UNTIL Shurtleff exposed what he called "the log cabin myth," it was erroneously believed that the first American colonists, regardless of their national origins, erected log cabins as their earliest choice of dwelling houses. Now it is generally recognized by all informed historians that the English settlers from Newfoundland to Virginia built several types of temporary residences, but the house of horizontally-placed logs was not part of their architectural pattern. Similarly, the first Dutch settlers at New York erected crude shelters of several types, but they did not build log homes. Recently the present writer has been called upon to re-examine the question of the log house as it pertains to the seventeenth century Maryland and Virginia settlements, and the newer data presented fully support Shurtleff's thesis. Corroborative data have also been added to Shurtleff's evidence, proving that the log cabin made its American debut with the Swedish and Finnish settlers on the Delaware River.

Pennsylvania holds a unique position in the diffusion of the "log complex" to America. Not only did the first settlers in the Commonwealth, who were of Scandinavian origin, build and occupy log houses, but the Germans who followed them did likewise. The two-fold combination resulted in an architectural impact that had

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3 C. A. Weslager, "Log Houses in Virginia During the 17th Century," shortly to be published by the Archaeological Society of Virginia.
a far-reaching effect on pioneer life in America during the next century.\(^5\)

Prior to 1638 no permanent settlement had become rooted in Pennsylvania, but with the landing of the first Swedish expedition that year at present Wilmington, Delaware, a series of events was set in motion which shortly brought parts of southeastern Pennsylvania under Swedish occupancy. When Johan Printz arrived in 1643 to assume the governorship of the colony the population was largely centered in and about Wilmington where the log complex characterized the domestic, church, and military architecture.\(^6\)


\(^6\) Jared Van Wagenen, Jr., in his recent work, *The Golden Age of Homespun* (Ithaca, 1953), expresses doubt that the Swedes are to be credited with the introduction of the log house in America. If he had consulted the available authorities he would not have fallen into this palpable error.
The Swedes had merely transplanted to America a type of building technique with which they had long been familiar in the rural parts of their homeland. The English and Dutch—the other two nationalities important in the early development of the Delaware Valley—did not share that knowledge in their native lands; at least, they did not build log houses in their homelands.\(^7\)

Printz transferred the seat of government to Tinicum Island, giving Pennsylvania her first statehouse. The governor's residence was built of hewn logs and a nearby fort was constructed of "hemlock logs laid one upon the other."\(^8\) There was also a log storehouse, log bathhouse, and several log residences. In 1646 Printz erected a church on Tinicum Island also built of logs.\(^9\)

When Printz departed for Europe, after a ten year administration, he made an inventory of the assets of New Sweden.\(^10\) Indicated below, with italic supplied by the author and appropriate comment and documentation in brackets, are the pertinent entries:

*From Sankikan [near present Trenton] to the Schuylkill about forty-five miles, on the west bank of the Delaware, as far landwards as the Swedes desired to use it, uncultivated, Indians dwelling upon it. Fort Korsholm, with eight morgens, cultivated land and some meadow, the rest uncultivated.*

[Fort Korsholm, on the Schuylkill, was situated within the area known as Passayunk. It was "a fine little fort of logs having sand and stone filled in between the woodwork and surrounded by palisades."—Israel Acrelius, *A History of New Sweden* (Phila., 1874), 46.]

*Fort Vasa, also called Kingsessing, about three (English) miles up the river, where twenty freemen live, twenty morgens field with cattle and horses.*

[A contemporary described Fort Vasa thus: "It was not properly a fort, but substantial log houses, built of good, strong, hard hickory, two stories high."—Thomas Campanius Holm, *A Short*]
This house of oak logs hewn and squared is near present Essington in the Borough of Prospect Park. It was constructed in the seventeenth century by Morton Mortenson, and has the corner chimney characteristic of the early Swedish types. It has been restored in recent years.

Courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

Description of the Province of New Sweden (Phila., 1834), 80, published as Volume II of the Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Acrelius stated, page 46, that "five families dwelt together in houses two stories high built of white nut tree (hickory). There can be little doubt that the "twenty freemen" referred to by Printz occupied houses of the type we now know as log cabins. Probably the second story extended over the first, making a sort of fortress-residence. Buildings of this type were known in Sweden. Fort Vasa (named for a place in the north of Finland) was situated between Cobb's Creek and the Schuylkill. The settlement apparently increased in size within a short time, for in 1680 reference was made to "ye Towne of Kingsesse in ye Schuylkills." See The Record of the Court At Upland, 1676-1681 (Historical Society of Penna., 1860), 171.]
Aronameck, about one and half miles from Vasa, four morgens cultivated land.

[This was a tract on Mill Creek near its entrance into the Schuylkill. Printz does not refer to any buildings here at this time, although in 1675 Captain Hans Monson was living on the tract and owned 1100 acres. The deed is quoted by George Smith, History of Delaware County (Phila., 1862), 523.]

Molndal with a water mill and four morgens of cultivated land.

[This mill was the so-called "Swedes Mill," built of logs and situated on Cobb's Creek. See Henry D. Paxson, Sketch and Map of a Trip from Philadelphia to Tinicum Island (Phila., 1926) 122. Campanius, page 8, said, "There was no fort near it, but only a strong dwelling house built of hickory [logs]."]

Tequirassy, about one and a half miles below, with three plantations of twelve morgens cultivated land, buildings and beasts.

[Situated south of Tinicum Island, this area was also known as Olof Stillé's place from one of the first settlers. The houses were apparently on the river shore near the mouth of Ridley Creek, but no description of them has been found to date.]

Upland otherwise called Meckopenacka, twelve morgens, cultivated land with dwellings.

[Present Chester, Pennsylvania, originally called Upland after a Swedish province on the Baltic. A blockhouse built there on an elevated place in 1643 was described by Printz as "a strong wooden house."—Instruction for Printz, 112. Structures of this type were usually of hewn logs. The "dwellings" are not described, but it is certain that some, if not all, were built of logs.]

Printztorp, ten morgens cultivated land with dwelling and beasts belonging to Gov. Printz. Four plantations adjoining Printztorp with sixteen morgens cultivated land, houses and beasts.

[Reference here is to the structures on Tinicum Island which we have previously noted. Some of the log houses were still standing in 1679, as indicated in the following quotation: "On this point three or four houses are standing, built by the Swedes, a little Lutheran church made of logs, and the remains of the large blockhouse which served them in place of a fortress, with the ruins of some log huts."—Jaspar Dankers & Peter Sluyter, Journal of a Voyage to New York (Memoirs, L. I. Historical Society, I (1867), 178.]
LOG HOUSES IN PENNSYLVANIA

Still another small seventeenth century Pennsylvania settlement not listed by Printz was “Finland” or Chammassungh, situated between present Marcus Hook and the mouth of Naaman’s Creek. Campanius wrote, “This place was inhabited by Finns who had strong houses but no forts.” The occupants in 1654 numbered “five or six freemen of the Company.”

Although specific descriptions of these “strong houses” are missing, it is reasonable to infer that they were built of logs.

Even if we eliminate those dwellings known to exist but not referred to in architectural detail, there still remains additional documentation to support the premise that many of the seventeenth century Pennsylvania Swedish structures were built of logs.

For example, the residence believed to have been built by Morton Mortenson near present Essington in the borough of Prospect Park is one of the few extant seventeenth century log homes in America. The original house of hewn oak logs was built in 1654, according to a pamphlet distributed to visitors by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission. About 1698 (according to the same pamphlet) a second hewn log house of pine and chestnut was built, and the two structures were connected by a central stone section in 1806. John Morton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was born in the house.


12 The writer does not vouch for these dates. Paxson (1926), 115, says the date of erection was 1694, indicated by figures on the inner side of the mantelpiece. He also states (p. 119) that Morton Mortensen came from Sweden on the Orn in 1654. Smith (1862), page 389, refers to this house as the Darby Creek Ferry House, stating that the figures 1698 were carved on the mantelpiece of the northwest end.

