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Peter Stebbins Craig--In Memoriam

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Peter Stebbins Craig

In Memoriam – a remarkable scholar has left us

BY ELLEN RYE

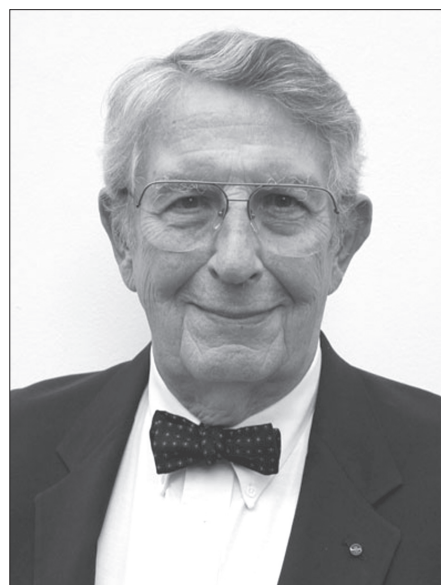
The world of Swedish-American genealogy lost one of its leading researchers when Peter Stebbins Craig, 81, slipped away peacefully at his Washington, D.C., home on Thanksgiving Day.

Peter as a child listened to his great-grandmother Martha Yocum talk about how their family's roots went back to *Nya Sverige*, the Swedish colony established in the Delaware River Valley in 1638. (The colony was overtaken by the Dutch in 1655, but almost all the colonists stayed, and that is what makes the colony's history so interesting.)

Peter tucked the stories away, never forgot them. He went on to Oberlin College and to Yale Law School, earning a J.D. degree, and then moved to Washington D.C., where he worked for many years in such positions as legal counsel for the federal Department of Transpor-

tation and for the Southern Railway.

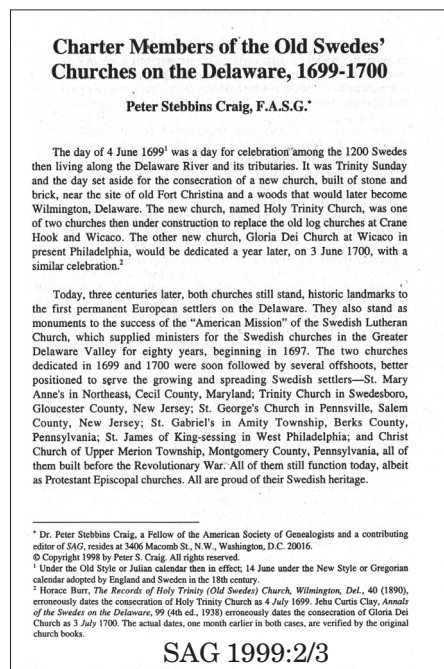
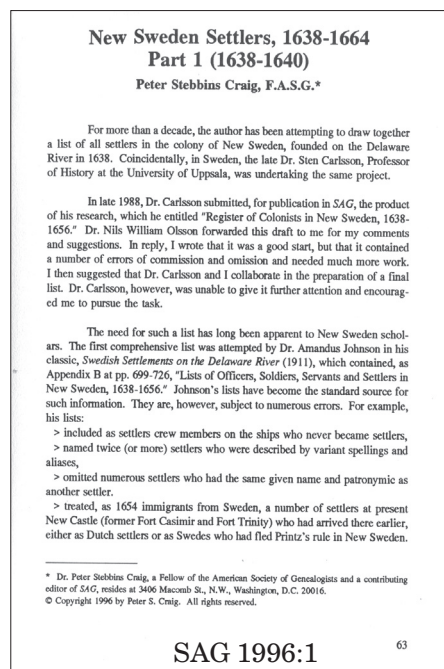
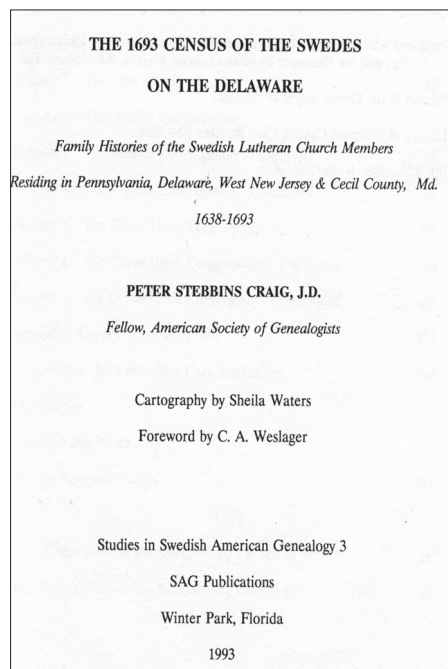
After discovering that doing genealogy only as a sideline when you are employed full-time really doesn't work well, Peter retired in 1987 at age 59 and immersed himself in researching the Swedish roots his great-grandmother had talked about, bringing to the task his strong sense of right vs. wrong – fact vs. supposition, his remarkable ability to retain detail, and a legal background which gave him an advantage in reading and interpreting birth/marriage/death, probate, land, and court records. The quest led him to study first-hand the sources available in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, and in Sweden. Not surprisingly – at least not to any genealogist, he found himself researching all the colonial Swedes and Finns he kept stumbling across. To keep things reasonably manageable,



Peter Stebbins Craig (1928–2009).

