

“The Fall of New Sweden: Political Takeovers, Cultural Makeovers”

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“Lost Colonies” Conference, March 26-27, 2004

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In the lost-and-found box of American colonies, New Sweden is the tube of Chapstick rolling around at the bottom of the box: never very valuable to begin with, hardly a prize when found. At least that is the image that one gets from studying early American history. Textbooks barely mention the colony, if they mention it at all, and then usually only as a wildly improbable venture doomed to fail in the English domination of eastern North America. Everyday Americans are unlikely to know that Sweden tried to colonize parts of present-day New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. Once told of this colony, they usually look profoundly puzzled, and one can almost hear them thinking, “Sweden?!”

My task in this paper is not to inflate the importance of New Sweden so that you are convinced it is the premier lost colony. Rather, I wish to demonstrate why I believe New Sweden was an unusual example, perhaps a unique one, of a lost colony: it was lost several times in the course of twenty years. Yet political takeovers did not result in cultural makeovers. Imperial control changed, but the culture of the conquered people changed only slowly and never completely disappeared.

In the global expansion of Europe, Sweden can hardly be said to have played a leading role. Yet, from the perspective of the scramble for North America in the 1620s and 1630s, Sweden posed a serious threat to other Europeans in the middle Atlantic coast. Swept up in larger competitive forces, New Sweden fell after only seventeen years (1638-1655) to the Dutch West India Company’s neighboring colony, New Netherland, which in turn was absorbed into the English colonial world in 1664 and again in 1674.

Though “lost” to the New Sweden Company and “gained” by the West India Company, this political takeover did not result in the extermination of Swedish influence in the Delaware Valley. In fact, while the Dutch easily conquered New Sweden, they

failed to conquer the people of New Sweden, or to impose a new identity on the Swedes and Finns who remained in the Delaware Valley. The result was successive waves of political change that had only ripple effects on local culture in spite of sometimes feverish battles over language, religion, and national pride.

This essay, then, will examine the case of a lost colony that led to a double succession of attempted cultural makeovers by the new political powers. It will also explore the various ways in which colonies can be lost, including territorial conquest, cultural decay, and national memory. While for most Americans New Sweden was long ago lost in every way, for some it remains very much alive in their heritage and efforts to influence public memory and national identity.



In retrospect, 365 years after the fact and considering Sweden's current mild-mannered reputation, Swedish colonial ambitions in the mid-seventeenth century appear wildly unrealistic, even silly. Historians usually write of New Sweden's short life in this vein, as folly or anomaly doomed to failure. Alan Taylor remarks that it "began as a scam by renegade Dutch entrepreneurs exploiting the Swedish flag to defy the monopolistic West India Company."¹ But in the 1630s Sweden reached its zenith of early-modern influence and power as it became the dominant force in Scandinavian politics, protector of Lutheranism on the continent, and therefore a force with which to be reckoned in the scramble for colonies and trade among the Dutch Republic, Spain, England, and France.

The ethos of Christian colonization propelled Sweden into ventures in North America and West Africa. There was no choice for a nation with pretensions to greatness, as Sweden had under King Gustavus II Adolphus (1611-1632) and his daughter Queen Christina (1632-1654). The Swedes never intended New Sweden to become a full-blown extension of Swedish culture abroad. The colony was one element of a larger scheme to strengthen the country's emerging European empire, which included Finland and territories circling the Baltic Sea. Outposts in America and Africa would allow the crown to market Sweden's natural resources, copper and timber, in the complex network of European trade into which flowed furs and tobacco from America. New Sweden was,

¹ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, Penguin History of the United States (New York, 2001), 254.

therefore, no haven for religious outcasts (though the government transported a few criminals there) and no safety valve to draw off Sweden's excess population (there was none). It was primarily a modest attempt to bypass the Dutch and enrich the country's economy and status in Europe.

The Swedish crown did not need to look far for ideas to expand its economic reach. Indeed, a string of ambitious Netherlanders beat a path to the chambers of Gustavus Adolphus and, after his heroic death in battle, of Christina's regents. Among the disgruntled Dutch merchants who sought open ears and purses in Sweden when they could no longer find them at home, only two need mention here. In the 1620s Willem Usselinx, "Calvinist firebrand" and found of the Dutch West India Company (WIC), persuaded the Swedish king to grant a license to a venture called the Southern Company, which came to naught. Then Peter Minuit, an even greater turncoat from the WIC, succeeded in gaining a charter for the New Sweden Company by calling upon the example of England, France, and Holland. "Sweden ought no longer to abstain from making her name known in foreign countries," he wrote while massaging chancellor Axel Oxenstierna's ego. Minuit, legendary early director of New Netherland and purchaser of the Manhattans, offered his services to the Swedish government, guided the first Swedish expedition into the soft underbelly of the Dutch colony, and decided where to plant the Swedish flag.²

The involvement of Dutchmen with ties to the WIC was of course a conflict of interest and it foreshadowed the tangled relationship that existed between New Sweden and New Netherland from the start. Half of the partners in the New Sweden Company were Dutch, half were Swedes. Under pressure from home, increasingly uneasy about the relationship, and disappointed with the financial losses of the first voyage, the Dutch soon withdrew. But their initial participation, besides revealing the fluidity of loyalties in the pursuit of wealth, was indicative of the close relations between the two countries. From the Netherlands, Sweden received capital, business expertise, soldiers, sailors,

