

370th Anniversary

The Second Voyage of the *Kalmar Nyckel*

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It is an unfortunate quirk of history that so little is known of the first voyage of the *Kalmar Nyckel*. The specifics of that historic event resulting in the establishment of Fort Christina, the founding of the colony of New Sweden and literally the founding of the state of Delaware are lost in the annals of history. Peter Minuit’s papers, the log of the ship all disappeared. Almost no primary source documents survived. As a result anything we know of the voyage come from letters written by supporters such as Samuel Blommaert, who did not sail and an official notarized affidavit describing that on March 29, 1638, a ceremony was conducted in the great cabin of the *Kalmar Nyckel* where Minuit purchased land for the new colony from the Lenape. This affidavit was signed by four sailors who had witnessed the event.

The second voyage of the *Kalmar Nyckel*, somewhat less auspicious does allow much more information to survive describing the founding of Delaware’s first permanent colony. We know for example that a baby boy was born during the crossing. Unlike the first voyage, which brought primarily soldiers and personnel to establish and hold Fort Christina. The second voyage brought the first settlers, whole families and livestock to permatize the possession of the new colony.

The *Kalmar Nyckel* originally departed from Gottenburg, Sweden, in the fall of 1639, under the command of a Dutchman, Cornelis Van Vliet. Several problems had delayed departure, not the least of which was that not one person had volunteered for free emigration. Therefore the government was forced to conscript: “married solders as had deserted or committed other offenses and transport them with their wives and children to New Sweden.”¹ These intrepid but reluctant pioneers were further promised to be returned to Sweden in two years. Though the original plans had called for stocking the ship with livestock only four mares and two colts were aboard.

Almost immediately upon departure the ship began leaking and had to put into port at Medemblik for repairs, two further attempts to depart were similarly thwarted by winds and seas. The crew blamed their captain and he was charged with “carelessness and dishonesty in victualing the ship”.² He was replaced with Pouwel Jansen. Finally on February 7, 1640, they weighed anchor for the new world. Aboard were the appointed Governor Peter Hollender Ridder and a pastor, Reorus Torkillus. The Royal Archives of Stockholm, contains the names of ten of the passengers.

¹ Scharf, J. Thomas, History of Delaware, Vol. 1. Philadelphia: Richards, 1888, page 42.

² Ibid.

After a swift but treacherous crossing, with much seasickness reported, the ship arrived at Fort Christiana on April 17, 1640. The new governor discovered he had arrived none too soon, the personnel charged with holding the fort until reinforcements would arrive had felt abandoned and had been planning that very day to abandon the fort for New Amsterdam. With the infusion of new settlers and an official governor, the colony of New Sweden expanded and flourished.

The *Kalmar Nyckel* remained at New Sweden until May of 1640, when she sailed back to Sweden. On board was Mans Kling, the commander of the contingent of soldiers who had manned the fort between the two voyages. He was sent back with orders to recruit more immigrants.

April 17, 2010, marks the 370th Anniversary of the return of the *Kalmar Nyckel* to what would become Delaware on her second voyage. More importantly it marks the arrival of the first settlers to the colony that would become the First State. Though at first reluctant, these pioneers persevered and remained to help found our state. Many of their descendents still live in the Delaware valley and we at the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation are proud to welcome them aboard the replica of the ship that bore them to the New World. Thousands of visitors sail and tour our beautiful ship, which is manned by hundreds of volunteer crew. Thousands more school children re-live history as they sail aboard the ship.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the volunteer crew, staff and Board of Trustees of the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, a grant from the State of Delaware, revenue from appearances and sails and the generous contributions of donors, the *Kalmar Nyckel* begins its 12th season sailing on the Christina River in Wilmington and along the Atlantic Seaboard.

Sources:

Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware, Volume 1. Philadelphia: Richards, 1888.

Weslager, C.A. A Man and His Ship: Peter Minuit and the Kalmar Nyckel. Wilmington: Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, 1989.