

SPECIAL FORUM

“Here Is the Beginning of Pennsylvania”: A Settler Commemoration and Entangled Histories of Foundational Sites

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On a cold and snowy December day in 1937, Pennsylvania Governor George H. Earle III was on an official state tour of Sweden and made a stop in the small town of Bottnaryd. The visit was described as “a pilgrimage” to the birthplace and tomb of Johan Printz, governor of the seventeenth-century New Sweden colony (1638–1655) located on the Delaware River. Visibly affected by the moment, Earle placed a wreath at the base of the tomb and, in a single and dramatic sentence, declared: “Here is the beginning of Pennsylvania.”¹ This was a rather remarkable statement. If there is one moment for the beginning of Pennsylvania, that moment has ordinarily been assigned to the arrival of William Penn in 1682. No governor had previously, nor has one since, described Bottnaryd as the site of Pennsylvania’s origin.

The visit to Sweden of Governor Earle was part of the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Celebration of 1938. It commemorated that 300 years had passed since the 1638 landfall of the ships *Kalmar Nyckel* and *Fogel Grip* at a place popularly called The Rocks in present-day Wilmington, Delaware, establishing the colony of New Sweden. The claim was that as the first European settlement in the Delaware Valley, this constituted the beginning of Pennsylvania’s civilization.

The Pennsylvania celebration was part of a much larger concurrent commemoration staged jointly by a range of different groups. The commemoration was most commonly called the New Sweden Tercentenary or the Delaware Tercentenary and was celebrated regionally, nationally, and internationally. Its most important organizers represented Pennsylvania and Delaware, Sweden, Finland, and the United States, as well as two commissions of joint Swedish-American and Finnish-American associations.² All of these groups laid claims to the New Sweden colony,

asserting that it represented a mutual foundational history. Framed by the puzzling question as to why a US governor would want to locate the beginning of his state in a foreign country, this article examines the case of the Pennsylvania celebration, and in particular its bonds to Sweden, to more broadly explore ways in which memories of settler origins in the United States have functioned in cross-border commemorations.

Memories of settling constitute a central myth of origin in United States history. In his study of the post-war white ethnic revival, Matthew Frye Jacobson has shown how the mythology of settling gave way during the twentieth century to that of immigration. The American myth of origin had, in the words of Jacobson, transitioned from “Plymouth Rock whiteness” to “Ellis Island whiteness.”³ However, these two understandings of United States origins rest on two different and largely incompatible understandings about place, and specifically to the question of where one’s origin is located.

Lorenzo Veracini has written about the distinct narrative structure of settler colonial memories, demonstrating that settler narratives are constructed as a one-way trip, an exodus from Europe across the ocean. Settlers come to stay and to establish new civilizations and social orders that outlive them.⁴ As a consequence, memories of settling rest on the notion that it is bound to a geographical location on United States territory. In contrast, memories of immigration function not through location but through genealogy, tracing blood bonds identified as “roots” outside US borders. These two origin myths thus display different ways of thinking about place.

In the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, a historical event must “take place” somewhere, and commemorative projects are largely concerned with processes of “keeping place,” preserving memory and continuity. Mitchell calls these places “foundational sites.”⁵ In this article, I will suggest that Governor Earle’s proclamation in Bottnaryd was an attempt to relocate Pennsylvania’s “foundational site” and to actively construct a new site that could harbor the history of how the state was settled. There are, of course, a multitude of possible foundational sites of settler histories, located anywhere between the settlers’ point of departure and their point of arrival. The case of the 1938 commemoration questions the notion that settler memories primarily “are about” the settlers’ point of arrival. Since the process of settling in America involved the permanent relocation of people from Europe, we need to study the memory of settling as entangled—and thus upheld and maintained, but also possibly challenged—in matrixes that cross national borders. The cross-border characteristic of settling ought to be a crucial dimension in the current discussion of settler colonialism.⁶

I suggest that border-crossing commemorations such as this one need to be studied as entangled histories. Entangled history—my translation of the French-German concept of *histoire croisée*—acknowledges that historical phenomena are spread over different imagined borders through multiple crossings and intersections. In the words of Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman, it stresses “the connections, the continuity, the belonging-together, [and] the hybridity of observable

spaces or analytical units.”⁷ The field of commemoration research has so far been overwhelmingly located within a national paradigm, where the relation between history, memory, and identity are preconditioned within certain collective spheres of a chosen society. By comparison, commemorations that cross borders have only recently begun to attract scholarly attention.⁸ Writing entangled history is one way of countering methodological nationalism in studies of commemorations.

By focusing on the crossing of national borders and how different groups entangled histories of settling, this article engages in the emerging discussion of the transnationalization of memory.⁹ Although there are valid arguments that remembrance is related to place, following the work on memory sites (*lieux de mémoire*) by Pierre Nora, recent research has demonstrate that memory is not fixed to it.¹⁰ The Pennsylvania commemoration of 1938 illustrates the cultural predisposition to locate settler foundational sites in American history but also how invented and profoundly complicated such projects really are.

A Cross-Border Beginning of Civilization

The New Sweden Tercentenary was staged at the intersection of ethnic, regional, national, and international cooperation.¹¹ Such a broad spectrum of groups became involved because the commemoration provided them all with a forum for establishing new relations and manifesting old ones across geopolitical borders.¹²

Each group involved in the 1938 commemoration had a different stake in participating. For Sweden and Finland, the goal was to highlight a connection to the United States in a period of geopolitical turmoil and to reconnect to their ethnic diasporas following the end of the great migration.¹³ For Pennsylvania and Delaware, the commemoration celebrated the perceived beginning of civilization in the respective states.

