

THE FINNS
IN AMERICAN
COLONIAL
HISTORY



THE FINNS *in*
American Colonial
History

Washington, D. C.
United States Government Printing Office
1937

Being extension of remarks of

HON. FRANK E. HOOK

Member of Congress from Michigan

in

House of Representatives

August 21, 1937

THE FINNS

in American Colonial History

MR. SPEAKER, the House of Representatives has under consideration, through Senate Joint Resolution 135, an amendment to a previous act of the Congress which would extend to the Government and the people of Finland an invitation to participate in the three-hundredth anniversary celebration of the founding of New Sweden, the first permanent white settlement on the banks of the Delaware River. For my part I cannot imagine why this invitation, heretofore extended to the Government of Sweden, was not originally drafted to include the Government of Finland. Ascribed to an oversight, the Senate was quick to correct the deficiency. Today, on the eve of adjournment, we have the opportunity of joining with the Senate in passing this resolution authorizing and instructing the President to invite the Government of Finland to join with the Government of Sweden as our guests for this commemorative festivity. I hope the resolution will pass unanimously.

The year 1638, when the first Swedish-Finnish colony was established in the New World, was just 138 years previous to the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and, if we were to add 138 years to that eventful date, it would bring us down to our own modern 1914. As far back before the Revolutionary War

as we are after it—this gives us a better picture of the sweep of the years since that eventful day nearly 300 years ago when these colonists of Sweden and Finland first landed on our shores.

In considering this colonial project, we must, of course, realize that Sweden as a nation was helped to its position of dominance in the affairs of Europe by the strength and virility of the people of its domain. Finland, then a grand duchy of Sweden, as over 150 years later a grand duchy of Russia, gave of her money and her people to the glory of Swedish arms. At one period of her history, in one of the destructive wars that militant Sweden was engaged in, Finland gave up one-third of her male population. Seventeenth century historians bear witness to the valor and fortitude of the Finns.

According to our best historical authorities, this colonial enterprise of the Kingdom of Sweden, which encompassed the territory of Finland as a grand duchy, grew out of a proposal made to Gustavus Adolphus, illustrious ruler of the Swedes, by William Usselinx, a Netherlander, just about the time that the Pilgrim fathers were setting out from English shores for the wilderness of Cape Cod. The idea took, and the New Sweden company was organized on the 1st of May 1627, and the stock lists were opened to all Europe. The King himself pledged \$400,000. The city of Wiipuri in modern Finland—Wiborg in Hanseatic League days—was a participant.

Men of every rank were solicited—

Says the American historian, Bancroft—

and it was resolved to invite colonists from all the nations of Europe. Other nations employed slaves in their colonies, and

slaves cost a great deal, labor with reluctance, and soon perish from hard usage, so the Swedish appeal declared for a free colony, saying, "Surely we shall gain more by a free people with wives and children." To the Scandinavian imagination, hope painted the New World as a paradise.

In the spring of 1638 the first ship from the Swedish Kingdom, the *Kalmar Nyckel*, arrived at the mouth of the Delaware River. It sailed up the river to the point where the city of Wilmington, Del., is now located. At the natural stone pier, still in existence and known as The Rocks, the small band of pioneers disembarked and thus began the effort which was destined to become the first permanent settlement in the Delaware River Valley.

The land upon which the colonists laid the foundations of a new pioneer Commonwealth in North America was purchased from friendly Indians. It extended as far up as the Schuylkill River, where Philadelphia, the cradle of our liberties, is now situated. Later additions to the territory of the New Sweden colony extended its boundaries so as ultimately to bring within its limits nearly all of present-day Delaware and sections of New Jersey and Maryland as well. Independence Hall itself stands on land that was one time a part of the colony, and in Wilmington the Holy Trinity Church—not to mention other churches in other places—harks back to these doughty pioneers of New Sweden.

In common with Virginia and the Massachusetts and other seventeenth-century colonies in North America, New Sweden on the Delaware resulted from the activities of a trading company. Both money and leadership for the enterprise came from the Finnish part of the Kingdom as well as from Sweden proper.

Admiral Klaus Fleming, one of the leading members of the Finnish nobility, became associated with the New Sweden Co., and from the first was in charge of its affairs. His directorship of the company was cut short by his death in 1644. According to Dr. Amandus Johnson, the leading authority on this phase of American colonial history, "the company and colony lost their best friend and most enthusiastic promoter" when Fleming was killed in battle against the Danes.

The Finnish contribution to the population of New Sweden was likewise conspicuous.

While we do not as yet have altogether satisfactory statistics regarding the number of Finns in New Sweden, proof positive and final exists showing that they constituted an important element in the population of the colony. Of the 12 separate expeditions sent to the colony between 1638 and 1656, the records do not always clearly separate the Finnish settlers from the Swedish. The last expedition, which arrived on the Delaware in March 1656, numbered 105 persons. Of these 92 were listed as Finns. At the time of the arrival of this group the persons in the colony, presumably adults who included the Finns already in New Sweden, numbered some 240. As late as 1664 a group of 140 Finns were reported to have arrived in Amsterdam, Holland, on their way to New Sweden. A conservative estimate, therefore, places the Finns at from one-third to one-half of the pioneers of the Delaware River Valley.