Donald Kent, Associate State Historian, in a personal communication to the writer dated October 26, 1954, stated he prepared the text for the pamphlet giving the two dates mentioned above, but added, “I did not attempt to go back to original sources, but merely consulted standard secondary works.” Although the dates have not been pinpointed there is no reason to doubt the seventeenth century authenticity of the house. It is built according to a style characteristic of certain early Swedish homes termed “plank-shaped timbering” in contrast to round log construction. The corner fireplace in the dwelling is diagnostic for the early Swedish style.

Actually “Marten Martensson” was in New Sweden in 1648. See Swedish Settlements, II, 714. A later list of settlers dated 1654-55, page 721, showed both “Martin Martinsson” and “Morten Mortenson” apparently father and son. Furthermore, in 1677 there lived at “Calkens Hoek,” which embraced the area where the present log house is situated, “mort mortensen Junior” and “mort: mortense senior” (Upland Court Records, 79). See abstract for patent of land to “Marton Martesen,” Smith (1862), 522.
The original hewn logs are concealed beneath sheathing nailed on by later generations.

Courtesy Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

The first church built within the limits of present Philadelphia was constructed of round logs. Known as the church at Wiccaco, it was a small one-room building later replaced by a brick structure.13

The so-called Andreas Boon log house, weatherboarded by later occupants and finally torn down in 1918, was built prior to 1688. It was located near Tinicum Island.14

On the west bank of Darby Creek above Clifton Station there is still standing a small log house said to have been built between 1643 and 1653.15 It is a rare example of the early Swedish type of round-log construction, having the characteristic corner fireplace.16

13 Prior to its use as a church, the original log building served as a blockhouse for purposes of defense. In 1675 the court at New Castle directed that a church be built, Records of the Court of New Castle, 1676-1681 (Lancaster, 1904), 46. A sketch of the log building taken from Clay is given by Paxson (1926), 30. John Watson, Annals of Philadelphia (Phila., 1884), I, 147, says that an old Swedish MS. stated the log house was built in 1677.

14 Paxson, 101.

15 Paxson, 102. He illustrates the house with a photo taken in 1926.

16 The writer is indebted to Mrs. H. O. Albrecht for guiding him to this oft-visited cabin.
LOG HOUSE, 1643-1653

This seventeenth-century, Swedish-type log house, of round log construction, with corner chimneys, is still standing on the west bank of Darby Creek above Clifton Station.

The log house of the Schute family, known to later generations as “the old Swedes’ house,” formerly stood on the northwest corner of Swanson Street and Becks Alley in Philadelphia. It is believed to date back to the original Swedish settlement. Also at No. 7 Clifton Street in Philadelphia there formerly stood a boarded log house floated up the river from an earlier location in Chester County.

In the early Pennsylvania court records there is reference in 1686 to “the logg house of Jeremy Collett” who lived in Chester County. It is one of the rare references in the early judicial papers to a log dwelling in unmistakable terms; usually, such words as “dwelling,” “dwelling house,” or simply “house” were employed,

17 Watson’s Annals, I, 148.
18 Watson’s Annals, 150.
19 Records of the Courts of Chester County, Pa., 1681-1697 (Lancaster, 1910), 78.
the scribe apparently attaching no significance to the type of architecture.

The writer has located another seventeenth century reference in the official state records to a log dwelling which has heretofore escaped notice. It is found in the following petition presented to Governor Wm. Markham on October 29, 1696:

Upon reading the petition of the neighborhood and adjacent inhabitants of Oxford Township, in the County of Philadelphia, requesting the Governor & Council to settle upon them and the public two roads and a branch of a road. The first beginning att a white oak neer the bridge over Thomas P'sons water mill race, and thence to the Bristol Township, according to the Return of the Courses thereof to the sd petition annexed, and protracted figure of same.

