

Moving The New Sweden Colonial Farmstead Museum to Governor Printz Park in Tinicum Township, PA

A talk with photos given by Joseph Mathews at the 2020 New Sweden History Conference at the American Swedish Historical Museum. See talk at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RoAO7OozkQ

Today I would like to describe in words and photographs the ambitious project that has transported the seven log buildings that comprise the New Sweden Colonial Farmstead Museum (NSCFM) that originally stood in a section of Bridgeton City Park in New Jersey, to a new home in Governor Printz Park in Essington, part of Tinicum Township, Pennsylvania, just south of Philadelphia International Airport on the Delaware River. As many of you already know, the NSCFM or--more simply for the purposes of this talk--the Farmstead or New Sweden Farmstead, was first built in 1987-88 by the New Jersey nonprofit, the New Sweden Company (NSC), not only to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the first permanent European settlement in the Delaware Valley by the Swedish nation, but also to educate the public about the New Sweden colony, its culture and physical environment.

Each of the buildings of the Farmstead was based on historical research conducted by the Swedish architectural preservationist and builder, Gunnar Zetterquist, and his associate Severin Johansson. There was also a Swedish mason, Ake Frank. The buildings were arranged in a rectangle to form a courtyard and fenced in to control livestock. Each building had a different purpose and was built over months and years in an order dictated by circumstances obtaining in the wilderness: simple shelter first while the land was cleared and the livestock and harvest was protected; and a roomier dwelling later on as the family grew and conditions improved. Other buildings included a granary, a stable with a hayloft, a livestock barn, a threshing barn with a storage loft, and a forge or smithy which was shared with other families nearby.

The grand opening of the Farmstead took place on April 14th, 1988, and was attended by state dignitaries like NJ Governor Thomas Kean and, more spectacularly, by the Swedish King Carl XVI Gustav and Queen Silvia who were greeted by members of the Nanticoke Lenni Lenape tribe headquartered in Bridgeton. Thousands were in attendance. It is still remembered by many as a great day for the city.

The Farmstead was operated for years as a living history museum by the New Sweden Company with many volunteers and even a small paid staff. I am a relative newcomer to Cumberland County of which Bridgeton is the county seat. I arrived in the early 1990's and never actually visited the Farmstead while it was in operation. Nevertheless I have some sense of the scale of the operation because I have perused its administrative papers in a collection at the Cumberland County Historical Society library where I work part-time. I've also spoken with eyewitnesses.

By the time I became involved with the Farmstead and the New Sweden Company around 2013, the Farmstead had been closed for years and the NSC had decided not to try to restore it in Bridgeton as had been its intention, but rather to move it to a more central location where more visitors could be attracted to it. The South Jersey industrial sand company, Whibco, Inc., headed by the Swedish American Wade Sjogren and his family, had contributed \$10,000, first intended for a restoration in place, then, after reconsideration, for the move to a better location.

As newly appointed Chairman of the organization, I asked Frank Eld, the Finnish-American log building preservationist from Idaho, to examine the buildings. He assured me they were indeed still salvageable despite the deterioration of 25 years. I'll mention parenthetically that others whose opinion I asked were quite skeptical about attempting a renovation, but Frank's "thumbs up" was enough for me. Frank joined our Board and stayed quite involved himself, even offering to lead the restoration as he once had done in Idaho for a museum there.

At that time we believed we were moving to Wilmington, either to the grounds of the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation (KNF) or to Fort Christina Park next door. Ultimately neither site worked out, but in 2015 and 2016, not knowing that yet, we dismantled three of the cabins and moved them to the parking lot of the KNF. Frank had showed us how to label all of the logs by stamping washers with a code referring to a diagram and then screwing them to the logs so that they wouldn't get lost. It worked well. This crucial step of labeling enabled the final assembly years later. We used the Whibco \$10K to pay the workers and Peter Boyce, the owner of Delmont Sawmill and an old but still quite operational logging truck. We had been struggling with heavy logs for a few days on our own, so it was a revelation to see Peter's boom lifting multiple logs at a time!

