**NAME**

HISTORIC: Fort Christina

AND/OR COMMON: Fort Christina State Park

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER: East Seventh Street and the Christina River

CITY, TOWN: Wilmington

STATE: Delaware

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY: DISTRICT

OWNERSHIP: PUBLIC

STATUS: OCCUPIED

PRESENT USE: PARK

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME: State of Delaware, Honorable Robert Reed, Acting Director, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs,

STREET & NUMBER: Hall of Records

CITY, TOWN: Dover

STATE: Delaware

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: New Castle County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER: 1100 King Street

CITY, TOWN: Wilmington

STATE: Delaware

**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE: None

DATE: ____________

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

CITY, TOWN: ____________

STATE: ____________

**See Instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms**

TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

Theme: Exploration & Settlement
Fort Christina was constructed by the Swedes under Peter Minuit in the spring of 1638 on the northern bank of the Christina River near its confluence with the Delaware River, on the site of the ancient Delaware Indian village, Hopokahacking. Minuit selected the site for its natural wharf, the stone outcropping called the "Rocks," and for its natural defenses, which the Indians had recognized as well. Located on the rocky termination of the ridge of the watershed dividing the valleys of the Christina and the Brandywine Creek, the site was surrounded by wide marshes, except on the northwest side where it could be approached on a narrow strip of high land, and was thus strategically situated for defense. On the south flowed the Christina River and ships could be moored within a few feet of the Rocks.

Fort Christina was erected partially upon and adjacent to the Rocks, with its south side fronting on the river. It was a square, palisaded earthwork, with acute-angled bastions projecting diagonally at the four corners. The two corners on the riverside, and the one on the northwest were mounted with cannon. Within the fort, two log houses were erected, one of which was probably used as a storage magazine, and the other as a barracks and dwelling. A narrow, wooden wharf or bridge had also been built from the southern wall of the fort, across the exposed part of the Rocks, connecting the work with deep water in the Christina River.

In 1640, under the direction of Governor Ridder, the earthworks were repaired and three new houses, a storehouse, and a barn were constructed within the fort. In 1641-2, settlers began to build their small houses on tobacco plantations outside the fort. In 1647, it was necessary to rebuild the fort entirely.

In 1654-55, Governor Rising had the town of Christina Harbour laid out in back of the fort to the north, and fifteen to twenty houses were constructed on the square blocks of the new town. At the same time Fort Christina was restrengthened and a new palisade was erected around the earthworks.

All these improvements had barely been completed, when the Dutch military and naval force attacked the settlement at Christina. Christina Harbour was burned, and after a bloodless ten-day siege, Rising surrendered to Stuyvesant.

After a period of disuse, Fort Christina was renamed Fort Altena by the Dutch, and was repaired. Following the English conquest in 1664, Fort Altena was allowed to fall into complete disrepair and the last vestiges of Swedish fortifications at the Rocks disappeared.

The old fort site today is enclosed within the boundaries of the Fort Christina State Park, developed and opened by the State of Delaware in 1938. The park, containing about two acres, is in the main a rectangular
Upon a ledge of rocks that formed a natural wharf along the Christina River on the present site of Wilmington, Delaware, the first Swedish expedition, commanded by Peter Minuit, landed in late March, 1638 and established Fort Christina, named for the queen of Sweden, the nucleus of New Sweden on the Delaware River. The Rocks and the site of Fort Christina are presently contained within Fort Christina State Park, an enclosed piece of open land on the Christina River.

**HISTORY**

Although not situated directly on the Delaware River, Fort Christina remained a principal center of Swedish settlement, even during the 10 year rule of Governor Printz from his new capital on Tinicum Island, some 15 miles north on the Delaware. The fort was constructed of palisades and earth in the form of a square, at the four corners of which acute-angled bastions projected diagonally. Cannon were placed in three of these corners and within the enclosure two log houses were erected for the garrison and its supplies. Colonization was at first slow, but by 1641 there were enough Swedish colonists to create a self-sufficient community. The town of Christina Harbor was laid out behind the fort, and by 1655 had over three hundred inhabitants.

When New Sweden fell to the Dutch in the bloodless conquest of 1655, a few New Netherlands soldiers were posted at Christina, renamed Altena by the Dutch. Their relations with the Swedish colonists were amicable and under peaceful occupation Christina fell into disrepair. This neglect was soon remedied by Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who ordered the fort repaired for use as the headquarters of the Dutch West India Company. Despite the Dutch invasion, the settlement of Christina Harbor remained predominantly Swedish. When the Delaware fell to the English in 1664, the King's soldiers garrisoned the fort, but it was the Swedish settlement which remained the heart of the village that spread along the banks of the Christina and became, in the next century, Wilmington.

The site of Fort Christina again became the location for defensive outpost during the Revolution, and again during the War of 1812, when Fort Union was built on the same site.

Today on the site of Fort Christina, enclosed by a state park in 1937, only the Rocks remain, the natural wharf where the Swedish ships, the Kalmar Nyckel and the Grip, landed in 1638.
### Major Bibliographical References

- Esther Chilstrom Meixner, Swedish Landmarks in the Delaware Valley (Bridgeport, Pa., 1960).
- Roger Yound, "Site of the Swedish Fort Christina, Wilmington, Delaware."

### Geographical Data

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The landmark boundaries consist of the State Park boundaries. They enclose the least-intruded upon land of the original settlement.

### Form Prepared By

**Name / Title**

Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

**Organization**

Historic Sites Survey

**Date**

7/21/75

**Street & Number**

1100 L. Street

**Telephone**

202-523-5464

**City or Town**

Washington

**State**

D.C.

### State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

- National __
- State ___
- Local ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

**FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE**

**Title**

**Date**

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**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

**DATE**

**Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation**

**Attest:**

**Date**

**Keeper of the National Register**

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area extending southwestward from Seventh Street to the northern bank of
the Christina River. At the southwestern corner of the rectangle, a large
triangular section diverges toward the west. The north side is enclosed
by an iron fence with an ornamental double gateway, the east and west
sides are enclosed by high brick walls, and the southern edge of the area
abuts the river. A heavy concrete bulkhead extends along the river bank,
covering all but a portion of the Rocks, and probably much of the fort site.
Within the park are; the Swedish Tercentenary Monument, a representation
of the Swedish Colonial vessel, Kalmar Nyckel, surmounting a granite column,
which was executed by Carl Milles and dedicated in 1938, as a gift from the
people of Sweden to the people of the United States, a small brick
maintenance structure, and a log cabin moved the site, in memorial to James
Fenimore Cooper. These three features do not contribute to the national
significance of the landmark.

The land on the east, north, and west sides of the park is occupied by heavy
industry.