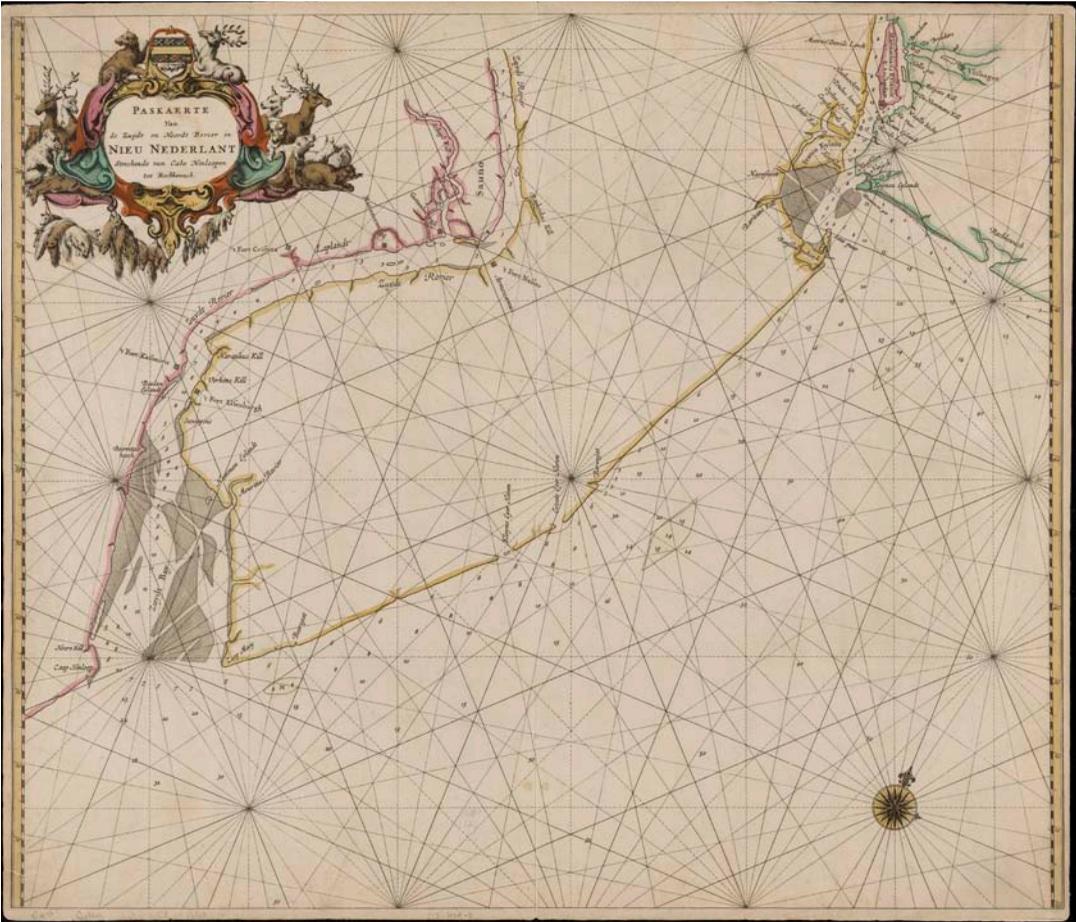


# A BRIEF HISTORY of NEW CASTLE

## *Colonial Rivalries*

New Castle's origins lie in the competition among European nations for trade and settlement along the Delaware River. In 1609 Henry Hudson, an Englishman employed by the Dutch, discovered the Delaware Bay. In the years that followed, other Dutch sailors explored the bay and then journeyed further north up the Delaware River. They sailed among treacherous shoals and past a landscape of low-lying wetlands that melded into shallow waters close to shore, a habitat for muskrats, water fowl, and spawning fish. Then, rather suddenly, there came a bend in the river that on the western side revealed higher ground above a sandy shoreline. Dry land stood close to the river's natural channel and thus offered easy access to the shore. The Dutchmen called this sandy point Sandhoek. It was the future site of New Castle.

