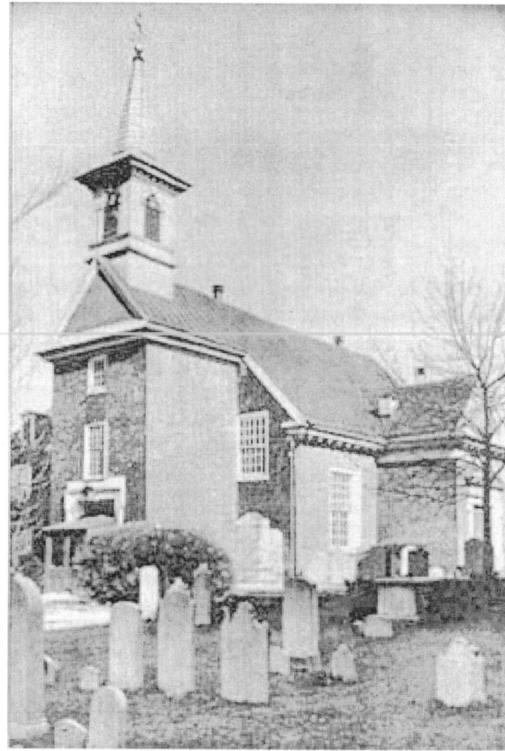


# DUTCH AND SWEDISH CULTURE

## In Colonial America

BY ROGERS W. YOUNG,  
ASSISTANT HISTORICAL TECHNICIAN  
BRANCH OF HISTORIC SITES  
WASHINGTON

Historical thought in this country has gradually felt the need for a more adequate recognition of the valuable contribution of Dutch and Swedish culture and economy to the colonial life of America and its posterity. Bearing this in mind, it is believed that a consideration of certain historic sites associated with seventeenth and eighteenth century Dutch and Swedish settlements would be helpful in evaluating the influence of the two colonial cultures on our national development. While the sites exemplifying these cultures are representative of a smaller segment of American colonial life than that influenced by Spanish, English and, to a lesser degree, French culture, they are nonetheless important as remains of an essential part of our great colonial tradition and heritage. No definitive commemoration of every important phase of our colonial development could afford to ignore the national influence of a Dutch and Swedish colonial culture from which has sprung such figures as Pierre Van Cortlandt, Frederick Philipse, II, Philip Schuyler, Martin Van Buren, Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John Morton and John Ericsson.



Gloria Dei Church  
A view of Old Swedes Church from the  
southwest

Through the agency of the Dutch and Swedish pioneers in North America, two of the most important geographic regions on the eastern seaboard were opened for commercial development and permanent colonization. The Dutch in the Hudson Valley and the Swedish in the Delaware valley with their pioneer trading posts and later plantation settlements overcame the physical and human hardships of the wilderness and laid the colonial foundation upon which the permanent English settlement of these regions was established in due course. While the actual period of Dutch and Swedish colonial sovereignty were comparatively brief, the influence of the culture and economy of these sturdy European elements continued dominant in both regions until the Revolution, despite their political control by the English. The penetration of the Dutch into New York and northern New Jersey, and of the Swedes into Delaware, eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey provided these areas with a fundamental European culture which

strongly influenced their subsequent development as English colonies and American states, and of which remains are observable even today.

Failure in the past to recognize the importance of Swedish contributions to American colonial life has resulted in the nearly complete disappearance of physical remains from this valuable colonial culture. The Swedes in the Delaware valley proved to be better agriculturists than aggressive colonists or traders, and as pioneer farmers in this region made a definite contribution to the development of American agriculture. In constructing domestic dwellings and farm buildings the Swedes adapted their European log dwellings to colonial conditions and introduced into America the log cabin or house, which appears to have become the prototype of all such structures throughout the American colonies. In addition to this unique type of domestic architecture, of which no unaltered examples exist, the Swedes produced an interesting church architecture, which more or less faithfully followed native Swedish designs. The only important examples of Swedish colonial institutional architecture existing are Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church at Wilmington, Delaware, completed 1699, and Gloria Dei (Old Swedes) Church, Philadelphia, completed 1700, both of which are still used for religious services. They are both significant examples of American colonial architecture. These two edifices are symbols of the innate piety and highest cultural aspirations of the Swedish element. They are also eloquent reminders of the Swedish belief in the principle of religious freedom, and their practice of religious tolerance in an age of religious bigotry. Although devoted to the service of Lutheranism, which the Swedes introduced in the Delaware valley, their walls ministered to all sects impartially.



SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC SITES  
REPRESENTING DUTCH AND SWEDISH  
COLONIAL SETTLEMENTS IN AMERICA  
DURING THE SEVENTEETH AND  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

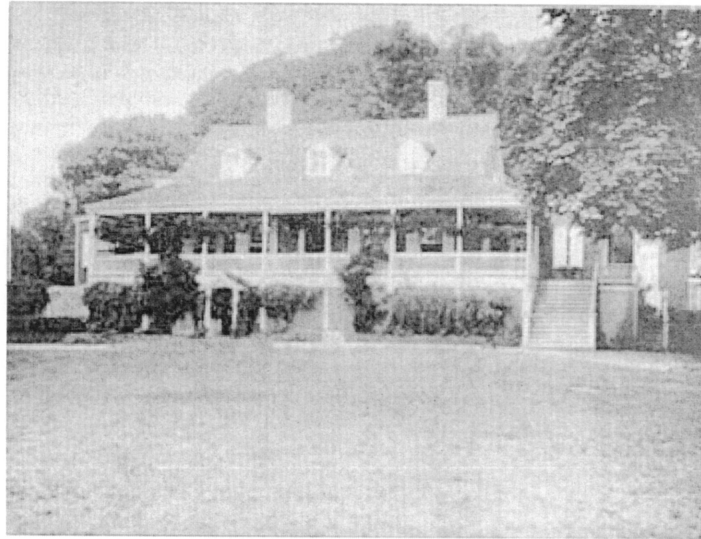
*(click image for an enlargement in a new*

Physical remains of Swedish political activity *window)*  
have long since disappeared from the Delaware valley. The Swedish court structures, where colonial juries first sat in this region, have vanished, although their system of justice was adopted by William Penn for his colony. While no surface remains exist at the two seats of the Swedish Colonial government, the sites have received official recognition in recent years. Considerable public interest in Swedish colonial sites was engendered by the Swedish Tercentenary Celebrations held in Delaware and Pennsylvania during 1938. During that year, Delaware established Fort Christina State Park at Wilmington, on the site of Fort Christina, which was the capital of New Sweden from 1638 to 1643, and again from 1654 to the end of Swedish sovereignty in 1655. Tinicum Island (Pennsylvania) , on the Delaware, was capital of the Swedish colony from 1643 to 1653. On a portion of the site of the Tinicum Island settlement, Pennsylvania established the Johan Printz State Park in 1938.

The establishment of Dutch and Swedish settlements in America was a small but nevertheless significant phase of the great European movement for colonization of the New World in the seventeenth century. Both colonies were proprietary provinces controlled by European trading companies. Although launched primarily to trade and colonize on the Delaware, the Swedish colony received poor support from Sweden and in the face of Dutch commercial competition turned to agricultural settlement and finally relinquished to the Dutch all political sovereignty in the region. New Netherland was established during the Dutch struggle for control of the world carrying trade, and gave Holland a North American foothold in her growing competition with England. Designed primarily as a commercial venture expected to produce tangible profits from trade, the Dutch colony originally consisted of a series of trading settlements, with little effort being made to undertake agricultural colonization.

The course of Dutch settlement in America was influenced not only by its definite economic motive but also by the geography of the region selected for development. Along the mighty Hudson, from its mouth to the head of navigation, Dutch trading posts were established in the fertile valley and the region was loosely knit into a province by a natural highway which provided communication and transportation for merchandise. The natural point of deposit and transshipment of merchandise was at the mouth of the river and here logically was established the social, economic and political center of the colony in the settlement of New Amsterdam. To provide direct economic and political control of a widespread trading region, which also in claim at least embraced the Connecticut and Delaware valleys as well as the Hudson, a strong executive was placed at Fort Amsterdam, and little self-government was exercised by the outlying trading settlements until late in the Dutch period. Trade remained the paramount activity of the Dutch colony until about 1650 when efforts were underway to expand the Hudson frontier through agricultural colonization. Development of landed agricultural domains was first unsuccessfully attempted by the Dutch through the patroonship system. This social, economic and political experiment succeeded better in the hands of the Dutch element when the manor system was established during the English provincial period in New York.

