AREA B

Part II

Character, Extent and Significance of the Site and Environment of New Castle in the Colonial Period

At tho site of New Castle, Peter Stuyvesant, director-general of New Netherland in America, found the "Key to t%i South River" of tho Dutah. Fort Casimir, which he built hero in 1661, became the "strength of the river" during the Dutch period and that of tho English under tho Duke of York rhlah followad.

William Penn, having secured proprietary rights to the Province sf Pennsylvania, made anxious and determined effort to secure title to tho Delaware counties in order to control the river as his "gateway to tho sea." Penn wrote in 1700, in connection with the collection of *em*-at New Castle, that "no place in the River or Bay yields tho prospect that is at New Castle - seeing 20 miles one way and a dozen tho other, any vessel coming or going, either up or down."

The great river which the Dutch had discovered in 1609 led by the Englisb navigator, Henry Hudson, and which tho English Captain Argall named in 1610 for tho governor of Virginia, Lord delaWarr, stirred the trading aspirations of several European aationm. Lyric reports of its possibilities roarhad them through tho early navigators who were impressed by its "superb beauty" as well ar by its value as a commercial thoroughfare, into which might be fed a rioh pelt and fur trade *from* the forested regions beyond its shores. Added tales of tho abundant food represented by its fauna and flora and the fertile roll of the river bor-der~, invited the establishment of permanent trading stations, which might survive and flourish even when tho hazards of the long ocean voyage delayed supplies from home.

Tho Dutch, who claimed the Delaware River by right of discovery and claimed the Hudson River alro by the same right, made the northern river the site of their capital. While developing this upper region, they stretched a long arm to their "South River" through the activity of traders, end a fort with soldiers at tho site of present Glocester. It was when it became necessary to protect their Indian trade on thlr river from the Swedes rho had mottled along it, beginning la 1638, from the mouth of the Christina aerth, and having scattered plantations south of the Christina, that Peter Stuyvesant chose the si to of New Castle as tho place upon whi h a single fortification would command tho whole river and region.

To the rite of New Castle, Indians came from the Chesapeake and the Susquehanna territory by stream and trail. They had long used the sandy point of this site as a fishing place and lookout, and doubtless as a signal station in peace and war. Here after the white man came to explore the river, the Indian watched for sails, and kept his stores for trade in a village of huts nearby, called variously, Aresapa, Mackerish, Kitton, and Tamaconk. The latter name, meaning Place of the Beaver has a connection with the site, which was a stretch of dry land running back from the shore, bordered north and south by tidal marshes that ran far inland. Through each marsh a creek emptied into the river. The character of the soil, and the natural features indicated that beaver dams along the streams had caused the rich silt from the forested land to overflow much of the site. Today the roll is silt loam over scattered beds of deep fine sand. Between the present canal and mill creek the site of the town ranges from 25 to 76 feet above level.

From the sandy point of land that jutted out beyond the present ferry wharf, the first Dutch explorers in the river called the site of New Castle Sand Hook. The river ran deep and clear close to the point so that the sailing ships of the settlement days could unload upon the small wharf built below the fort. The mouth of the "town creek" to the north of it, was deep enough to afford safe harbor from winter storms for smaller craft. Later the point was washed away by great storms, the first of these recorded being that of 1664, when the newly-built palisade wall before the fort and the pier, were destroyed by the lashing of the waves that threatened to undermine the fort itself.

In time the whole shore receded to some extent, and later the building of piers caused mud flats to develop over the sand beach.

Beyond the bordering marshes and stream valleys north and south of the plain which formed the town site, the land stretched away mostly level or very gently rolling to the Christina creek on the north and the Appoquinimink creek on the south. This was the region most intimately connected with the town and the life of its people, together with the woodland or forest extending west as far as a man could walk in four or five days.

Politically, the whole of the Delaware River valley, on the west side from the falls at the site of Trenton, and on both sides from the site of Gloucester, New Jersey to the ocean, constituted the single area of trade and settlement over which control was centered at New Castle in the Dutch and early English period.