² Margareta Revera, "The Making of a Civilized Nation: Nation-Building, Aristocratic Culture and Social Change," in Arne Losman, Agneta Lundström, and Margareta Revera, eds., *The Age of New Sweden*, trans. Bernard Vowles (Stockholm, 1988), 111-118; Frederick Zwielerlein, *Religion in New Netherland: A History of the Development of the Religious Conditions in the Province of New Netherland, 1623-1664* (New York, 1910), 106-108; Amandus Johnson, *The Swedish Settlements on the Delaware, 1638-1664*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1911), 96.

educators, and technology. While on generally friendly terms with England and France as well, Sweden benefited enormously from its close ties to Amsterdam.³ Along the Delaware River, the New Swedes came to depend almost entirely on the Dutch and the English for supplies and trade goods, which as we shall soon see, allowed the Swedes to play a pivotal middle role in the fur trade between Americans and other Europeans.

From their arrival in America to the end of New Sweden as a separate colony, Swedes mingled with other residents of and visitors to the Delaware Valley, including Indians, English, and Dutch. The region's geographical centrality, access to the interior fur supply, and lack of political authority strong enough to exclude outsiders combined to create a zone of cultural diversity and political squabbling to a degree unknown at the time in other areas of colonial North America. At the outset the European presence along the lower South (Delaware) River consisted of fortified trading posts manned by company officials and protected by company soldiers. Minuit knew full well that he would find a Dutch fort on the Delaware in 1638, for Fort Nassau had been built in 1626 and manned intermittently since then. He avoided it and any trouble with its Dutch occupants. Instead, he sailed up the Minquas Kil (Christina Creek in modern Wilmington) and established Fort Christina on a site well suited to the Indian trade but incapable of giving Sweden control of the Delaware traffic (see map). The Swedish presence was not long unnoticed; Dutch officials responded predictably with protests and obstructions but no violence.

Looking back at the first five years of New Sweden's history reveals that they fit the pattern of other new world colonial ventures. A relatively small number of colonists are unloaded, face unexpected hardships, survive by doing things that they would not otherwise do at home, and leave few traces in the records. In the early years at Fort Christina a Swedish minority clashed with the Dutch around them, for obscure reasons on the individual level and for obvious reasons as the agents of a much larger political contest. Then in 1643 New Sweden began its transformation from a trading outpost to a

³ Revera, "Making a Nation," in Losman, *et al.*, eds., *Age of New Sweden*, 115; Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 11, 13. Johnson's account of Swedish imperial policymaking in relation to New Sweden is by far the most detailed, to an extent not obvious from the book's title. His work is nearly encyclopedic and remains the starting point for any work on New Sweden.

colony with the arrival of Governor Johan Printz and a contingent of settlers. The population began to grow, from about 105 in 1644 to 370 in 1654.⁴

For the remainder of New Sweden's independence, Dutch-Swedish interaction mirrored the state of relations between the two countries in Europe, i.e. competitiveness beneath a veneer of friendliness. Since the crown of Sweden and the States General of the United Provinces remained on friendly terms, they instructed their colonial leaders to avoid conflicts that would jeopardize European peace and goodwill, not to mention company profits. Prudence also suggested that a unified front against the English to the north and south was the only way the Swedes and Dutch could hope to preserve their colonies from English nibbling or outright conquest. Printz's instructions in 1643 were typical of his Dutch counterparts' as well. He should assert Sweden's claim to the South River against the Dutch "with mildness and propriety." If encroachments became hostile, he should "seek to repel such force by force . . . first with grace and admonitions . . . then to do everything with severity." As long as Hollanders did not disturb the Swedes in what they lawfully possessed, "the Governor shall hold good friendship and neighborhood with the aforesaid Hollanders in Fort Nassau" and New Netherland. Likewise, Printz should "not do or inflict any encroachment" upon the Dutch or English "in that which they actually possess."⁵

Easier said than done, as it turned out, for the stakes were high: access to vast quantities of furs coming far inland on the backs of Susquehannocks, "30, 40 or more thousands of beavers in one season," according to the Dutch commissary (trade official) Andries Hudde. The Dutch did not need title to land on the west bank of the South River as long as the Swedes respected their right to trade at the traditional place on the east bank of the Schuylkill (in present-day Center City Philadelphia). Three primary arteries carried the supply of furs from the Susquehannocks far inland to Europeans on the

⁴ Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 194, 700-710; Amandus Johnson, trans., *The Instruction for Johan Printz, Governor of New Sweden* (Philadelphia, 1930), 130, 187; "Report of Rising, 1654," in Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey, and Delaware, 1630-1707*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1912), 149; Stellan Dahlgren and Hans Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden: Governor Johan Rising's Journal, 1654-1655, in Its Historical Context*, Acta Bibliothecae R. Universitatis Upsaliensis, XXVII (Stockholm, 1988), 59, 122.

⁵ *Instruction for Johan Printz*, 72-76.

