Oxenstierna was appointed regent to serve for the remaining twelve years of her minority.

Oxenstierna did not forget the king's ambitious schemes. One of his main efforts was to revive the colonization plans of his royal master. He spoke to Samuel Bloemaert, a Dutch financier, about organizing a trading expedition. Bloemaert was one of the directors of the Dutch West India Company, for which Peter Minuit in 1625 had purchased the island of Manhattan from its Indian owners for the equivalent of twenty-four dollars. After six years' service as director-general and acting governor of the New Netherlands, Minuit was suddenly recalled to Holland and summarily dismissed from the service of the company. Bloemaert himself had been one of the "patroons" of an attempted Dutch settlement near Cape May in 1630. He had the highest regard for Minuit's courage, self-reliance and administrative ability, and recommended him to Oxenstierna as the leader of the proposed expedition.

Plans for the organization of the company were completed in 1636. Funds were widely subscribed for the New Sweden Company, and Minuit who had been called to Sweden in the meantime, personally

supplied one-eighth of the total capital of 24,000 guilders. Two vessels were purchased, and about November 20, 1637, they set sail from the new port of Gothenburg.

### The First Expedition Sails

Minuit had received explicit instructions for his venture. He was not to attempt too hasty a voyage across the Western Ocean, heaving with winter gales; but, rather, was to proceed in a leisurely manner and keep his eyes open for a fat Spanish prize or two. Capture of one of the famous Spanish gold ships would have reimbursed the proprietors of the New Sweden Company even at the outset of the voyage. However, no enemy vessels were seen and, after an uneventful ten-week voyage, the *Kalmar Nyckel* and the *Fogel Grip* dropped anchor in the Delaware.

Minuit's instructions provided that he build a house or fort either on Minqua's Kill (now Christina Creek near Wilmington) or at some other place which was by nature strong, and that it was to be called "New Stockholm." Either Minuit disobeyed his orders, since a fort he built near Wilmington was named Christina, or he built a New Stockholm elsewhere that has failed of recognition. It has been asserted that a Swedish settlement on the east side of the Delaware, near Bridgeport, in Gloucester County, owes its birth to Minuit. Within fifty years of his arrival in the river, this settlement was known as New Stockholm, as was its creek which extends to Swedesboro.

### Minuit Lost in Hurricane

The dauntless Dutchman who led these Swedish pioneer immigrants was not to live to see the success of his ventures. In June, 1638, he departed from the new colony on board the *Kalmar Nyckel* for the West Indies, still on the lookout for a Spanish prize. At St. Christopher, a Dutch merchantman, the *Flying Deer* of Rotterdam, was lying in the harbor and her captain invited the famous explorer on board. Suddenly one of the dreaded West Indian hurricanes blew up and the *Deer* was blown out to sea, never to be heard from again. The *Kalmar Nyckel* had to return to Europe without her commander.

Peter Minuit's death left a vacancy hard to fill, and it was several months before the New Sweden Company could agree on a successor. Peter Hol-

leader Ridder finally was chosen as the second governor of New Sweden and commander of Fort Christina.

Under his leadership a second group of colonists set sail on board the *Kalmar Nyckel* in September, 1639. Among Ridder's company was the Reverend Reorus Torkillus, who was to act as spiritual adviser to the people of New Sweden. He was the first minister of the Lutheran faith to serve in America.

In addition to the handful of passengers there were also on board the little sloop "four mares and two young horses and a number of farm implements . . . so that the colonists can make a trial with seeding in the Autumn."

### **New Sweden Becomes a Crown Colony**

Between 1640 and 1642 the *Kalmar Nyckel* made three voyages across the Atlantic. On each trip more Colonists were brought out, and the sloop, returning with its load of pelts, carried news of the nature of New Sweden to the mother country. Gradually the attitude of the crown and of the proprietors of the New Sweden Company changed. No longer did they dream of sudden riches to be amassed by one or two lucky trading ventures. They began to understand that, if wealth was to come from America, it would come only through the gradual development of the Delaware settlements. New Sweden was to become a crown colony in fact as well as in name.