To review further the progress of the colonial effort of the Swedes and Finns, which, incidentally was but a scant 30 years after Jamestown had first been settled by the English, and but 15 years after the first Dutch-

men had settled on Manhattan Island and founded New Amsterdam, we find the national jealousies of old Europe being transferred to the unsettled shores of the New World.

As Bancroft says:

The fame of Swedish arms protected the Swedish flag in the New World; and while Banner and Torstenson were humbling Austria and Denmark, the Dutch did not at first proceed beyond a protest. Meantime, tidings of the loveliness of the country had been borne to Scandinavia, and the peasantry of Sweden and of Finland longed to exchange their farms in Europe for homes on the Delaware. At the last considerable expedition there were more than a hundred families eager to embark for the land of promise, and unable to obtain a passage on the crowded vessels. * * * Philadelphia, like Delaware, traces its lineage to the Swedes, who had planted a suburb of Philadelphia before William Penn became its proprietary. * * * The Swedes and Dutch were left to contend for the Delaware. In the vicinity of the river the Swedish company was more powerful than its rival; but the province of New Netherlands was tenfold more populous than New Sweden.

And then the inevitable happened. A revival of Swedish aggression in the Delaware finally aroused the Dutch to action. In 1654 one-legged Peter Stuyvesant, who himself had arrived in New Amsterdam but in 1647, led a force of more than 600 men into the Delaware. Bancroft chronicles that—

One fort after another surrendered, and to Rysingh, the Swedish Governor, honorable terms were conceded; the colonists were promised quiet possession of their estates; and jurisdiction of the Dutch was established.

Such was the end of New Sweden—

Comments Bancroft—

the colony that connects our country with Gustavus Adolphus and the nations that dwell on the Gulf of Bothnia.

But although the Swedes had control of their colony for but 16 years the population remained. For more than a hundred years there was a direct contact between the Swedes and their church authorities in Sweden. These settlers—Swedes and Finns alike—retained their identity—linguistic, religious, cultural—but ultimately they merged with the blood stream of American nationality. Intermixture of Swedes and Finns and the anglicization of the language of both had proceeded apace by the time the fathers of this country created a new nation on this continent.

By that time a few descendants of the Delaware colonists had risen to positions sufficiently conspicuous to bring them into participation in the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars as signers of the Declaration of Independence and, later, as signers of the Constitution of the United States. The majority lived the lives of hard-working pioneers and made their contributions to the development of American institutions and ideals in that anonymous manner which ever characterizes the life and endeavors of the common man who was then, as he is today, the real foundation of all that we hold dear and worthwhile in this glorious country.

As Bancroft, our own American historian, summarizes it—

The descendants of the colonists, in the course of generations, widely scattered and blended with emigrants of other lineage, constituted, perhaps more than one part in two hundred of the population of our country in the early part of the nineteenth century. At the surrender they did not much exceed 700 souls. As Protestants, they shared the religious impulse of the age. They revered the bonds of family and the purity of morals; their children, under every disadvantage of teachers and Swedish

books, were well instructed. With the natives they preserved peace. The love for their mother country and an abiding sentiment of loyalty toward its sovereign continued to distinguish them; at Stockholm they remained for a century the objects of a disinterested and generous regard; in the New World, a part of their descendants still preserve their altar and their dwellings around the graves of their fathers.

But let me return to the Finns. As we all know, there is one thing that Finland and the Finns have particularly impressed upon the consciousness of the American people. It is the integrity that they have kept with themselves throughout their entire history—the integrity they have kept with the world, and with this country in particular. Finland is the only nation that has fairly and promptly paid its debt to the United States. The citizens of the Finnish Republic have in these trying years, which might well be called an era of default and dishonesty in international commitments, followed a policy of honest dealing which excites the admiration of all who value the sanctity of contractual obligations.

In thus abundantly illustrating this all too rare policy of honest debtor, the Finns of today have only given relief to qualities that we find among the Finns along the Delaware centuries ago. Honesty, fair dealing, and hard work were characteristics of the Delaware Finns in the 1600's. We learn from a history of the New Sweden colony, published in 1702, that in a settlement named Finland, which was in the vicinity of present-day Chester, Pa., the Finns lived without fortifications, at peace with the Indians. Together with the Swedes they founded the first towns, built the first schools and roads, established the first law courts, and constructed the first churches in the Delaware

Valley, and in doing so made important and lasting contributions to American civilization.

We who are celebrating this year the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Constitution of the United States are likely to forget that just as the fathers of the Constitution wrought mightily, a century and a half ago, to lay the foundations of the independent United States, so these pioneers of the Delaware, some 150 years before the momentous Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, wrought mightily to carve organized civilized communities out of the wilderness.

The work of the fathers is being commemorated this year; the achievements of the Delaware settlers will be commemorated next year, in 1938.

It is my sincere hope that the Delaware Tercentenary, in which the Finns of Finland and our own citizens of Finnish antecedents will participate, will assume proportions commensurate with the importance of the seventeenth century founders of the colony.

Let the tercentenary be celebrated in a manner that will clearly impress the American people with the fact that, according to history, the Finns were one of four nations that helped to settle the Original Thirteen States of the Union, the other three being the English, the Dutch, and the Swedes.

