

# Meeting New Sweden

## A Norwegian exploring the Forest Finn heritage

BY JAN MYHRVOLD

The annual New Sweden History Conference took place in Philadelphia on Nov. 3, 2012, with the theme “The Forest Finns of Europe, New Sweden, and North America.” In connection with this, Dr. Maud Wedin of Falun, Sweden, and I, Jan Myhrvold from Gerdrum, Norway, were invited to be lecturers.

As both Maud and I are especially interested in the Forest Finns, we also managed to set aside a few days after the conference, getting acquainted with New Sweden, and most important, visiting places with connections to the Forest Finns.

New Sweden is the name of the Swedish colony that was started in 1638 along the Delaware River in the future states of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. The first Forest Finns were deported there as they had farmed with the then prohibited method of “Slash and burn” agriculture (*svedjebränning*) in Sweden. The choice between a gruesome punishment and deportation to the “West Indies” was not difficult. The colonists of New Sweden sent messages to the “old country” about the fertile soil, and soon more shiploads of people came. Still, after the Dutch had taken over New Sweden in 1655, and the English had taken over in 1664, the immigration continued for some years. It is estimated that about 600 individuals immigrated. Even after the government became English, New Sweden was allowed to govern itself for some time with Swedish clergymen and Swedish law. The Church of Sweden did not leave New Sweden until 1789.

### Wednesday Oct. 31

Because of “Hurricane Sandy,” Maud’s original flight was cancelled and she was transferred to a flight on the 31st. After arrival, she spent a day in New York and could clearly see the damage done by “Sandy.” The first thing she noticed was that the train from the airport to downtown did not run because there was no electricity.

### Thursday Nov. 1

Maud took a bus to Philadelphia as the trains still did not run from New York. I arrived at Newark in the afternoon, and by then the trains ran to Philadelphia. I did not notice much damage from the storm of three days earlier.

### Friday Nov. 2

After breakfast we visited the American Swedish Historical Museum

(ASHM) farther south in Philadelphia, and at the museum I saw for the first time trees that had blown down. Curator Carrie Hogan was our contact, and she gave us a lot of information. We bought a number of books in the museum shop, and had plenty of time to visit the great exhibitions about the Swedish immigration to the U.S. The ASHM has, as the name suggests, its focus on all epochs of the immigrating Swedes, not just New Sweden as I assumed at first. Later in the day we visited the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the U.S. Declaration of Independence was signed by John Morton. For lunch we had a Philadelphia Cheese Steak sandwich, and then we did not eat anything more that day.

### Saturday Nov. 3

This was another day with an early start. We went back to the museum



*The American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*

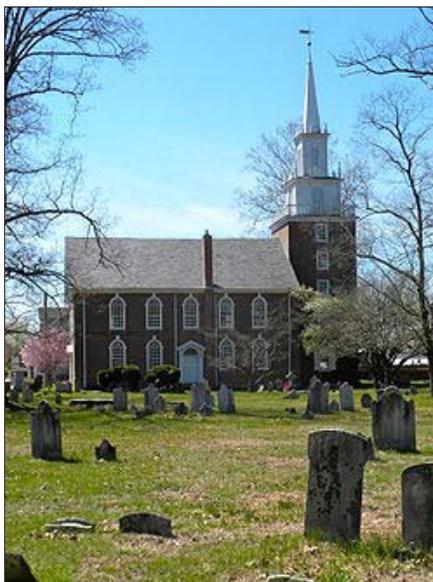
and had breakfast there. Kim-Eric Williams introduced Maud, who started with her lecture on “The Evolution of Forest Finn Culture in Finland and Scandinavia in the 16th and 17th Centuries.” Next was Ronald Hendrickson with his lecture on “On this shore a home established ...’: An Introduction to the Forest Finns in America.” My own lecture came next, its title was “Perspectives on Family Names and Migration before 1821: Studies on the Forest Finn Ethnicity in Dalarna and the Swedish-Norwegian Border Area.”