Delaware. Sweden choked the Minquas Kil with Fort Christina, and Indians barred Dutchmen from proceeding above the falls of the Delaware (at present-day Trenton). So the Dutch concentrated their activity at the Schuylkill. Clashes between Swedes and Dutch coincided with the seasonal nature of the Indian trade, peaking in the warmer months and falling off in autumn and winter.⁶

By the 1650s the competition along the Delaware River was taking on imperial proportions and reflected a complex set of economic and political alliances and rivalries involving the English from New Haven colony and the Chesapeake, the Dutch from New Netherland, the Susquehannocks, and various subgroups of the Lenape (Delaware) Indians. In 1651 the tide began to turn against the Swedes. Petrus Stuyvesant, the director-general of New Netherland since 1647, was finally able to take matters on the South River into his own hands. As he marched overland in 1651 with soldiers, eleven ships and more soldiers sailed around from Manhattan to meet him. With this force of at least 200 men he built a fort below Christina. Outnumbered and outgunned, Printz could do nothing but bluster. In letters home he expressed his growing melancholy year after year. Among his complaints in 1651 was that Stuyvesant “himself in person has invited our freemen to break their oath, leave H[er] R[oyal] Maj[esty] and give themselves under the Holland flag; and if they do not do this, then he has threatened to drive them from their houses and homes.” Under the new circumstances and destitute of supply ships since 1647, Printz consolidated his forces and abandoned Fort Elfsborg. With the new Fort Casimir and a virtual monopoly of the fur trade, the Dutch no longer needed forts Beversreede and Nassau and deserted them.⁷

A year later Printz reported that the Dutch “wrong us wherever they can and intrude upon us on all sides.” To add to the Swedes’ trouble, the Dutch “stir up the Savages against us and hasten them upon our neck.” Some colonists lost hope of every seeing a ship from Sweden again and packed up for Maryland or New Netherland proper, shrinking New Sweden’s population to a critical point. The Anglo-Dutch war from 1652

⁶ Charles T. Gehring, trans. and ed., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, Volumes XVIII-XIX: Delaware Papers (Dutch Period): A Collection of Documents Pertaining to the Regulation of Affairs on the South River of New Netherland, 1648-1664* (Baltimore, 1981), 271-273.

⁷ *Instruction for Johan Printz*, 180-181; Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 339, 445-446.

to 1654 distracted Printz's opponents for a time and gave him a chance to regain the Indians' favor, which he did at the expense of the Dutch. Meanwhile, twenty-six Dutch families settled around Fort Casimir and forty families planted on the east side of the river with more to come, an ominous sign if the Swedes were not reinforced. Without a single word from Sweden in more than five years, exhausted from his constant struggle to keep the colony alive, and as a device to appease the remaining colonists, Printz left America late in 1653 to seek help in Europe. Back on the Delaware, he wrote, "the common people have been so confused and led astray by the Hollanders, that they not only no longer wish to obey commands, but almost all of them are on their feet ready to commit as great an excess as they possibly can and then flee."⁸ New Sweden appeared doomed.

Unknown to anyone in America, however, a new expedition set forth from Sweden in early 1654 with upwards of 300 colonists. Even as the Dutch seemed to be absorbing New Sweden, the tables quickly turned and the Swedes reasserted their control in a dramatic show of determination. The expedition's commander, Johan Risingh, became the colony's new director and held instructions to reclaim both sides of the Delaware for Sweden. "If the Dutch could not be removed by argument and grave remonstrances and anything else which can be done without danger and hostility," then it was better "to tolerate the Dutch there" and turn their strategy against them by building a Swedish fort still lower on the river. Risingh found nine soldiers defending Fort Casimir an irresistible temptation. He demanded its surrender. The Dutch officials allegedly told Risingh "that they cared not who possessed the fort, as long as they were allowed to dwell there safely and freely." In spite of this admission, the Dutch never formally surrendered and could do nothing to prevent the Swedes from capturing the fort, "without hostility" but with resentment. Since it was Trinity Sunday and "it was deemed best to exclude all Dutch names from the *Rivier*," Risingh renamed the fort Trefaldighet (Trinity).⁹

⁸ *Instruction for Johan Printz*, 185-186, 188, 196.

⁹ Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 581-583; Dahlgren and Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden*, 167.

A few days later the Dutch colonists appeared at Fort Christina and acted out a drama that would be all too common in the next years as political control of their farms changed hands repeatedly. “All were of a mind to be placed under Swedish protection in order to enjoy the freedom and rights” of Swedish colonists. “Asked if they wished to be the loyal subjects of Her Royal Majesty and our honest neighbors and citizens,” wrote Risingh, “they all asserted with one voice, and there under the open sky swore an oath.” The Swedes then welcomed them with libations and food. Two Dutch officers even offered additional assistance to the Swedes.¹⁰

Risingh was no lamb in the American woods, however. Upon the advice of Swedish colonists who knew the Dutch people, their past, and their character well enough to fear some would “cause unrest and harm” if allowed to stay, Risingh separated the sheep from the goats. Among his sins Cornelius de Boer “had scornfully talked about Her Majesty and said that the Swedish kingdom had been put up on the stock exchange in Amsterdam.” Alexander Boyer was “adjudged to be a malicious and hateful man,” but since he had a Swedish wife (with questionable taste in men), he was accepted in return for promises of good behavior. Two Englishmen left for Manhattan. Three Dutch soldiers agreed to remain as freemen on their land near Trefaldighet, but six others sneaked off to Manhattan. In all the Swedes accepted twenty-two Dutch colonists.¹¹