The Dutch claimed the Delaware Bay and River, or, as they called it, the South River, by right of discovery. They built a trading post called Fort Nassau on the eastern bank, at the place that is now Gloucester, New Jersey. Their principal focus, however, was on the North River, now known as the Hudson. It was at the mouth of that river that in 1624 the Dutch West India Company established its American headquarters in the town of New Amsterdam. In the next decade the Dutch concentrated their efforts on New



Early map of Dutch area of trade and settlement from the South, or Delaware, River to the North, or Hudson, River. New Castle took root at the location identified on the map as Fort Kalimiris. *(Courtesy of University of Delaware Library, Newark, Del.)*

Amsterdam and the North River. Sweden took advantage of the infrequent presence of Dutchmen on the South River, especially on its west side, to establish a colony of their own not far above the Sandhoek. In 1638, the Swedes purchased land from the Lenni Lenape Indians. The purchase included the point where two tributary rivers, the Christina and the Brandywine, join to flow into what we now call by the name later given by the English, the Delaware River. There the Swedes built a modest fort, called Fort Christina for their queen, and sent colonists from Sweden and Finland to establish farms along the river.

The main attraction of the Delaware River region to both colonial nations was not colonizing for its own sake, but rather the lucrative fur trade with

the native people. The contest between the Dutch and Swedes to monopolize that trade provoked conflict. In 1647 the Dutch West India Company sent a new director-general named Peter Stuyvesant to New Amsterdam. An aggressive military man, he was determined to reclaim Dutch primacy on the Delaware River. On a reconnaissance sail up the river in 1651, Stuyvesant recognized the strategic importance of the Sandhoek, located as it was between the principal Swedish settlements and the sea, and decided to build a fort at the Sandhoek.

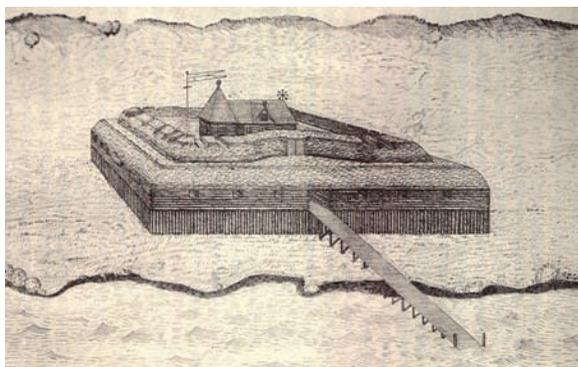
Stuyvesant negotiated the purchase of the land that now encompasses New Castle from local Lenni Lenape chiefs and commanded the soldiers who had come with him to the Sandhoek to build a modest fort there. The Dutch fort consisted of a blockhouse built of logs, probably surrounded by a palisade and a trench, and equipped with cannons. Stuyvesant named it Fort Casimir to honor a Dutch nobleman and military hero. During the fort's construction Stuyvesant was called back to New Amsterdam to



