

A Little Valley's Prosperity and Hopes of Preservation: Swedish Incorporation of English Imperialism in the Delaware Valley and the Decline of Lenape Power Before William Penn (1669-1682)

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Abstract

After decades of different colonial powers attempting to colonize and exploit the Delaware Valley, the English finally obtained control by 1665, though not without issues. Many of the old settlers from the former colony of New Sweden (1638-1655) desired independence from the English Empire, setting up a rebellion with the help of the Lenape. This rebellion was stopped by fellow Swedes, establishing English rule in the area which the others had to adapt to. However, based on close examination of underutilized Swedish records from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the Swedes in the various regions of the Delaware Valley adopted aspects of English imperialism while maintaining ties to the Lenape to further their prospects. However, the Swedes and the Lenape forged different trajectories where the Swedes incorporated themselves into the English Empire while the Lenape had to single-handedly resist English encroachment, hence creating the first signs of the decline in Lenape power around the Delaware Valley.

Introduction

During the 1670s, the Delaware Valley faced economic and social transformations that led to the Swedish and Lenape acceptance of William Penn and English colonists settling in the Delaware Valley by 1682. Before the 1670s, the Delaware Valley remained in the hands of various colonial powers: the Dutch in 1631, the Swedes from 1638 to 1655, the Dutch ruling from New Amsterdam between 1655-1665, and the English ruling from Albany, New York from 1665 to 1682. The remaining New Sweden colonists who stayed behind after its fall to the Dutch in 1655, managed to adopt their own court system called the

Upland Court west of the Delaware River which ran as an independent entity during Dutch and early English rule. The Upland Court only collected quit-rents, or rents paid with hard currency or agricultural commodities, and assurances of loyalty (Armstrong, 1860).

In 1669, various Swedes and the Lenape attempted to overthrow English rule during the Long Swede Rebellion, which ultimately failed due to some Swedes, including an Upland Court justice, intervening to stop the rebellion (Haefli, 2006). By the end of the 1670s, the Swedes of the Upland Court adopted English imperialism into their independent

government and aligned themselves with both the English and the Lenape to further their prospects as a minority group in an anglicized world. This switch in alliances, however, left the Lenape without a clear ally against English aggression, leaving them to fend for themselves against future settlements.

Swedes' Incorporation of English Imperialism in the Delaware Valley

The Swedes of Upland, however, while managing to govern themselves, faced a new governor: Edmund Andros. Andros remained loyal to the King of England, Charles II, and desired to implement new systems in both New York and in the Delaware Valley in 1676. Andros's first system was to implement three new jurisdictions, including the Upland Court, which was now a part of his jurisdiction, though remaining independent (Andros, 1676). Andros' other system included English land policies where everyone who bought land had to purchase at least 100 acres of land, to which 50 acres of the property would be "improved" upon. This meant that the land should be cultivated or developed for crops and/or industry for products to go to New England and Barbados to feed servants and slaves. (Webb, 1995, Andros, 1676).

The Upland Court records, relatively unexamined before this paper, indicated that Upland followed these new patterns. They issued grants for lands in the Delaware Valley, usually giving more acreages along the Delaware River to wealthier, more established families, while less prominent families received lands along the Schuylkill River and smaller creeks that feed into the Delaware River (Armstrong, 1860). The Upland Court also fined people who did not abide by regulation or pay their quit-rent, to which some of the fines were nearly fifteen-fold (Armstrong, 1860).

In New Jersey, the Swedes developed land according to English customs and even helped the English acquire land in the West Jersey colony (located in Southwest New Jersey today). West Jersey Quaker and English colonists developed land at an exponential rate in the late 1670s, (Soderlund, 2022). Swedish brothers, Sven Svenson and Anders Svenson, helped to purchase the area of Gloucester County, New Jersey for the proprietors, establishing plantations thousands of acres each (Indians Deed, 1677). A few Swedes moved to New Jersey between 1675 and 1682, purchasing lands already owned by Quakers, to which they would have to pay quit-rents to maintain and develop the lands, hence living and cooperating with English authorities on both sides of the Delaware River (Rambo, 1682, Helm, 1686, Keen, 1682).

While these policies were put into place by Andros, the Upland Court, and New Jersey, the Lenape reacted with less force than they had in the early 1670s. In the past, the Lenape killed individuals to assert their authority in the Delaware Valley, which was their most sacred land (Hitakonanu'laxk, 1994). Now, while trying to keep alliances and with a decline in their populations due to diseases, the Lenape merely threatened English settlements (Soderlund, 2014). In one case, Andros allowed English settlements north of Upland's district, which were then threatened by the Lenape. The Upland Court refused to intervene in the affair, allowing for the English to settle and for the Lenape to become self-reliant (Soderlund, 2022).

Conclusion

When William Penn arrived in the Delaware Valley in October of 1682, Penn not only met with the Lenape to negotiate land deals and maintain a peaceful prospect, but also faced the various old settlers in the area (Weslager, 1959). These Swedes,

however, were now used to either living or dealing with various English powers surrounding the Delaware Valley. The Swedes welcomed William Penn with great joy, hoping to improve their prospects (Weslager, 1959). The Lenape also hoped that they would be able to preserve their sovereignty through friendly relations with William Penn. Unfortunately, this peace resulted in the Lenape being dispossessed from their original homelands while the Swedes adapted to English politics and economics that improved their landholdings and prospects (Soderlund, 2014).

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