The happy unanimity that Risingh first recorded was a fiction, if not from the beginning then soon after. Besides the Dutch officers, soldiers, and colonists who left or were excluded, the remaining Netherlanders expressed their anxiety about living under Swedish rule. Risingh did his best to promote fairness and gain the loyalty of the Dutch. He established a “regular court of law” for the Dutch colonists, with Swedish officers and Dutch colonists as the justices. He confirmed the Dutch their freedoms, “in regard to their persons, goods, trade, economy, and their religion.” But increasingly in the autumn of 1654 and continuing into the new year, the Swedes heard rumors that Stuyvesant was readying a force to retake Fort Casimir and all of the South River. (There were also persistent reports that New Englanders were about to attack New Netherland.) Amid the

¹⁰ Dahlgren and Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden*, 159.

¹¹ Dahlgren and Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden*, 167.

uncertainty and rumormongering, the Swedes smelled a mutiny among the Dutch at Trefaldighet. In October the “cunning Dutchman” Andries Hudde ran away but was captured and returned to Christina. The Swedes found letters to him from the Chesapeake, one from a former official of New Sweden who had absconded to the English. Risingh resented the plots to lure away colonists because he had presented the Maryland governor with gifts and “lavishly entertained” the English “to maintain good relations.”¹²

By early 1655 no reinforcements or supplies had arrived from Sweden. The situation for the Swedish settlers was desperate. The Dutch agitated to leave for Manhattan. Some Swedes ran away, mostly to the English, while others bided their time and awaited the seemingly inevitable collapse of the colony. For his part Risingh “did everything in our power to prevent this by giving people hope of good relief and assistance as had been promised, and we appeased them with one thing or another, as best we could.” He eventually permitted more Dutch freemen to leave, admonishing them not to plot against the Swedes. But the Dutch proved dishonorable, and “they all returned with General Stuyvesant and showed him all our paths in order to attack us.” When the invasion force appeared, the Swedes repaired to the fort at Tinicum. Risingh pledged to receive Stuyvesant “in the manner of S. Martens (where he lost one of his legs)” and gave a final pep talk. The Swedish freemen pledged to “stake our property, our lives, and our blood against the attack by Stuyvesant and the Dutch.”¹³

As the Swedish commander tried to prevent the English, Dutch, and Indians from picking apart his colony, Stuyvesant plotted his revenge on the Swedes, once and for all. The directors of the WIC were furious and ordered him to drive the Swedes completely from the South River. The Swedes could resettle in other parts of New Netherland but preferably would not remain on the Delaware. Instead, the area would be left to Dutch colonists. Stuyvesant’s first chance for revenge came soon enough in September 1654 when the Swedish ship *Gyllene Haj* sailed by mistake into the North (Hudson) River on

¹² Dahlgren and Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden*, 183, 199, 215-219.

¹³ Dahlgren and Norman, eds., *The Rise and Fall of New Sweden*, 231, 241-243; “Report of Governor Johan Rising, 1655,” in Albert Cook Myers, ed., *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey, and Delaware, 1630-1707*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1912), 158.

its way to New Sweden with more colonists and fresh supplies. Stuyvesant seized it. Protesting to Risingh that the council of New Netherland did “not now intend nor design, anything else with their neighbors than fraternal harmony, friendly communication and commerce,” Stuyvesant promised to hold the ship until the WIC received “proper restitution and legal satisfaction for the surprise and capture of our Fort Casimir will all its munitions of war, buildings and effects.” The cargo was sold in New Amsterdam and the Swedish colonists were set free, although most were apparently attracted to stay in New Netherland and never reached New Sweden. Stuyvesant rubbed salt in Risingh’s wounds by offering him refuge in New Amsterdam once the rumored English attack on New Sweden began. “He did all this as a great insult to us here,” Risingh wrote, “as he saw that we sat here so forsaken.”¹⁴

While Risingh hoped against the worst, Stuyvesant spent months preparing an expedition to remove New Sweden from the South River. The force left New Amsterdam on a Sunday after church, sufficiently fortified with righteousness and anticipating a great victory. With seven ships of varied size and over 300 soldiers, the Dutch fleet encountered little resistance from the pitiful Swedes. Trefaldighet fell. Tinicum fell. Stuyvesant behaved graciously. No blood was shed.¹⁵

The narrative of the fall of New Sweden thus far would suggest a fairly typical set of circumstances were at work in this mid-seventeenth-century struggle: the Swedes were outmanned, outgunned, and outmaneuvered by a neighboring colonial power that coveted strategic territory, while the colonists and officials on the ground exercised a pragmatic response to their changing political fortunes in order to carry on their lives unmolested. Scholarship in the last fifteen years, however, complicates the narrative, for it inserts in a much greater way the presence and influence of Indians in the rise and fall of New Sweden.

¹⁴ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 85; *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*, V, 186-189, 197-200.