In late 2016, then Swedish Colonial Society Governor Michael D'Andrea informed us of the opportunity he had learned about from Tinicum Township Commissioner Pat Barr, namely, that there was to be an improvement project at the 7-acre Governor Printz Park, the very site of Johan Printz's colonial capital with the archaeological remnants of the 1643 Printzhof still in place underground. It is a much-used space for recreation and community events. To the beautiful view over the river would be added landscaping, newly paved walkways, picnic gazebos, a band shell, a splash pad, a playground, and shuffleboard and horseshoe courts. Already in place were the impressive statue of Governor Printz and the New Sweden History Walk with signage offering historical information. It seemed that Printz Park could make the Farmstead a most fitting home.

In fact, the idea had deep roots. The New Sweden historian Amandus Johnson, in a 1938 essay, provides a brief history of the Swedish Colonial Society that he founded in 1909 and its role in establishing Governor Printz Park as a memorial of the Printzhof and the settlement on Tinicum Island. He describes how he hoped eventually that a replica Printzhof would be built and the park developed "as a kind of Skansen" with a "Swedish farm from the 1600's" made up of various log buildings serving different purposes. Skansen, as many of you know, is the world's first open-air museum, having been opened in Stockholm in 1891, and is comprised of over 150 historic structures

from throughout Sweden, the purpose of which is to show pre-industrial and rural ways of life. The folklorist Arthur Hazelius was Skansen's founder as Georg Karlin was the founder of Kulturen, Sweden's second open air museum at Lund in southern Sweden, which opened in 1892. Perhaps it was under the influence of Skansen or Kulturen or Johnson's essay, that the New Sweden Company hired Gunnar Zetterquist to design and build the Farmstead in the first place. In any case, prompted by Swedish Colonial Society Governor D'Andrea, we came to realize that in all the Delaware Valley there could be no better home for the Farmstead than Governor Printz Park.

In May 2017 the Swedish Colonial Society, guided by D'Andrea, pledged \$25K to reconstruct the largest of the cabins at the park. This is the only cabin with two rooms, the so-called Main Residence. Additional money had been solicited from individuals through a Buy-a-Log Campaign publicized in the SCS Journal. At \$100 a log or \$1000 a wall, that would bring in thousands more. Getting the backing of the Swedish Colonial Society was a game-changer to us at the New Sweden Company.

Around this time, conversations between the township and our two organizations--the SCS and the NSC--took place and a deal was struck: the township would prepare the site by building code-required foundations for each of the seven buildings, if for their part the New Sweden Company would reconstruct each cabin on site at its own expense and then deed the finished cabins to the township. We all decided it would be best to arrange the cabins around the New Sweden History Walk. The signage which had seen better days would be refurbished and historian Kim-Eric Williams would write revisions for each sign along the walk.

Meanwhile, over the winter, Bridgeton City had given us a July 1st, 2017 deadline to have the four remaining cabins removed. We had just enough left from the \$10K to accomplish this. I labeled the logs, a local contractor dismantled the cabins, and Peter Boyce of Delmont Sawmill carried the logs to a storage area in Leesburg NJ provided for free by Whibco. Bridgeton gave us extra time to allow two fledgling baby vultures to vacate the cabin with the opening in the roof (called the Smokehouse), but all of the cabins were out of Bridgeton City Park by the end of 2017.

To recap: as 2018 starts, with the SCS's \$25K pledge, we know we want to build the Main Residence in Governor Printz Park. The question is... who will do the job? 2018 was largely spent trying to answer this question and another related question, that of insurance. The insurance that we already had was revealed to be inadequate for construction activity. Much time and effort was expended exploring the feasibility of using volunteers headed up by a very willing not to say impatient Frank Eld. This unfortunately turned out to be a dead end because of liability issues. Long story short: we needed a general contractor who came with his own insurance and who had experience with log buildings. The name of Eli Stolfus and Highline Construction came to us through the good offices of former SCS Governor Sally Bridwell who got Eli's name from her handyman. Highline is an Amish-owned construction business operating out of Atglen PA in Lancaster (correction: Chester) County. The new SCS Governor John Tepe and I went to speak with Eli who showed interest in our project because of

its historical nature. Right off the bat, he had some good ideas about how economically to make our buildings as strong and as safe for visitors--schoolchildren among them--as possible. It took some time, but with John Tepe's lawyerly advice we drew up and signed off on a satisfactory three-way agreement between Highline, Tinicum Township, and the New Sweden Company.

