

ORAL HISTORY SERIES - NUMBER TWO - 1998

SHERMAN W. TRIBBITT

GOVERNOR OF DELAWARE, 1973-1977



DELAWARE HERITAGE
COMMISSION



SHERMAN W. TRIBBITT



DELAWARE HERITAGE COMMISSION

Oral History Series
Sherman W. Tribbitt

by Roger Martin

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About the Oral History Series

An oral history is different from a biography, although it is a biography of sorts, perhaps closer to an autobiography. But it is not that either. It is a combination because it melds interviewer's questions (perhaps the beginning of a biography) with the very personal responses and interpretations of those questions by the interviewed or the subject.

Reading this oral history will be a new experience. First, you will find that the interviewed person's conversational responses are very little changed. So the flavor of the history is conversational and informal. There are repetitions and interjections which are part of the Governor's personality and they definitely add a spontaneous spark to the history.

Second, what you get in an oral history is the story the interviewee feels is important about his/her life. Questions like what was your greatest mistake? and what are you proudest about? help the reader to know the interviewed person better. You'll get some surprises.

Third, this is not the whole story. The definitive biography of the subject has yet to be written. There are parts of the life which will not be told in this oral history. They will be the province of later historians.

Included in this oral history of Governor Tribbitt's administration are the memories of persons who worked closely with him at various stages of his political career. They include Francis O. Biondi, John Bryson, Frank Calio, Nancy Cook, Richard Cordrey, Ned Davis, Bruce Ennis, Cliff Hearn, Ken Madden, Ruth Ann Minner, John Poplos, Marge Toop, N.C. Vasuki and Sherman (Skip) Webb, Jr.

And, our special gratitude goes to Mrs. Jeanne Tribbitt for adding her engaging recall of events during her years as the Governor's wife in the Governor's mansion.

If you wish to check specific references as you read the book, the code of persons interviewed and by whom follows. For example, (1M11) means the quotation is from the November 12, 1997, interview of the governor by Roger Martin, page 11. The words inserted in parentheses within a quoted paragraph have been added by the author to aid comprehension.

1M	11/12/97	Sherman Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
2M	12/3/97	Sherman Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
3M	12/8/97	Sherman Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
4M	12/19/97	Sherman Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
5M	12/27/97	Sherman Tribbitt and Skip Webb interviewed by Roger Martin
1P	1/12/98	Bruce Ennis interviewed by John Paradee
6M	1/26/98	Sherman Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
7M	2/14/98	Jeanne Tribbitt interviewed by Roger Martin
8M	3/15/98	Skip Webb interviewed by Roger Martin
9M	3/16/98	Skip Webb interviewed by Roger Martin
10M	3/16/98	Skip Webb interviewed by Roger Martin
11M	3/24/98	N.C. Vasuki and John Bryson interviewed by Roger Martin
12M	4/3/98	John Poplos interviewed by Roger Martin
13M	4/4/98	Cliff Hearn interviewed by Roger Martin
14M	4/13/98	Frank Calio interviewed by Roger Martin
15M	4/13/98	Ken Madden interviewed by Roger Martin
1RC	3/21/98	Marge Toop interviewed by Richard Carter
17M	5/11/98	Ruth Ann Minner interviewed by Martin
18M	4/21/98	Richard Cordrey, Nancy Cook and Richard Carter interviewed by Roger Martin
19M	4/24/98	Frank Biondi interviewed by Roger Martin
2P	6/18/98	Ned Davis interviewed by John Paradee

About the Author

Roger Martin was born in Delmar, Maryland, grew up in Laurel and graduated from the University of Delaware with a B.A. in German and Political Science and an M.A. in German. He was a member of the Delaware State Senate from 1972 to 1994 and Democratic Majority Leader, 1977-78, and again in 1994. Although he has recently retired from a career as a history teacher from Middletown High School, he is, of course, busier than ever.

His published works include: *Oral History Series number One, Elbert N. Carvel; A History of Delaware through its Governors, 1776 to 1984; Tales of Delaware; Delaware's Medal of Honor Winners*, and *Memoirs of the Senate*.



Family portrait.
From left: Jimmy, Jeanne, Sherman, Carole and Tip.

Introduction

Sherman Tribbitt was Delaware's governor from 1973-1977. It was a troubled administration from the beginning, one that was a prime example of Murphy's Law—if anything can go wrong, it will. This book is neither an *apologia*, nor a polemic, but simply, as nearly as possible, a dispassionate chronicling of the times that tried Sherman Tribbitt's soul. This author has said in the past that perhaps no other governor had to endure so many crises as Charles Terry did since the administration of William Cannon during the Civil War. After considerable research, this author now modifies the aforementioned assertion to conclude that it will be a long time before another chief executive will endure such trying times as Sherman Tribbitt. And yet, when all things are considered, because of his iron character and vast political experience, perhaps he was the best suited person at the time to weather the storms that buffeted the state, many of which were not of his doing.

Very few governors have understood the minutiae and day-to-day “nuts and bolts” of state government the way Tribbitt did. At the same time, he was the captain at the helm when all these things, such as the near-failure of the Farmers Bank and the tragedy on the canal where a ship rammed into the railroad bridge disrupting commerce, occurred. They happened on his watch and he took the heat for them, but he did act. He did not bury his head in the sand, nor was he frozen with inertia, overwhelmed with one complication after another. He was up every day meeting the next task to come down the pike. Ironically, his greatest calamity, the Farmers Bank, turned out to be his greatest triumph. Only those who were involved daily with that task understood how critical the situation was. Most people had no idea. At the time Delaware's citizenry was as ignorant of the potential perils of what could happen if the Farmers Bank failed as were the passengers on the Titanic to their impending doom

when it hit the iceberg. Only this time, there was a happy ending. Unfortunately, the Farmers Bank incident was just one more leak in the ship below the waterline that doomed Tribbitt's political career. Who among us, after reading the facts of the case, would have wanted to be in his unenviable position?

Nonetheless, amidst a sea of troubles, great strides were made in his administration. The Governor's Council on Economic Advisors was established. This group, in the next administration, became known as DEFAC (Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council). The present DEFAC regularly predicts state revenues. Other steps forward were taken. Runaway capital expenditures and the bond bill were capped and kept from burdening the state with excessive debt; women were appointed to the state police for the first time; a solvent state employees pension fund (one of the best in the country today) was created; food stamps came into existence for our state's needy; the Delaware Tomorrow Commission, which predicted troubles in our future growth, particularly in lower New Castle County, was organized; the lottery, albeit born in ignominy, was founded; the Delaware Solid Waste Authority, a model in forward thinking in waste disposal, first saw the light of day, and such legislation as the Wetlands Act, beach protection, and other environmental concerns were formulated.

Roger Martin



Regarding the book's format: author's comments are italicized—responses are in regular type face. It is illustrative of one of the techniques used in Oral History interviews.

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Biographical

Delaware is part of an entity called the Delmarva peninsula. Rivers flow from one state through another. We share the water, both the salt and fresh, and the climate. People share common folklife, topographical, agricultural and environmental roots. In early times people moved freely from one section of it to another. Many current Delawareans were born somewhere else on the peninsula. It is not unusual.

Sherman Tribbitt—one of those—born in Maryland ended up in Delaware. Like so many other young men born in the 1920s and raised during the Great Depression, no one had much material wealth. His family was not rich, nor did he come from a long line of socially prominent people. And typical of many in recent generations he didn't know what he wanted to do or where he was headed. Several great events would help determine that course, like the Depression and the Second World War.

You know I grew up in the Depression and things everywhere were tight—none of us, the people I grew up with; nobody's family (had) any heavily endowed people. I don't know that much about them except on my mother's side. (Her) maiden name was Thawley. My grandfather, Willard Thawley (that's where I get my middle name), was a lay minister very active in the Pilgrim Holiness Church in Denton. The church was a round church, a circular church and he built that church. Outside of Denton there is what is known as a Holiness campground which still exists today; only there's been a merger with the Wesleyan faith. My grandfather was a founder of the Holiness campground. As a matter of fact next to the tabernacle out in that campground there's Thawley Lane which is named after my grandfather.

My mother was the organist at the Pilgrim Holiness Church from the time I can remember until I graduated high school. My mother never cooked on Sundays. She did all the cooking on Saturdays,



Early childhood photograph of Sherman Tribbitt,
born November 9, 1922.

saved (her) time for the church on Sunday. It was morning, afternoon, night service.(1M2)

While his mother was very devout and very attendant to churchgoing, his father was not necessarily so.

He made her a good husband. He'd take her to church and go get her 'cause my mother didn't drive, but he would come, if it was Thursday night prayer meeting or a Sunday night meeting, my father'd come by the time he figured church'd be over. He'd come and sit inside the church by a pot-bellied stove until the service was over and then he took her home. But he didn't actually subscribe to the Holiness faith.(1M2)

Tribbitt, like many other Americans, does not know the origins of his family.