¹⁵ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 91-92; Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 595-602; Gehring, trans. and ed., *Delaware Papers (Dutch)*, 38. Four Swedish documents vividly describing the surrender of Trefaldighet are translated in C.A. Weslager, “A Ruse De Guerre—and the Fall of New Sweden,” trans. Richard H. Hulan, *Delaware History* 23 (1988), 1-23.

Karen Ordahl Kupperman argues that “during its short life [New Sweden] solved the basic problems faced by all settlements in a unique way that makes this venture stand out among Europe’s North American colonies.” The New Swedish adapted to the realities of their situation, including a persistent shortage of goods from home and a prime location for trade with Indians. “New Sweden’s masterstroke,” Kupperman states, “was to take up an intermediary role in the vital trade between Europeans and Indians. They took advantage of their central situation, buying trade goods from other European colonists, trading them to Indians with furs to sell, and reselling the furs for transport to European consumers.” Careful readings of the reports of Printz, Risingh, Stuyvesant, and various English officials from as far away as New England reveal the difficult balancing act that, for a time, kept New Sweden alive. Kupperman concludes, “Clearly such a balancing act could not succeed forever, but while it lasted it was an experiment unique in the human relations laboratory of North America’s east coast.”¹⁶

The fall of New Sweden, therefore, should be seen as the collapse of a house of cards, with Indians as much as Europeans keeping the fragile house standing for as long as it did. When, in 1655, some cards were withdrawn, the Susquehannocks and their allies around Manhattan took desperate measures to keep their relationship with the Swedes alive. The Indians knew that the Dutch or the English, both better supplied and more numerous than the Swedes, would not allow themselves to be dominated like the Swedes, who had no choice but to act as trade mediators, playing the Dutch and the English against each other while trading with them for supplies sufficient to keep their Indian patrons happy. As Cynthia Van Zandt has explained, New Sweden had become “a client colony of the Susquehannocks and the Lenapes, and this cross-cultural patron/client relationship became intertwined with events at Manhattan in the Fall of 1655.” In her view New Netherland “not only absorbed” New Sweden in 1655, “but also it became enmeshed with shifting alliances and enmities of Lenape, Susquehannock, and Haudenosaunee [Iroquois] peoples.” The attack on Manhattan that started the Peach War is intimately woven into the Dutch invasion of New Sweden. In one way, the attack that

¹⁶ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, “Scandinavian Colonists Confront the New World,” in Carol Hoffecker, Richard Waldron, Lorraine E. Williams, and Barbara E. Benson, eds., *New Sweden in America* (Newark, Del., 1995), 89-11, quotation on 94.

forced Stuyvesant to return to Manhattan and give the New Swedes more favorable surrender terms than he had planned was an expression of the Susquehannocks' role as the Swedes' protectors. It may have also been part of an ongoing struggle between the Susquehannocks and the Iroquois. "From the Susquehannocks' perspective," Van Zandt argues, New Netherland "appeared to be a client colony of Iroquoia." Thus, their assistance with the attack on New Amsterdam at Manhattan served a dual purpose: it exacted some measure of revenge on the Dutch for attacking the Swedes, and it struck "a blow against an important Iroquois client," and thus on the Iroquois themselves. This helps explain why the allied Indians who attacked New Amsterdam mocked the colonists there and carried out many symbolic displays of power meant to assert Susquehannock supremacy over the Iroquois, via the Dutch.¹⁷



The change of political control in the lower Delaware Valley forced some realignments of alliances between the various Indian groups and the Dutch and the English. With the removal of the Swedes, "little changed in Indian-European relations in the valley." Another indication of the uniqueness of the New Sweden venture, Kupperman suggests, is that "when the English conquered New Netherland in 1664 they found a resident Indian population still in the valley more than fifty years after the onset of sustained European contact, an Indian population that greeted them in the hope of continued peace and moderate prosperity." Only with the influx of English colonists in the 1680s were Indians in the area forced to move west or adapt more fully to European ways.¹⁸

In similar ways relations between the Swedes and their Dutch conquerors remained peaceful after 1655 but were not without disagreements. The Dutch leaders of New Netherland were well versed in dealing with foreign populations within the colony because of the English towns on Dutch Long Island. The main difference with the Swedes was that they did not willingly place themselves under Dutch authority, as the English had done. For several reasons, the Dutch did not actively seek to assimilate New

¹⁷ Cynthia Jean Van Zandt, "Negotiating Settlement: Colonialism, Cultural Exchange, and Conflict in Early Colonial Atlantic North America, 1580-1660" (Ph. D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1998), 116-131.

¹⁸ Kupperman, "Scandinavian Colonists," 119.

Swedes into New Netherland. It was not in the Netherlanders' nature, they had better things to do, and it was easier to take a gradual approach based on semi-autonomy for the Scandinavians.