Highline began work on April 4, 2019, showing up at the KNF parking lot where the logs of the Main Residence were stacked. Somehow, the sight of the powerful-looking forklift immediately dispelled the doubts that may have crept in during the delays of 2018. The way the small Highline crew swung into action further impressed. At first, Highline owner Eli Stolfus helped set up the workplace and then Henry Fisher and Josh Forren took over. Other workers would join the group as well, usually numbering no more than four. Henry was the foreman who made many of the on-site decisions that had to be made on the spot. He consistently proved to have good judgement. Workers seemed to work independently, but teams formed organically as needed. It was a smooth-running work site.

The Main Residence was up within a month and looked wonderful, inside and out. The grand opening took place on June 1, 2019 with displays and docents dressed in colonial style meeting waves of visitors. Then on June 30th, we were back again with displays and colonial garb participating with the township's July 4th celebration. It had started to make sense to us that we should try to coordinate many of our events with those of the township so as to increase the likelihood of higher attendance--one of the benefits of partnering with Tinicum Township. Another important partner was the Tinicum Township Historical Society headed by president Bill Moller.

The completion of the Main Residence was certainly a triumph. We were able to start our programming with a Harvest Festival at which we displayed the Settler's Trunk of the New Sweden Centre. We also decorated the cabin for Christmas as part of our annual Julmiddag or Christmas luncheon. But the idea all along had been to complete the first building to establish the project's credibility and then search for a grant to build the remaining 6 cabins. The cost to rebuild the Main Residence had exceeded the original SCS \$25K pledge and even the Buy-a-Log income, but the generosity of the SCS met this challenge. In the end, after chinking was added, around \$41K had been spent to build the Main Residence. Some of this was borrowed from the SCS treasury and was to be reimbursed from any future grant. But where would that grant come from to finish the remaining cabins?

We knew we had to mount a fundraising campaign, so Governor John Tepe got started by estimating costs for all six cabins, basing his estimate on the costs incurred for the Main Residence. He arrived at the figure of \$177,250. He then wrote a Prospectus describing the overall project, including many photos and the budget, and sent the application to a funding source he knew of: the Crystal Trust in Wilmington, Delaware. We'd have to wait until Christmas 2019 to hear back--only a few months. Remember that the cabins had been exposed to outside elements for years: rain, snow, and sun.

Alarming, some of the logs had sprouted fungi. We could only hope to be rescued by an infusion of cash.

To our astonishment, a check for John's requested amount--\$177,250--was in the SCS mailbox by early January. The Crystal Trust had come through! Then, soon enough, a new 3-way Agreement was negotiated, written, signed, and put into action. By this time, Covid-19 had struck and Highline had to wait for PA's construction ban to be lifted before it could start, but start it did on May 7, 2020. Because the pandemic had shut down the splash pad and other events in the park, Highline could work through the summer, erecting all of the buildings in turn without interruption. This was a great help. Passersby must have been curious all summer as each of the buildings came into being!

As of August 13th, all the work on all 6 buildings was done except for the chinking and the fireplaces. As of the recording of this talk on September 23rd, much of the chinking has been done. Enough money remains from the grant to pay for the chinking and, we hope, for both fireplaces. After that, other work remains of course. The many authentic Swedish artifacts--farm implements, a weaving loom, and so on--that were once used in Bridgeton have to be brought out of storage, refurbished, and returned to their buildings. Educational programs will need to be devised, cooperation with partners worked out, and so on. But for now, for the time being, to see these buildings rescued from their previous sorry state, restored, structurally strong, safe and proud looking is enough for today and is to be celebrated. I extend heartfelt thanks to all of the good folks--too numerous to mention here--who helped make the renovation and reconstruction of the Farmstead happen!