After lunch the archeology professor Lu Ann De Cunzo lectured on “The ‘Cultures of Agriculture’ in 17th-Century New Sweden.” At the end of the day we got a practical lecture by Frank Eld, who has studied the Finnish timber techniques in North America. His talk was titled “Finnish Vernacular Log Structures in New Sweden and North America.”

The about 140 participants of the conference were very interested, and were an inspiring group to talk to.

### Sunday Nov.4

Today we picked up our rental car. Even though it had a GPS, it did not take many minutes before we were lost. After a few days we understood the American system of signs and



*Old Swede's Church, Swedesboro, New Jersey.*

roads. Due to this mishap we found Racoon Creek, which was one of the settlers' areas on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River.

We had brunch at a small restaurant in Swedesboro, which turned out to be the culinary highpoint of the trip. Alfred Nicolosi had offered to take us around to several points of interest. The first was the Trinity Church, also called Old Swedes' Swedesboro, which was built in 1703. Here they kept a copy of the old church register, starting in 1713, where I found on page three several Finnish surnames. It was a some-

what exotic instance, when Finnish surnames in an American church record, written in Swedish, are photographed by a Norwegian.

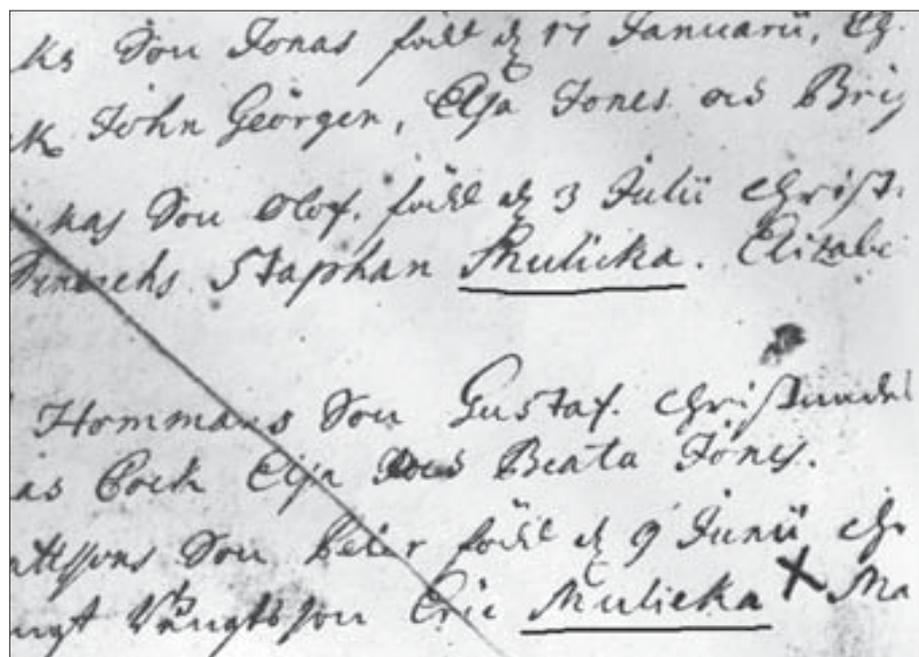
In the cemetery outside we found the family grave of Erik Pålsson Mullica. On the border of the cemetery we saw our first log cabin, “The Shorn Log Cabin.” It had been moved to Swedesboro, and was supposedly built at Racoon Creek by Morton Mortonson, the paternal grandfather of John Morton. As we had already heard about the “Morton Farmstead” and the “Morton Morton House,” that we planned to visit, we had the humorous idea of naming this place “the Morton Morton Morton House.”

Our schedule was strict so there was unfortunately not time to take more photos of the church records. Instead we were able to visit a house that is said to be the oldest wooden house in America, “The Nothnagle Log Cabin” in Gibbstown. New Jersey. The owners, Harry and Doris Rink, who live next door, were very happy to show us around. The house was built 1638-1645, according to the information sign, but research shows that it probably dates to no earlier than 1670.