By 1642 Johan Printz was chosen governor of New Sweden. Printz, a "heft of a man" of close to 400 pounds weight, had been a famous and fearless cavalry commander under Gustavus Adolphus. He had also made a name for himself as diplomat and administrator. However, he had fallen from grace because of an unlucky engagement in which several hundred of his troops were killed. Consequently, he welcomed the opportunity to go to America and redeem himself in the eyes of the government and people alike.

### **Johan Printz Builds Fort Elfsborg**

Under the able administration of Governor Printz an era of expansion and development began for New Sweden. In the Spring of 1643 colonists and Indians gathered to witness the landing of the new governor, whose fame had preceded him. On be-

holding the gargantuan figure of Printz, the Indians in their sly humor dubbed him the "Big Belly."

Almost immediately Printz gave orders for the erection of a new fort on the Jersey shore. The trained eye of the military man had discovered the site from where Swedish cannon might command the river. He chose a point of land that stretches into the Delaware, south of the modern cities of Newcastle and Wilmington. The site is at Elsinboro, near the present city of Salem, New Jersey, and it is said that foundation pilings may still be seen at low water. The fort was called Elfsborg after the Swedish city of that name. But to the soldiers it was known as "Fort Myggenborg," meaning "Mosquito Fort," because of the mosquitoes and gnats which made the life of the garrison a torment.

Later Printz began the construction of *Printzhof*, his own fortified home on Tinicum Island, opposite Red Bank in Gloucester County. By the end of the year 1643, *Printzhof* and its surrounding buildings became the headquarters of the colonial government of New Sweden.

### **The Colonists Make Headway**

The colonists of New Sweden had explored their land widely and had learned to know its character. They found fertile soil, a milder climate than at home, and a plentiful supply of fresh waters. Game of every description, fruit, berries and other food stuffs abounded in marsh and forest. The country was well watered by navigable streams that made exploration of the interior easy, and provided many varieties of fish. The Indians, responding to fair treatment, were friendly and taught the settlers many things that made life more comfortable. Seed corn was obtained from the red men, and gardens and fields began to spring up around the homes that gradually evolved from dugouts, sod huts, and crude bark and brush shelters into tight and substantial log cabins. Beaver, mink, otter and many other fur-bearing animals furnished pelts for clothing and bedding and for exchange in Europe, and every vessel leaving for the homeland carried its cargo of fur bales. The colonists were contented with the frugal existence that their labor in fields and woods gave them.

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## Tercentenary Celebration, 1938

Sweden, like England and the Netherlands, was a mother country of New Jersey. Though soon passing under the political control of the Dutch and the English, the Swedes remained and made important contributions to our State and Nation.

The year 1938 will mark the 300th anniversary of the establishment of New Sweden, when the governments of Sweden and the United States will join with the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware in a three-month celebration, beginning June 27, 1938, when, at Wilmington, the Swedish Crown Prince will unveil a monument presented by the Swedish people. President Roosevelt and commissions from all sections of the United States will participate, as well as guests from Sweden, estimated at about 3,000, who will accompany the royal party. New Jersey's part in this celebration is directed by the New Jersey Swedish Tercentenary Commission, appointed by Act of Legislature and constituted as follows: Senator D. Stewart Craven, Salem, Chairman; Joseph S. Sickler, Salem, Secretary; Lewis T. Stevens, Cape May, corresponding secretary; Senator Albert E. Burling, Camden; Senator Robert C. Hendrickson, Woodbury; Assemblyman Henry Lodge, Audubon; Assemblyman Harry Royce, Westmont; Assemblyman Bartholomew A. Sheehan, Camden; Assemblyman William A. Downer, Glassboro; Assemblyman Norman P. Featherer, Penns Grove; Assemblyman G. Milton Loper, Bridgeton; Samuel H. Richards, Collingswood; Dr. Henry L. Sinexon, Paulsboro; Frank I. Liveright, Newark; Walter Hall, Salem; Loyal D. Odhner, Camden; Newlin B. Watson, Bridgeton.

