

## *A Swedish Visitor Tells about Philadelphia, 1748*

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*A member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, Peter Kalm was a botanist sent to North America to collect seeds that could be grown in Sweden. During his three years in America, Kalm kept a journal with descriptions of not only natural history, but American Society as well. Here, Kalm describes Philadelphia.*

SOURCE: Peter Kalm, *Travels in North America* (London, 1771)

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All the streets except two which are nearest to the river, run in a straight line, and make right angles at the intersections. Some are paved, others are not; and it seems less necessary, since the ground is sandy, and therefore soon absorbs the wet. But in most of the streets is a pavement of flags, a fathom or more broad, laid before the houses, and posts put on the outside three or four fathom asunder. Under the roofs are gutters which are carefully connected with pipes, and by this means, those who walk under them, when it rains, or when the snow melts, need not fear being wet by the dropping from the roofs.

The houses make a good appearance, are frequently several stories high, and built either of bricks or of stone; but the former are more commonly used, since bricks are made before the town, and are well burnt. The stone which has been employed in the building of other houses, is a mixture of black or grey *glimmer*, running in undulated veins, and of a loose, and quite small grained *limestone*, which runs scattered between the bendings of the other veins, and are of a grey colour, excepting here and there some single grains of sand, of a paler hue. The *glimmer* makes the greatest part of the stone; but the mixture is sometimes of another kind. This stone is now got in great quantities in the country, is easily cut, and has the good quality of not attracting the moisture in a wet season. Very good lime is burnt every where hereabouts, for masonry.

The town is now quite filled with inhabitants, which in regard to their country, religion, and trade, are very different from each other. You meet with excellent masters in all trades, and many things are made here full as well as in *England*. Yet no manufactures, especially for making fine cloth, are established. Perhaps the reason is, that it can be got with so little difficulty from *England*, and that the breed of sheep which is brought over, degenerates in process of time, and affords but a coarse wool.

Here is great plenty of provisions, and their prices are very moderate. There are no examples of an extraordinary dearth.

Every one who acknowledges God to be the Creator, preserver, and ruler of all things, and teaches or undertakes nothing against the state, or against the common peace, is at liberty to settle, stay, and carry on his trade here, be his religious principles ever so strange. No one is here molested on account of the erroneous principles of the doctrine which he follows, if he does not exceed the above-mentioned bounds. And he is so well secured by the laws in his person and property, and enjoys such liberties, that a citizen of *Philadelphia* may in a manner be said to live in his house like a king.

On a careful consideration of what I have already said, it will be easy to conceive how this city should rise so suddenly from nothing, into such grandeur and perfection, without supposing any powerful monarch's contributing to it, either by punishing the

wicked, or by giving great supplies in money. And yet its fine appearance, good regulations, agreeable situation, natural advantages, trade, riches and power, are by no means inferior to those of any, even of the most ancient towns in *Europe*. It has not been necessary to force people to come and settle here; on the contrary, foreigners of different languages have left their country, houses, property, and relations, and ventured over wide and stormy seas, in order to come hither. Other countries, which have been peopled for a long space of time, complain of the small number of their inhabitants. But *Pennsylvania*, which was no better than a desert in the year 1681, and hardly contained five hundred people, now vies with several kingdoms in *Europe* in number of inhabitants. It has received numbers of people, which other countries, to their infinite loss, have either neglected or expelled.