

The Swedes and Finns in New Jersey

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The Rise and Fall of Swedish Rule in the Delaware Valley

NEW SWEDEN, the Swedish crown colony established on the Delaware River by Peter Minuit in 1638, saw its most prosperous period between 1643 and 1653. During those ten years the colony was administered by Johan Printz (Bjornsson), a Swedish cavalry leader of unusual ability.

The handful of Swedes who had landed on the Delaware from the *Kalmar Nyckel* and the *Fogel Grip* in the Spring of 1638 had been sent by the New Sweden Company. That group of Swedes and Dutch hoped to amass a fortune in trading with the Indians. In exchange for valuable furs they offered axes, knives, tools, nails, cloth and copper kettles. Later even muskets, powder and bullets were traded, but usually the bartering was done with trinkets and baubles of no particular value, brought or sent from Europe.

But when Printz took over the colony, the dream of sudden riches had already vanished. The proprietors of the New Sweden Company had begun to understand that the road to wealth was through the gradual development of the Delaware settlements into a self-sustaining colony. From the very beginning Printz tried to create a genuine settlement instead of a mere trading post.

On February 15, 1643, preceded by a drummer and a trumpeter, the third royal governor of New Sweden descended from the deck of the *Fama*. The gangplank must have sagged under his weight of 400 pounds. The bugle blew. The drum rolled. Printz read to the assembled colonists his patent of office and his instruc-

tions from his government, and found himself master of a small kingdom. At that time the territory of New Sweden extended on the Pennsylvania side from Cape Henlopen to Sankikans, the Falls of the Delaware, opposite present-day Trenton; and on the New Jersey side from Cape May to Raccoon Creek at Bridgeport.

The new governor and his retinue were given a hearty welcome by the colonists. A picturesque but badly bruised and battered company followed Printz over the *Fama's* gangplank to the shore of the New World. The voyage from Sweden had lasted more than three months, while incessant gales had battered the little ship and her companion, the *Swan*, until their sails had been torn to shreds and the mainmast of the *Swan* had been lost.

The Goals of the Swedes

Printz's instructions were simple, yet explicit. He was not to disturb the Dutch and English traders on the Delaware. Yet he was expected to undersell them if necessary and to use any other means to capture their Indian trade and get a monopoly for the Swedes.

He was to maintain the Lutheran faith according to the Augsburg Confession. He was to encourage the settlers in raising cattle, planting tobacco, prospecting for valuable metals, cutting timber for export, cultivating grapes and other fruits, and building substantial homes. The colony was to become self-sustaining in every respect.

Printz also was to administer justice throughout the

Swedish possessions. In addition to the martial musicians who had officiated at his landing, he brought four lieutenants, two chaplains, a barber-surgeon, and a quartermaster—altogether fifty-odd souls. With the people who had already settled at Fort Christina and several outposts on the Jersey shore, Printz could muster about an even hundred able-bodied men among his settlers.

But still more settlers were needed if this immense territory with its hills and marshes, streams and woods were to be properly developed. Printz dispatched Johan Papegoja on board the returning *Fama*. Papegoja, who later became Printz's son-in-law, was to lay the pressing needs of the colony before the authorities in Stockholm. In particular he was to plead for more settlers.

The Army Marches!

Immediately after his trusted ambassador sailed, Printz set about to increase New Sweden's population in his own direct way. With his drummer, bugler and soldiers, he crossed the river to call on Lamberton's English Puritans at the mouth of Varkens Kill, now Salem Creek. The little community had been hard hit by disease and other disasters; only about 60 of the original number remained. Printz lined up the survivors and gave them the choice of swearing allegiance to Sweden, or returning to their original homes in Connecticut. The Puritans succumbed and became subjects of His Excellency, by grace of Queen Christina, Royal Governor of New Sweden.

In the same summary manner Printz served notice on the Dutch settlers along the Delaware that he claimed their lands for the Swedish crown by right of purchase from the Indians. That the Indians had previously sold these same tracts to the Dutch did not



GOVERNOR JOHAN PRINTZ

(Courtesy American-Swedish Museum, Philadelphia)

worry him in the least. The Dutch authorities of New Netherland were far away, and the government of New England was even more remote.

