

# The Swedes and Finns In New Jersey

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THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SETTLEMENT  
BY THE SWEDES AND FINNS ON THE DELAWARE

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## *The Swedes and Finns as Americans*

WHEN the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church at Swedesboro became an Episcopal church, Swedish culture in New Jersey virtually came to an end. Like the other peoples who had originally come to found colonies, the Swedes remained to build a new Nation. Almost from the date of the founding of the Republic, records of the New Jersey Swedes as Swedes cease. The Swedish culture began a long slumber from which it was not to stir for almost a century.

The few remaining old people who could speak Swedish died, and with them perished the use of the language in daily life. Inter-marriage with the English, Dutch, Germans and Scotch-Irish became even more prevalent and wiped out traces of Swedish living in the homes. Swedes and Finns who had fought vigorously for an independent America caught admirably the new spirit of Americanism. The collapse of Swedish churches and their replacement by English Protestant houses of worship cut completely any religious bond with Sweden.

Similarly, the rise of publicly supported schools continued the work of the English schools of the previous century. Young Swedes learned solely the language and thought of the new country, for there was none to teach the old ways. Only the funeral of an aged Swede, the accidental discovery of a Colonial record or some sentimental memento recalled the days of the Swedish pastors and loyalty to the Swedish Crown.

### **MORE SWEDISH SETTLEMENTS**

The Swedes continued to move about South Jersey in the early years of the nineteenth century, follow-

ing in the paths blazed a hundred years before by Eric Mullica and James Steelman. Petersons, Ericksons and Hoffmans were among the original settlers of Leesburg in Cumberland County, founded by two Englishmen. Swedes also accompanied another Englishman, Peter Reeve, to nearby Dorchester which was likewise founded shortly after 1800.

Throughout the succeeding quarter of a century they kept moving across the State in small numbers to settlements along Delaware Bay, notably to Port Norris at the mouth of the Maurice River, and further east into Cape May County, where Swedes are believed to have settled originally in the late years of the seventeenth century. These Delaware Bay settlers forsook the traditional agriculture of their countrymen and entered the oyster and fish industries, ultimately finding their way back to the ancient Swedish occupations of commercial navigation and ship-building.

During the first third of the nineteenth century the Swedes in the Raccoon and Penns Neck region maintained a slender relationship with old Sweden through the person of their former pastor, Nicholas Collin. Although established at Gloria Dei Church in Philadelphia, Collin had made too many friends across the river to isolate himself from the region. While his former parishioners became devout Episcopalians, the old Lutheran pastor journeyed up the creeks to visit the scenes of what had once been a flourishing Swedish section. With his death in 1831, however, this tie was broken. Thereafter, New Jersey Swedes interested in Sweden or Swedish ways had to depend upon infrequent visits to or visitors from the mother country.

The Swedes who lived in New Jersey along the creeks first settled by their ancestors continued to follow their agricultural way of life. They contributed to the development of the section as it grew into one of the great tomato and dairy farming tracts in the United States. Old newspaper files occasionally recount the activities of a Swede, descended from the original settlers of the region. A member of the Rambo family, pillars of Tollstadius' Swedish Lutheran church, is reported in 1853 as an Episcopal missionary. And a union of two old Swedish names occurs in that of Helmes Vanneman, a Swedesboro business man of the same period. There are similar echoes in the firm of Lock, Lock and Fisher at Repaupo.

For the most part, however, public records of the pre-Civil War period are barren of Swedish names. The Swedes had no tradition of office holding, for as early as 1702 the British had shut the small Swedish landholders out of the competition by requiring the ownership of 1,000 acres of land as a qualification for membership in the assembly. With the exception of a local official here and there, mayors and sheriffs, the Swedes of South Jersey seem to have taken little part in the administration of either their counties or their State.

By the middle of the century Swedes had moved north along the Atlantic Coast as far as Barnegat on the island of Long Beach. History tended to repeat itself here, for the Swedes mingled with the Dutch in a community devoted almost exclusively to seafaring life. The old names of Erickson and Anderson recur in Barnegat records alongside Dutch names such as Falkenburg and Inman. This community rapidly became dominated by Swedes, one of the few towns in New Jersey which succeeded in attracting emigrants from Sweden. Possibly this resulted from the maritime life of the community.