Pennsylvania began its preparations in 1935, passing a legislative act the following year that created the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Commission, which called for a celebration of “the Earliest Settlement, the First Courts of Law, and the First Capital within what is now Pennsylvania.” The historical reasons for the celebration were identified as the achievements of the New Sweden colony and in particular its peaceful Indian relations, which constituted “the foundations upon which our Pennsylvania civilization is based.”¹⁴ It was fundamentally a settler colonial commemoration, legitimizing the continued disenfranchisement of American Indians and asserting the hegemony of white heritage in the state.

Frank W. Melvin, who also was head of the Swedish Colonial Society, became chairman of the Pennsylvania Commission, with Governor Earle acting as honorary chairman and the commemoration’s figurehead. Although the celebration took New Sweden as its historical reference point, this was not a commemoration of the colony per se—the Pennsylvania celebration did not even incorporate the colony’s name. In a radio speech, Frank Melvin emphasized that it “is a mistake [. . .] to assume that this

Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Celebration is a Swedish celebration.” Nor was it, he said, a Finnish, Dutch, or English celebration, although these people too settled along the Delaware River.¹⁵ The celebration was staged in explicit relation to contemporary regional commemorations in America. The magnitude was intended to be on a par with New England tercentenaries such as the Connecticut Tercentenary in 1936 and the Rhode Island Tercentenary in 1936.¹⁶ This was, in other words, fundamentally to be a celebration of the state of Pennsylvania.

The celebrations in Delaware were very similar. Its joint resolution, also adopted in 1935, presented New Sweden as “the beginning of a permanent government” in Delaware and described The Rocks as the foundational site for the region’s “European civilization.”¹⁷ The main focus of the Delaware Commission was the desolate area surrounding The Rocks—which until then had been used as a shipyard—and the project to turn it into a state park.¹⁸ Like Pennsylvania, Delaware staged its celebration in an American context where regional commemorations rivaled the primacy of Plymouth Rock as a national foundational memory.¹⁹

Although the focus in Pennsylvania and Delaware was on their state histories, it was the international attention from Sweden that made the event particularly interesting for the states.²⁰ Sweden invested considerable energy in the celebration. Although preparations also began in 1935, this work was not made public until Sweden received an official invitation to participate in the American celebrations. The public work of the state-funded Swedish Commission began in the summer of 1936 as the US Congress adopted a joint resolution to extend an invitation to the Swedish government.²¹ Sweden’s extensive list of commemorative projects included a US visit of a delegation of politicians, businessmen, and cultural leaders headed by the Swedish Crown Prince.²²

The celebrations began in June 1938 with the arrival of the foreign delegations, one from Sweden and one from Finland, signaling the official start of a commemoration that brought together a multitude of actors celebrating the same past at the same time, but for many different purposes. This was the first time the New Sweden colony had been commemorated on such a large scale. The border-crossing matrix of the commemoration laid the groundwork for the possibility of situating Pennsylvania’s foundational site to Sweden.

Political Concurrences

There was a noticeable political dimension to the 1938 Pennsylvania celebration. For decades, Pennsylvania had been a solidly Republican state and had not elected a Democratic governor since the 1890s.²³ Partly because of the state’s Republican rule during the Depression, and partly in response to national New Deal legislation, many Pennsylvania laborers, immigrants, and African Americans—groups that previously had voted for the GOP—cast their votes for Democrats in the 1934 election. Pennsylvania elected a Democratic governor and US senator—George Earle and

Joseph F. Guffey—and the Democratic Party for the first time since 1877 took control of the state’s House of Representatives. The Democrats strengthened their power in 1936 by winning a striking two-thirds majority in the Pennsylvania Senate.²⁴

The Pennsylvania Democrats had run on a platform of New Deal policies such as reforms for fairer taxation, increased workers’ rights and implementation of relief programs. These reforms became known as the Little New Deal. They were implemented during the Earle administration and thus strongly associated with it.²⁵ The New Sweden Tercentenary in general was in fact closely associated with the Democratic Party. Like Pennsylvania, Delaware invested much prestige in the commemoration, and that the state’s planning had likewise been launched by a newly elected Democratic governor. Although New Jersey had also adopted a resolution in 1937 claiming New Sweden to be the beginning of their civilization, the New Jersey celebrations were largely stymied by changing state administrations in the late 1930s.²⁶ During most of the commemorative planning, the New Jersey governor was a Republican, a fact which may have affected their participation in a celebration so clearly associated with New Deal supporters and overseas welfare state proponents.²⁷

The New Deal overtones of the celebration resonated with both a contemporary and historicizing image of Sweden as a liberal welfare state. During the late 1930s Sweden had become increasingly known as a “laboratory” for social engineering, with its governing Social Democratic Party implementing welfare reforms that showed similarities to policies of the New Deal. Both within and outside the US, Sweden was framed as demonstrating an alternative way of dealing with the economic and social crisis of the 1930s, combining capitalism and democracy with state regulations and social reform. In the widely distributed *Sweden: The Middle Way*, first published in 1936, American journalist Marquis Childs described Sweden as an alternative to communism and fascism, with both private, for-profit businesses and consumer cooperatives, both public and private ownership.²⁸ Childs’s book was popular among New Dealers and helped channel their attention toward Sweden.²⁹

The contemporary representations of Sweden in the 1938 commemoration circulated through representations of history. According to commemorators from both sides of the Atlantic, Pennsylvania and Sweden shared common ideological and humanitarian values and had done so since the colonists’ arrival in 1638.³⁰ In the words of Pennsylvania Commission chairman Frank Melvin, the Swedish forefathers embodied a heritage that centered on peace and justice, “now central principles in the United States of America [that] were exemplified in New Sweden.” Pennsylvania’s heritage from New Sweden, he claimed, rested on three pillars: “(1) religious toleration; (2) policies of peace and fair dealing; [and] (3) respect for minority groups.”³¹

None of Melvin’s three pillars did in fact correspond to the seventeenth-century reality. The description of American Indians as a racial minority was questionable, to put it mildly, for a colony of a few hundred individuals, and Sweden could hardly be described as either peaceful or religiously tolerant, since it was fighting on the

Protestant side against Catholics in the Thirty Years' War when the colony was established. Melvin's statement nevertheless attests to the powerful contemporary image of Sweden that permeated the historical representations of Swedish colonialism.