I would like to mention how we handled some of the physical challenges of the renovation. As with any construction project, we were limited in money and time. The logs themselves were of varying viability: many were still solid, others had rotted areas that needed treatment, others had to be replaced entirely. There were inherent flaws in the original buildings: notches were facing upward inviting water damage and causing ends simply to fall off. Given such unpredictability, we paid Highline by the hour. It was important therefore that challenges be addressed quickly and definitively. Therefore, rather than try to build upon stone foundations, as they had in 1988, to save time and to achieve greater stability, Highline anchored the bottom logs onto cement block which was later covered by fieldstones cemented into place, thus giving the appearance of stone foundations.

I visited Skansen in Fall 2019 and spoke with their Architectural Conservator Staffan Hansing who asked why we used structural screws and chinking. Chinking is unknown in Sweden and historic log cabins will stand hundreds of years with wooden pegs and simple gravity. I answered that our buildings needed to be safe for visitors and screws inserted at regular intervals achieved safety quickly, keeping us within our budget. He reluctantly granted me that, but what about chinking? Well, 6 of our 7 original buildings were chinked in 1988 because they had to be built quickly to meet a deadline--no time for hand-hewing. Gaps had to be sealed up. In 2020 chinking is still required to cover

those parts of the screws visible in the gaps and to keep the interiors of the cabins dry. Remember that molds had invaded the logs which need to stay as dry as possible. With our project, chinking is necessary finishing work.

I was especially interested in roofs at Skansen. Gunnar Zetterqvist's roof design was modeled on wooden roofs made of planks or slabs typical of the province of Dalarna. The Mora farmstead at Skansen has several such buildings. To carry out this design, we would have had to use half-logs or slabs which are expensive. Or we would have had to use two layers of planks with some extra handiwork. Being under the constraints of time and money, we chose instead to use cedar shakes which were much cheaper than slabs and were also historically accurate, cedar shingles being manufactured in the colony early on. We priced out all of our options: pine boards are cheapest (\$4.50 sq. foot), then slabs (\$8.50), then cedar shakes (\$9), and finally sod (\$17 including maintenance). The cost of shakes is mitigated by other savings: only one layer of underlying pine boards is needed, then only one layer of ice and water shield, then a layer of cedar breather mat, then the shingles. Cedar shingles last long, are attractive, and no staining is needed.

I'll mention just a few more details. We have installed chicken wire to keep children out from under the Granary and made removable steps to prevent them from climbing onto its front porch.

We have installed fixed windows with glass panes instead of sliding boards to add light to the interior.

You have to duck to enter the cabins because low doors were better for defense in the 17th century.

The Smokehouse was designed to have an opening in its roof to allow smoke from the fire inside to escape. If we want one, we'll add the opening later.

You can track the progress made on the Farmstead as it was built over 2019-2020. Bill Moller, president of the Tincum Township Historical Society, visited the work site every day to take photos which he will provide upon request. Contact him at tths@rcn.com.

There is another partnership to mention: Tincum Township has offered exhibition space to house the artifact collection of the SCS at the beautifully renovated 19th century Lazaretto quarantine station. The new location should increase visitation for the collection.

In conclusion, I hope I have conveyed that we learned as we went as this project unfolded over about 4 years from Fall 2015 when the first cabin was dismantled to the start of construction in Spring of 2020. I'm amazed now at how attractive and safe the reconstructed Farmstead is thanks to Highline's expertise and the support of The Swedish Colonial Society and our other grantors.

In 1988 Gunnar Zetterquist realized his vision of "a Swedish farm from the 1600's" as Amandus Johnson expressed it in his essay. In 2020 we saved Zetterquist's buildings from demolition and reconstructed them anew on the site Johnson hoped to see "developed as a kind of Skansen." By preserving the Farmstead, The Swedish Colonial Society has made it possible to perform in collaboration with its partners in Tinicum its stated mission of promoting the history and culture of New Sweden in America. May that work prosper!