

By Jeannette Eckman)

1. a. Extent and Significance of New Castle  
in Colonial Days

By a **series** of **misfortunes** which resulted in the **loss** of many colonial **records** concerning **New Castle** and because of the lack of historians with the financial **backing** to do **the necessary intensive** and **wide-spread** research from **scattered** sources, **New Castle** has **been** deprived of its rightful attention in the **admirable histories** of **American** colonial life, In **recent years** a number of historical books and pamphlets about the town have **been** published\*. Much additional research in original **sources** has been done for this study and report, which further **establishes** the importance of the preservation of and replacing of original features of those dwellings and other buildings that **have** been remodeled in a style out of keeping with the **general** unspoiled **survival** of the old town.

Among the choice places for **settlement** along the Atlantic seaboard during the seventeenth century, the **sandy** point that jutted out into the **great** and beautiful Delaware River at the site of present **New Castle**, was a landmark for Dutch explorers **who** were the first Europeans to discover it, according to such records as survive. Soon it was a regular port of call for Dutch **traders**, who loaded into their ships rich harvests of beaver skins provided by the **Indians**. After the Swedes had made the first permanent **settlement** on the river in 1638, at the site of **Wilmington** and **above**, the **Dutch** recognizing as the **'key to the river'** the **site**

of New Castle with its jutting point and its miles of unobstructed view north and south, built here in 1661 their Fort **Casimir**.

**When** the Dutch finally wrested the Delaware River from the Swedes in 1656, they strengthened Fort **Casimir**, sending soldiers and an increasing number of settlers and supplies from their main site of government at New Amsterdam on the Hudson and from Holland. Through **this** settlement they controlled **and** governed the whole of the Delaware River valley,

During the Dutch period **from** 1651 to 1664, **vessels** from **New Amsterdam** **and** directly from the Netherlands in Europe stopped at this port; English merchant ships from **New England**, Maryland, and Virginia, and English and French vessels **from** the West **Indies**, **also stopped** here to trade. The Dutch provided warehouses for **the** supplies of the merchants **and** **endeavored** to lure and hold the Indian **fur** trade from the **Susquehanna** region,

Small as the port **was** from a modern viewpoint, its existence in this location served to hold together the whole Atlantic seaboard territory **and** to prevent the driving of a wedge between **England's northern** and **southern colonies** along the coast, **which** the French might well have done, had the river been undefended,

**When** the Dutch colonial hold upon the **extensive** territory **from** the upper Hudson to the seacoast south of Delaware Bay was

surrendered to the English **James, Duke** of York in 1664, the Duke recognized the importance of the New **Castle** settlement and region and gave **special** instructions to his **representatives that** the **Delaware** River territory be secured for him against the **claims** of the proprietor of Maryland, Lord **Baltimore**.

The Duke of York in granting **Pennsylvania's** territory to William Penn in **1681**, at **first** held on to **New Castle** and the adjacent region from twelve **miles** above the town to the seacoast below the bay, Only by a persistent and **skillful** campaign did Penn gain the **Delaware** territory as his **"gateway to the sea"**<sup>a</sup>. Under Penn, **New Castle** remained the capital of his lower province: the Three Counties on the **Delaware**. For the life of **New Castle** **and** the Delaware territory attached to it **was** too **well** established as a separate entity to be **successfully** reoriented about the new capital of **Philadelphia**.

Throughout the colonial period, **New Castle** had an individual and cosmopolitan **quality**. **Its** few hundred houses, its public buildings, churches, **taverns, shops** and wharfs, its few tanneries, smithies, **and** brick kilns beyond the torn **streets**, together **with** the plantations of **rich** cropland and forest that extended inland and up and **down** the river, embodied a civilization and a **culture** that came **from** no one **nation**. **Houses, language, customs,** and beliefs reflected the varied character of the population:

Swedes and **Finns** who were ardent Lutherans, Dutch from Holland and other **Netherland** provinces who were chiefly Dutch Reformed in faith, though some **were Lutherans**; Rench **Hugenots** who had sought religious freedom among the Dutch and some **French** from the **West Indies**; **church** of England and Quaker English and a few Catholic English from Maryland, a few **Germans** from the **lowland** districts of the **Rhine**, a few **Welsh**, Danes, Norwegians; several Jewish traders, **negro** slaves, Here in miniature was a **dress-rehearsal** of the melting pot that **America** has become.

With the **establishment** of William **Penn's capital** at Philadelphia in the **1680's**, that city soon became the major fast-growing port on the Delaware ; but in the minds of several of **Penn's** deputy governors, who, **fresh** from Europe, surveyed the advantages and promise of the Delaware region, **New Castle was** the indicated port of the future. Great **plans** of development of port and **surrounding country** were **nurtured**, and boldly or **secretly begun**. **Expansion and** growth in competition with the Quaker capital was not permitted, however, and by the **1750's**, port activity and the prosperity of the town had declined, **Wilmington** had begun to develop both **as** tom and harbor on the Christina **and** drew both farm and river trade from **New Castle**, But still through this port came a large part of the immigration from Europe to the eastern **colonies**.

The political importance of New Castle grew as **its** trade declined, The three **counties** of **Delaware**, having **successfully established**

in 1704 a legislature separate from that of Pennsylvania, held their annual assembly at **New Castle**. As capital of the colony and county seat where the courts met, **the town was** a lively political center.

The bent and impetus toward political independence inherited from **settlement** days and kept **alive** by contention with the proprietary **government** of **Pennsylvania**, **matured during** the pre-Revolutionary **struggles** with England, **and** in the Revolution itself. **New Castle** sent to the continental **congress** and **to Washington's army**, **men who** led in the declaring and **making** of independence; and in the drafting of the **constitution** of the United States when **independence** was won.

**New Castle** flourished again **as** a port town following the **Revolution**, especially after the **capital** of the country **was** moved from Philadelphia to Washington. Through **New Castle** across the peninsula to the Chesapeake flowed a great traffic. **Packets ships** from up the river, **sloops** and ocean going <sup>SHIPS</sup> ~~schooners~~ from **North Atlantic** or **European** ports **discharged** and took on passengers and **goods** at the wharves along **the New Castle Strand**. Stages and **carts** carried them to **Frenchtown** near the head of Elk River. There other **sailing** ships took ~~them~~ to Maryland ports or on to Virginia and **ports** further south. During the resulting **prosperity** in the late **1700's** and early **1800's** a number of fine **Georgian** houses and the town hall replaced **earlier dwellings** and buildings. **These** enriched the general **architectural** treasure of the town **as** an authentic part of

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its tradition, and detracted nothing from the appeal of older and simpler buildings.