

“ At the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, we sail and run educational programs inspired by our magnificent tall ship Kalmar Nyckel ... She is a full-scale and faithful reconstruction of Peter Minuit’s flagship, with a sparred length of 141 feet, a complex rig that takes eight miles of line, and a main mast that stands six stories tall from the waterline. ” — Samuel Heed, Senior Historian, Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, 2011

# Keys to Swedish America

**Dr Edward Harris**  
*Heritage Matters*



From many points of the compass, one of the most useful and important inventions by humans was the creation of the lock and its twin, the key. In a chicken and egg evolutionary scheme, it is impossible to say whether doors preceded keys and locks, but such security devices must have followed the appearance of enclosures that could be isolated by a closing implement, be it a gate of sorts or the lid of a strongbox. Locks and keys became an essential ingredient of life, once people 'hunted and gathered' from fixed positions, not for food itself but for the means of trade by which sustenance could be obtained by exchange.

So important are those implements of peace and order that they have transcended the material world and become metaphors for any number of situations that have nothing to do with keeping thieves locked out, or conversely confining sundry bad boys to the barracks of a prison. 'He or she holds the key to unlock' the mystery of this or that, or to solve a particular problem, is a common refrain. Individuals are also granted 'the keys to the City' and such like honours, 'unlocking' freedoms otherwise denied, except as an award for public service.

In 1629, the city of Kalmar in Sweden saw the arrival of a warship, the Kalmar Nyckel, or 'The Key of Kalmar', named for the fortress that guarded that town and also held the key to an important crossroad of the Baltic Sea. By 1637, the Kalmar Nyckel became a part of Sweden's venture at colonisation in the Americas and the following year landed at Fort Christina, on the shore of what would become the City of Wilmington, Delaware.

Today, some of the keys to that historical development are held by the Trustees, Staff and Volunteers of the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, headed by chairman H. Hunter Lott III, and in the possible discovery and excavation of the site of the first Swedish redoubt in the New World, 'Fort Christina', erected in 1638 near 'The Rocks' on the edge of the Christina River.

The Foundation's centrepiece is a modern tall ship representing the Kalmar Nyckel of the 1630s, a ship that is perhaps one of the few 'working' square-riggers in existence. By that it is meant that the vessel goes to sea most days under full sail with a small professional crew and a myriad of 'sailors' comprised of volunteers of all ages and walks of life, from child to grandparent, from students to retired lawyers.

As such, the Kalmar Nyckel is also a project in experimental archaeology and is providing keys to an understanding of how such vessels operated on the high seas in the first century of north European settlement in the Americas.

Thus is Bermuda, established 26 years before Fort Christina, related to such activities at Wilmington, in addition to that city being home to the 'Friends of Bermuda Maritime Museum, Inc.', shepherded for some three decades by an old friend of the island, Richard Popper of the law firm Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, and of The Planning Factory, commanded by the

inimitable Cher Przelomski, which handles events at the National Museum here.

At Bermuda, as in Delaware (and indeed worldwide), archaeology often provides the keys to what happened in history; often it is the only way that ensures a keyhole into knowledge of the Past. A scholar once said that 'the conditions for sailing ships on the ocean in times of old are the same as prevail today'; hence the sea provides a unique laboratory for archaeological research into the Age of Sail, when ships were the only mode of oceanic travel and represented some of the highest technological resources of the day. The fly in the ointment is that the ships of the early historical periods exist only as archaeological remains. Thus reproductions like the Kalmar Nyckel have become of vital importance to archaeologists from the Vasa Museum in Sweden, for example, who seek to understand how ships of the seventeenth century actually worked at sea.

Of its other duties, Chairman Lott writes: 'True to its mission, Kalmar Nyckel hosts some three thousand 4th and 5th grade elementary school pupils each year. The KN Foundation has created and implemented educational curriculum units for these grades — "Thinking Chronologically", "Thinking Geographically" and "Thinking Economically" — which serve to blend on-site visits to the ship with classroom lesson plans. These units teach both maritime history and our multicultural legacy, as they relate to the Delaware Valley's economic, industrial, ecological and cultural development.' Herabouts on a smaller fore-and-aft rigged vessel, the Bermuda Sloop Foundation carries out similar educational roles.

Being a working vessel, the Kalmar Nyckel logs some 3,000 miles of sail on an annual basis, since the tall ship was launched in 1997. It is berthed next to a public park, which may contain the remains of Fort Christina, a name forever wedded with that of the Kalmar Nyckel, for it was the first Swedish settlers in America from that ship who constructed that bulwark. The Kalmar Nyckel Foundation, along with State of Delaware archaeologists, such as Craig Lukaszic, have been advocating a search for Fort Christina, which, if found, would join the very rare class of such monuments of early north European settlement in the Americas, as exhibited at Bermuda, Jamestown and Fort St. George in Maine.

In its continuing education and heritage work with its vessel, under the command of Captain Lauren Morgens and Port Captain Sharon Litcofsky, and in its quest with others to find Fort Christina, one cannot in new times but wish the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation the best whipsniff of the mariners' saying of old, 'Fair winds and a following sea', in exploring the keys to the first settlement of Sweden in America.

Edward Cecil Harris, MBE, JP, PH.D, FSA is Executive Director of the National Museum at Dockyard. Comments may be made to director@bmm.bm or 704-5480.

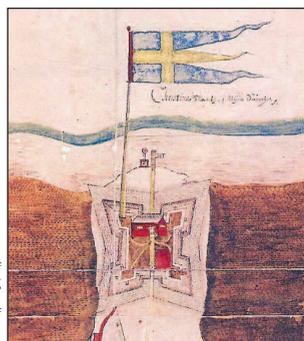


“ These units teach both maritime history and our multicultural legacy, as they relate to the Delaware Valley's economic, industrial, ecological and cultural development. ” — H. Hunter Lott III

The 'Tall Ship of Delaware', (top) the Kalmar Nyckel, under sail in the open sea, seen from the port rear. While (left) elementary students suit up in life jackets for a day of sail training on the Kalmar Nyckel.



Left: The Lindstrom map of 1655 with Fort Christina in 'New Sweden', with an extensive rampart with cannon to the landward side of the fort.



Right: A detail of a map of 1654 showing the Swedish flag flying over Fort Christina in Delaware, a 'star' fort typical of the period in Europe.