Peter established a cut-off date, limiting his research to the 1638-late 1700's period.

Before long, Peter was in touch



with other scholars in the U.S. and Sweden who had been researching *Nya Sverige*, and with various organizations and individuals concerned with colonial history, including especially the Swedish Colonial Society of Pennsylvania, of which he became a permanent council member and official society historian and genealogist until his death.

Among those who came to know Peter are all the many individuals who enlisted his help in establishing their own family connections to the Swedish colony.

Among Peter's colleagues and friends was Nils William Olsson, the founder of SAG, who published a series of Peter's articles detailing the genealogies of numerous *Nya Sverige* settlers. For many years Nils William included Peter as a member of the staff of the annual SAG workshop in Salt Lake City.

Peter's work appeared in other publications as well, and he frequently lectured. Among his noteworthy contributions are his many major articles in the Swedish Colonial Society of Pennsylvania's quarterly, *The Swedish Colonial News*, each article focusing on just one of the early Swedish or Finnish families and their descendants. His two books, *The 1693 Census of the Swedes on the Delaware* (1993, published by SAG) and *1671 Census of the Delaware* (1999, published by the Genealogical Society of Pa.) are definitive works

that should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the Swedish colony.

Not to be forgotten is the Gloria Dei Records Project. For more than a decade Peter has led the team in the U.S. and Sweden which has been translating and compiling the locatable records of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church in Philadelphia, starting with the early 1640's. Five volumes have been published; there are three more to come. The team cannot imagine what it will be like to continue without him.

Peter was a Fellow of the American Society of Genealogists (F.A.S.G.) and a Fellow of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania. In 2002 King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden designated Peter as a Knight First Class of the Royal Order of the Polar Star (*Nordstjärneorden*) in recognition of his contributions.

Just this past October Peter was honored by the Swedish Colonial Society with its first (and possibly its last) Lifetime Achievement Award during the Centennial celebration of the founding of the Society.

In the words of a Society member, "Many who went before, like Amandus Johnson, did outstanding research on the Swedish colony, but it is Peter who has made it come alive by compiling all sorts of information we can trust is correct. Now we know who the settlers were, about the lives of their children and grandchildren,

which creek they lived by, how much land they had, who their neighbors were, what legal disputes they got into, whether they could read and write, how much they gave to the church repair fund, even the occasional scandal, things like that."

Peter leaves his wife Sally, his four children Steve, Cary, Jenny, and Katie, four grandchildren with another on the way, and, among others, his older brother John and family. We send them our heartfelt condolences.

The writer is Ellen Rye of Silver Spring, Maryland.
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The Swedish Colonial Society establishes a Memorial Fund

The Honorary Governor, Rev. Kim-Eric Williams writes:

"A Publications and Research Fund, in Peter's name, will be established by the Society and contributions in his memory may be made out to the "Swedish Colonial Society" and marked "Craig Fund."

Donations in honor of Peter should be sent to the *Swedish Colonial Society, Gloria Dei Church, Christian St. and Christopher Columbus Blvd. Philadelphia, PA 19147, U.S.A.*

"May he and all the faithful departed through the mercy of God, rest in peace."

Digitized old Swedish newspapers

Recently the Swedish National Library (*Kungliga Biblioteket*) finally gave the public access to parts of their huge collection of old newspapers.

They have been working on this for a long time, starting with the world's oldest newspaper *Ordinari Post Tijdender*, that started publishing in the 1640s, and still comes out every week as *Post och Inrikes Tidningar*, the official gazette of Sweden.

This effort, which also read the newspapers by computer (an OCR

program), did not have any marked success, and was also difficult to search. The new effort seems to be using the same programs as the successful Finnish National Library has used, and is easy to navigate.

As this is just a beta-version, the number of newspapers is limited, but still very useful. You need to be able to read Swedish to get the benefit of it. The newspapers from the 1700s and early 1800s are printed in *fraktur* type face, which might not be so easy to read.

There are 28 available newspapers online now. The search is not yet perfect, but it is still useful, as you can search on a place name or a family name. I recently found an old wedding announcement from 1823 for a relative in a rural parish, where I would never have looked otherwise.

It is estimated that in due time more than 110 million pages will be digitized and made public. And then we are just waiting for the Swedish-American newspapers...

Link on page 30!