My father never had any brothers. And I never had any brothers and my father had one uncle that had a son who married but never had any children so the Tribbitts kind of ran out. His father's mother died very young. She didn't die in childbirth but he was very small and, evidently, her parents raised him. But his father must not have paid much mind to him. I don't know too much about him quite frankly.(1M8) My father was raised by his grandmother and grandfather, and I really don't know where his own father got to. He had two uncles and that's how he got to Denton; he was raised up around Goldsboro, Maryland. He came to Denton as a young man and married my mother. They were the parents of three children. He was in France in World War I (serving as) a cook. My father's full name was Sherman Lawrence Tribbitt. My mother's name was Minnie Alverta Thawley. They had a child born while he was in France. He never saw the child. It was a girl. She only lived a few weeks.(1M8)

I was born (in) 1922 (November 9), and I have one sister who was born in 1929, Elizabeth Louise Tribbitt Willis. (1M3) She lives in



Governor Tribbitt's mother,
Minnie Alverta Thawley.

Denton, has lived there all her life. We got along fine but of course (there was an) age disparity. You see, when I graduated from high school she was about in the fifth grade. I guess you couldn't call us really close because when you're growing up with that much age disparity, six years is a lot. Same way when you get up in high school. If you graduate at 18 and somebody is 12 years old, there's a big age disparity but when you get to be 50 and somebody is 42, then it disappears.(1M4)

There is a big mystery about Tribbitt's name on his birth certificate that even today he can't explain.

My birth certificate reads Sherman *Lawrence* Tribbitt and the Lawrence has a straight line through it and over top of the Lawrence is *Willard*. I was grown up before I ever saw a birth certificate—I don't know whether it was Doctor Palmer, who was my mother's doctor at the time I was born, (but) somebody crossed out the Lawrence. Of course, I would have been a junior. As I grew up people referred to me as Sherman, Jr., but I am not a junior. I was Sherman Tribbitt—little Sherman, big Sherman.(1M3)

I can't imagine him (my father) crossing out his own name, unless he decided his wife wanted me named after her father and crossed it out. I don't know who did it because my mother died young (at 46), while I was in the Navy. She had diabetes and a lot of times as you well know heart trouble can accompany diabetes, but I do not remember her taking any medicine for it.(1M4)

Was he close to his father?

Very close. My father never graduated from high school, but he had a great mind and he was a great penman and he was a hard worker. It was amazing to me how the man was able to come through the hard times in the Depression like everybody else, raising children, but he did very well. (He) worked for Prudential Insurance Company. (He) kept what they called a debit—50 cents a week,

PLACE OF BIRTH		STATE OF MARYLAND		File No. <u>21261</u>
COUNTY <u>Talbot Co. Md</u>		Registration Dist. No. <u>290</u>		
Village or City <u>Foston md</u>		(No. <u>Emergency Hospital</u> , <u>Private</u> Ward)		
BIRTHPLACE-LIMITS OF		FULL NAME <u>Sherman Willard Tribbitt</u>		
Sex of Child <u>Male</u>	Legiti- mate <u>yes</u>	Twin, Triplet, or other? <u>—</u>	and (1) Number in order of birth <u>—</u>	Date of Birth <u>Nov 9</u> 19 <u>2</u>
To be answered in case of plural births only)				(Month) (Day) (Year)
FATHER		MOTHER		
FULL NAME <u>Mr. Sherman Tribbitt</u>		FULL MAIDEN NAME <u>Minnie Alberta Hawley</u>		
P O ADDRESS <u>Denton md</u>		P O ADDRESS <u>Denton Caroline Co. Md</u>		
COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>87</u> (Years)	COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDAY <u>27</u> (Years)	
BIRTHPLACE <u>Denton md</u>		BIRTHPLACE <u>Denton md</u>		
OCCUPATION <u>Salesman</u>		OCCUPATION <u>Ex. W.</u>		

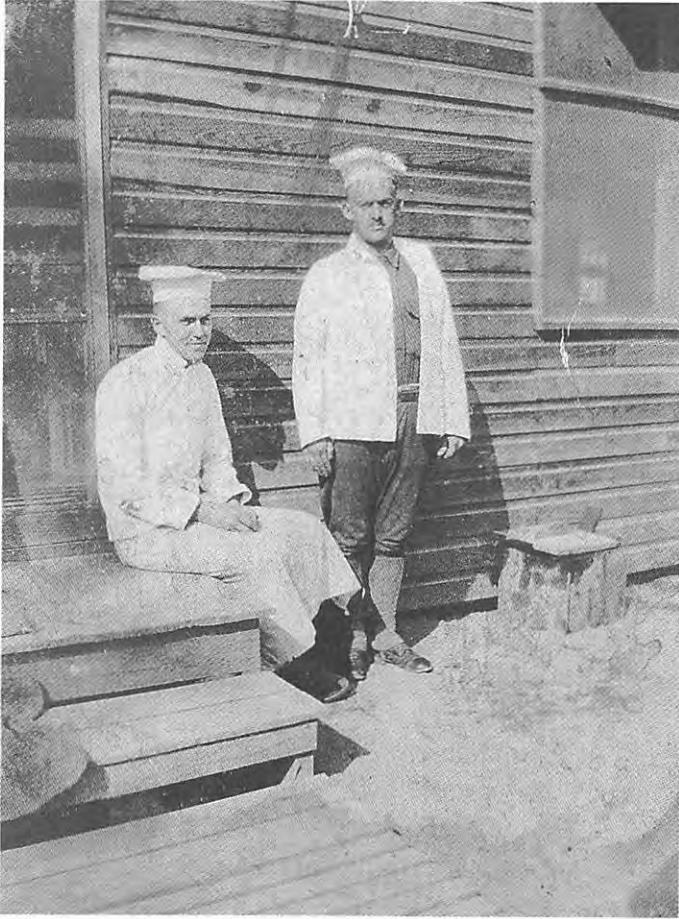
Governor Tribbitt's birth certificate with corrected middle name.

a dollar a week—insurance and then he shifted over to New York Life Insurance Company and then he acquired a farm. We never lived on a farm, but the first farm he owned was four or five miles outside of Denton. He was always back and forth out there, almost as much as if he lived there. He (became) Mayor of Denton, and (once) he got in(to) politics, (he) was elected three times to a county office. Some people call it county treasurer. Some people call it receiver of taxes. Caroline County was predominantly through the years, and still is, a Democratic county and it was hard for a Republican to get elected to office without a good deal of Democratic support. Prior to that, he first was elected in 1934 receiver of taxes. I remember he ran for the House of Delegates in Maryland and was defeated.(1M5)

His father was bitten by the bug of politics. His son seems to have followed in his footsteps in important respects. He's a good money manager and is well respected in the community.

In my senior year in high school, in the fall of 1938, my father ran for Clerk of the Court in Caroline County which is, outside the county commissioner, the highest elected office. He ran against a man by the name of Wayne Cawley. Cawley had three sons and one of his sons (Bryant) was in my class. We had to go through that fall with the fathers running against each other and both in the same class, but we remained friends. Mr. and Mrs. Cawley—I grew up with all four of their children and we were very close. My father lost that election by 200 votes which was quite something. Mr. Cawley served four years and then was defeated in the primary, which had to be in 1942. Then my father ran against the man who beat Cawley and lost again by 200 votes.(1M5)

(Father) was chairman of the Caroline County State Republican Central Committee for a number of years. He and Governor (Theodore) McKeldin were great friends as he was with Governor Harry Nice who preceded him. Nice was a Republican (who) came along after Albert C. Ritchie. My father was very friendly with



(Sitting) Governor Tribbitt's father, Sherman Tribbitt
as a cook in WWI somewhere in France.

Theodore McKeldin when he was governor. (McKeldin) was about to appoint my father on what we call the Public Service Commission here in Delaware—it's the regulatory board over utilities—in the fall of 1951 when he died with a cerebral hemorrhage.(1M6) He wasn't a hard-liner Republican a bit more than I'm a hard-line Democrat. Our party—we don't have all the white hats, neither does the other party. There('re) all kinds of people mixed up in both political parties. But my father, he had to have a lot of friends to get elected in a strong four to one (Democratic) registration in those days in Caroline County.(1M7)

The Tribbitt Family was as handicapped financially as anyone else during the Depression, but they eked out a living through perseverance and industry. But the 10-year-old Sherman found a way himself to make money.

I never once ever worried about whether we were going to have anything to eat. Now they had to be concerned about where they were going to get money enough to get food and clothes and whatnot, but my father used to sew all my shoes. My mother never made any clothes for me but she did for my sister. I was fortunate enough. I got in the newspaper business and had a large route and papers were two cents apiece in those days and I made 2/3 of a cent off each paper, the *Baltimore News*. It later became *Baltimore American*. Then I got working in the grocery store and I always had a little money. I never depended on my father for money. If the paper was 12 cents a week for six days, two cents apiece, I got 2/3 of 12 cents. The first paper I ever sold, a paper I think is still published today, is called the *Pennsylvania Grit*. It was a weekly paper from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, before I got with the *Baltimore News*. I helped another boy and then I bought him out and I had something like 200 daily newspapers.(1M8/9)



Sherman Lawrence Tribbitt,
the Governor's father.

