

The Delaware Finns of Colonial America

Dr. Peter S. Craig

Fellow of American Society of Genealogist Washington, D.C.

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Scope of lecture: The history of the Forest Finns who came from Sweden to the Delaware River in the 1600s, first as settlers of the New Sweden colony and later, during Dutch rule, via Norway and Amsterdam. Their integration into the Swedish society on the Delaware. Examples of particular families, such as the Morton, Sinnickson, Mullica families, and a few notorious ones, such as Lasse and Karin, Ivar the Finn and Marcus Jacobsson (the “Long Finn”) and Thomas Jacobsson's son who became an Indian chief.

Finn defined. When I speak of Finns, I am not referring to one's place of birth, but rather one's primary language. Indeed, virtually all of the Finns who came to the Delaware in the 1600s came from Sweden as we know it today. Although Finland was then a part of Sweden, most settlers who came from Finland came from port cities and their primary language was Swedish. In this category were settlers such as Captain Sven Skute from Kronoby, Matz Hansson from Borgå, who were ethnically Swedish. To meet my definition of a Finn, it must be a person whose primary language was Finnish.

Most scholars before me have sought to identify the Finns in New Sweden by looking at their *last* names. This is dead wrong. All of the Finns who came to America in the 1600s had no surname or family name. They followed the same patronymic naming system as used by most Swedes at the time.

To identify who was a Finn, who was a Swede, and who was Dutch or German or otherwise, one has to look at how they were described by their contemporaries. It is only through a meticulous study of the lives of each settler, especially how he or she was described, that one can safely conclude that a person was a Finn or not. This I have sought to do.

The New Sweden Colony, 1638-1655

The colony of New Sweden was founded on the Delaware in 1638, when Fort Christina was built at present Wilmington, Delaware, and manned by 24 soldiers. Throughout the period from 1638 until 1654, only twelve adult males in New Sweden can be identified as Finns from contemporary records. The first was named Lars Svensson. He arrived in New Sweden in 1640.

The third expedition to New Sweden, which arrived in 1641, brought Ivert Hendricksson (Ivert the Finn), who volunteered to come as a laborer from the port of Stockholm, leaving his wife and little son behind. Also on this expedition were seven Finns, boarding at Göteborg, convicts who had been found guilty of forest-burning - Clement Jöransson, Eskil Larsson and his son Bärtil Eskilsson and Jöns Pålsson from Sunne Parish, Värmland; and Måns Jöransson, Hendrick Mattson and Johan Hendricksson, whose home parishes are unknown.

In 1643, three more arrived: Hendrick Olofsson, Governor Printz's young page, Mårten Thomasson from Storkyro, Österbotten, and another convict, Anders Andersson the Finn, a former soldier imprisoned at Fort Älfsborg, near Göteborg.

After 1643, no more Finns arrived until the arrival of the *Eagle* in 1654. This marks the first year in which a significant number of Finns came to the colony. They were all freemen, recruited by Captain Sven Skute and came from Västerås, Värmland and Dalsland. Including women and children, there were about 100 Finns on this voyage.

Again, in 1656, another large contingent of about 100 Finns arrived on the *Mercurius*. These, like the 1654 group, were all volunteers who wanted to come to New Sweden as freemen. They almost didn't make it. By the time the ship arrived on the Delaware, New Sweden had surrendered to New Netherland, and the Dutch did not look favorably on further immigration from Sweden. However, the Lenape Indians, who were friendly with the Swedes and the Finns, intervened. They boarded the *Mercurius* and sailed past the Dutch guns at Fort Casimir (New Castle) and allowed the new settlers to land safely at Tinicum Island. The Dutch didn't dare intervene, for fear of antagonizing the Indians.

Under Dutch Rule, 1656-1664

The arrival of more Finns on the *Mercurius* in 1656 changed the course of history on the Delaware River. This influx of new settlers made the former New Sweden colony populous enough to deal more effectively with their Dutch conquerors. An agreement was reached with the Dutch governor, Peter Stuyvesant, to allow the Swedes and Finns to govern themselves on the land which had traditionally been New Sweden - that is, all the land north of the Christina River, including all of present Pennsylvania. Thus, from the ashes of New Sweden, there arose the Upland Court, which ruled Pennsylvania and parts of Delaware and West New Jersey until the court was abolished by the English in 1682.