The first step was to gain the Swedes' political loyalty. In exchange for a guarantee that the Swedes who remained in America would, among other liberties, "enjoy the freedom of the Augsburg Confession and be allowed a person to instruct them therein," the Dutch extracted an oath of allegiance from Swedish freemen. Resentments lingered from the conquest, making the transition a bumpy one. Understandably bitter, Risingh complained to Stuyvesant about his soldiers' behavior toward the Swedes. "Your people have ravaged us as if they were in the country of their archenemy," Risingh wrote. "The women were, sometimes with violence, torn from their houses; buildings dismantled and hauled away; oxen, cows, pigs and other animals slaughtered daily in large numbers; even the horses were not spared but wantonly shot, the plantations devastated and everything thereabouts so ill-treated that our provisions have consequently been mostly spoiled, taken away and otherwise consumed."¹⁹

There was some truth to Risingh's description. Given the level of destruction and an uncertain future, it is surprising how many Swedes decided to stay in America. No precise census was made, but several hundred Finns and Swedes remained on the Delaware in clustered settlements at Christina and above. The Dutch renamed Trefaldighet; it became New Amstel while Christina became Altena. Integration into New Netherland brought a relatively higher level of services and standard of living to the South River because of the greater sophistication of the Dutch economy and social institutions.

One of the first rifts between Dutch and Swedes developed in March 1656. A shipload of 130 Swedes arrived on the South River expecting to join the Swedish colony. Dutch authorities decided that the settlers, "for grave reasons," were an unwelcome addition and ordered the ship to return to Sweden. Meanwhile, the commander of the river reported that some of the remnant Swedes had proved "troublesome or very dangerous," namely by holding "secret intelligence with the savages." To prevent more

¹⁹ Gehring, trans. and ed., *Delaware Papers (Dutch)*, 43-44, 46-47.

unrest the council ordered the troublemakers to New Amsterdam, twelve soldiers to the Delaware, and any Swedes who had not yet taken the oath to do so or face deportation. Hendrick Huygen, Minit's nephew and the Dutch supercargo of the Swedish expedition, had helped the Swedes many time before. Although he tried to resolve the dispute in "a friendly conference," the Dutch commander detained him as "a traitor and enemy of his State." Huygen appealed to the council for permission to settle the colonists temporarily at an uninhabited place until a resolution could be obtained from the home governments. He did not wish them to be dispersed through the Dutch colony for fear that families would be separated and that "they must altogether be deprived of their worship of God and live under a foreign nation, whose language and manners are not known to them."²⁰

While Huygen negotiated at Manhattan and Stuyvesant's council continued to insist that the Swedes leave after a stop at New Amsterdam for supplies, some Swedes, Finns, and Indians boarded the *Mercurius* and sailed it past Fort Casimir, contrary to orders, and landed upriver. Whether it was an effort by the Swedes to liberate their countrypeople or just some of the goods on board, the Dutch reacted quickly to restore order. They suspected that "some of the principal men of the Swedes were at the bottom of it and that also most of the other Swedes, who had taken the oath of loyalty, had in their opinion been stirred up or misled." With the additional soldiers and the warship *de Waagh*, the Dutch eventually drove off the Swedish ship and concentrated on resolving the "differences, jealousies and dissensions" that flourished along the Delaware between Indians, Swedes, and Dutch.²¹

The *Mercurius* affair heightened Dutch suspicions that the Swedes were not to be trusted. When the council appointed a vice-director to oversee the Delaware region of New Netherland, it instructed him to keep the Swedes and Indians out of Fort Casimir as much as possible and to prohibit "the free people, especially the Swedes," from spending the night inside without his knowledge and consent. In general, "he must look well after the Swedes, who still are there," weed out any "who are not well affected towards the Honble Company and our native country," and "with all possible politeness make them

²⁰ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 120-122.

²¹ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 123-128.

leave . . . to prevent any more dissatisfaction.” From the Swedes’ perspective, they were the conquered living among the conquerors. They remained hopeful that the States General would return the colony to Sweden. In the meantime they asserted their rights and remained a close-knit community.²²

When the WIC divided the South River into two districts late in 1656, its decision complicated affairs with the Swedes. The company maintained control of the area above Casimir-New Amstel and ceded jurisdiction of the fort, village, and everything south to the city of Amsterdam as payment for the burgomasters’ assistance during the expedition against New Sweden. Most Swedes lived in the company zone, but they now faced a divided Dutch authority: two local directors instead of one. Soon enough the Dutch began to squabble amongst themselves, Stuyvesant received conflicting reports, and the Swedes were either lost in the shuffle or fingered as the perpetrators of mischief.

In 1657 the council further divided its authority on the South River by granting the Swedes their own court jurisdiction and local government centered at Tinicum Island. While still suspicious of some Swedes, the Dutch apparently tried to woo them with some autonomy under the immediate authority of the vice-director at Altena and ultimately the director-general and council at New Amsterdam. The Swedes continued to expand their privileges as they gained the trust of Dutch officials. After three years of control, the Dutch had successfully exerted their authority, removed delinquents, granted some degree of independence to the Swedish community, and generally brought a cooperative understanding to relations on the Delaware.

In 1659 rumors spread that an Anglo-Swedish alliance and the difficulties the States General were having with both nations would translate into a Swedish expedition under the English flag, or vice versa, to retake the South River. Under the circumstances the WIC directors reiterated their objections of the few years before to a Swedish militia company and suggested again that Stuyvesant resettle the Swedes. To the contrary, when New Netherland appeared on the verge of collapse from the war with the Esopus Indians and the increasing likelihood of an English invasion, he not only allowed the Swedish officers to continue but also sent a representative to the South River to enlist Swedes and

²² *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 115-116.