With the phenomenal amount of money this boy, not yet in his teens, was earning while other heads of households were struggling to keep their heads above water, he was able to indulge himself.

I bought a bicycle from a fellow, who's still the undertaker today, by the name of Charles Moore. I bought it for two dollars and a half. It had the small tires on it without a tube. It was just a bicycle, that's all. Well, I saved my money and I sent to Montgomery Ward and got the bicycle called Hawthorne. That was the make that Montgomery Ward sold. Long about 1934 a bicycle cost twenty-one dollars and some cents plus shipping charges and it had balloon tires. Well, I got that bicycle. It came a few days before Christmas and I put it together and put it underneath the tree just like Santa Claus brought it. And I paid for it.(1M9)

Despite his first successes at capitalism, the experience was not without adversity.

Well, then Christmas Day it snowed. I just had to ride that bicycle in the snow and I slipped and bent the arm that comes out of the sprocket down to the pedal. I bent it so bad that it wouldn't clear the frame when you pedaled it. And I was so sick I couldn't eat and my father couldn't get anything done about it Christmas Day. A day or two after he had to take it somewhere and have it heated so he'd bend that arm coming out of the sprocket (to) clear again. But that day was a sick day. I got that bright new bicycle and couldn't ride it! (1M10)

Tribbitt, by his own admission, was not a stellar student, nor was he a troublemaker. On describing what kind of student he was he says he was:

Just an average student. I probably was never—I don't remember ever being on the honor roll.(1M10)

As with many people who have long been out of school, Tribbitt is no different from those who compare today's schools with their schools.

I enjoyed high school. If you go by any of the high schools in this state anywhere (today), the parking lots are filled with automobiles. I wonder who in the world is riding the buses with all those cars in the school grounds. When I graduated from high school there was only one boy in the whole school that had a car—only one person and he never drove it to school. Today, everybody's got automobiles.(1M14)

Did he have a favorite teacher?

Now, I always liked Mrs. Helen Hughes. She was the nicest lady. She taught English. I thought as much of Mrs. Hughes as I did anybody else. I'm not saying that other teachers were not also great instructors, but Mrs. Hughes stuck out in my mind.(1M15)

Mrs. Hughes was the mother of Harry Hughes, Governor of Maryland, who was first elected in 1978, two years after Tribbitt left office.

We were raised a block apart on Franklin Street in Denton. He was elected to the House of Delegates two years before I was elected to the House of Representatives. Harry was the Secretary of Transportation under (Governor) Marvin Mandel, and (from that position) was a candidate for governor.(1M15)

Aside from his part time jobs and going to school, Tribbitt was an avid sports fan, not as a spectator but as a very active participant. As with his newspaper job, he went after soccer wholeheartedly, much to the consternation of the seniors on the team.

When I grew up in Caroline County, they didn't have football and the fall sport was soccer. I made the varsity as a freshman and the seniors at that time didn't want any freshman playing on their soccer team and in practice one of them jumped on my right leg and broke it.(1M10) This fellow came over and jumped with both feet right against my leg. People tell me they could hear it crack. And I rode uptown in a man's truck who was out there and boy I can remember when the truck crossed over Franklin Street,—a little dip there—the pain shot all up my leg.(1M13) They had to take me to Easton Hospital to get the leg set. If you broke your leg in those days there wasn't any walking cast. You were laid up for something like eight weeks, that cast up above my knee. Well, anyway, I got over it (and) I played soccer all through high school.(1M10) I played all through Beacom (as well as on) the Denton town team and I made the all-star team picked from the Eastern Shore.(1M11)

Soccer wasn't the only sport Tribbitt played. Baseball was another.

I was absolutely crazy over baseball. I played baseball four years in high school. I played baseball at Beacom. I played baseball for the Mardela (Md.) league. When I got here to Odessa we had a great ball team for about five years in 1947. The baseball team won the state semi-pro championship.(1M11)

In one championship game, though it has been over half a century, Tribbitt still remembers the details with a twinkle of excitement in his eyes as though it had been yesterday.

We played VFW 615 out of Wilmington and we beat them three to two. There were two outs and a man on second and third and VFW 615 batting in the ninth, Charlie Weldin was the batter. I knew how to pace Charlie. Charlie hit a line drive ball between right field and center field and I caught that ball and we won the game.(1M12)



Sherman Tribbitt, a Denton home town soccer player.
Front row, 4th on right.

On another occasion Tribbitt's team went out to Western Maryland to play a championship which offered another amusing anecdote in his baseball career.

We went out to a little town called Westernport (in Allegheny County). The ball diamond (was) in the town. If a ball went over the fence, it went into West Virginia. We lost that game but one of our boys hit a home run so he could always say he hit a ball out of Maryland and into West Virginia. That same summer we played a ball game down to Centreville, Maryland, and Harry Hughes pitched against Odessa. We beat him one to nothing.(1M12)

The years passed and as Tribbitt approached adulthood, fate intervened and changed his life forever. This fate came onto the scene in the name of a man called Leach. It was a change that would wrest him from his Maryland roots.

John Leach was quite an educator. He was a very respected gentleman and he was a recruiter for Beacom College (in Wilmington). He traveled all over the Eastern Shore high schools looking for students to come to Goldey Beacom. He came to Denton. John Leach was a very active Republican here in the State of Delaware. But he was a very well-liked man and all the students that went through the Beacom college system liked Mr. Leach, me included. He came to our house, talked to me and my parents and I'm sure when he came he knew that my father was a Republican, and he probably thought he'd bring another Republican to Delaware. Well, through the years, after I got into politics we used to always kid about him thinking he brought another Republican to Delaware (who) ended up a Democrat. But probably with his influence and talking to my parents, they knowing that I didn't have the best of grades, we decided (that I would) go to business school.(1M16)

Coming to Wilmington presented a new challenge to the youth who, not quite 17 years old, left his Maryland home and opened a

new chapter in his life. As to having perhaps bitten off more than he could chew, considering his less than momentous academic achievements, he responded:

No. I never thought that even. When I came to Beacom in the fall of 1939 the tuition was \$25 a month and the school did not have dormitories or places for students to stay. You had the Y(MCA), but I couldn't afford to stay (there), but they had (other) arrangements. I lived at 816 Adams Street in Wilmington.(1M17)

Tribbitt, in describing the roomers of that house, relates a sad thought about those young men:

Well it was eleven boys that lived (there) and the landlady was a widow lady; but they all didn't go to Beacom. Some of them went to Goldey. Four boys out of those eleven were killed in World War II.(1M17)

We paid \$6 a week each. We didn't eat there. In my particular case there was a boarding house on Jefferson Street, a block from 10th and Jefferson where the school was. Just below 9th and Jefferson was a rooming house for eating only. And I waited on tables there for my meals. This lady didn't have roomers. It was just like a house with tables inside and you'd go in, family style. I didn't get any pay but I got my meals.

My father paid the tuition and I'd go home on Saturdays; I'd work in the A&P store, get around \$3 a day. That was big money in those days.(1M18)

In the summertime, between school sessions, Tribbitt didn't go home to go fishing or sit under a shade tree on a lazy afternoon. He worked for money to take him into the next year.

In my pocketbook is my social security card. I got it working for Phillips Packing Company. They were based in Cambridge (Maryland). They had canneries all over the Eastern Shore and I

worked in Denton. I was a bookkeeper. I had nothing to do with the processing. We canned peas, corn, and tomatoes there.(My pay) was something like a dollar an hour, 95 cents maybe.(1M18/19)

Once he had completed his schooling, Tribbitt stayed in Wilmington where he secured his first full employment.

I went to work for Security Trust Company at 6th and Market Streets. It's now PNC. The bank's still there. It's a branch bank. But I went there as a runner going to the clearing house, wrapping money, (and) worked myself up to become a teller. I worked there until I went in(to) the Navy.(1M19)

Living in a city such as Wilmington, which in 1940 totaled over 100,000, was eerie enough for someone from Denton, but by today's standards it was a very tame environment.