But Printz was by no means merely a blustering top-sergeant of a governor. He had brains as well as bulk, and foresaw clearly enough that eventually the Dutch and English would attempt to oust the Swedes from their possessions. Although he believed that his brave little army gave temporary security, he was aware of the need for fortified strongholds.

At an advantageous point on the Jersey shore, a

short distance west of the present city of Salem, Printz immediately constructed Fort Elfsborg. Though but an open earthwork redoubt, with log palisades rising above its walls, Elfsborg was the most formidable and important fortification in the colony. Its position on a promontory jutting into the river made it the key to the Delaware. Printz's heaviest artillery was placed here, eight 12-pounders and a mortar. Three officers and thirteen men constituted the garrison of "Fort Myggenborg." That was the nickname the soldiers gave the fortress, because of the myriad mosquitoes that made life miserable.

Another fortification, Fort Gothenburg, was raised on Tinicum Island, opposite Gibbstown in Gloucester County. Here the governor also built Printzhof, his official residence. The choice of the island for the colony's capitol was particularly wise. Tinicum was centrally located, and from there Printz could keep constant watch on the Dutch at Fort Nassau. This Dutch fort, situated a short distance north of Tinicum Island near the mouth of Big Timber Creek, had been revived by the Dutch after Printz's arrival in the New World.

Printz also fortified several trading posts on the Pennsylvania side of the river. As yet the growing conflict between the Colonial ambitions of Sweden on the one hand, and the Netherlands and England on the other, was far from breaking into open flames. The rivals adopted a policy of watchful waiting and kept a close account of each other's activities along the wide river.

In the meantime Printz did not neglect the economic development of New Sweden. More forest land was cleared and put under cultivation by the Finns and Swedes. Corn, wheat and rye were planted. The acreage of the tobacco fields was increased, for that product of the New World's fields brought fancy prices on the European market. Present-day Salem County in particular became famed for its tobacco crops.

Origin of the American Log Cabin

The first Swedish settlers probably erected primitive log cabins. Some of these, shaped like a cone, closely resembled Indian tepees but were of different construc-

tion. The Swedes used long poles set in a circle and fastened together at the top. Brush woven over the poles and sods, with the grass side inward, served as a covering. Other Swedish cabins were rounded like Eskimos' igloos to shed rain.

Under the supervision of Governor Printz these temporary shelters gave way to substantial log cabins. The Swedes were better woodsmen than either the English or the Dutch. There were no extensive forests in the Netherlands, and in England the woods were usually the domain of great noblemen. But the Swedes knew how to work timber, fell trees, cut them in logs, square them, notch them, and pile them onto each other to construct a tight blockhouse. As they thus built their homes, reminiscent of the cabins in the deep forests of Sweden and Finland, they were the originators of the American log cabin, the structure that later became the distinctive mark of the frontier everywhere.

The splendor of Printz's own residence on Tinicum Island could not fail to stir the colonists to emulate their governor. Printzhof, "one of the best homes between Virginia and New Amsterdam", was one of the few two-story buildings of the colony. It was built from logs throughout and its interior was fitted with dressed lumber. Six thousand bricks for fireplaces and chimneys had been imported from Sweden. The magnificent furnishings were Printz's own, also brought over from Sweden. Printzhof also boasted the only glass-paned windows in the colony. Seated behind them, the governor on many an occasion looked out on his realm, observing groups of colonists at work in the field, others floating long rafts down the river, or fishing from primitive dugouts.

How the Early Settlers Lived

Though the life of the colonists themselves may have contrasted sharply with the baronial splendor of Printzhof, it was far from being as primitive as latter day accounts picture pioneer existence. An abundance of venison, even an occasional bear, was easily obtained from the virgin forest of South Jersey. Wild ducks, geese and turkeys were plentiful. Fish, oysters and clams could be taken from the waters. The woods also supplied wild fruits, berries, edible roots and herbs in



THE REALL LOG HOUSE, NEAR FRIESBURG, SALEM COUNTY
CORNERS OF BUILDING ILLUSTRATE SWEDISH METHOD OF NOTCHING LOGS

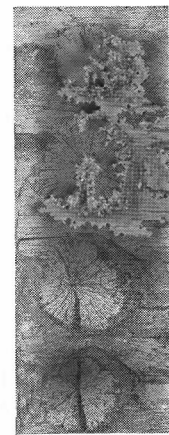
profusion. The settlers grew garden vegetables, including peas, beans, squash, potatoes and turnips. Though the crops failed, especially the corn, during Printz's first year, the fields usually yielded enough grain for the colonists' use.