Finns into the company's service for the Esopus war. The representative would first make known Stuyvesant's request to the Swedish sheriff and commissaries, then "he shall ask for their advice and assistance, to enlist as many soldiers as possible among the Swedes and Fins." He was also charged with luring freemen to resettle along the North (Hudson) River with promises of good farmland and a pair of oxen.²³

In addition to the pressure from Holland, the Swedes' activities with the English and the Indians of the Delaware region colored relations between Dutch and Swedes, usually for the worse. Maryland and Virginia remained attractive to Dutch and Swedish residents of New Netherland as a refuge from debts or as a land of better opportunity. One of the greatest challenges Dutch and Swedish officials faced was keeping their settlers in place while negotiating with the English for the return of those already gone. In policymaking the Dutch could never forget their competition. When trying to resolve disputes among the Swedes about the best place to form a village, the Dutch commissary heard that the Swedes were "very changeable." If forced too close together along the Delaware or Schuylkill, they were "more inclined to go to Maryland." It was not an idle threat, for less than a year later in 1661 magistrate Stille traveled to Maryland to retrieve some Finns who had moved there. Upon finding their Finnish friends struggling along the Sassafra River, the newly arrived Finns decided to return with Stille and thought the others would follow. The commissary, Willem Beeckman, suggested arranging the Finns in a village near the Swedes at Passyunk (in present-day South Philadelphia) or prohibiting them at the least from "settling separately as that people has been so inclined to do," following the custom of the Finnish forests. Reports to Stuyvesant expressed a constant anxiety about the gravitational pull of the English nearby.²⁴

The Swedes continued their longstanding relationship with the local Indians, against the wishes of the Dutch who desired to monopolize the fur trade and act as a united entity in Indian affairs. In 1656 Dirck Michielsen, a Finn, and Cornelis Martensen, a Swede, were charged with selling liquor to the Indians, an offense that threatened the peace and plagued the government. Proclamations against the practice apparently had as

²³ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 297-298.

²⁴ Gehring, trans. and ed., *Delaware Papers (Dutch)*, 199, 231.

little effect on the Scandinavians as on the Dutch. The Swedes also annoyed the Dutch by traveling deep into Minquas (Susquehannock) territory to trade. Besides depriving the company of its profit, the Swedes risked dragging the Dutch into trouble with the Indians, something they did not need considering the hostility of the Indians to the north. In 1657, for instance, an Indian murdered and robbed Lourens Hanssen as he returned from a trading mission. Three years later “two so-called Christians, one a Hollander, the other a Swede or Fin,” murdered three Indians—a man, a woman, and a boy—for their wampum.²⁵ For good reason the Dutch strove to limit Swedish contact with Indians.

In the 1660s there was as yet no consistent Dutch opinion of and policy toward the Swedes. The mayors of Amsterdam sent Dutch farmers to the South River and asked Beeckman “to mix some of them among the Swedish and Finnish nation.” Others asked for more planters from Europe, “not Hollanders, however, but other nations and especially Finns and Swedes, who are good farmers.” And for all their fears of an imminent Anglo-Swedish expedition against the colony, in 1663 alone the Dutch allowed ships to unload at least sixty-two Scandinavians at the South River. On the verge of the colony’s demise, the WIC echoed its warnings to Stuyvesant to guard against “malevolent and threatening neighbors.”²⁶

At first glance it would appear that the conquering Dutch merely reciprocated the Swedes’ toleration of the Reformed colonists in New Sweden by granting toleration to the Lutherans who remained in the expanded New Netherland. The Dutch were not so neighborly. Originally Stuyvesant intended to ship the three Lutheran ministers on the South River back to Sweden with Risingh. But while negotiating the capitulation Stuyvesant received the urgent news that New Amsterdam was under Indian attack. Before he rushed back he accepted the toleration clause that allowed the Swedes their Lutheran faith and a minister to guide them. The Reverend Lars Karlsson Lock stayed in America. Stuyvesant’s decision, later criticized by the directors, was expedient rather than generous. Since the Dutch had no Reformed minister to supply the colonists on the

²⁵ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 129, 305; Gehring, trans. and ed., *Delaware Papers (Dutch)*, 106-107.

²⁶ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 455; Gehring, trans. and ed., *Delaware Papers (Dutch)*, 236; Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 666-667.

Delaware, it would have been harsh to prohibit Lutheranism while offering no practical alternative form of Protestant worship. Perhaps Stuyvesant hoped to convert the Swedes gradually as part of his policy of leniency. In the meantime he lacked the power to force the Swedes to submit to Calvinism.²⁷

The Dutch government resembled the Swedish in their desire to maintain an unadulterated culture in America. The original instructions from the WIC not only provided for the exclusive public practice of the Reformed faith but they also insisted that “all public business” be carried on in “the Nether-Dutch language only.” Otherwise, the actions would be null and void.²⁸ The Dutch colonists were apparently successful in this regard, for there is mention of a language barrier between officials of the two nations. In their trading and social relations a good number of settlers had learned the language of the other group.