In the Upland Court, class distinctions were apparent between the Swedes and the Finns. All of the court justices and all of the officers of the militia were Swedes.

The arrival of Finnish families in 1654 and 1656 also drastically changed the ethnic mix on the Delaware. Now there were about as many Finnish men as there were Swedish. Prior to 1654, the ratio of men to women was quite lopsided, so that it was difficult for Swedish men to marry. Now, however, with the influx of young Finnish women, there were many marriages of Swedish husbands and Finnish wives.

Historically, in New Sweden, the Finnish minority had been looked down upon by the Swedish majority. The Finns were also brutally harassed by Governor Printz. Indeed, his harsh treatment of the Finns led to a freemen's petition in 1653, which included many grievances - principally his treatment of the Finns - leading to Governor Printz quitting his job and returning to Sweden.

Governor Rising, Printz's successor, was much more lenient toward the Finns. Previously, the Finns had been limited to living in the area south of Upland Creek, an area named Finland. Rising opened up other areas for Finnish settlement, including Ammansland (Ridley Township, Chester [now Delaware] County, Pennsylvania) and Bochten (in Brandywine Hundred, New Castle County).

After the establishment of the Upland Court in 1656, many Finns continued to feel like second-class citizens. A number of them moved to northern Maryland, where they settled along the Sassafra and Elk rivers. Others were lured by the Dutch to Crane Hook, south of the Christina River, where the Dutch government promised them an independent colony.

The last migration of Finns, 1663-1664

Despite their status as second-class citizens in America, the Finns who survived the voyage across the Atlantic and the hardships of living on the American frontier were very pleased with their new home. Several of them wrote letters back to Sweden, urging their Finnish relatives and friends to come to America, where the land was fertile and farming was very productive. This led to the final group migrations in 1663 and 1664.

These migrations were made possible by a decision of the Dutch colony south of the Christina River, called New Amstel. After Stuyvesant conquered New Sweden in 1655, his company (the Dutch West Indies Company) had to repay war loans from the City of Amsterdam. To settle these debts, the area south of the Christina River was transferred to the City of Amsterdam, which named its colony New Amstel.

Alexander d'Hinojosa, the second governor of New Amstel, was persuaded that the Dutch were poor farmers. The Dutchmen who went to America were primarily interested in trade - with the Indians for furs, with the English of Maryland and Virginia for tobacco. Few were interested in farming. He also observed, however, that the Swedes and Finns living to the north were excellent farmers. He therefore urged the merchants of the City of Amsterdam to recruit more Swedes and Finns.

This they did, and many more Finns responded. To reach Amsterdam, the Finns walked to Christiania (Oslo) Norway, and were carried to Amsterdam on Dutch vessels. Beginning in 1663 and continuing to the middle of 1664, four ships left Amsterdam for the Delaware, carrying more Finns. 32 were aboard the first ship; 140 were aboard the last one.

The last voyage, however, resulted in a disaster. 140 Finns from Sundsvall, Torp and Borgsjö in Medelpad, were loaded on the *Waghen* [wagon] and sailed to America in June 1664. The ship never arrived on the Delaware. By one report, this ship, called the Finnish ship (because all of its passengers were Finns), sank off the coast of New England. Only one Finnish passenger, named Jacob Eit or Lickoven, escaped.

New Sweden Becomes New York, 1664

At the same time as the disappearance of the Finnish ship, a group of English warships was heading towards New Amsterdam and the Delaware River, intent on taking the Dutch colonies between New England and Virginia. The invasion force was successful and the Delaware valley became part of a new colony called New York.

The English, however, respected the rights of the Swedes and Finns living on the Delaware, granting land patents to all of the old residents. The Upland Court was continued, as before. For many years few Englishmen chose to settle on the Delaware and the entire river remained primarily Swedish and Finnish. A census taken in 1671 showed that outside of New Castle (the largest town on the river) over 80% of the residents were Swedish and Finnish.