The New Sweden Tercentenary was a manifestation of three democracies—the United States, Sweden, and Finland—emphasizing their mutual interest in peace and respect for individual rights and international treaties.³² For Pennsylvania, there were also more immediate similarities with Sweden: both were market economies with current governments interested in social welfare. In the intersection of political and historical concurrences, the major contemporary significance of the colony was the ways in which it provided a historical link that legitimized and gave depth to expressions of shared ideologies and values.

A Matter of Origin

As a prelude to the celebrations staged during the tercentenary year in 1938, Governor Earle led an official Pennsylvania delegation on a tour of Sweden beginning in November 1937. The delegation consisted mostly of senior members of the state administration.³³ This delegation was the first official visit to Sweden ever made by a currently serving elected representative from the United States.³⁴

Earle's justification for visiting Sweden was to unveil two commemorative plaques, donated by Pennsylvania, in Gothenburg. The plaques, one in Swedish and one in English, commemorated the departure of *Kalmar Nyckel* and *Fogel Grip* to North America.³⁵ The inscriptions told that the Swedish colonization had established the foundations for the state of Pennsylvania.³⁶ At the unveiling, Earle claimed that the ships that had departed to America 300 years ago "were destined to found an enduring civilization."³⁷ A couple of weeks before his arrival in Sweden, Earle had released a Thanksgiving proclamation in commemoration of "the approximate anniversary of the date the ships *Kalmar Nyckel* and *Fogel Grip* sailed from Gothenburg." While Pennsylvania celebrated the presumed date of the colonists' landing at The Rocks, in today's Delaware, as Forefather's Day on April 8, 1938—making this a one-time state legal holiday³⁸—the arrival was teleologically incorporated into the state geography by stating that it took place "on land later included in the Royal Grant to William Penn."³⁹

These claims were made against a background of a Pennsylvania history that generally had not been defined as Swedish. New Sweden has been acknowledged as one of the first European colonizing attempts in the Delaware River Valley, together with English and in particular Dutch trading posts actually preceding the Swedish.⁴⁰ However, the role as Pennsylvania's founder was—and is still today—consistently ascribed to William Penn. His role has been manifested in adaptations of Benjamin West's famous 1771 painting, in public art such as Alexander Milne Calder's statue placed on top of Philadelphia City Hall in 1894, and in the use of Penn's imagery and

name to advertise products ranging from oatmeal to insurance.⁴¹ Outside the state's eastern urban areas, Pennsylvania has largely been associated with German settling under the moniker "Pennsylvania Dutch."⁴²

The claim made by Pennsylvania in 1938 thus assigned greater than usual significance to the Swedish colony. In a booklet intended primarily for educational purposes titled *The Brief History of the Colonization of New Sweden Thereby Establishing the Foundation of Pennsylvania*, the commission stated that the task of the commemoration was to rewrite Pennsylvania history: "For generations the tale of William Penn and the 'founding' of Pennsylvania, told and retold now makes it difficult for the average Pennsylvanian to realize that his Commonwealth had a prior civilization." Now the commission claimed that Penn did not simply found Pennsylvania (highlighted by the commission's conspicuously inserted inverted commas), but instead was welcomed to a society already established by the Swedish and Finnish colonists.⁴³ In 1938 this history was formulated as the origin of the state at large.

For Governor Earle personally, the celebration and in particular the visit to Sweden was more than a historical manifestation. According to Richard Keller, Earle's genealogy was "like a review of American history," tracing descendants from both the *Mayflower* and from a Quaker.⁴⁴ At the time of the celebration he had found out that he also had Swedish ancestry. This revelation seems to have touched the governor deeply. In his speech in Gothenburg, Earle declared that it was "with proud humility that I, with the blood of these pioneer Swedish forefathers in my veins, come to you in this official manner to present a small token of Pennsylvania's debt of appreciation." The delegation tour, he said, was "a return voyage" following the route of the seventeenth-century colonists.⁴⁵ Earle thus embodied a double return, on the one hand as a gubernatorial heir to Johan Printz, and on the other as a descendant of a Swedish colonist who, so to speak, was coming home—despite the fact that this was his first ever visit to the country.⁴⁶

At a luncheon in Stockholm, the city's Chamber of Commerce chairman said that Sweden might be considered "a Mother country of the State of Pennsylvania."⁴⁷ This claim was accentuated by the framing of the route that the Pennsylvania delegation traveled around Sweden, envisaged as taking place in the footsteps of the past, tracing the colonists back to their point of departure. After traveling to the Swedish east coast, where Earle visited the tomb of Gustavus Adolphus—under whose reign the colony was first envisioned—and dined with King Gustav V at the Royal Palace, the Pennsylvania delegation returned to the west coast by way of Bottnaryd. As described in the state's commemorative report, the delegation returned to America "from the same spot where Peter Minuit started 300 years ago to found New Sweden."⁴⁸ Through the delegation's words and actions, the visit to Sweden functioned to mark it as the foundational site of Pennsylvania.