And so relations went until 1663 when the WIC ceded all control of the South River to the city of Amsterdam in a last desperate attempt to establish a strong barrier of settlements above Maryland. The city entered colonial activity with a new zeal. It not only accepted the petition of a company of Mennonites who wished to settle on the southeastern reaches of the South Bay, it raised 2500 guilders to loan them for financing the voyage of twenty-five families.²⁹

A year before the English took political control of New Netherland, the Dutch relinquished religious control of significant parts of it. The Swedes cracked the veneer of Dutch orthodoxy on the South River, but only with the intrusion of the Mennonites and English conquerors in 1664 did it crumble entirely.



So how great a loss to the Swedes was the conquest of New Sweden? What does it mean to be a lost colony? Certainly the owners of the colony (the investors in the New Sweden Company) as well as the Swedish crown considered the colony a significant loss

²⁷ *Ecclesiastical Records: State of New York*, I, 395-396.

²⁸ Arnold J.F. van Laer, trans. and ed., *Documents Relating to New Netherland in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, Calif.), 6.

²⁹ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII, 176-177; Zwierlein, *Religion in New Netherland*, 130-132.

financially and to the fortunes of Sweden, even though it had not proved a great success. The loss struck a blow to Johan Risingh's career. To the residents on the ground, however, the psychological shock of changing governments and loyalties was probably outweighed before too long with the reality of continued ownership of land, freedom of religion, the ability to hold office, and general prosperity under the Dutch, and then the English. Life changed little, as far as we can tell, and only a relative few seemed compelled to accept Dutchness or Englishness beyond the minimum necessary to function under the new leadership.

Much like the core of New Netherland from Manhattan to Albany, where Dutch culture thrived into the nineteenth century and survives even today in numerous place names and other cultural contributions to American culture, New Swedes and their descendants made lasting contributions to American heritage. They multiplied and spread their settlements into New Jersey, where they formed Lutheran congregations in Swedesboro, Penn's Neck (present-day Pennsville), and Maurice River. Just as the Dutch continued to call Reformed ministers from the Netherlands to preach in Dutch and English, so too did the Swedes employ Lutheran priests from Sweden until 1786. Nils Collin, the last Swedish priest, died in 1831.³⁰

Perhaps the most famous, and most often mentioned, contribution of the Swedes and Finns to American life was the log cabin. Proponents of the memory of New Sweden wish us to imagine the gash in the fabric of American history without the all-American log cabin in which so many presidents and heroes were born.

New Sweden lingers in American memory in other ways. While it no longer has a place in the meta-narrative of American history, it competes for the attention of those attracted to the colonial period. This competition, it seems, is an uphill battle. While the nation looks ahead to the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown colony, how many remember the great national commemoration of the 350th anniversary of New Sweden in 1988? There was none. No Congressional commissions, no commemorative coins struck, no PBS documentaries. A conference at the University of Delaware marked the event,

³⁰ Stellan Dahlgren, "New Sweden in America in the 17th Century: An Overview," *New Jersey Folklife* 13 (1988), 17-21. "The New Sweden venture had no great importance in the history of Sweden or of North America," Dahlgren concludes (21).

several scholarly books were published, and there were local commemorations in the Delaware Valley, but the anniversary did not penetrate the nation's consciousness as it may have in 1938 for the 300th anniversary, which also attracted the attention of scholars in such events as an exhibit of maps at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.³¹

Those attending the Lost Colonies conference may wish to visit the institutions and sites in the area that preserve the memory of New Sweden and its people. In South Philadelphia there is the Swedish American Historical Museum, with an extensive exhibit about New Sweden and later Swedes in the United States. Information is at <http://www.americanswedish.org/>. Also in Philadelphia is the Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church. While the building dates to the English period, the congregation has its roots in New Sweden. Information is at <http://www.colonialswedes.org/Churches/GloDei.html>. Those who wish to venture into the heart of New Sweden can travel into downtown Wilmington, Delaware, where they can visit the reconstructed ship *Kalmar Nyckel*, the dedication of which attracted a host of ambassadors in 1998 (see <http://www.kalnyc.org/> for information). Also in Wilmington is Governor Printz State Park and the Old Swedes Church (visit <http://www.biderman.net/parks.htm> for information). Just across the state line in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, is a surviving example of the famous Swedish-Finnish log cabin (see <http://www.biderman.net/log.htm>). If these sites whet your appetite for even more adventure, cross over into South Jersey to Bridgeton, where you will find the New Sweden farmstead, complete with replica buildings, farm animals, and demonstrations (and log cabins, too). Their website is <http://www.fieldtrip.com/nj/94514802.htm>.

Finally, there is the heritage organization of descendants of the original New Swedes. The Swedish Colonial Society was founded in 1909 and continues to pursue these purposes: to collect, preserve and publish materials relating to the history of the Swedes and Finns in America; to maintain parks, monuments and memorials of historic sites; and to commemorate historic events and accomplishments. One need not prove

³¹ "New Sweden, 1638-1938," William L. Clements Library *Bulletin*, No. XXVIII (1938).

descent from a founding Swede to join the society, and members may wear the attractive society medal. For more information about the SCS, visit <http://www.colonialswedes.org>.



Medallion of the Swedish Colonial Society (courtesy of the society's web site)

One must be left with the conclusion that New Sweden was not in fact a lost colony. It was simply misplaced and remains to be rediscovered by modern American tourists, and conference goers.