The Quaker Invasion

All of this began to change after 1675 when English Quakers, seeking freedom of religion not allowed in England, began settling on the Delaware River in large numbers. This was epitomized by William Penn's new colony, called Pennsylvania, which displaced the Upland Court.

By the time of the Quaker invasion, the distinctions between Finns and Swedes were beginning to

blur. Part of this was due to intermarriage. Part was due to the fact that the Finns had adopted the Swedish language as their own. In 1693, when the Swedes and Finns petitioned the King of Sweden for new ministers and new religious books, they insisted on ministers and books in Swedish, pointing out that all of the Finns then read and understood Swedish.

This petition of 1693 was successful. For 80 years, starting in 1696 and continuing up to the time of the American Revolution, Sweden supplied a steady stream of ministers and Swedish-language Bibles, hymnals, catechisms and ABC books for the Swedes and Finns on the Delaware. This was called Sweden's American Mission. It resulted in the construction of seven Old Swedes churches, all of which still flourish today, although they are now Episcopal (not Lutheran) churches. As the congregations became more and more used to the English language, the churches also changed from Lutheran to Episcopal - the English equivalent to the Swedish Lutheran church.

Swedish and Finnish Contributions to American Life

Except (at first) for the difference in language, the Swedes and Finns who came to America from Sweden were very much alike. Most of them were of the peasant class, generally uneducated. Most of them signed their names with a mark. If asked how to spell their names, they could not do so. They were, however, excellent woodsmen, hunters, fishermen and farmers.

The life style of the Swedes and Finns and the American Indians were quite similar. Both the Indians and the immigrants from Sweden made dug-out **canoes** out of tree trunks. Both the Indians and the immigrants also were accustomed to the **sauna**. Only their houses were different. The Indians made their houses out of poles and animal skins. The Swedes and Finns made their houses out of logs - log cabins such as one then found in Göteborg or deep in the forests of Sweden.

Given their similarity in life styles, the Swedes and Finns quickly became **friendly with the American Indians**. They also treated them fairly, always paying the Indians for land which they vacated for the immigrants from Sweden. The peaceful and friendly relations between the Indians and the Swedes and Finns was in stark contrast with the American colonies of the English and the Dutch. New Sweden, both under Swedish rule and under the rule of the Upland Court, was the only area on America's Atlantic coast, from Maine to Florida, which did not have bloody wars between the Indians and the Europeans.

The **log cabin**, introduced by the Swedes and Finns, also became the standard house for the American frontier. One can almost trace the movement of the Swedes and Finns from the Delaware Valley to the south and west by tracing the log cabins which they built or which later immigrants copied from them.

Some Notable Finns

Lasse the Finn and Karin the Finn - first "witches" on the Delaware: Lasse the Finn, also known as Lars Svensson and Lasse Kokki [the cook in Finnish] was the first Finn to arrive in New Sweden in 1640. He was sent to the colony as punishment for some unspecified crime and was accompanied by his wife Karin the Finn and their small children. They were to become the first people on the Delaware to be accused of "witchcraft."

After five years of forced labor at the company's plantation near Fort Christina, Lasse was granted his freedom and allowed to settle in "Finland" on the southwest side of Upland Creek.

Like all freemen, who were required to purchase their goods from New Sweden's company store, he fell deeply in debt. Governor Printz used this debt as a pretext to seize Lasse the Finn's farm, forcing Lasse, Karin and their children to live without shelter in the woods. Lasse the Finn died of exposure and his wife Karin was imprisoned, driven insane and also died, leaving several impoverished children. Other freemen, Swedes and Finns alike, were so furious at the governor for his cruel treatment of Lasse the Finn and Karin the Finn that this was the primary grievance in their 1653 complaint, which led to Printz's resignation. Governor Printz defended his actions, claiming that Lasse and Karin had been guilty of witchcraft. Besides, he claimed, they owed more money than their plantation was worth.