#### THE GREAT IMMIGRATION FROM SWEDEN

Disastrous crop failures in Sweden in 1867-69 accounted for a sudden increase in the number of Swedish immigrants to the United States. During the next decade Swedish arrivals averaged 15,000 a year and the number rose steadily until it reached an all-time high of 39,000 in 1903. This immigration was part of a general European movement to the promised land of America. Swedes, however, often had special motives. The development of the agricultural lands in the American middle west seriously

affected farming in their homeland. Some came to this country because of religious or social discrimination, while others fled to escape compulsory military service. In the 1890's and early 1900's the growth of factories in Sweden resulted in labor conflicts and economic crises which prompted many Swedes to seek a new start in a new country.

Only a small proportion of these Swedes came to New Jersey. And most of these immigrants continued to be attracted to the metropolitan area rather than to southern New Jersey. Occasionally, however, new arrivals from Sweden did seek the soil settled by the Colonial Swedes. In 1874 several families from Sweden purchased land near Franklinville in Gloucester County, and a few years before a settlement of Swedish farmers existed in the vicinity of Malaga. It is thought that one of these Malaga citizens, Jassen Skaarup, helped develop the Franklinville settlement.

The year 1874 marks a turning point in Swedish consciousness in the east, for it was then that Israel Acrelius' *History of New Sweden* was first translated into English and published in the United States. The centennial of American Independence, celebrated two years later, helped to awaken interest in all phases of American history and served to make Swedish-Americans sensitive to their Nation's part in the development of America. As historical and genealogical societies became more important, more and more information was revealed about the half-forgotten role of Sweden in the New World. For the Swedes of New Jersey, however, there was a decided drawback; most of the research and publication dealt with the settlements on the west bank of the Delaware River, those made while Sweden remained in control of her Colony. The story of the New Jersey churches and the Swedish penetration of the Jersey interior remained for the most part untold.

Constant intermarriage gradually wiped out the physical characteristics of the Swedes and Finns and by the twentieth century they were virtually indistinguishable from the other nationalities in South Jersey. The Anglicization of names had continued, although often the Swedish origin was apparent. For example, Bengston changed to Banks, Kyn to Keen, Bonde to Boon, Svenson to Swanson, Whiler to Wheeler, Hopman to Hoffman, and Jonesson to Jones. Given names were similarly altered, Per to Peter, Lars to Lawrence, Nils to Nicholas, and Olave to William.

Place names in southern New Jersey, however, retained a strong Swedish flavor. The old New Stockholm Township now includes the three towns of

Bridgeport, Gibbstown and Nortonville; Finnstown has changed to Finns Point, but there survive Repapo, Rambo Station, Dalbo's Landing, Helm's Cove, Elsinborough Township, and Swedesboro itself. Two early Swedes, Eric Mullica and James Steelman, left their names over a wide area of the coastal region. A few Swedish names are even of comparatively recent origin, as in the case of New Sweden Crossroad in Gloucester County and Swedes Run in both Burlington and Salem Counties.

#### SWEDES IN SOUTH JERSEY TODAY

Yet in the southern part of the State persons of Swedish descent are no longer concentrated in the historically Swedish regions. Gloucester and Salem Counties were the eighteenth century strongholds of the Swedes. According to the 1930 census, these two counties contain only one-seventh of the Swedes in southern New Jersey. Atlantic and Cape May Counties, once sparsely settled with Swedes, now have more than one-third of the South Jersey total.

Present-day Swedes in the southern part of the State are either descendants of pioneer families or comparatively recent arrivals. The former have generally followed their ancestors' agricultural tradition, although many have entered trade and the professions. The native-born and first-generation Swedes, however, have gone back to the maritime life. The fishing industry of the region, both deep sea and oyster, is practically dominated by Swedes.

Angelsea, near Wildwood in Cape May County, is the headquarters for large fishing fleets. They are operated by six companies, the largest of which is headed by Sven Marthin, a native-born son of Swedish parentage. Latest available figures show that at least 500 Swedes are engaged in fishing at or near Wildwood. Many of them agree with Mr. Marthin's reason for coming to Wildwood and its environs, when he asserted, "The first Swedes came to the Delaware just as the Germans came to Pennsylvania, and they still come here."

Other Swedes of the region have gone into another ancient Swedish industry, shipbuilding. The shipyards of South Jersey, particularly the large plants in Camden, employ many Swedes as mechanics and engineers, while the smaller boatbuilding yards in the extreme southern part of the State also depend upon traditional Swedish skill in this industry.