Transplanting a Settler Logic

However, the legitimacy of Pennsylvania's commemoration was not uncontested. Even before the celebration began in 1938, a conflict surfaced with Delaware concerning the invitation of Finland to participate in the commemoration. I suggest that these conflicts were expressions of an attempt by Pennsylvania to redefine the dominating logic about the location of foundational sites of settling. Its main battlefield was a project of relocating the foundational site of the New Sweden colony from The Rocks to a place called Tinicum Island.

During early summer 1936, when the commemorative planning had been going on for more than a year, representatives of Sweden, the Swedish Americans, and Delaware learned that the Finnish ambassador to the United States had met with Governor Earle to seek to have Finland invited to the commemoration.⁴⁹ Despite objections from the other actors, the United States Congress in April 1937 amended its resolution and officially invited Finland to participate.⁵⁰ According to Frank Melvin, the motivation was that Sweden and Finland had been united as one country in the 1600s and that one-third of the colonists came from Finland.⁵¹ Delaware, Sweden and Swedish-American representatives protested this claim, arguing that Finland had merely been a province of Sweden in the seventeenth century and thus all colonists had been Swedes.⁵²

Moreover, in the opinion of historian George H. Ryden, who had drafted the Delaware resolution, the Pennsylvania act of 1936 was historically "inaccurate" since it referred to an event that did not take place in 1638. The first New Sweden colonists had not settled in present-day Pennsylvania until 1641, and the colony's capital had not been transferred from Fort Christina, in today's Wilmington, to Tinicum Island, southwest of Philadelphia, until 1643. "Although Pennsylvania know it full well, they [sic] will not acknowledge that the first permanent settlement in the Delaware River Valley was on Delaware soil, that the first capital of new Sweden colony was Ft. Christina, and that their right to share in the celebration of 1938 is based only on the fact that the land claims of the colony of New Sweden extended in the year, 1638, to the Schuylkill River."⁵³ According to this argument, Pennsylvania had a lesser right to dictate the plans of the Tercentenary. The foundational site of New Sweden, and hence of Delaware, was The Rocks in Wilmington. According to the Delaware Tercentenary Commission, The Rocks "bear to all of this region the same relation that 'Plymouth Rock' bears to New England."⁵⁴ Since the foundational site of New Sweden was on Delaware territory, that state should be the center of attention.

One of the main commemorative projects in Sweden was to donate a monument to the United States designed by the famous Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. The original intention of the Swedish Commission was to place the monument in Philadelphia. This would also be where the Swedish and Finnish delegations would land and where the inauguration ceremonies attended by President Roosevelt would be

held. Philadelphia would thus be the center of the entire national and international commemoration.⁵⁵

After lobbying by Delaware and the Swedish Americans, the Swedish Commission changed its mind.⁵⁶ The commemoration referred to the landing in Delaware and, as the Swedish ambassador said, “nothing substantial happened in Philadelphia.” Consequently, both the landing ceremony and the monument were placed at The Rocks, in the newly built Fort Christina State Park.⁵⁷ This was the place that all except Pennsylvania agreed to be the foundational site of civilization in the Delaware Valley.

The consensus did not, however, discourage the Pennsylvania Commission. In an attempt to counter the historical focus on The Rocks, it concentrated on Tinicum Island and the establishment of Governor Printz Park. According to the Commission, this was the site of “the first capitol and the first government building in Pennsylvania.”⁵⁸ It was here that “the original social life and institutions of Pennsylvania” began, and where the first church services were held.⁵⁹ Governor Printz Park was donated to the state by the Swedish Colonial Society and became a prestigious project of the Pennsylvania Commission.⁶⁰ When it became clear that Pennsylvania would not receive the Swedish monument, an attempt was made to secure another gift from Sweden to place in the park. “Governor Printz Park is my baby,” Melvin wrote, emphasizing that he was “keenly disappointed that nothing has worked out so that we may have a real Swedish memorial in our park.” During the spring of 1938, Pennsylvania hoped to buy the Swedish home of Johan Printz, Gunillaberg, to disassemble it, transport it to the United States and reassemble it in Pennsylvania.⁶¹ Even though the project was undertaken with support of the Swedish Commission, it was never completed.

Pennsylvania also had a project of even greater scale. The State of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the US Delaware Tercentenary Commission wrote a resolution asking President Roosevelt to issue a request to Sweden that “the body of Governor Johan Printz [...] be returned to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.” The idea was to transfer Printz’s remains from the tomb in Bottnaryd church and reinter him in “a fitting mausoleum” in Governor Printz Park.⁶² Had the body actually been brought “back,” the foundational site of Bottnaryd would, in some sense, have been transplanted to Pennsylvania. The remarkable plan never came to fruition, however, and it is unlikely that the resolution even reached the desk of the President.

Pennsylvania’s invitation to Finland, its focus on Tinicum Island and on Johan Printz, should be understood as a concerted retreat from The Rocks as the state’s foundational site. There was an inherent pedagogical problem in the idea that the foundation of Pennsylvania was located at the colonists’ point of departure in Sweden, in the way the Pennsylvania delegation’s overseas visit and Earle’s Thanksgiving proclamation had emphasized. To stress the importance of Tinicum Island was a way

of creating a foundational site in present-day Pennsylvania. Transferring the remains of Printz would be a means of increasing the site's significance.