Nicolosi had chosen a very ambitious program for us, and we soon continued our trip towards Delaware and the Winterthur Museum. This museum is the repository for the collections of Henry Francis du Pont, and has more than 90,000 artifacts that were used in the U.S. between 1630 and 1860. Our guided tour lasted 90 minutes, but we only saw a small part of the collections. We must return another time. We were unfortunately not allowed to take photos.

### Monday Nov. 5

We had been invited to see the reconstructed ship *Kalmar Nyckel*. We arrived in good time so we could first visit the Holy Trinity (Old Swedes') Church in Wilmington, Delaware, which is situated just a stone's throw from the *Kalmar Nyckel* shipyard. Nearby is the Hendrickson House, which has been



moved here from Crum Creek, some kilometers farther north.

At the church we also met again with Earl Seppala, whom we had met at the conference two days back. Seppala is one of the big enthusiasts, a retired Engineer and retired U.S. Army Colonel, who is a member of 11 volunteer societies and on the boards of eight of them. He is very active with the *Kalmar Nyckel* Foundation.

Now we moved to the shipyard, where the ship *Kalmar Nyckel* was built and launched in 1997. Sam Heed, who is Director of Education and Senior Historian of the Foundation, met us and took us on a privileged tour of the ship.

The original *Kalmar Nyckel* was one of the ships that kept the connection between the Motherland and New Sweden. The new *Kalmar Nyckel* is known as the Tall Ship of Delaware and is used by the state of Delaware for outreach and educational purposes. She usually is out sailing during the summer.

Also in the shipyard is the New Sweden Centre, which welcomes visitors and school groups to explore the lives of the Swedish and Finnish settlers in a set of exhibits, "Experience New Sweden," designed by the well-known Aleasa Hogate, the



*The Kalmar Nyckel replica.*

Centre's VP and Education Director. There are replicas of items from the old days you may handle. The Centre is only about 100 sq. feet, but is well worth a visit.

Just behind the shipyard we found "Fort Christina." Today there is nothing to see from the fort, but a wide avenue leads to a big monument where it is supposed to have stood. The place was chosen originally because the stable bedrock made it a safe place to descend from the ships



*The Finnish Settlers Monument, by Väinö Aaltonen, first inaugurated at the 300<sup>th</sup> jubilee in 1938. It is located in Chester, Pennsylvania.*

*From left: Alfred Nicolosi, Maud Wedin, and Jan Myhrvold. Photo by Earl Seppala.*

to the shore.

After a good lunch at "Joe's Crab Shack" we went on to "Finland," an area where many Forest Finns settled in the 1650s. Today there is a big monument, made by Väinö Altonen, in the memory of those immigrants. Without help we would never have found this place as there are no signs that point to it.

A little farther north, by Darby Creek, is the "Lower Swedish Cabin," which we visited after the Finn Monument. We had hoped to finally see a log cabin that was built after the Forest Finn model, but it was built along the same lines as the other ones we had seen in the U.S. The logs were not squarely cut, as in other buildings, and the corners were not sawed off, but there was a gap between the horizontal logs where clay or cement had been used to seal the walls.

## Tuesday Nov. 6

Today was the U.S. Presidential Election, so we had no special program, but used the day to travel around southern New Jersey to find more old buildings and explore new sites.

We started by going to the "Swedish Granary" in Greenwich, by the Maurice River, at the southernmost point of New Jersey. We had seen pictures of that house and now we hoped to find that it had been built in the Nordic manner. At a distance it looked so, but this building was also built without the sealed log walls.



*The Swedish Granary.*

The next stop was the open air museum "New Sweden Colonial Farmstead" in Bridgeton City Park (NJ), which was built for the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of New Swe-

den in 1988. Today volunteers are fighting the bureaucracy, which has allowed the buildings to fall into disrepair. It is unbelievable how neglected the buildings have become in 24 years. The bottom logs have been destroyed in some buildings. Even if there is low precipitation in the area, the humidity seems to be high. If this state of disrepair were typical of American policy, it would not be possible to preserve buildings even from the 1800s.