The Swedish church in Angelsea is the focal point for the observance of Swedish national customs and traditions in the Cape May, Cumberland and Atlantic County region. Another center is the Wildwood Chapter of the Vasa Order of America, a national fraternity of Swedish-Americans, which numbers here 250 members. There are also chapters in Atlantic City and Camden.

The descendants of the Swedes of Colonial times are still concentrated in Camden, Gloucester and Salem Counties. Town and city directories in these sections are studded with names transplanted from abroad while New Sweden was still a political entity in the Delaware Valley. Among them are Hanson,



*SWEDESBORO TODAY, VIEW TAKEN FROM TRINITY CHURCH*

Tallman, Mecum, Steelman, Dalbow, Helms, Erickson, Sinnickson, Hendrickson, Vannaman and Lock. These Swedish-Americans, as well as later Swedes in the area, follow generally the custom of the earlier Swedes by crossing the Delaware for the continued observance of Swedish ways. They attend Swedish Lutheran Churches in and around Philadelphia and belong to the Swedish Colonial Society. Many have joined the Swedish singing societies in Philadelphia.

The folk dances, native songs and other customs of Sweden which are now observed throughout the State were for the most part brought to New Jersey by first-generation Swedes of recent origin, rather than preserved through the centuries by the descendants of the original pioneers. Thus, most of the Swedish life in the State is actually concentrated in the northern region, for of 29,849 residents of Swedish birth or of Swedish parentage, approximately 90 percent now dwell north of Burlington County, the historical boundary of New Sweden in New Jersey. About 70 percent of the Swedish population lives in cities of more than 10,000 population, while an even greater percentage is found in the five metropolitan counties of Hudson, Essex, Bergen, Passaic and Union. Swedish immigrants and their children are today obviously city dwellers, for the largest numbers live in Jersey City, Newark, East Orange and Montclair.

In 1930 the State had 2,271 native and 2,233 first-generation Finns. More than half of both groups lived in metropolitan Bergen and Hudson Counties; about one-third of the total was in Jersey City and Teaneck. In addition to these counties, only Essex, Union and Camden had more than 100 of each group.

#### REVIVAL OF THE SWEDISH LUTHERAN CHURCH

As Swedish immigration to New Jersey increased, the Swedes felt the need of establishing their own churches. While they were not delayed in this achievement so long as their eighteenth century ancestors, it was not until 1889 that the first Swedish Lutheran Church was founded in the State. This was the Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church in Dover. The following year churches were organized in Arlington and Jersey City.

Throughout the rest of the decade up to 1900, Swedish Lutheran churches continued to be founded in Essex County. Houses of Lutheran worship were established in East Orange (1893), Montclair



LUTHERAN CHURCH, WEST NEW YORK

(1895), Summit (1897) and Newark (1897). In 1893 there were also Swedish Lutheran Churches established at Clifton, Paterson and Passaic in Passaic County. Soon after 1900, churches were organized in Plainfield (1901), Elizabeth (1901), West New York (1902) and Bayonne (1903). Others followed at Ridgefield Park in 1906, Englewood in 1909, Bergenfield in 1910 and New Brunswick in 1915. The most recent Swedish Lutheran church is the Bethel Lutheran congregation of Jersey City, founded in 1923.

In 1938, as three centuries ago, the church plays an important role in the lives of Swedish-Americans. And it remains the chief stronghold of Swedish culture, the focal point for the preservation of the Swedish language and customs. Many of the Swedish churches of the State conduct services in Swedish and English and hold observances in the manner of churches in Sweden.

The service of the Swedish Lutheran Churches in the main follows "The Swedish Mass" as it is celebrated in Sweden and dates from the Swedish reformer, Olavus Petri, who codified the service in 1531. The English translation is considered an exceptionally faithful one. The introits and melodies used are distinctively Swedish; several originated

from *Bjuråkers Handskrift*, prior to 1550. The prayers and confessions are direct translations of the Swedish, as are the salutations and responses. Among the typically Swedish customs are the silent prayers at the beginning and close of the service, standing during the reading of the Scriptures, and the extent of congregational singing. Every high mass includes four hymns sung by the congregation.

The Swedish Lutheran church buildings represent a compromise between the strict cross effect of the Episcopal design and the free style of church architecture. Unlike the Episcopalians, the Swedish Lutherans have placed the pulpit and choir loft outside the sanctuary proper. The churches vary little in design, the positions of pulpit, organ and choir being quite uniform.

#### HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS

A number of typically Swedish festivals are celebrated by the Swedish Lutheran Churches of the State. Perhaps the most characteristic are those centering around Christmas, Julafton and Julotta. The former marks Christmas eve and the latter Christmas matins. The morning service is always opened with a traditional Swedish hymn written in 1814 especially for this occasion, *All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn*. The first of the four stanzas follows:

All hail to thee, O blessed morn!  
To tidings long by prophets borne  
Hast thou fulfillment given.  
O sacred and immortal day,  
When unto earth, in glorious ray,  
Descends the grace of heaven!  
Singing, ringing sounds are blending  
Praises sending unto heaven  
For the Saviour to us given.

Julafton is the traditional home evening for the Swedish people. They eat the Christmas eve supper of "lutfisk and gröt" (fish and rice) and exchange gifts. Other families prepare a more elaborate meal of typical Swedish dishes among which are brown beans, meat balls, various types of cheeses, herring prepared in a number of native ways, rice cooked in milk, and assorted cookies and breads. A custom associated with the Christmas meal is that of placing a bean in the rice. The one who receives it in his portion is supposed to be married during the coming year.

During the Lenten season the churches observe the

Semla Festival in which buns are cut open and filled with almond paste, and then eaten with hot or cold milk poured over them. Known as "semla bullar," this confection has been brought to America from Sweden.

A festival rooted in folklore is Midsummer's Day, marking the summer solstice. In addition to the special significance of the longest day of the year in the Land of Midnight Sun, the festival is also associated with Christian observance of the feast of John the Baptist. Also an ancient Swedish custom is the Lucia Fest which falls on December 13. The main rite is the choice of a young girl to represent St. Lucia, who, adorned with a special headdress with candles, serves coffee to those present. A custom which has developed among the Swedes in America, is White Gift Sunday. On this day, the Sunday before Christmas, the children and young people bring food, clothes, toys and money to the church. These gifts, which are distributed to the poor, are placed on a white sheet which signifies the purity of the central message of Christmas.

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, first Swedish church in New Jersey, is today the largest of the Swedish churches, numbering 15 congregations with 2,124 communicants and 751 children. While there is no official connection between the Swedish Lutheran Churches of New Jersey and the Consistory at Uppsala, cordial reciprocal relations have been maintained.

#### OTHER SWEDISH CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Today most of the Swedish churches in the State, of all denominations, have a full English program. They strive, however, to foster, especially among the children, a knowledge of the homeland. The report from the Swedish Methodist Church is typical: "We are endeavoring to keep the young people interested in the Swedish language and culture. We sing Swedish hymns, and hold festivals in true Swedish style. . . . At the larger church festivals we try to have as much Swedish speaking and singing as possible. We try, to a large extent, to follow the good old Swedish customs in our homes. On many of our outings we try to create an active interest in Swedish games."

The Swedish Methodist Church has congregations in East Orange, Arlington and Jersey City. These three have a voting membership of 250, about 150 more under membership age, and nearly 500 others who maintain some informal connection. There are Swedish Baptist Churches in Montclair, Newark and



*"OLD MAIN", UPSALA COLLEGE, EAST ORANGE, N. J.*

Arlington, with about 323 members. The Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant, with ministers at East Orange, North Plainfield, Dover and Montclair (the latter two are Congregationalist), has about 420 members, excluding those at Perth Amboy, where services are held occasionally.

The Salvation Army at Montclair and Arlington, in charge of Swedish officers, is especially active among the Swedes in those communities. The branch in Montclair, which began its work in 1906 and acquired its own building in 1911, conducts all meetings, except those for young people, in Swedish. Most of the children in the Sunday School have Swedish parents.

Several secular organizations have been founded for the furtherance of Swedish culture and traditions. The International Order of Good Templars, a temperance education brotherhood, has five Swedish lodges in New Jersey, situated in East Orange, Roseland, Newark, Jersey City and Westfield. The Swedish Folk Festival Society of the Oranges was formed in 1934 to stimulate interest and participation in

Swedish folk dancing, songs, games and related activities. This group also sponsors dance exhibitions in schools, clubs and churches. The largest Swedish organization in the State is the Vasa Order of America, which has 22 lodges with 2,300 members. Primarily a sick benefit society, its meetings are also devoted to Swedish dancing and music. The Viking Lodge, which maintains six chapters in the State, is a similar institution.