The invitation of Finland should likewise be seen as part of this strategy to legitimize the significance of Tinicum Island, and hence of Pennsylvania's commemorative claims. Including Finland in the celebration on an equal basis with Sweden merged the celebration of historical settlement on Pennsylvania territory in the 1640s with the Delaware landfall in 1638. Delaware contended that the landfall took place on its territory and that present-day Delaware therefore should be the commemorative center. In countering that assertion, the inclusion of Finland historically legitimized Pennsylvania's claim to an event that evidently did not take place in Pennsylvania.

A Little New Deal Problem

The Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Celebration not only had to battle critique of historical accuracy, but also allegations that the commemoration was a political stunt. Critics claimed that the celebrations constituted lavish and unnecessary state spending in the post-Depression era and that it was a way for Earle to promote his own political aspirations.

Earle returned from Sweden profoundly impressed by its welfare policies. Newspapers reported that the visit had given him many new ideas, especially on welfare relief and housing. Several newspapers quoted Earle saying that Sweden had "practically eliminated poverty and reduced unemployment to a minimum." This was largely due to Sweden's housing program, the excellence of which Earle was "perfectly amazed." The Swedish system, he thought, should be implemented everywhere in America.⁶³ These welfare policies that Earle considered an inspirational result of his visit to Sweden were eclipsed by a surge of political criticism.

One of the more vocal critics of Earle, and of the commemoration, was political columnist John M. Cummings of the Republican newspaper the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "The boys are coming home," Cummings reported from the return voyage from Sweden. "They are coming home to face the stern realities of Pennsylvania's politics, realities that were far away and nebulous as they hobnobbed with royalty and basked in the adulation of the subjects of King Gus."⁶⁴ While mocking Earle for receiving the Order of the Polar Star from the Swedish King and expressing his "devout wish that the State has heard the last of the junket to Sweden," Cummings continued to sarcastically criticize the Pennsylvania delegation for excessively tipping Swedish hotel employees, causing them to go on strike as the delegation went home and upsetting "the social balance" in Sweden. Earle, he thought, should go back to Sweden to correct the problem (with the implication that he need not return to America).⁶⁵

According to Cummings and others, the actual reason for Earle's visit to Sweden and his investment in the commemoration was the prospect of a seat in the US Senate. The *Philadelphia Record*, which supported the Democratic Party, reported

that the commemoration was “a Plot for [the] Swedish Vote.” The paper also criticized organizers for staging the commemoration when, in the words of an unnamed Delaware historian, “every Swedish school child knows” that the 1638 landing did not take place in Pennsylvania. “We are not, nor have we ever known, a Swedish school child,” the *Record* wrote, “but we think he’s right.”⁶⁶

The fact that Earle spent \$40,000 of the taxpayers’ money on a commemoration that was historically inaccurate was, in the words of the *Erie Dispatch*, due to politics. “There are some critics of Gov. Earle who intimate [that] the state’s chief executive [. . .] may be making a bid for the support of the Swedes, especially that large group in the North Central State.”⁶⁷ Accompanying a commentary in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a cartoon portrayed Earle and Joseph Guffey in seventeenth-century costumes, standing on a map of Pennsylvania and—in mock Swedish—toasting the ethnic vote allegedly secured by the commemoration.⁶⁸ The publicity associated with the commemoration and the Governor’s trip to Sweden was considered beneficial for Earle and his future political career.

Press criticism aside, commemorators also had to consider the current political climate as they planned the celebrations. With reference to the upcoming election in November 1938 and the state’s 15 percent unemployment rate, Melvin informed the Swedish ambassador that it was unwise to have “Bacchanalian feasts and revels” where they were “wining and dining royalty.”⁶⁹ For that reason, there would, for example, not be any liquor served at Pennsylvania’s commemorative banquets and luncheons. Though the socio-economic effects of the Depression affected the commemoration, a more immediate public relations concern was the accusations of corruption raised against the Earle administration.

Charles Margiotti, the Pennsylvania Attorney General, had been a member of Earle’s 1937 delegation to Sweden. In the spring of 1938, Margiotti launched his own independent bid for a gubernatorial nomination and made charges of corruption against state officials and Earle’s office. When Margiotti did not produce evidence to support his allegations, Earle fired him. In return, Margiotti denounced the governor for bribery. The grand jury investigation that followed was the beginning of what became known as the Margiotti Affair.⁷⁰ It was one of the most infected political brawls in Pennsylvania history, described by Franklin D. Roosevelt as “a latter-day Dante’s Inferno.”⁷¹

The Margiotti Affair took place in the summer of 1938, during the peak of the celebrations, and spilled over onto the public image of the commemoration. Because of the charges, the relationship between the Swedish delegation and Earle grew strained, causing Melvin to blame the affair for the Crown Prince not revisiting Philadelphia on his way back to Sweden.⁷² According to Richard Keller, Earle “eventually came to believe that [there was] a conspiracy between the Republican Party and the courts to use the Margiotti charges to reverse the Little New Deal.” Though Earle and his associates were cleared after Pennsylvania House committee hearings and no one from his administration was convicted in the trials eventually held,

the affair and Democratic infighting led to the party's defeat in the 1938 Pennsylvania elections. George H. Earle, once considered a leading contender for the 1940 Democratic presidential nomination, was not elected to the US Senate and his political career came to an end.⁷³

The political criticism of the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Celebration was both a cause and an effect of the commemoration's most decisive failure—to convince the public of its naturalness. The unrelated yet parallel scandal of the Margiotti Affair likely influenced the public's perception of a project so tightly connected to the governor's Little New Deal administration. Regional or national commemorations in the United States are charged with patriotism and universal values. While ethnic groups may celebrate a history connected to group identity, a foundational history purportedly belonging to “everyone” must at least appear to be detached from politics and ideology and to convey a sense of being a self-evident event. This never happened during the Pennsylvania celebration. According to Paul Beers, “George Earle was the most bizarre figure ever to occupy the Pennsylvania Governor's Office.”⁷⁴ The strong link to Earle's flamboyant persona and his administration's scandals were detrimental to the commemoration's patriotic aims.