In the settlement days, New Castle, as the "key to the river" was a potential metropolis and great commercial port. Men of vision pointed this out to European trading companies and to rulers of European countries; but the times were not propitious. The wisdom and knowledge required to establish flourishing colonies and to maintain the health and safety of the people were not combined with the necessary power and means to that and. While a jealous ambition smouldered in the hearts of some powerful individuals and groups in Europe, some hardier and wiser leaders settled a few hundred each of Swedes, Dutch and English in turn, upon the roll. The backers of these settlements were unable to provide sufficient support from home, and the infant colony at the rite of New Castle, suffered as did the others, from many physical hardships, and also from the injustice and misfortune that resulted from changing regimes in control, and from political disruption.

In spite of obstacles presented at every turn by man and nature, New Castle slowly grew, keeping and attracting and giving birth to men of the fibre and character that had much to do with Delaware's becoming and outstanding colony among the original thirteen. The strength, spirit, and wisdom of Delaware's progress toward independent self-government gave New Castle, its capital, the historical importance it deserved. Here the government of the colony and state had its beginnings end its growth. Here in the old court house the colonial assembly passed the resolutions that supported Delaware's distinguished delegates in the sessions of the Continental Congress; here it endorsed the Declaration of Independence; and here the convention met which drafted the first constitution of the state.

The large part played by New Castle's environment in the town's growth and importance has never been adequately stressed. The true history of the people on the farms and in the hamlets and village communities from their first planting and settlement, has been barely touched upon in such historical studies as have been made and published. Much of the material for such a history has been lost. Enough remains to indicate that throughout the colonial period the life of the town was inseparably connected with that of the surrounding country.

New Castle, besides being the colonial capital, was the moat of the courts and county government. It was the voting place for the annual elections to which all the electors came to cast their votes from rill the hundreds* of the county.

* The hundred is a political division of the county, named from the old English court district of Alfred the Great's day.

After Penn's arrival, the tom became the center of the circle that defined the boundary of the county, the 12-mile radius by which the circle was established began fittingly at "the end of the horse dyke", the thoroughfare that connected the town with the plantations and settlements above it, After the cupola war built on the courthouse, this became the center of the survey.

The horse or bread dyke ever the marsh north of the tom and the causeway ever the marsh to the south of the tom supplemented the river as avenues of communication upon which depended the social, economic, and political life of early New Castle.

Above tho tom, the country extending north to the Christina had several centers of populations; the nearest and moat intimately connected with the life of the torn was Swanwyck, a mile up the river shore from New Castle (within the site now owned by the Lukens Steel Company) where, beginning in 1658, from 14 to 20 plots of land bad population chiefly of Dutch, Finns, and Swedes, some of whom as late 86 the 1680's needed interpreters to put their petitions en testimony before the courts. After 1664, there were English owners of plantations here in addition to the elder settlers.

A second community was Crane Hook, lying north of Swanwyck, between the shore and the road from New Castle to Christina ferry - which war on the general route of the present River Road, Here 16 to 20 plots were famed, chiefly by Finnsand Swedes.

Both Swanwyck and Crane Hook bad a large area of common land, most of it woodland, lying west of the cultinted plots along the Delaware River.

Nearer Christina, Swedes, Finns and English had plantations extending from the Delaware River, westward along the Christina valley.

In all these communities, residents of New Castle were among the owners of farms, small or large.

The settlement about the ferry across the Christina Creek, sear tho present site of the Swedish monument rod , was called Christinaham to begin with, but soon be- "Christeen" in most contemporary records.

The Lutherans at Swanwyck - Dutch as well as Swedes had a church there in the earl English period (and perhaps before); at Crane Hook, & was a Lutheran church in 1665. The Dutch church in the town of New Castle was of the Reformed faith, and during Dutch control and later continued in that faith until the congregation was absorbed by the Presbyterian.

In 1699, after the Swedish Lutheran Church (Old Swedes) was built near the Christina, the Crane Hook Church was abandoned. The Swanwyck church bed already disbanded for lack of a clergyman.

South of New Castle, in the Dutch and Early English period, religious services were held on plantations near the ferry over St. George's Creek; and also at the ferry over the Appoquinimink, present Odessa.