Sometimes on a Sunday night my father would bring me back to Wilmington from Denton up to the Market Street bridge. There was a Joy service station immediately south of the bridge. And he would leave me there. I would walk with a suitcase in my hand from there to 816 Adams Street and never think a thing in the world, any more than walking down the street in Denton. But I think how it's changed through the years. I wouldn't consider doing that tonight, for the world. Adams Street's out about six blocks from Market Street and then I had to walk all the way up to 8th Street, fourteen or fifteen blocks.(1M21)

I went to work there I think for \$65 a month and on Monday mornings we had to be to work at 6 o'clock because in those days all over the City of Wilmington there were American Stores, A & P Stores, almost at every corner all through the city and the bank had the night deposits (from Saturday nights) and if we didn't get to work on time Monday morning to open the bags and take the cash out and put a slip in for the checks, you wouldn't have time during

the day because there was always a line in front of your window.(1M20)

Being a bank teller can be very demanding. Tribbitt recalls an instance when, had it not been for the honesty of another "down homer" from Denton, he would have learned a very painful lesson:

Across the street was J. T. Mullins (a men's clothing store). They paid off in cash every week and each employee would get in his envelope the paper money and the change, whatever it was figured out to be. Well, on payroll day there was a man by the name of Andrews, Jack Andrews, who was from Denton. This particular Friday he called (and said): "Sherman, I want to give you my payroll." So I took it over the telephone. Well, he'd come over later. He'd have a check for whatever it totaled. Let's say it totaled \$3,000.(1M20)

On a particular Friday, after the bank had closed, I'm in the process of proving up for the day. A knock comes on the front door of the bank and a doorman (lets) Mr. Andrews in. He comes in, stands in front of my window and said: "Sherman, have you proved up yet?" I said: "No, Mr. Andrews, I'm in the process." He took out two packs of tens (in those days fifty tens in a package was \$500). He said: "You'll need this today when you prove up." I had put \$1,000 in tens too much in the payroll. Well, (if) I'd call(ed) Mullins and they'd said "our payroll's fine", if it happened that way, that would have been the end of it.(1M20/21)

Being in a big city can get very lonely. Tribbitt didn't realize it at the time (whoever does?), but Cupid was hiding around the corner of the bank readying his arrow.

I was working when I met Jeanne. Her sister's husband worked (at the bank also) and they lived on Boxwood Road. Jeanne was going to Mary Washington College at the time (in) Fredericksburg, Virginia. Well, he and I became friendly even though he was ten

years older than me. He knew that Jeanne was coming up to his house for the Christmas holidays when she came up from Mary Washington in 1941. So, he drew me a map. I didn't know how to get there. I'd gotten a car by then, '36 Ford, second hand for \$250.(1M22) I went out there on a blind date. I had not laid eyes on Jeanne before.(1M23) (The car) had two headlights, about like candles, and we went to Philadelphia (to) the Earle Theater and saw Frank Sinatra on the first date.

Within a week or ten days she was back in Fredericksburg. And then I got to going to Fredericksburg.(1M23)

It wasn't until Easter, 1942, that Tribbitt met Jeanne's parents in Odessa for the first time. Her father, E. Sherman Webb, Sr., local farmer and businessman, had already served one term in the Delaware House of Representatives in 1930 as a Democrat and would serve a term in the State Senate in 1948.

Mr. Webb, Sherman Webb. People knew him more as "Tip" Webb, TIP, which is what our youngest son goes by today. He was a very quiet sort of a gentleman. I liked him.(1M6)

That fall, rumblings of war, both in the Pacific and in Europe, for which the United States was woefully unprepared, became more ominous. Tribbitt was one of the millions of American men who received a call from Uncle Sam.

In November of 1942, a day or two after my birthday, I got my questionnaire. I don't even think I filled it out. I said to my father: "I'm going to be drafted so I decided to go into the Navy." I thought it maybe was safer—I'd have a place to sleep, and I was able to go in with a Third Class Yeoman rating which helped a little.(1M25)

By this time Jeanne Webb had graduated from Mary Washington and had gotten a position with Hercules Powder

Company in downtown Wilmington. Luckily for them, Tribbitt had been assigned close to home for his naval training.

I took my boot training at Bainbridge (Md.) and just before I was prepared to get out of boot camp, lo and behold, I thought to myself if I could get stationed here in ship's company, I could have my old car here and I could go back and forth to Wilmington. Jeanne was living out on Washington Street. I could go to Wilmington over night.(1M26)

It was at this point that Tribbitt's panache and savoir faire went to work just as it had done when he wanted a bicycle that Christmas ten years before.

I'm sitting there figuring I'm going to graduate from boot camp within a week. I go to see the chaplain, whatever his name was, and I said, "Do you know what?" "I'd like to sing—sung in my choir at home. I'd like to be in the ship's company choir." He said: "You would?" "Yes, I would." Well, damned if he didn't get me transferred to ship's company. They put me in the disbursing office and I stayed there from February to November that year. That's where I was when we were married. I had liberty every night. Hell, it was about a 35-minute ride from there to Wilmington.(1M27)

Wedding bells chimed on July 24, 1943, and the young couple did what thousands of others did at the time when war clouds seemed the blackest—they took a chance that everything would work out all right.

The day of the wedding we came from Denton. I came up in my '36 Ford. My mother and father had a '39 Chevy. (My father) said to me, "I think maybe you better use my car to go away wherever you're going." And I had "T" stamps for gasoline ration (meant for trucks with unlimited supply) which you weren't supposed to use on

automobiles. People selling gas, if you had any kind of stamp they would take it.(1M29)

It seems that Tribbitt was always facing obstacles and he could always figure a way to get by them. Only this time he didn't remove the obstacle—Lady Luck and somebody else did!

We're getting ready. We put my suitcase in the car. I didn't put it in, my friends did. And after they got everything all done, my uncle pulled the car up. So now the wedding is all (over) and it comes time for Jeanne and I to leave. She's got her suitcase and things and we're ready to go, come down out of the house, we were married in the yard out here on Bay View Road. Well, lo and behold, get to the car and the door's locked. What are we going to do? My things were locked up in the car. She had hers outside the car.(1M30)

(My uncle) just wasn't thinking. I guess he just forgot (and) put (the car keys) over the sun visor. I don't know, but it happened. And here's the strange part. There was a man by the name of Hopkins standing around the car 'cause we're ready to leave. He walks up. He has a Pontiac. He walked up and stuck his key in there and damned if it didn't open the car door. And this was a Chevrolet.(1M30)

Honeymoon problems didn't stop there. The gremlins were still at work when they arrived at their secret destination in Ocean City, Maryland.

I did something. We were married on a Saturday evening (and) got so damned sunburned Sunday we couldn't even lay in bed. I mean we were red. We knew it when darkness came on.(1M31)

Stolen moments in those dark days were fleeting and eventually Tribbitt's choir singing days were over. Casualties were mounting and straining all the manpower resources available in that crucial year of 1943.

Well, I stayed (in Bainbridge) from February to November of '43. I got transferred to a ship. I was to pick up a ship in Norfolk. I was a one-man detail so in those (days) to go to Norfolk, you go on the train from Perryville to Wilmington and then from Wilmington all the way down to Kiptopeake, to Cape Charles (and) across on the ferry.(1M27)

Despite the desperate hours, the newlyweds usurped those last few moments.

I had called Jeanne to tell her I was coming on the train. She met me at the station in Wilmington to say good-bye and it ended up she got on the train with me and went to Norfolk. Rode across the ferry and the whole works and then she had a girl in Williamsburg she stayed with. And, of course, I went aboard ship like 3 o'clock in the afternoon and, within an hour or so, that ship was on its way to Casablanca, one of eight or ten DEs (destroyers) escorting a convoy, the *USS Frost*.(1M27)

That was the first trip that we took, that convoy to Casablanca. We left on November 13 and we brought (another convoy) back and distributed it up and down to wherever the merchant ships were going up and down the East Coast. And then we went in(to) the Brooklyn Navy Yard and it was Christmas Day and I got liberty.(1M32)

Never one to pass up an opportunity, Tribbitt hot-footed it south even though he only had 24 hours. But, in wartime, 24 hours of liberty is a lifetime especially when a gnawing little doubt in the back of your mind keeps reminding you: "It might be my last time."

I had to be back on the ship at 6 o'clock the next morning. I went to the Pennsylvania Station and got the train down to Wilmington, got underneath the Market Street bridge and hitchhiked. Of course, I'm in a sailor's uniform. I get a ride down to Bay View Road (just north of Odessa).(1M32)

You know the mail was all censored. I could mail a letter in Casablanca, but we probably got back to the states by the time the letter got censored and what not. I (walked down) Bay View Road to where Mr. and Mrs. Webb live. My mother and father were there. It was Christmas dinner. All the family, all the Webb Family and Jeanne was standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes. Well, I opened the kitchen door and she had no idea where I was, and there I am standing there with everybody, all the family (except) my sister. Well, my father and Mr. Webb got in the car and drove to Denton to get my sister and brought her back before I had to leave. But to walk in on Christmas Day. It had to be Jeanne (who was) most surprised. She had no way of knowing. All she knew was I went to sea on a ship. I had to catch a 6 o'clock train out of Wilmington station to get back to New York by 0800.(1M33)

The killer groups, six DEs (destroyers) and a baby flat-top, reduced the threats of the U-boats in the Atlantic considerably toward the end of 1944. Hedge-hogs (shot off the bow of the deck and detonating only when they hit something) and depth charges (timed to explode at certain depths) were lethal weapons of the destroyers. The Germans countered with a lethal weapon of their own—the magnetic torpedo. If, by chance, the torpedo missed its target the first time, it would circle back and be drawn back into the target's screws with devastating effect. Tribbitt describes one particular incident when it could have been the USS Frost that took a hit.