But the criticism was not only an expression of dissatisfaction with Earle and the ways in which the celebration was politically charged. It also reveals public discontent with the fact that a celebration staged by the state, with state funding and for the state majority population, was so enmeshed in Swedishness. Despite organizers' claims that it was not a Swedish celebration, much of the criticism centered on how Earle “hobnobbed” with representatives of Sweden and courted Swedish Americans for their political support. The Pennsylvania celebration had, in other words, become entangled with Sweden's participation in the New Sweden Tercentenary.

Entangled Histories of Foundational Sites

The report of the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Celebration exists only as a stenciled copy at the State Archives in Harrisburg, never having been completed, printed, or distributed. In a way, the report is a fitting allegory of the Pennsylvania commemoration: initiated with grand ambitions but never materializing as planned. The celebration was colored by the interstate rivalry with Delaware, but also by Governor Earle's personal attachment to his newfound Swedish roots and by the political legitimacy the Swedish connection provide to his Little New Deal. These dimensions are central to understanding both why Pennsylvania chose to promote New Sweden as its foundational history and why this was a project eventually bound to fail.

The celebration never managed to shed its Little New Deal overtones or to convincingly argue that celebrating 1938 as the tercentenary year for Pennsylvania's first civilization was an obvious or natural choice. When it was over, Frank Melvin wrote

in a private communication that the commission had been aware of the shaky ground on which the commemoration was based. Knowing that the landing in 1638 had indeed not taken place on Pennsylvania territory, Melvin noted “how careful we were to skate around that hole in the ice, and not to fall in.”⁷⁵

It is in light of this awareness that we should understand Governor Earle’s visit to Sweden and his claim that Pennsylvania began in the obscure small town of Bottnaryd. Rather than claiming the outskirts of Wilmington, Delaware, to be the foundational site of Pennsylvania, the Commission bypassed their neighboring state by arguing that the foundational site in fact was at the colonist’s point of origin, not their point of arrival. In this logic, the beginning of Pennsylvania was not The Rocks but the quay of Gothenburg and the birthplace of New Sweden Governor Johan Printz.

A crucial problem with Pennsylvania’s insistence on making Sweden the state’s foundational site was that it directly countered the anatomy of settler colonial mythologies. The memory of the Pilgrims is conditioned on their landing at Plymouth Rock, and not on their departure from Plymouth in England (or from Southampton, Newlyn or Leiden, depending on the version). Foundational sites of settling in America are overwhelmingly located on United States territory—not in rural towns in southern Sweden.

The narrative structure of settler memories, epitomized by the image of the exodus and insistence on the importance of land, established boundaries for the possible locations of the beginning of an American state. Whereas the beginning of Pennsylvania could only be located in Pennsylvania, the actions of Governor Earle paradoxically enough empowered the commemorative inclusion of Sweden. What Pennsylvania effectively did in the 1930s was to incorporate the Scandinavian country into the center of an American myth of origin. The direct reason for this was of course not the anatomy of settler memories, but the concurrent political ideas of Swedish social democracy and the Pennsylvania Little New Deal.

Governor Earle’s actions may have been a “political stunt,” as his critics asserted, but they also provide an unexpected and applicable example for the present-day study of commemorations, suggesting the need to analyze such events as entangled histories. What Earle did was, in a sense, to open a new theoretical horizon on memories of settling. The very act of locating the beginning of Pennsylvania in Sweden questions the assumptions we make about the beginning of a settler society and the way we ponder its often problematic legacies.

While the myth of Ellis Island draws attention to the importance of cross-border genealogies, the myth of Plymouth Rock—or of its lesser known analogue in Delaware—constitutes a foundational history firmly attached to the American landscape. But memories of settling are not circumscribed to specific locations. The most immediate example of this is the profound interest that settler foundational sites in America still garner from overseas. When the quadricentennial of the founding of the Jamestown colony was commemorated in 2007, the Virginia celebrations were attended by Queen Elizabeth II, and when the 375th anniversary of the New Sweden

colony was observed in 2013, it included a visit of King Carl XVI Gustaf, aiming to promote common interests in business and commerce. The memories of these settlements have become entangled in no small part through the commemorative work of people such as Governor Earle—and his latter-day successors. Histories of settling in America may be national mythologies, but they do not belong to the nation, and their legacies are not purely a national responsibility.

Notes

¹ “The 300th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Churches, Schools and Law Courts in Pennsylvania,” undated report (hereafter cited as Report, “The 300th Anniversary”), Box 8, Pennsylvania Three Hundredth Anniversary Commission (Swedish Tercentenary), Commemorative, Monument and Exposition Commissions, Bureau of Archives and History, Records of Special Commissions, RG-25, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA (hereafter cited as PSA); Press release, Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Commission, December 4 and 5 [1937], Box 7, PSA.

² Pennsylvania noted that 25 other US states had appointed commissions that would participate in the Philadelphia celebrations; see Minutes, Executive Committee, Pennsylvania Commission, 6 June 1938, Box 1, PSA.

³ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.

⁴ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96–104.

⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 153.

⁶ For overviews, see Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*; Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁷ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 33–35.

⁸ Adam Hjorthén, *Border-Crossing Commemorations: Entangled Histories of Swedish Settling in America* (Ph.D. diss., Stockholm University, Sweden, 2015), 15–26.