#### NEW JERSEY'S SWEDISH COLLEGE

An important Swedish activity in New Jersey is the coeducational school of Upsala College at East Orange. Founded in 1893 and operated by the Swedish Lutheran Church, approximately one-third of its 402 students are of Swedish extraction. More than half of the members of the faculty are Swedish. Courses are offered in the Swedish language, literature and cultural history.

Named after the great Swedish university at Upp-

sala, the school was organized by that part of the Swedish Lutheran Church in America which now comprises the New York and New England Conferences. It was originally in Brooklyn, where it was known as the Upsala Institute of Learning; in 1898 it was moved to Kenilworth, N. J., where it remained until 1924 when it was established in East Orange.

Although Upsala is technically a denominational school, neither the curriculum nor the student body is sectarian. A recent survey shows that the highest percentage of students was Catholic, while the next highest was Jewish. The majority of the enrollment is from New Jersey.

In addition to its Swedish Lutheran atmosphere and background, Upsala has two societies, both local chapters of the Swedish Cultural Society of America, which encourage interest in Swedish activities. The Swedish Literary Society *De Nio*, founded in 1905, meets monthly to discuss phases of Swedish literature and to promote the use of the Swedish language. The Swedish Cultural Society of Northern New Jersey was organized in 1931; it sponsors a varied program of lectures on Swedish cultural and economic subjects. There is also the Swedish Society, an undergraduate organization whose members meet to converse in Swedish.

Alumni of Upsala have won distinction in a num-

ber of fields, notably in missionary, religious, professional and business spheres. A large number of the students prepare for teaching or business careers. A significant illustration of the secular character of the institution is the decline in the percentage of pastors among the graduates. In 1905 three out of four alumni became ministers, while in 1935 only two out of 62 graduates are listed as members of the clergy.

#### THE SWEDISH CONTRIBUTION

Three hundred years after the founding of New Sweden, Swedish culture perhaps plays a greater role than ever before in the lives of the people of New Jersey. Yet this has resulted more from direct importation from Sweden than from growth on local soil over three centuries. New Jersey, in common with the rest of the country, feels a number of definite Swedish influences in many aspects of its cultural and commercial life.

Twenty years ago an eating place serving Swedish delicacies (*smörgåsbord*) was a novelty even in New York. Today restaurants with Swedish names like Kungsholm, Valhalla and Stockholm have sprung up in several of the State's large cities and along the



SWEDISH STAMPS ISSUED FOR THE CELEBRATION

highways. The blue and gold flag which once floated over southern New Jersey unofficially flies again.

More important, however, is the influence that Swedish arts have had latterly on home decoration. Swedish glass and Swedish silver have become extremely popular both as collectors' items and as articles for daily use. During the past decade there has been a sharp trend toward Swedish design in household furniture, especially sofas and tables.

It is in economics and politics that Sweden enjoys

its greatest prestige. Sweden's consumer and producer cooperatives have stimulated the growth of similar organizations in this country. To thousands of members of New Jersey cooperatives, Sweden represents the modern example in cooperative living.

The interest in Sweden's cooperatives has naturally led to an examination of Sweden's people and government. After three centuries many Americans again look to one of the Nation's mother countries for an example of economic and political life.

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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 marks the 300th anniversary of the establishment of New Sweden, when the governments of Sweden and Finland and the United States 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 Commission to Commemorate the 300th Anniversary of the Settlement by the Swedes and Finns on the Delaware, appointed by Act of Legislature and constituted as follows:

*Senators:* D. Stewart Craven, Salem, Chairman; Albert E. Burling, Camden; Robert C. Hendrickson, Woodbury; George H. Stanger, Vineland.

*Assemblymen:* Millard E. Allen, Laurel Springs; Lawrence H. Ellis, Haddonfield; Norman P. Featherer, Penns Grove; Howard B. Hancock, Greenwich; Rocco Palese, Camden; John G. Sholl, Pitman.

*Commissioners:* Frank I. Liveright, Newark, Vice Chairman, North Jersey; Loyal D. Odhner, Camden, Vice Chairman, South Jersey; Harry C. Hallberg, Orange; George de B. Keim, Edgewater Park; Karl J. Olson, East Orange; Samuel H. Richards, Collingswood.

*Secretary:* Ann G. Craven, Salem.