All we did was anti-submarine. We never had any destination. If we were here and Intelligence tells us there's a sub operating right out here (indicating another location), that's where we went.(1M28) We were off the coast of Africa, been out there for several weeks, and we got assigned to go into Casablanca to restore. We were relieved with another flat-top and six other DEs. The very next day after we were relieved, the sub sank the flat top and one of the DEs

and they towed the DE into Casablanca. We saw it and there was only half a ship. It had been hit with one of those torpedoes.(1M29)

About the time of President Roosevelt's death, Tribbitt described one of the triumphs of the USS Frost:

We had been hedge-hogging and dropping depth charges on a submarine all day long and we knew she was in trouble. She surfaced right alongside. It was so damn close, the guns on the ship—we couldn't depress them. I could hit it with a baseball. Later on that night, she submerged again, and finally they were in such deep trouble that they surfaced and the Germans jumped out. We could see them with lights on, jumping out of the conning tower and they scuttled her and blew her up. And every man got off it and never lost a soul. And by the same token the *USS Frost* sank five U-boats and we never lost a man off our ship. Never lost a soul.(1M28)

Tribbitt went aboard the ship as a storekeeper and ended up being chief, equivalent to a sergeant. His battle station was on the flying bridge with the gun director and he felt relatively safe. But, as the war drew to a close, he started having second thoughts about being exposed in combat in such a vulnerable position.

Now we had 40 and 20 millimeters, but the largest we had on there was (a) three-inch gun. The gun director controlled the range and the distance of these guns. Well, I used to think to myself on the battle station, I'm all the way up on this flying bridge and the submarine's on the water. I'm better off way up here than if I'm down in one of those chain hammocks or below deck. Well, after the war was over in the European theater, we got camouflaged and got ready to go to the Pacific 'cause the Japanese war was still on and I got to thinking to myself on the way to San Diego here I had a safe battle station. Now going out on the Pacific with suicide planes, that's right where they'll come down on the flying (deck).(1M31)



Governor Tribbitt throws out the first ball:
Penn Mart Shopping Center vs. Llangollen Estates.
(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

Through the canal we went to San Diego, and that's where I was VJ Day.(1M32) We were on our way to Pearl Harbor (but when) we got there, they turned us around. We came right back to San Diego, back through the canal and, by the time we got back to Norfolk, you had to have 21 points to get out of the Navy (and) I had 21 points. So I left the ship in Norfolk and they sent me back to Bainbridge to (be) discharged.(1M33/34)

In November of 1997, Tribbitt attended a reunion of his buddies from the USS Frost in Charleston, S. C.

I think there were around 20 of them there. But, of course, in 50 years like attrition, something like 60 or 70 of the crew were deceased.(1M34)

Officially, we sank five German U-boats. We got a presidential citation, not just me, everybody on the ship did, all the crew did, after the war, signed by Harry Truman.(1M28)

Speaker of the House

After the war Tribbitt and his wife Jeanne settled in Odessa where he went into the hardware business with his father-in-law E. Sherman Webb, Sr. Webb was a Democrat who had served one two-year term in the Delaware House in 1930 and would soon be elected to the Senate in Governor Elbert N. Carvel's first term in 1948. Tribbitt's close association with Webb introduced him to the world of politics and soon he was thinking about becoming involved himself.

At that point, I had a wife and child who was scarcely a little over a year old and we were expecting our second child. Well, I was

trying to get my feet on the ground and I didn't know what to do so I got in(to) politics.(1M6)

Years later after his father's death, people who knew Tribbitt and his (family) in Denton told him that his father would turn over in his grave if he had known his son would become a Democrat. Tribbitt sets the record straight. One weekend when he and Jeanne went to Denton to see his folks Tribbitt broached the subject to his father:

I said, "Dad, you know I think I'm interested in politics but I believe I'm going to be a Democrat." My father's exact words to me he said, "Son, when I got old enough to decide what I wanted to do, I decided. You decide what you want." And that was the end of the conversation. He never said another word about it, but you must understand this was three or four years before I actually ran for a public office.(1M6)

So Tribbitt became a Democratic committeeman in St. Georges Hundred. He was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1956 from the 13th District (Odessa-Middletown-Port Penn area), the same year J. Caleb Boggs was re-elected to a second term as Delaware's Republican Governor. Democrats controlled the House, and its speaker was Representative Harry Mayhew of Milford.

The custom in Tribbitt's district was to rotate to give a person from each town a chance to field a candidate in alternate years. If the representative lived in Middletown, two years later it was Odessa's turn or Port Penn's turn. They kept rotating it so nobody ever succeeded himself. I was the first man that ever succeeded himself in St. Georges Hundred. And so it was Odessa's turn in '56 and I ran and was elected and I liked it. I wanted to run for re-election and apparently the Democrats who had the nominating responsibility were satisfied and renominated me and I ran four straight terms. First

term as a freshman member and then the next three terms as Speaker.(2M4)

Ned Davis (Delaware State News reporter and later press secretary for Governor Terry), recalls those early days in the General Assembly:

I'll never forget Judge Bush, Superior Court Judge William D. Bush, now retired, was then a House attorney. He came up to me one day and said, "You see that young man there?" This was before he was Speaker. I said, "I certainly do." He said, "He's got a great career ahead of him. He will probably be Governor some day." And this was his freshman term in the General Assembly.(2P1)

Despite his breaking precedence in running for re-election, he did not do so without opposition. Tribbitt said,

Now in those four terms I was primaried twice out of the four terms. In '58 I had a primary and I was re-elected. In 1960 I ran unopposed. In '62 I had a primary against the Mayor of Middletown and I was re-elected.(2M4)

Speaker of the House is a very powerful post among its 41 members. The Speaker names the committees and, just as importantly, assigns bills to committees. A bill being read in can easily be killed right at the start by its being assigned to a committee where it never (sees) the light of day. Often in the past lobbyists and House members have gotten to the Speaker before a bill was read in so they could predetermine a particular bill's future.

In general, however, Tribbitt tried to be fair about this assignment.

I decided to use the system. When a bill came over from the Senate or a bill was introduced in the House, I would assign that bill to the committee to which the subject matter pertained: in other

words, appropriations bills to the appropriations committee; anything to do with the judiciary to the judiciary committee, I would assign it (according) to the subject matter to which the bill pertained. I thought that was a fair way to do it.(2M67)

Tribbitt was elected to the General Assembly when the "Good Ol Boys" ways of doing things were about to be altered. Great changes were on the horizon much to the particular distress of downstate. For example, the City of Wilmington and New Castle County, despite their burgeoning populations, were grossly under-represented. Kent and Sussex Counties could outvote them at anytime. Richard Sincok, a retired DuPonter and later State Representative, and others brought suit in court to seek redress for a terribly malapportioned state General Assembly.

The Sincok suit (questioned) the validity of the existing system because apportionment was so vastly different between Blackbird and Appoquinimink Hundreds that had one Senator (and Christiana and Brandywine Hundreds). It wasn't fair and (it) not only brought reapportionment, it also brought it all across the country, not just in Delaware.(2M16/17)

By the time Tribbitt had become Governor, a quiet revolution had taken place in the shift of political power from downstate to upstate. From 1956 to 1972, Kent and Sussex Counties representatives in the General Assembly had dropped from 20 to 12. New Castle's and Wilmington's, conversely, had jumped from 15 to 29. Ironically, while Tribbitt supported reapportionment at the time, it would turn against him. When he became chief executive of the state many downstaters felt disenfranchised. Not only was there reapportionment, but the change in form of government from commissions to cabinet was brewing.

Capital punishment was another issue that shook the foundations of the General Assembly once again and it caught many legislators in the cross-hairs. Speaker Tribbitt was no exception.

From time to time in the General Assembly, real public issues (surface) whereby people get worked up and I'll use capital punishment as an illustration. I first went to the General Assembly when Boggs was governor. The legislature passed legislation abolishing capital punishment and Governor Boggs signed it. And I voted for it. I didn't believe in capital punishment personally. When I ran for re-election in '58 people re-elected me but I found they weren't happy with my capital punishment vote. Well, down the road a piece, there was a murder in Sussex County; this was three or four years later when Carvel was governor.(2M14)

The people downstate were so enraged about the vicious murder that almost immediately a bill was introduced in the General Assembly to bring back capital punishment. It passed both houses with Speaker Tribbitt's vote, but Governor Carvel vetoed it. The Senate overrode his veto and it came back to the House.

I had a weekend. Well, you know, I knew most of the people in my representative district so I decided I'm going to find out (what my constituents think about this). I went through the telephone book and I called every fifth name. I said, "I've got to make a decision for you next Tuesday and I've got to either vote for or against capital punishment. Are you for or against?" Overwhelmingly the people in this district were in favor of capital punishment.