⁹ Udo J. Hebel, ed., *Transnational American Memories* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney, eds., *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2014).

¹⁰ For a critique of Nora, see Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann, eds., *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Irial Glynn and J. Olaf Kleist, eds., *History, Memory and Migration: Perceptions of the Past and the Politics of Incorporation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹¹ Cf. Michael Kammen's description of the event as a "Swedish-American celebration" in *Mystic Chords of Memory. The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 457.

¹² Hjorthén, *Border-Crossing Commemorations*, 295–307.

¹³ Max Engman, "The Tug of War Over 'Nya Sverige,'" *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, 45 (1994): 106–110; Fritz Henriksson, *Sweden's Participation in the U.S. Celebration of the New Sweden Tercentenary* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1939), 9–11, 16.

¹⁴ Act No. 31, To Provide for the Commemoration... of the Three Hundredth Anniversary, *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Session of 1936*, 79–80; Act No. 542, Supplementing the Act... for the commemoration of the three hundredth anniversary of the earliest settlement, *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Passed at the Session of 1937*, 2697–700.

¹⁵ Frank Melvin, "Pennsylvania's 300th Anniversary," radio address, WPEN, Box 7, PSA. See also Melvin to [undisclosed recipient], 10 February 1937, Box 6, PSA.

¹⁶ Melvin to Tercentenary Commission, Connecticut, 6 November 1936 and copy of Rhode Island Resolution #9 approved 31 May 1935, all in Box 1, PSA.

¹⁷ Senate Joint Resolution No. 3, 20 March 1935, Box 1, RG 1330, SG 6, Box 1, Temporary Commemorative Commissions, Swedish Tercentenary Commission, RG 1330, SG 0 (1330.0), Delaware Public Archives, Dover, DE (hereafter cited as DPA). See also SJR No 2, 10 February 1937 and HJR No. 5, 5 March 1937 all in Delaware Tercentenary Commission Minute Book, RG 1330, SG 10, Box 1, DPA. See also Delaware Tercentenary Bulletin No. 1, Box 4, RG 1330, SG 0, DPA.

¹⁸ Final Report of Delaware Tercentenary Commission, 17 January 1939, RG 1330, SG 11, Box 21, DPA.

¹⁹ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 375–378, 384–90.

²⁰ Act of the General Assembly, No. 542, Approved 2 July 1937, Box 1, PSA.

²¹ Delaware River Valley Tercentenary, Public Resolution 102 (HJ Res 499), 74th Congress, 2nd Session, 5 June 1936, United States Statutes At Large, Vol. 49, Chapter 533 (1936) 1486–7. On the work of the US Commission, see *Observance of the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the First Permanent Settlement in the Delaware River Valley 1938* (United States Government Printing Office, 1940).

²² Boström to Minister for Foreign Affairs, 8 March 1936, Folder 1, Utrikesdepartementet, 1920 års dossiersystem, P66, Vol. 843, Riksarkivet (National Archives), Stockholm (hereafter UD 1920); Fritz Henriksson, V.P.M., 16 September 1936, Vol. 1, U14, Utställningsbestyrelsen, Bestyrelsen för firandet av Nya Sverigeminnet, Riksarkivet, Stockholm, Sweden (hereafter cited as UBNS); for an overview of Sweden's participation, see Henriksson, *Sweden's Participation*; Engman, "The Tug of War."

²³ Carol E. Hoeffecker, *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 183; Richard Keller, *Pennsylvania's Little New Deal* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 101.

²⁴ Keller, *Pennsylvania's Little New Deal*, 101–55; Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 455–58.

²⁵ Keller *Pennsylvania's Little New Deal*, 152–289; Paul A. Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics Today and Yesterday: The Tolerable Accommodation* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 118, 122–24.

²⁶ Joint Resolution No. 2, 29 May 1937, *Acts of the 162nd Legislature of the State of New Jersey* (1937), 656–57.

²⁷ On the limited New Jersey celebration, see Folder 1 and 2, MG 272, Swedish Tercentenary Records, New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, NJ.

²⁸ Carl Marklund, "The Social Laboratory, the Middle Way and the Swedish Model: Three Frames for the Image of Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 34 (2009): 264–85.

²⁹ Marklund, "The Social Laboratory," 271.

³⁰ H.K.H. Prins Bertil, speech at Pennsylvania State Banquet, 28 June 1938, Vol. 148, Slottsarkivet (The Palace Archives), Stockholm.

³¹ Frank Melvin, speech at Forefather's Day Banquet, Report, "The 300th Anniversary," 65ff., Box 8, PSA.

³² Engman, "The Tug of War," 109–10.

³³ Earle to Wollmar Boström, 22 October 1937, 811.415, Box 5037, Chicago Jubilee–Delaware River Valley, RG 59, Department of State, Decimal File 1930–39, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter DoS); G.S. Messersmith to Fred Morris Dearing, 9 November 1937, 811.415, Box 5038, DoS; Report, "The 300th Anniversary," Box 8, PSA.

³⁴ Radio News, Swedish American Line, No. 2, The 1938 Tercentenary Collection, American Swedish Historical Museum, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter ASHM).

³⁵ See for example Press release, Swedish American Tercentenary Association, undated [November 1937], Box 7, PSA.

³⁶ Pictures of plaques, Vol. 845, UD 1920.

³⁷ Address of The Governor of Pennsylvania, Gothenburg, Sweden, 28 November 1937, attached to Melvin to Cordell Hull, 11 November 1937, Box 5038, 811.415, (hereafter Address, Gothenburg, 28 November 1937), DoS.