As a footnote, it should be noted that one of Lasse the Finn's children, Karin Larsdotter, married the Swede Sven Svensson of Wicaco (Philadelphia). They gave the one acre of land on which was built Gloria Dei (Old Swedes) Church in Philadelphia. Born near Stockholm, Lasse's daughter lived to a ripe old age and was buried at Gloria Dei Church on 19 August 1720. Karin Larsdotter has many descendants living in America today.

As a further footnote, Lasse the Finn's plantation, which had been seized by Governor Printz, became known as "Printz Torp." It remained in the Printz family until 1675 when Armebot Printz, the Governor's daughter, sold it to a Quaker named Robert Wade. He renamed the house "Essex House," where the first meeting of the religious society of Friends in the Delaware Valley was held later that year.

Ivert the Finn, the Delaware's First Bigamist. Ivert Hendricksson volunteered to go to America as a laborer in 1641. He left his wife and his son Hendrick Evertsson behind. After a number of years in America, he decided the single life was not for him, so he got married. But, as luck would have it, his wife and son arrived in New Sweden at a later time, probably on the *Mercurius* in 1656. The Dutch authorities were understanding, however, and gave him special permission to have two wives.

Two wives, however, were not enough for Ivert the Finn. He also was accused with having affairs with other women. Also, when under the influence of alcohol, which was quite often, he became belligerent and beat up other men. Finally, the Upland Court could take this no longer. He was tried and convicted of assault and banished from the colony. The Dutch at New Amstel, however, offered him safe haven at Crane Hook - beyond the Upland Court jurisdiction - and he lived out his days here on Bastu (sauna) Creek, finally dying about 1683. By contemporary accounts, he was the worst scoundrel on the river.

By contrast, his son Hendrick Evertsson was one of the most respected men of his community, serving as church warden of Holy Trinity Church in Wilmington. Hendrick Evertsson has many descendants in America today.

Marcus Jacobsson and the 1669 Long Finn Rebellion: Another notorious Finn was Marcus Jacobsson, who had a unique route to America. Somehow, he was shipped from London to Maryland as an indentured servant. In Maryland, he found raising tobacco a rather distasteful job and fled his master to find refuge among the Finns on the Delaware. Here, he posed as the son of Königsmark, a famous Swedish general in the Thirty Years War, and lived well on handouts from the Finnish farmers. The imposter also claimed that a Swedish fleet was on its way to the Delaware to recapture the New Sweden colony from the English. Marcus went from house to house, urging the Finns and the Swedes to show their loyalty to the Fatherland and arm themselves so as to be able to help the Swedish fleet when it arrived. There was no Swedish fleet, however, and Marcus, the Long Finn, was soon caught by Peter Cock, chief justice of the Upland Court. He was tried and convicted of treason against the English government, branded and

banished to Barbados, where he was sold as an indentured servant. Those who had supported the Long Finn (28 of them) were fined between 50 and 1500 guilders apiece, depending on the degree of their involvement in the so-called Long Finn Rebellion.

The Finn who became an Indian chief. One of the Finnish families aboard the *Mercurius* in 1656 was the family of **Thomas Jacobsson**, a Finn from near Örebro. He sailed to America with his wife, three children and a maid. Other children were born in America. One day, while playing near his father's log cabin, one of his sons (probably Jacob Thomasson, the eldest) was kidnapped by the Indians. It was said that the Indians occasionally did this to replace one of their own children who had died. Years later, a Swedish Indian trader named John Hansson Steelman noticed that the Indian chief he was dealing with had fair skin and looked like he was of European birth. Steelman related this to Olle Thomasson, one of the sons of Thomas Jacobsson, who wondered whether this Indian chief might be his long-lost brother. It was arranged for the Indian chief to visit the place from which he had been kidnapped. This brought back his childhood recollections and the two brothers, Olle Thomasson and his brother the Indian chief, embraced each other in tears. They then parted. The Indian chief was unwilling to leave his tribe and was later killed in a battle between his tribe and a hostile Indian tribe. To this day there are descendants of the Delaware Indians by the name of Thompson who believe they are descended from this Finnish Indian chief, although it cannot be proved.