The English conquest of 1664 brought Dutch sovereignty to an end, but for over a century afterward Dutch influence continued dominant in local political activity, social life, agricultural pursuits and architectural developments throughout much of New York and northern New Jersey. Although the British had absorbed the Hudson settlements when they proved a threat to the expansion of the English colonial empire, once the transfer of sovereignty was made the British did little to alter the pattern of culture and economy in the old Dutch colony. The most significant sites of Dutch colonial



Van Cortlandt Manor House

Looking northward at the front of the Van Cortlandt Manor House. The nineteenth century wings may be seen at the rear of the main portion of the structure. The nineteenth century veranda masks the high front basement, which reputedly dates from the seventeenth century

activity would include public and private structures exemplifying social life, commercial occupation and political organization. Few, indeed, are Dutch private structures remaining to day which can be identified positively as ante-dating the English conquest of 1664. Of Dutch public structures erected prior to 1664, including the several forts and trading posts, there are no remains extant. Therefore, the chief sites worthy of present consideration will be found to have been established under Dutch influence and tradition between 1664 and 1776.

The political, economic, social, architectural and religious contributions made by Dutch colonial activity in America can be illustrated by certain significant sites. The site most representative of the centralized Dutch colonial government, commercial activity and colonial town society, is unquestionably that of Fort Amsterdam, the nucleus of New Amsterdam, the capital and trading center of New Netherland. While no remains exist at the site, it is in public ownership.

A notable contribution from Dutch colonial culture was an architectural form, reputed to be one of the earliest true indigenous designs evolved during the development of American architecture. This is the so-called Dutch colonial type, which was an adaptation of European Dutch design to meet colonial living conditions. Guided by the criteria of obvious age, architectural merit and historic value, a study of the examples of Dutch colonial domestic architecture now existing in northern New Jersey and New York has revealed two especially important structures in Westchester County, New York. The Van Cortlandt Manor House, at Harmon, is an unusually splendid example of a Dutch colonial country residence. Philipse Manor Hall, at Yonkers, on the other hand, is a fine and pretentious mansion, peculiarly representative of the architectural elegance attained by the elite class of Dutch colonial society. Furthermore, these two fine structures are

representative physical remains of the manor or land-owning system, that interesting social, economic and political entity of Dutch colonial society on the Hudson.

The colony of New Netherland made a contribution to colonial religious history when it introduced the Dutch Reformed Church into North America. Established in an age of religious bigotry in Europe, the Dutch colony was a landmark in the struggle for the freedom of religious conscience in the New World. Despite the existence of an established church in New Netherland, during the early Dutch period the colony became an asylum for persecuted beliefs in Europe and the other American colonies. The fundamental Dutch tolerance prevailed over Stuyvesant's brief religious tyranny and was largely the cause for the early establishment of a cosmopolitan atmosphere in New Amsterdam and New York. Sleepy Hollow Church, at Tarrytown, is perhaps the finest existing representative of the splendid tradition of Dutch colonial religious activity. Structurally, this venerable religious edifice is a distinctive and even unique example of Dutch colonial institutional architecture in the Hudson valley.

Public interest has long been manifested in the need for the preservation of Dutch colonial sites. In past years, the States of New York and New Jersey, certain cities and counties in these States, and patriotic organizations and societies have gradually acquired for preservation a select group of interesting examples of Dutch colonial architecture, which have valuable historical associations. This group includes several noteworthy houses deserving of special mention. As early as 1849 New York acquired the Jonathan Hasbrouck House at Newburgh, which served as Washington's headquarters in 1782-1783, and is now maintained as a public museum. The De Clarke-De Wint House at Tappan, New York, Washington's headquarters in 1780 and 1783, is maintained as a museum by the Masonic Order. Philipse Manor Hall at Yonkers was presented to New York in 1908 and has been developed as a museum by the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society which acts as custodian. The Britton-Cubberly House on Staten Island is maintained by the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences. Included in the New York City park system and maintained as public museums are: the Cornell-Schenck House, Highland Park; the Pieter Lefferts House, Prospect Park; and the Van Cortlandt Mansion, in Van Cortlandt Park. In New Jersey, the state maintains the Zabriskie-Steuben House at New Bridge as a public museum. The Dirck Day House at Lower Preackness, New Jersey, Washington's headquarters, 1780, is owned and maintained by the Passaic County Park Commission