³⁸ Act No. 473, "Providing for the creation of a legal holiday . . . to be known and observed as 'Forefathers Day'," 1 July 1937, *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1937), 2545–46.

³⁹ George H. Earle, "A Proclamation of Thanksgiving for Three Hundred Years of Godly Civilization," 10 November 1937, Box 4, PSA.

⁴⁰ Susan E. Klepp, "Encounter and Experiment: The Colonial Period," in *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth*, eds. Randall M. Miller and William Pencak (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 47–61.

⁴¹ William C. Kashatus III, "Images of William Penn: An Evolving Portrait of Pennsylvania's Founding Father," in *An Image of Peace: The Penn Treaty Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1996). See also Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 292–98.

⁴² See for example Don Yoder, *Discovering American Folklife: Essays on Folk Culture and the Pennsylvania Dutch* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2001); Katharina Hering, "We Are All Makers of History": *People and Publics in the Practice of Pennsylvania-German Family History, 1891–1966* (unpublished dissertation, George Mason University, 2009). Heritage tourism of Pennsylvania's significant industrial past also developed from the mid-twentieth century; see Carolyn Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

⁴³ *The Brief History of the Colonization of New Sweden Thereby Establishing the Foundation of Pennsylvania*, Distributed by the Pennsylvania 300th Anniversary Commission, ASHM.

⁴⁴ Keller, *Pennsylvania's Little New Deal*, 123–24.

⁴⁵ Address, Gothenburg, 28 November 1937, DoS.

⁴⁶ On ethnic "homecoming," see Catherine Nash, *Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories, Genealogy, and the Politics of Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 70–78.

⁴⁷ Oscar Wallenberg, speech at the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, 2 December 1937, Box 7, PSA.

⁴⁸ Report, "The 300th Anniversary," Box 8, PSA.

⁴⁹ Engman, "The Tug of War," 81–82.

⁵⁰ Engman, "The Tug of War," 82, 84, 87–90. See also Oscar Solbert to Christopher Ward, 26 August 1937, RG 1330, SG 0, Box 7, DPA.

⁵¹ Melvin to Eero Järnefelt, 25 September 1936, Box 2, PSA.

⁵² Engman, "The Tug of War," 80–81.

⁵³ George H. Ryden to Christopher Ward, 18 November 1936, RG 1330, SG 6, 13, 15, Box 1, DPA.

⁵⁴ Report of Delaware Swedish Tercentenary Commission, RG 1330, SG 6, Box 1, DPA. See also Minutes, Delaware Commission, 10 December 1936, RG 1330, SG6, Box 1, DPA.

⁵⁵ See for example minutes, Bestyrelsen, 16 September 1936 and minutes, Arbetsutskottet, 22 September 1936, all in UBNS; Henriksson, *Sweden's Participation*, 27–40.

⁵⁶ Minutes, Bestyrelsen, 25 November 1936, UBNS.

⁵⁷ Wollmar Boström to Bestyrelsen, telegram, 10 November 1936, Vol. 843, UD 1920.

⁵⁸ Presentation of Governor Printz Park by the Swedish Colonial Society to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 29 June 1938, Box 3, PSA.

⁵⁹ *The Brief History of the Colonization*, ASHM.

⁶⁰ Act No. 271, "Authorizing the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, on Behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to... Acquire Governor Printz Park," 8 May 1937, *Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1937)*, 1000–1.

⁶¹ Melvin to J. Sigfrid Edström, 25 April 1938 and Edström to Melvin, 2 May 1938, all in Box 2, PSA.

⁶² Resolution, Addressed to the President of the United States by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the United States Delaware Valley Tercentenary Commission, undated, Box 6, PSA. There was a precedent to this project in the 1880s idea of transferring William Penn's remains from England to the newly built Philadelphia City Hall; see Kashatus, "Images of William Penn," 12.

⁶³ "Earle Was Amazed At Swedish Housing," *Berwick Enterprise*, 17 December 1937, Box 9, PSA. See also other clippings in same box, such as "Sweden Has Inspired Earle to Banish Slums, He Says," *Scranton Tribune*, 17 December 1937.

⁶⁴ John M. Cummings, "Strictly Politics," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 December 1937, Box 9, PSA. On Cummings, see Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 125–125.

⁶⁵ John M. Cummings, "Strictly Politics: Commander, not Knight," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 January 1938, and "Strictly Politics: Earle Urged to Hie to Sweden. End discontent his tips caused," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1938, Box 9, PSA.

⁶⁶ “So this is politics: It’s a Plot for Swedish Vote. Else Why Leave Governors Waiting for Plane?”, *Philadelphia Record*, 2 April 1938, Box 10, PSA.

⁶⁷ “Governor Earle Spends \$40,000 Of Taxpayers Cash to Carry Pair of Incorrect Placques [sic] to Sweden”, *Erie Dispatch*, 23 November 1937, Box 9, PSA.

⁶⁸ John M. Cummings, ”Strictly Politics: Thank Two Senators It’s Legal Holiday Today,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 April 1938, Box 10, PSA.

⁶⁹ Melvin to Edström, 1 June 1938, Box 1, PSA.

⁷⁰ Keller, *Pennsylvania’s Little New Deal*, 310–13.

⁷¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, quoted in Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 117.

⁷² Melvin to Edström, 12 July 1938, Box 2, PSA.

⁷³ Keller, *Pennsylvania’s Little New Deal*, 326–42; Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 120, 128–34.

⁷⁴ Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 119.

⁷⁵ Melvin to Grafström, 13 December 1938, Box 2, PSA.