The furniture of the cabins was hand-hewn from logs. A smooth-sawed slab on four legs may have served as a table, smaller ones for chairs and stools. Beds were palletlike shelves built against the walls. A layer of straw, covered with a deerskin or bearskin, supplied a mattress, and bedclothes were more skins.

Wood also was the raw material for most other household utensils. The clever hands of these early woodsmen shaped plates from smooth strips of bark; spoons and forks from the limbs of a tree; cups and

bowls from wooden blocks, and even the bread pans were hollowed with an adze out of a section of a tree trunk. An axe, a knife, a saw, several iron or copper kettles and a musket were usually the only implements which a pioneer secured from the mother country. The rest he fashioned himself.

Progress continued, supervised by Printz himself. The governor made frequent inspection tours through his



ANOTHER METHOD OF
JOINING LOGS USED BY
SWEDISH SETTLERS

domain, not an easy task for a man of his bulk. He seemed fairly on the road to the realization of his aspiration to make New Sweden self-sustaining.

The trade with the Indians was not neglected. Although Printz had a personal aversion to the "savages", he was much too shrewd to forget the steady demands of the New Sweden Company for valuable pelts and furs. And the Indian trappers and hunters were the ones to supply that demand, at least as long as trade goods in Printz's warehouses held out.

A Lighted Candle Brings Disaster

But then New Sweden fell upon hard times. The colony's quiet life was interrupted by the explosion of the powder magazine at Fort Gothenburg during the night of November 25, 1645.

It had been a peaceful night. One guard, Sven Vass by name, had been on duty and his little candle was the only light that showed after the trumpeter had sounded "Lights out!" for the garrison. But Sven Vass fell asleep. The little candle dropped and the dry palisade walls of Fort Gothenburg were ablaze before the surprised soldier could wipe the slumber from his benumbed eyes. The community was torn from its sleep by a deafening explosion as the blaze reached the powder house of the fort. Spreading on the wings of the night breeze, the fire reduced Printzhof, the fort, officers, warehouses and residences to a mass of smoldering ruins before daylight. Only a single barn escaped the flames.

Printz rebuilt his residence in even greater splendor. Sven Vass was court-martialed and sent back to Sweden in chains. But the explosion seemed to have been an ill omen. It was the first in a long series of major mishaps.

Several ships sent out in short succession from the mother country failed to arrive. The vessel of the Ninth Expedition, the *Katt* (the cat), had need for even more than nine lives. Shipwrecked in the West Indies, her crew and passengers, 70 men, women and children, were made prisoners by the Spanish. After years of hardships, the few survivors were ransomed by the Dutch, acting as agents for Swedish authorities; only 19 persons ever reached the shores of their native land again.

Another venture met with misfortune almost from the start. The authorities had chosen a great number of new settlers, most of them Finns. Two ships were loaded with cargoes and passengers. But at the moment of sailing one of the vessels was found utterly unseaworthy. Her passengers were transferred to the second, the *Eagle*. She sailed and was captured by the British, who mistook her for a Dutch vessel. Released, she was set upon by a Turkish corsair. She fought off that menace, but was struck by a series of severe storms in short succession. Scurvy, plague and pestilence ravaged her crew and passengers. An error of navigation brought her to Chesapeake Bay. Bravely she set forth again to meet with another great storm. When she finally came up the Delaware, the crew were so weak that they could not lower the anchor. Men from ashore did that for her. Of the original 350 on board, 100 had died during the voyage.

A third vessel, the *Gyllene Haj* (Golden Shark), was captured by Pieter Stuyvesant, the governor of New Netherland, when a pilot erred in reckoning and sailed her up the Hudson instead of the Delaware.