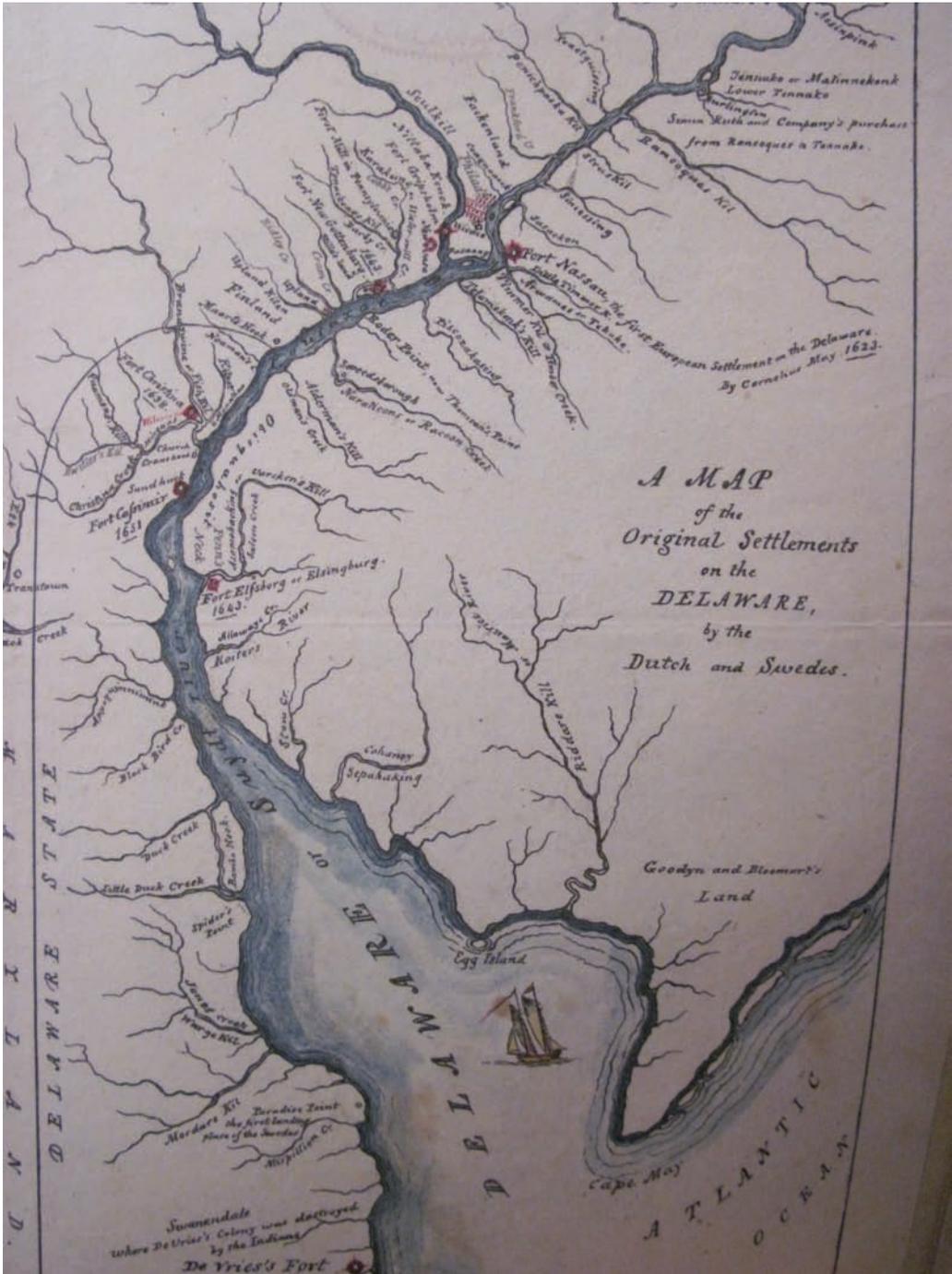
Detail of Benjamin Ferris's *Map of the Original Settlements on the Delaware ...* with locations of Dutch and Swedish forts identified in red. (Courtesy of Delaware Historical Society)

handle a serious Indian uprising. Thus, the fort was built quickly and rather shoddily.

Nothing of Fort Casimir can be seen above ground today, but late-twentieth-century archaeologists' discoveries suggest that the fort was located in the vicinity of Second and Chestnut streets. Modern visitors may think that location to be rather far from the river bank, but silt



Over the years artists have attempted to interpret dimensionally the flat drawing made by Swedish engineer Peter Lindstrom of Fort Casimir after his restoration work in 1654-55. This attempt dates from 1905. (Courtesy of Delaware Historical Society)



Full view of Ferris map, made for his book *Original Settlements on the Delaware*, published in 1845. (Courtesy of Delaware Historical Society)