The second Beginning at Richard Dungworth's mill, leading to Thomas P'sons grist mill, Lying & being at Franckford according to the Return of the Courses thereof & protracted figure of the same to the sd petition also annexed.

As also, a Branch of the said Road beginning att a white Oak, in Richd Buzbies Land, neer Jno Wells Log-house, Leading to the extent of the bounds of Oxford Townshipp, according to the Return of the courses thereof and protracted figure of the same, to the sd petition also annexed.20

No discussion of early log structures would be complete without reference to the so-called "blockhouses." Principally built for military purposes, blockhouses were constructed in most, if not all of the North American colonies during the seventeenth century. The logs were usually hewn square and placed horizontally. Typical of the blockhouse was the New England "garrison house" in which, "The logs never notched and chamfered ... are in some cases ... only halved at the corners, in some dovetailed to lock either continuously upward, or only in pairs; in some cases partly halved and partly dovetailed, and in some tenoned into vertical corner posts ... they were not built as dwellings in the first place, but as forts."21

20 Minutes of the Provincial Council of Penna. (Phila., 1852), I, 500.
The term “blockhouse” in seventeenth century Pennsylvania had a somewhat different connotation from that in New England. It might be applied to a fort such as “the large blockhouse” on Tinicum Island. It might also be applied to a residence, particularly if the logs were hewn. Dankers and Sluyter, after spending a night in a log house described it as “… made according to the Swedish mode, and as they usually built their houses here, which are blockhouses, or houses of hewn logs, being nothing else than entire trees, split through the middle or somewhat squared out of the rough, these trees are laid in the form of a square upon each other as high as they wish to have the house, the ends of these timbers are let into each other about a foot from the ends of them.”

Another example of the log blockhouse used residentially is found in a court entry of 1677. Jonas Juriansen Kien sold a parcel of land at Upland (present Chester) to John Test including, “a certayne new Blocqhouse by him the sd. Jonas built on the above mentioned Lott.”

The same year Jan Cornelissen of Amesland complained to the court that his “son Erik is bereft of his natural Sences & is turned quyt mad and yet hee being a poor man is not able to maintain him.” The court ordered that three or four persons “bee hired to build a Little Blockhouse at Amesland for to put in the sd. madman.” Perhaps it would not be inaccurate to refer to this log building as Pennsylvania’s first mental hospital.

In Upland proper there was standing in 1678 a blockhouse called “a house of defense or country house.” It was a rectangular structure measuring 14 x 15 feet and “fitt for the Court to sit in.” The court did meet here, and thus a blockhouse was adapted for the use of the early Chester County judiciary.

In conclusion, the writer has offered in evidence numerous ex-

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2 Dankers & Sluyter, op. cit., 175. These observers also commented on how the Swedes placed their chimneys in the corner of the log dwelling.

3 Upland Court Records, 90.

4 Op. cit., 102. Amesland was the area near and about Darby Creek and Cobb’s Creek.


6 Captain John Carr, a prominent man in the colony, who lived at New Castle, owned “a great house with the blockhouse and kitching.”—John Frederick Lewis, Thomas Spry Lawyer & Physician (Phila., 1932), 31. One might interpret this to mean that the log blockhouse, presumably earlier than the mansion house, was retained as a wing. It was common practice for the owner of a small log dwelling to add to it as his fortunes permitted.
amples from seventeenth century sources to prove that Pennsylvania's first permanent settlers—the Swedes and Finns—built dwellings and other useful structures of either round or squared logs. The English followers of William Penn who came to Pennsylvania after the Swedes generally ignored or shunned unfamiliar log house techniques and built conventional frame and brick homes. If any Englishman initially built a log dwelling to house his family, we may be sure it was in imitation of a residence of a neighboring Swede. When the Germans began to settle in Pennsylvania, the log house again emerged as the characteristic dwelling, and the technique was borrowed by newly-arriving Scotch-Irish settlers. But that is another topic—the log houses of the Pennsylvania Germans—on which the writer will, in due time, present his data.