The Mullica family was one of the prominent Finnish families on the Delaware. Pål Jönsson, a Finn from Mora parish, Hälsingland, arrived in New Sweden with his wife and children on the *Eagle* in 1654. He was also called Mullica, which I am told means “little bull” in Finnish and also “the little Pål,” leading one historian to the erroneous conclusion that he was Polish. Anyway, Pål Jönsson Mullica was poor and not in good health, so that his wife and children frequently needed charitable help. He moved to Maryland in 1661 but died soon thereafter. One of his sons, Anders Pålsson Mullica, remained in Maryland. His descendants became known as Paulson. Another son, Eric Pålsson Mullica lived first in Pennsylvania and later moved to the Atlantic Ocean side of New Jersey, where he died around 1700. He not only has many descendants today. He also leaves his name on the map. The river by his last home is called the Mullica River. And a town in New Jersey founded by his sons is called Mullica Hill.

Mårten Mårtensson and the Morton Family. Of the Finnish families, perhaps the most famous, is that of Mårten Mårtensson, who also arrived in New Sweden on the *Eagle* in 1654 with his wife and children. According to burial records of Gloria Dei Church, he was born in Finland and was about 100 years old when he died in 1706 and his son Mårten Mårtensson, Jr., was born in Sweden. These records indicate that Mårten Mårtensson was born in Finland and moved to Sweden, where his eldest son was born, before coming to America.

A number of Finnish writers have claimed that Mårten Mårtensson's real name was Martti Marttinen and that he came from Rautalampi, Finland. I have found nothing that verifies this. To the contrary, Mårten Mårtensson was always called by that name, a patronymic, not a family- or sur-name. His sons were named Mårtensson because they, too, were the sons of a Mårten. He was Finnish and he was born in Finland, but the place of his birth is not shown in any record of which I am aware.

Mårten Mårtensson's principal claim to fame was that he lived to an older age than any other resident of New Sweden. But he also is the ancestor of countless Americans, among them his great-grandson John Morton, who in 1776 cast the deciding vote for the Pennsylvania delegation in favor of declaring independence from England.

The mecca of the Morton family is the Morton Homestead on Darby Creek in Delaware County,

Pennsylvania. The Morton Homestead features two log structures, now joined by masonry. The north unit was built in the 1690s by Matthias Mårtensson, a son of Mårten Mårtensson. It is the oldest log house in America. The south unit, built about 1760 over the remains of Mårten Mårtensson's original log house, served as an inn for travelers using the ferry between the Morton Homestead and Tinicum Island.

Sinnick Broer and his Sinnickson family. Another well-known Finnish family is that of Sinnick Broer, who arrived on the Delaware in 1656 with his wife and children. Sinnick's son Broer Sinnicksson remained in New Castle County and served as a church warden at Holy Trinity Church. His descendants tended to use Sinex as their surname. Another of Sinnick's sons, Anders Sinnicksson, moved across the Delaware to Salem County. His descendants used the surname of Sinnickson. His grandson, Andrew Sinnickson, became the wealthiest of the Swedes and Finns in New Jersey and his great-grandson, Thomas Sinnickson became the first congressman from his area to be elected to the United States Congress.

Conclusion

I hope that this brief overview gives a sense of the contribution of the Forest Finns to the Swedish society on the Delaware River, a society which began with the New Sweden colony, continued to flourish as a separate government under the Upland Court, and continued as a distinct ethnic group under the Swedish Lutheran American Mission until the Revolutionary War.

By the end of the 1600s, the Finnish language had been superseded by the Swedish language. By the end of the 1700s, the Swedish language had given way to the English language. However, the proud heritage of the descendants of that society lives on.

There are today at least 25 million descendants of the Swedes and Finns of the Delaware. At least half of these, perhaps more, have one or more Delaware Finns in their family tree. They cherish their family roots, extending back to their origins, here in Old Sweden.

If you want to learn more about these early settlers, you may wish to consult one or more of my three publications. The first is *The 1693 Census of the Swedes on the Delaware*, published in 1993. The second is my analysis of the *1671 Census of the Delaware*, which will be published in book form this fall. The third is my series of articles in the *Swedish American Genealogist* called *New Sweden Settlers, 1638-1664*. This, too, will be published in book form - hopefully sometime next year.