

6-1-2009

The Swedish Colonial Society

Herbert R. Rambo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rambo, Herbert R. (2009) "The Swedish Colonial Society," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 29 : No. 2 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol29/iss2/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

The Swedish Colonial Society



BY HERBERT R. RAMBO

Founded in 1909 at Philadelphia, Penna., by a group of prominent academics, the Swedish Colonial Society is America's oldest Swedish historical organization and unique in this country because of its relationship to the Swedish royal family and the Swedish government.

Over the past century, the Society's research has become the foundation for the study of the New Sweden Colony (1638-1655), the short-lived effort by Sweden to claim a stake in colonial America. After 1655 the Swedish flag no longer flew overhead, but the Swedish and Finnish colonists remained as the majority population in Delaware, South-eastern Pennsylvania, and Southern New Jersey under successive Dutch and English rulers. They lived with a considerable degree of self-government until the arrival of William Penn and the flood of several thousand English Quakers ended the so-called "Swedish Nation on the Delaware" (1655-1681).

New Sweden was unique among the American colonies because the colonists lived peaceably with the Lenape Indians and the friendship between the two communities continues into the 21st century.

It was also in 17th century New Sweden where Swedes and Finns carved homes from the forest and introduced the most iconic symbol of the American frontier, the log cabin.

Over the years the Society has published 13 books, beginning with *Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* (1911) by Dr. Amandus Johnson. Additionally, the Society is in the midst of publishing the seven-volume

work *Colonial Records of Swedish Churches in Pennsylvania*, edited by the Society's renowned historian Dr. Peter S. Craig and Dr. Kim-Eric Williams, the leading translator of 17th century Swedish.

The most public face of the Swedish Colonial Society is the national award winning website

www.colonialswedes.org

and the *Swedish Colonial News*, the undisputed journal of record for the New Sweden Colony. The colony was a brief but significant chapter in America's colonial past.

In 2000 the Swedish Colonial Society moved its historical archives to the professionally managed Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, making scholarly research readily available on a daily basis.

Historical preservation has been a high priority over the years. The Society coordinated the effort leading to Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church being the first religious building in American to win designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1942.

The Society established "Printz Park," honoring Royal Governor Johan Printz who lived on that site. The Society also worked with the State government to preserve the Morton Homestead with its ties to Declaration of Independence signer John Morton.

The Society coordinated the return of the Rambo Apple Tree to Sweden, where it had been extinct following a severe winter in 1709-10. The species survived because a New Sweden colonist took its seeds to America in 1640. The first planting in Sweden, financed by the King, was by the U.S.

Ambassador to Sweden and Swedish officials at the start of the Carl Linnaeus Tercentennial in Uppsala, Sweden, in 2006.

Currently the Society is working with the American Swedish Historical Museum to develop an action plan for the many historical artifacts at the closed New Sweden Farmstead Museum, Bridgeton, NJ.

In addition to being a historical organization, the Swedish Colonial Society has a hereditary program. Those able to prove their descent from Swedes coming to America between 1638 and 1783 are awarded Forefather Member status certifying that they are among America's oldest Swedish families.

A unique aspect of the Swedish Colonial Society is its connection to Sweden's royal family and recognition by the Swedish government.

King Gustav V was the first "High Patron," serving as the Society's honorary leader and establishing the tradition that continues today with King Carl XVI Gustaf. In 2003 Crown Princess Victoria accepted "Deputy High Patron" during her visit to Philadelphia and Wilmington, Del.

Sweden's ambassador to the United States Jonas Hafström is the Society's "Patron," another honorary leadership position, and the Swedish government has authorized the Society's use of the "*Tre Kronor*" as appropriate for an organization headed by His Majesty the King. Among the current leadership there are five recipients of the "Order of the Polar Star" awarded by the King.