The bill—when it came before the House to override, a 35 member house in those days, we had one member absent. (At) the end of the roll call (incidentally, the Speaker votes last), I cast the vote that was one shy to override and the roll call was tabled. That individual came to Legislative Hall later in the day. The bill was lifted from the table and he cast the vote that overrode Governor Carvel's veto.(2M15)

Perhaps the most painful and distressing issue that came before the state, and particularly the General Assembly, was race relations in the form of a bill called public accommodations. The problem

was that the old Jim Crow laws had been on the books since 1875. These laws allowed discrimination against blacks. In effect the proposed legislation said:

You couldn't refuse to serve a person because of his race, color, or creed—whether it was in a restaurant or whether it was in a hotel or any place of public service. That's why you used the word public accommodations bill. (There were) some Democrats for it, basically in New Castle County, and some in Kent; not too many in Sussex. Republicans, same way; they were split. Governor Carvel was for it. And (during) his first two years of his second term which was in '61-'62, the public accommodations bill passed the Delaware Senate and it was sent over to the House. I assigned the bill to the Revised Statute Committee. The chairman was Robert Davidson from St. Georges.(2M6)

Well, the Civil Rights movement was getting pretty strong in those days and Reverend (Robert) Andrews a very strong civil rights person, and Reverend Maurice Moyer, Littleton Mitchell, president then of the NAACP, (and) Roosevelt Franklin were the key leaders. (These leaders) started trying to get the bill out of committee. I was getting pressured to use my authority as Speaker to get it before the House of Representatives. I wouldn't characterize Representative Davidson as opposed to it, but he was listening to a lot of his friends, downstaters more than others, (about) keeping the bill in committee. So it stayed there almost to the end of the session.(2M6-8)

As the session wore on, Speaker Tribbitt came under increasing pressure by the civil rights leaders to get the bill out of committee. Tribbitt met with Davidson:

I sent for Representative Davidson to come down to Odessa. He came to my house late one day. He'd been duck hunting. He came in,



Sherman Tribbitt as
Delaware Speaker of the House, 1958.

hip boots on, hunting clothes, shotgun—everything. Here's what I said to him: "Bob, that public accommodations bill has got to come out of committee." (2M8)

Subsequently, Davidson reported the bill out of committee. But he was unsuccessful in getting it to the floor and that's where the bill remained for the rest of that session—in committee. After the 1962 election, the bill was re-introduced and again Speaker Tribbitt assigned the bill to the Revised Statutes Committee, only this time there was a new chairman. Davidson had been elected to the State Senate. The chairman of the committee was now Representative Glenn Busker of Smyrna, a man who was absolutely opposed to the bill.

I pretty well understood that he had no intention to ever bring that bill out of committee. Well, the civil rights people were getting edgy and they started picketing here at my business on the sidewalk in Odessa off and on for two or three months. They picketed my house here in Odessa which was fine. They were exercising their privilege. I began to carry the public accommodations bill right on these shoulders. They (the civil rights advocates) began to point the finger at the Speaker, meaning Sherman Tribbitt, because he (as)signed that bill to a committee to kill it, meaning Glenn Busker. (2M9)

The picketing continued right up through President John F. Kennedy's visit to Delaware in November 1963 to dedicate the new I-95 highway between Newark and Elkton, Maryland. Picketers came to the dedication replete with placards demonstrating against Tribbitt. Kennedy saw the demonstrators and thought they were picketing him. Until told otherwise, he thought it had something to do with his presidency. Tribbitt was feeling the heat and he felt it was time to act.



President John F. Kennedy

Mr. (Norman) Eskridge (Representative, Seaford), Glenn Busker, and Sherman Tribbitt attended (a) legislative leaders' conference in Boston; Eskridge knew that bill had to pass the General Assembly. He was broad enough to know it had to be done and he thought looking down the road a piece that if I want(ed) to run statewide, I had to be on the side of the public accommodations bill. Mr. Eskridge and Sherman Tribbitt talked Glenn Busker into releasing that bill from his committee (in the) next session.

I said, "Glenn, that bill has got to come out of the committee. You can do anything that you want on the floor of the House. If you get it amended, if you get it recommitted, whatever you want to do; parliamentary procedure is up to you. I'll treat you fair as far as ruling on motions but it's got to come out of committee." He agreed to bring it out of committee.(2M10)

While in Boston, the trio received a telegram from Governor Carvel who called a meeting in his office Sunday night (concerning the public accommodations bill).

I talked Glenn Busker into going to that meeting with me. We went to the governor's office and there was a room full of people, a lot of labor leaders, a lot of civil rights movement (people), a lot of people gathered in the governor's office. Nobody knew but me that Glenn Busker had agreed (to bring the bill out of committee); Mr. Eskridge did, but he wasn't there. He'd gone home.(2M10/11)

As is often the case when two opposing sides with tempers aflame meet under circumstances such as these, one spark can ignite the tinderbox—and it did!

Well, the meeting was going on pretty well and all of a sudden one of the civil rights leaders got up and walked over to Busker and said: "If you don't bring that bill out of committee, your house needs blowing up!" That's exactly what he said to him in the presence of a whole room full of people including Governor Carvel. Well, the

meeting broke up. Glenn Busker told me after the meeting—he said: “I’ll never ever bring that bill out of committee—NEVER will I bring it out!” Well, my question is what am I going to do? (2M11)

With his back to the wall, Tribbitt summoned all his ingenuity and power as Speaker of the House and attempted a parliamentary maneuver rarely used. He redrafted a copy of the Senate-passed bill and gave it to Representative Paul Shockley of Wilmington and told him:

Paul, this is the public accommodations bill exactly like the Senate-passed version, word for word. You introduce this bill and when you introduce it you request me as Speaker not to assign it to committee, to lay it on the table.(2M12)

Laying it on the table means it could be considered by the House at any time but, more particularly, it wouldn’t be sent to committee only to be killed by Busker. In this fashion the bill was pulled off the table later. It finally passed the House and was sent to the Senate where it passed a third and final time. When the bill reached Governor Carvel’s desk in December, 1963, he signed it into law. This bill ended the Jim Crow laws that had victimized Delaware African Americans for 88 years!

That’s how the public accommodations bill got passed (in) the General Assembly.(2M13)

Lieutenant Governor

By the time the year 1964 had rolled around, Sherman Tribbitt had been Speaker of the House for six years. From that powerful

position he had cultivated many friendships. One of those he came to know was Charles L. Terry of Dover.

It was almost like father and son because he was 22 years older than me. And we had become close friends while I was in the legislature and he was President Judge of Superior Court. Then later (he) became Chief Justice and there was speculation for probably a year before the convention of 1964 as to whether he would consider running for governor and Kent County was (saying) "it's our turn"—Kent County versus New Castle—who's had the most recent Democrat nomination from the respective counties.(3M1)

Given the assumption that it was Kent County's turn to run somebody for governor, Terry, as the most talked-about person, found himself in a peculiar position. He was a sitting judge and as such could not participate publicly in the pursuit of such office so he bided his time.

Meanwhile, Terry and Tribbitt continued their friendship.

From time to time he would stop in Odessa at my place of business and I would stop at his house after a legislative day and we had become very close friends. So it seemed to gel up maybe late '63 along in there that he decided to run for governor and he wanted me to run for lieutenant governor with him.

Well, I'd sat over there in the House for eight years, and it's a question of how long you can sit there and say "yes" and "no" and the "yes" suits some people and the "no" doesn't suit other people. I didn't see how much longer I could sit in the General Assembly without causing a serious problem. I had to do a lot of thinking about this because, after all, other than governor and president *pro tem*, the speaker's one of the most powerful positions there is in the State of Delaware.(4M1/2)

Leaving the powerful position of Speaker for one of presiding over the state-Senate with no vote except in the case of a tie gave

Tribbitt great cause to ponder. His political aspirations could be thrown to the winds of oblivion but what clinched it for him was the following consideration:

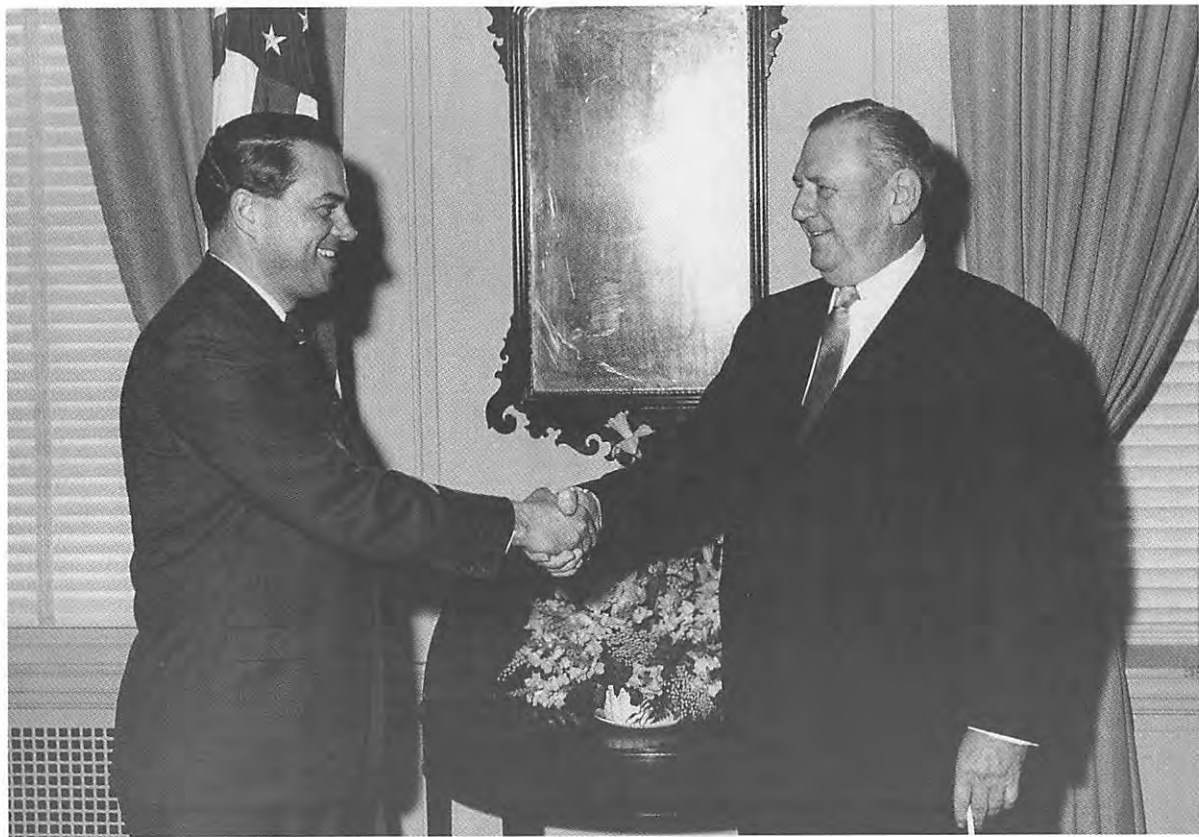
Terry made it very clear to me that, if he decided to run, he only wanted to serve one term and (that) would place me in a position if we were elected to seek the nomination in '68 for the governorship, which appealed to me.(3M1)

Terry did make his mind up and decided to seek the nomination.

Now, there were a few other Democrats (who were very supportive)—Ernie Killen and Bob Reed. Terry had a strong supporter in Vernon Derrickson who was Kent County chairman, and Sam Fox who was another strong political figure in those days. Terry had their support and he announced that he decided to resign from the Supreme Court and seek the election to the governorship. I don't think he resigned (from) the Supreme Court until after he got the nomination. I believe he might have resigned the night before.(3M1/2)

Came convention time and Terry had no opposition to his nomination for governor. Such was not the case with Tribbitt who had made the decision to cast his political fortunes with Terry. Opposing him for the nomination for lieutenant governor was James Latchum, an attorney with the firm Berl, Potter, and Anderson. What's more, William Potter, a member of the firm, was for many years Democratic national committeeman and a big politico in the city Democratic Party and he was obviously backing Latchum.

So it was just Latchum and myself. The nomination speeches were made and all the hullabaloo and the roll call starts.(Wilmington voted first and then they went to the county, then Kent and Sussex delegates.) When it got to that point in the roll call where I received the nomination, the City of Wilmington had a big band down there.



Lt. Governor Tribbitt with his governor, Charles Terry.

They all marched out of the convention and went home because their man had lost.

See each county had 60 (delegates); that's 180 and the City of Wilmington had 30. That's 210 delegates. So, it was somewhere down the process of calling the roll when I got the one vote that put me over to assure the nomination. That's when the Wilmington delegation, my friends John Babiarz, Russell Dineen, Ed Hutchison and Leo Marshall and the whole crowd marched out of the convention; gone home, so dissatisfied. That upset Terry a little bit—his concern about how sore the Wilmington delegation was, but it didn't amount to a thing. A day or two later you would have never known they walked out.(3M2/3)

Since that time Leo Marshall, longtime Democratic city chairman, related to Tribbitt just why the city delegation walked out that day.

And Leo, he gives me the reason because a particular Wilmington attorney had promised the city committee (a) \$10,000 contribution. Now, you've got to understand, that was before we had the limitations on the (contributions).

Jimmy Latchum has said to me a number of times. "Man, you did me the greatest favor in the world by beating me on the nomination for lieutenant governor because if I'd gotten that, I might not have gotten on the bench and that's really where I preferred to be. I prefer to be a jurist rather than a political person." And he has thanked me many times for that. So I got the nomination and Terry and I ran together.(3M3)

That summer the Republican Party put up David Buckson of Camden for governor and William Best of Nassau for lieutenant governor.

Buckson, Dave, all of his life he never has changed. Jeanne's known him all of her life. In fact, they claim to be about 45th cousins.

Well, anyway, Dave always was an aggressive fighter. He was always on the offense and could move to the defense very easily. And, if you remember, there was an issue in that campaign where Dave Buckson was accused of swiping Terry's speech he was going to deliver in Georgetown. That became a big argument for three or four days about Dave somehow or another getting the privilege of seeing Terry's speech before he gave it.

Bill Best was not an aggressive campaigner.(3M5) I was a sponsor of the legislation to create the Delaware State Fire School that had gone through the General Assembly. (He) was the minority leader in the House while I was Speaker in the last session. Bill wasn't supportive of it and of course most politicians through the years always seemed to cater to the volunteer firemen's association statewide (as well as) individual fire companies. That's just part of politics. And so I was very interested in (creating the fire school). At the convention that year, the state convention in Harrington, they made me an honorary member. So I felt I was in excellent political shape with the volunteer firemen.(3M5/6)

Tribbitt talks about Charles Terry's campaign style.

We traveled continually together. And I've got to say, Governor Terry was a fine gentleman. But I can't say that he was a real mixer at firehouse dinners or things of that nature. It wasn't his cup of tea. As a matter of fact, he had said to me if he were elected I only want to serve (one term). I'm not going to all those firehouse things and all those parties and whatnot and I want you to go. So I went everywhere.(3M7)

On others' campaign styles:

Senator (John) Williams was anything but an orator. And I'm not trying to take anything away from him. Lyndon Johnson used to call him "Whispering Willy." Cale Boggs in his style, homey, was excellent. I never considered (Senator) Bill Roth to be a great

speaker. (US Senator) Joe Biden's been gifted with the ability to talk. Only what people say about him (is) he doesn't know when to stop (*laughter*). But he is the master of his vocabulary. So, not necessarily are people in prominence great orators. But some are. You're fortunate if you have the ability to speak and hold an audience. If you're going to speak before a group and it's a Women's Christian Temperance Union and if you're watching closely enough you can tell if you lose the audience. And when you reach that point you'd better figure some way to get out.(3M8)

Some of the overriding issues in that campaign of 1964 were magistrate reform and a merit system for state employees. For example, becoming a magistrate was oftentimes a political pay-off. These were little fiefdoms up and down the state where more often than not, abuses had occurred. The merit system harbored abuses as well.

Well, the magistrate system was a semi-judicial part of the judicial system and magistrates were appointed (who had) little knowledge of the law. They were on a fee system in those days. It's not like it is today, (it was a) fee system based on a percentage of the fees of convictions. But it was really political. A politician back before my time, excluding myself, (*laughter*) (might) call a magistrate and talk to him (and your wishes) might get consideration. Magistrates had to be 21, and could read and write. (The system) needed correcting. In Governor Terry's case he had a career on the bench. He was very much concerned with magistrate reform.(3M10/11)

Regarding the merit system, too often when one political party was elected there was a tendency to throw state employees of the opposite party out of work and have them replaced with political appointments.

And the merit system came in really in the Terry administration but went into effect, you might say, in the Peterson administration.(3M10)

When the campaigning was done in 1964 and voters had been to the polls, Tribbitt wound up at his home in Odessa Heights, as he usually did on election night. Later in the evening he went down to Terry's home on State Street in Dover and awaited the results. When the dawn broke the next day, Charles Terry and Sherman Tribbitt had become governor and lieutenant governor elect. In addition, in this year of the Lyndon Johnson landslide, there was an overwhelming majority given the Democratic Party in the General Assembly. Everything, for Democrats, was coming up roses!

Two days later there was great revelry for Democrats as victors and losers congregated at Return Day in Georgetown. These were the fun times. But, amid the euphoria of the moment, little did Charles Terry, already 65 years of age and a gentleman of the old school, realize what he would have to endure before he left office four years later.

