

The Arrival of the *Mercurius* and the Creation of the Upland Court

The year 2006 marks two important 350th anniversaries relating to the colonial Swedes on the Delaware – the arrival of the last authorized voyage of the New Sweden Company, the *Mercurius*, and the creation of the Upland Court, which was to serve the Swedes and Finns for the next quarter century.

Spurred by a report from Governor Risingh that the ship *Golden Shark* had not reached its New Sweden destination, the Swedish government wasted no time to outfit a new voyage to its American colony. The ship *Mercurius* was purchased at Zaardam in the Netherlands, completely rebuilt and then sent to Göteborg, loaded with cargo for the new world. After the arrival of the *Mercurius* in Göteborg in July 1655, it was prepared for a trans-Atlantic voyage and new colonists were recruited.

No accurate passenger list survives for the *Mercurius*. Martin Thijsen Anckarhjelm in Göteborg, who was in charge of preparing the *Mercurius* for departure, kept a registry of Finnish emigrants who had enrolled to go to New Sweden. His list reached 110 persons by 17 October 1655, but he was soon ordered to limit the number of new colonists to 85. An on-board count by Hendrick Huygen showed a total of 92 Finns (33 men, young and old, 16 women, 11 maidens and 32 children under 12) plus 9 officers and old servants, 2 Swedish women and 2 Swedish maidens, a total of 105 passengers. Including the crew there were 130 souls on board. According to Papegoja, a hundred or more persons were left behind, who had sold all of their possessions, hoping to travel to New Sweden.

The *Mercurius* departed Göteborg and drifted to Älvsborg by 10 November. Here the ship waited fifteen days for favorable winds and headed out to sea on 25 November. After three and a half months at sea, the *Mercurius* arrived before former Fort Trinity (present New Castle) on 13 March 1656. But, contrary to expectations, a Dutch flag was flying over the fort. Going ashore, Hendrick Huygen, Commissary of the voyage, learned of the surrender of New Sweden to the Dutch the preceding September. The Dutch also renamed the fort as Fort Casimir, its original name when built by the Dutch in 1651.

The local Dutch commander at Fort Casimir, Jean Paul Jacquet, had written to Stuyvesant on 7 March, complaining of the “mutinous” behavior of Sven Skute and Jacob Svensson. Now he hastily wrote to Stuyvesant again, reporting the arrival of the *Mercurius* with 130 souls on board and asking for instructions. His letters, as well as a letter from Papegoja asking for permission to unload passengers and cargo, were carried to New Amsterdam by Isaac Allerton’s trading ketch. The letters arrived on 18 March and led to an emergency meeting of Stuyvesant’s Council, which lasted well past midnight. The Council sent orders that the *Mercurius* should be sent back to Sweden, without leaving any passengers or cargo on the South River. In addition, Sven Skute and Jacob Svensson should be arrested and sent to New Amsterdam.

Traveling overland to New Amsterdam, Hendrick Huygen made a last-ditch effort to change the Council’s mind. Arriving on 1 April 1656, he urged Stuyvesant to allow the colonists to join their countrymen, but the Council was adamant. The ship and all

of its passengers and cargo must leave the South River promptly. Huygen thereupon agreed that he would personally order the *Mercurius* to sail to New Amsterdam with all of its passengers and cargo and gave his personal bond to remain in Manhattan until the ship arrived.

Not consulted in these negotiations were the Swedes and Finns living on the Delaware and their friends, the native Indians. In accordance with Stuyvesant’s order, Papegoja wrote, “we decided to set sail for Manhattan. But as soon as the savages or Indians observed this they collected speedily in great numbers, came down to us and reminded us of the former friendship and love, which they had for us Swedes, above all other nations, and said that they would destroy and exterminate both Swedes and Hollanders, unless we remained with them and traded as in the past. Then all our Swedes, who feared the savages, came to us also and protested strongly against us in writing, . . . saying that we would be the cause of their destruction if we departed.” Papegoja was unable to decide what to do, but, seeing the danger of refusing the Indians’ demands, he ordered the skipper to turn upriver and the passengers were put ashore with their belongings at Tincum Island.

According to a later report by one of the passengers, Anders Bengtsson, “the Dutch forbade the ship to travel up the river, would have ignominiously sent it back, if the heathens (who loved the Swedes) had not gathered together, went on board, and defiantly brought it up past the fort.”

Reports of “some mishap” between the Dutch and the Swedes or Indians reached New Amsterdam by 18 April 1656 (28 April, new style), when Stuyvesant dispatched soldiers overland to the South River to determine what had happened to the *Mercurius*. Five days later Andreas Hudden returned to Manhattan from Fort Casimir carrying a report from Jacquet regarding the behavior of the Swedes and Indians on the South River, including the fact that the *Mercurius*, contrary to orders, had sailed up above Fort Casimir to Tincum Island and had landed goods there. The Council absolved the captain and crew of the *Mercurius* from any responsibility for this disobedience, as well as Hendrick Huygen. From the accounts of witnesses, the Council found that the incident was “caused by the obstruction of some Swedes and Finns, joined by some savages, coming on board with Papegoja and remaining on board in a large number until the said ship had passed Fort Casimir,” and that “some of the principal men of the Swedes were at the bottom of it and that also most of the other Swedes, who had taken the oath of loyalty [to Stuyvesant], had been stirred up or misled.” It was decided that Hendrick Huygen and Stuyvesant’s own representatives should promptly go to the South River and negotiate a peaceful settlement.

The settlement agreement is not of record, but it may be inferred from subsequent developments. The *Mercurius* passengers were permitted to remain. Huygen was permitted to trade the ship’s cargoes for a return load of tobacco; the *Mercurius* would have safe passage to return to Sweden. In