Now it was finally time to visit an archive, and we went to Salem County Historical Society, which has archives and a library. Much of New Sweden on the east side of the Delaware River belongs to Salem County. We stayed there until they closed and then we tried the Salem County courthouse, where the court records are kept, but it was closed due to the election.

Next we went to see a Swedish log cabin, close to Salem, the "Hancock House," where the fireplace was not of a Swedish type. Then we went back to Mullica Hill, where we managed to take photos of Erik Mullica's house before it became too dark.



*The Morton Morton house, Norwood, Delaware Co., Pennsylvania.*

### Wednesday Nov. 7

This time the weather had become much colder, and there was snow in the air in the evening. We met Ron Henrickson at Tinicum Island in Philadelphia at Governor Printz Park, where there is a statue of Governor Johan Printz, who was the governor of New Sweden 1643-1653. Even if

he was sometimes a hard master, he was also very important for the development of the colony.

Not too far away is the "Morton Homestead" which consists of a two-story main building, with two big rooms downstairs, and two rooms upstairs. The fireplaces are placed in the middle of the house, and have no signs of being of either Swedish or Finnish type. This might be because John Morton's father died early and his mother remarried an Englishman.

On the way to the next interesting site we also visited the grave of John Morton at the Old Swedish Burial Ground, Chester, Pennsylvania.

The next place was the "Morton Morton House" in the Norwood area of southwest Philadelphia, which was built around 1750 by Morton Morton, a cousin of John Morton's.

After some trouble we found the Gloria Dei church in Philadelphia, and luckily enough it was open, so we could go inside from the heavy rain.

Then it was time to visit another archives. Maud had made an appointment with with Kim-Eric Williams, the Historian of the Swedish Colonial Society and an Archivist at the Lutheran Archives Center, located at the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia. The records of the Swedish Colonial Society are housed there, as is the Craig Collection. Dr.



*House built by Eric Mullica Jr in 1704. Eric's father Eric Pålsson Mullica, born 1636 in Delsbo, (Häls.) arrived with his parents, Pål Jönsson and his wife Margret, on the Eagle (Örnen) in 1654. Eric Mullica Sr. was married to Ingeri Olsdotter, from Värmland, and they had 8 children. Of these sons Eric Jr and brothers John and William bought a plot of land in 1704 at what is now called Mullica Hill, Gloucester Co, New Jersey. Source: Peter S. Craig: The 1693 Census on the Swedes on the Delaware (1993), and Wikipedia (Eric Pålsson Mullica).*



*Maud Wedin and Kim-Eric Williams.*

Peter Stebbins Craig, FASG, researched the Swedish and Finnish population of New Sweden for many years of his life, and was the one who “knew everything” about them. Sadly, Dr. Craig died in 2009 but generously willed all his research materials to the Society. Dr. Williams

explained that shortly the Society will have finished digitizing the bulk of the Craig Collection; and will be making it available online to Society members.

As soon as I was back at the hotel I joined the Colonial Society, at \$30/year.

## Thursday Nov. 8: Going home day

Before we left for Newark Airport we had to make a detour and see how the Amish people live. We were told to drive directly west towards Lancaster. The first sign of being in the right area was when we saw a road sign with a horse and carriage. Not long after that we saw the first Amish driving just such a carriage, which was just as in the movies. We were told that they did not use either cars or tractors, but that they do use tractors, but not of the newest kind. A car is OK to be transported in, but they do not seem to own or drive them themselves.

We have to come back and visit New Sweden again, as there are so many more places to visit and things to research.

We wish to say “Tack!” to Alfred Nicolosi, Ron Hendrickson, Earl Seppala, Aleasa Hogate, Sam Heed, Kim-Eric Williams, and the staff of the ASHM for their generosity and hospitality!

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