Troubles With the Dutch

Meanwhile, the relations between Printz and the Dutch had become more and more strained. So far Printz had repeatedly thwarted their attempts to get a foothold at the Delaware. But now Stuyvesant had become governor of New Netherland, and "Old Peg-leg" was a match for Printz in courage as well as in shrewdness. Printz could have his trumpeter blow his horn and his drummer sound the roll, but there were only 80 or 90 men he could summon to arms. In 1651 he had been forced to barricade himself with his whole force at Fort Gothenburg when Stuyvesant sent a formidable fleet against the Swedes. The Dutch governor landed 200 men from his ships at Fort Elfsborg and Fort Nassau and marched overland at the head of an army of 120 men.

But the expected attack on New Sweden was not made. Stuyvesant was shrewd enough to let time fight his battles for him. Printz may still have been master of the Delaware, but he could continue to hold that position only as long as new settlers, new supplies and new trade goods could reach him.

Indeed, the dismal failure of the several expeditions had left New Sweden's warehouses and trading posts bare of trade goods. Printz also had trouble with the Indians. The red men became truculent, and began to frequent Dutch and English trading posts again. Printz's temper was rising. He became cranky with the Indians and threatened to "break the neck of every one of them." An unsolved murder mystery at one of the Swedish outposts for which the Indians were blamed, increased mutual suspicion. Printz wrote to the mother country for 200 soldiers to keep the natives, whom he called "a lot of poor rascals", in their place. But the reinforcements were not sent.

Printz Returns to Stockholm

All these troubles had undermined Printz's health. Gout, too, plagued his gargantuan physique. When he had come to the Delaware, he had expected to stay only three years; a decade had passed. Printz had done his best for New Sweden; now he longed to go back to Old Sweden. Repeatedly he asked the authorities in Stockholm to release him. Finally, in 1653, he could stand it no longer. He called the settlers and Indian sachems together. In their presence he appointed the trusted Papegoja, who had married his eldest daughter, to act as his deputy. With his wife and younger children Printz departed for New Amsterdam in October 1653. From there he sailed for Sweden on board a Dutch vessel.

He had promised the settlers and Indian chiefs to send relief or to return within the year. But he was appointed governor of one of the Swedish provinces shortly after his return, and the New World knew him no more.

Papegoja, although he had proved his mettle under the guidance of his master and father-in-law, was not the man to cope with the perplexing problems of ruling a whole wilderness and defending it against the ever-threatening inroads of the Dutch and English. He was also beset by domestic trouble. His wife, Arme-got, tried to make up for her husband's shortcomings

as an administrator and in time became virtually the ruler of the colony. The colonists probably did not care for this "petticoat government." Johan Rising, last of the Swedish governors of the Delaware River colony, seemed to arrive just in time.

The End of Swedish Rule

But Rising also proved unequal to the task that Printz had left to his successors. The Dutch were now planning in all earnestness to absorb the Swedish colony. When the news of the loss of the ship *Gyllene Haj* reached New Sweden, Rising lost heart. Stuyvesant appeared in person in September 1655 and Rising's only condition of surrender was that the Swedish settlers might be left in full possession of their lands. Stuyvesant assented and the days of an independent New Sweden were over. After the surrender, Swedes and Finns moved to the New Jersey side in increasing numbers and established settlements like Finn's Point, Repaupo and Raccoon.

The Dutch rule, however, did not last very long. Only nine years later New Netherland, and with it New Sweden, passed into the hands of the English.

The transition from one rule to another caused hardly a ripple on the tide of life as it slowly flowed through the Delaware River settlements. Dutch and Swedes lived peacefully side by side, as they had in the days when their respective governors had waged miniature warfare on each other. Even after Stuyvesant had taken possession, the Twelfth, and final, Expedition of the New Sweden Company arrived. Its vessel, the *Mercurius*, brought 105 prospective settlers, of whom 92 were Finns. They were graciously received, given land grants and were gradually absorbed by their own countrymen and the Dutch and English alike.

The influence of the Swedes on religion, language and customs is felt to this very day. As a national group, however, they had no further part in shaping the political destiny of the people who lived along the shores of Delaware Bay.

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Tercentenary Celebration, 1938

Sweden and Finland, like England and the Netherlands, were mother countries of New Jersey. Though soon passing under the political control of the Dutch and the English, the Swedes and Finns 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 Finland 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 and Finland, 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:

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