It is possible under Delaware law that an elected governor can be of one party while the lieutenant governor is of another. It has happened several times and woe be to the lieutenant governor whose only duties are presiding over the state Senate. There have been instances where the governor and lieutenant governor of the same party have not gotten along. One time a certain lieutenant governor started hobnobbing with some of the more powerful senators, and the governor felt left out. That lieutenant governor was never in the governor's office more than three or four times in four years. Not so for Tribbitt. He was not only of the same party as the governor, but was pulled into the center of things at the outset.

In my case, Governor Terry assured me from the beginning. I'd have a part of everything and I was free to walk in(to) his office. It didn't matter who was there conferring with the governor, I was always accepted, went in and out of the governor's office just as

much as if I was the governor during Terry's administration. That was very appreciated, made me very close, and I've noticed that the present governor, Governor Carper and Lieutenant Governor Ruth Ann Minner work very closely together. He's been very courteous to his lieutenant governor, Governor Carper has.(3M4)

From Ned Davis' perspective, he viewed the interaction between the Governor and his Lt. Governor this way:

As Lt. Governor, Sherman worked very closely with Governor Terry. I think he learned an awful lot about how to be Governor, not that he didn't already know a great deal about government and politics from his years as Speaker. Governor Terry was in his '60s and not too eager to go to every little function that came along. Sherman, being the good soldier and also wanting to get better known around the state, was eager to go. The Governor would often send him to represent him at political, social, charitable or business meetings. Sherman would never say no. I was the Governor's press secretary, chief of staff after Bill Quillen left Terry's office. I never changed my title, however, I was busy as the devil. Whenever Sherman was sent on assignment by me, I would take these invitations and go with the Governor and I would say, "Send Sherman. Send Sherman." Sherman would come to me to get his speech. So, I was, partially, his speech writer. I got to be a great admirer of his capacity. He wasn't a great speaker and still isn't. But, he is a very warm and earnest person and it conveys itself when he communicates with people. He does it extremely effectively.(2P2)

With the Terry Administration well under way, efforts were made to propose legislation to the General Assembly to do something about both the merit system and magistrate reform. Included in the new session was Governor Terry's pet project, a statewide community college system. The first campus was downstate:

That was the first location Del Tech (Delaware Technical and Community College) operated, in Georgetown. (There are three other) campuses; here in Dover, up at Churchman's Road, and in the City of Wilmington.(3M5)

Perhaps the highlight of the 1966 elections was the visit to Delaware by President Lyndon Johnson. Riding high still with (a) definite mandate from two years before, Delaware Democrats felt the good times would continue.

Boggs was running for re-election to the United States Senate and Jim Tunnell (Jr.) ran against him. Johnson came in to the Greater Wilmington Airport and there were throngs of people. Johnson was a head taller than Governor Terry was. Anyway, we went through the formation of greeting him. He went over to shake hands with the people who were lining up in back of the fence toward the runway and Terry and I walked over and they had the bubble top car there and we got in and Senator (J. Allen) Frear was sitting in the car. He was not out to the airplane, just Governor Terry and myself, to greet President Johnson. This is something I remember.

When Johnson was majority leader of the Senate, they (he and Frear) were very close friends—really close. When (Johnson) got over to the car, he looks in and sees Allen Frear sitting inside. He looked in the car and in his Texas drawl he said, "Goddamn, Allen Frear, what in hell are you doing with yourself these (days)—down to Dover scratching your ass? Damn, I'd like to be in Texas scratching my ass." Of course, Johnson had a name for being a crude man. He was very crude. Remember how he used to pick those dogs up by the ears? (3M16)

Tribbitt describes the motorcade from the airport into Wilmington:

We left the airport and went into Wilmington and straight up Market Street and the throngs of people were unbelievable. The car

was barely moving because of the people out in the street and Johnson was standing up. He could stand up and his head would be sticking out the roof of the car and he was shaking hands with people. And the Secret Service was trying to keep people back. But he gave those Secret Service people hell. "Get back!" "What ails you fellows?" "Get back and let those people come up here!" He was giving them hell.

Terry looks out the window and I remember him saying to me: "Look at these people! Man, we're going to sweep this election."

When Johnson spoke at Rodney Square he called Jim Tunnell, Tun-NELL. I remember that very well.(3M16/17)

Terry and the rest of the Democrats couldn't have been more wrong about the coming election. Whether it was racial tensions, Vietnam war demonstrations, or just a plain backlash to Johnson's overwhelming victory over Goldwater in 1964 elections, the electorate spoke decisively—and it wasn't good news for Democrats. The backlash took its toll on Delaware Democrats as well. One of the "problems" Governor Terry had in his first two years was the inordinate number of fellow Democrats who were elected with him in the General Assembly. After one particularly exasperating session with some of them, he was known to have said publicly that one of his problems was that there were too many Democrats with whom he had to deal. The 1966 elections took care of Governor Terry's problem in this regard. Democrats lost the House and split evenly with Republicans in the Senate with Lieutenant Governor Sherman Tribbitt saving the Senate by his deciding vote.

Republicans in the Senate soon caught on as to how to manipulate Tribbitt and his one vote to break a tie:

Under reapportionment we had become an 18-member-Senate and it was 9-9 and I was presiding officer with the right to vote in case of a tie, according to the Delaware constitution. Well, it didn't take the senators, both Democrats and Republicans, long to figure out, he's only got to vote when it's a tie. And consequently, if it



President Lyndon Johnson greeting (from right) Delaware Governor Terry, Congressman Harris McDowell, Jr., and Sherman Tribbitt. 1966.

(was) something that the Democrats wanted, whatever the subject matter was, whatever bill it was, if everybody voted and it was tied, then the lieutenant governor had a vote and no doubt he would vote with his party. Or, if it was something that the Republicans were pushing and the Democrats were opposed to, and it was a 9-9 vote, I would vote against it and defeat the bill. That didn't last long before they sharpened up. They didn't give me that authority to vote.(3M17/18)

Tribbitt did learn how to finagle and, through some slick parliamentary maneuvering, did manage to get an old veteran Senate Democrat elected President Pro Tem:

Senator McCullough (Calvin R., Holloway Terrace), all the time he served in the Senate never was President *Pro Tem*. I declared him elected President *Pro Tem* of the Senate with seven yea votes. The roll call came out of the 18-member-Senate. Some Democrats didn't vote for him. Some of the Republicans recorded not voting. In other words, he didn't get 10 votes. It took 10 to pass something. But he got seven yea votes. (Since) it was a procedural motion, he could have got(ten) it on one vote if everybody else had recorded not voting.(3M18)

Prior to Governor Terry, Delaware did not have a state home for the governor. But, early on in his administration the state, by a circuitous route, acquired one. Tribbitt tells how it came about:

When Governor Buck (C. Douglass) died Delaware had not had a governor's mansion. And consequently when the contents of Governor Buck's will became known and the state was going to be the recipient of Buena Vista some politicians started talking about a governor's mansion. Terry asked me if I would go up to Buena Vista to talk to the Buck Family, which I did, getting some ideas what it'd cost to heat it for a year, different things like that.

Well, Governor Terry never said this to me, but I know this is what went through his mind. Terry had to say to himself: "Look

here, Charlie Terry, now you were born and bred Kent Countian and you're governor. If the time has arrived for a governor's mansion, it's not going to be at Buena Vista, it's going to be in Dover." So, within a short time after that, Terry started negotiating for the purchase of Woodburn from Tom Murray, Sr., and we purchased it 'cause Terry got to live there about two years of his term.(3M11/12)

Buena Vista came replete with a swimming pool which suffered an ignominious fate much to the chagrin of state authorities:

The swimming pool was there, but those in authority in the Archives and whatnot decided that they didn't want to maintain that pool and it was filled (in). But, as I understand it, they didn't break the cement in the bottom of the pool. They filled the pool in with dirt, leveling it all up so you wouldn't know the swimming pool was there. Well, the problem soon developed with rains; the water couldn't get through the cement and it became a loblolly (hog pen). Consequently the dirt on top of it stayed muddy. So, the dirt had to be removed and the bottom cement broke(n) up. It was a beautiful home and today it's in use continually even though it's a conference center.(3M12)

Tribbitt ends the Buena Vista acquisition tale with a quip of his own:

A couple of Christmases ago Governor Carper had a dinner party at the Governor's House for the former living governors and their wives in honor of Governor Peterson (who had recently remarried). At the conclusion of the dinner, which was delightful, Governor Carper asked each one of the former governors if he'd stand up and say whatever he wanted to on any subject. Well, it came my turn. I said, had Governor Peterson, Governor du Pont, or Governor Castle been governor when Governor Buck died and left Buena Vista to the State of Delaware, we'd be having this dinner tonight up at Buena

Vista because those fellows would have had the Governor's Mansion up at Buena Vista. And none of the three ever said a word.(3M13)

Working with Governor Terry wasn't all work and no play. Tribbitt and Terry had some time together away from Legislative Hall when they would go gunning out in the fields and marshes.

I took him out a lot of times because I have gunned all my life until the last two or three years for geese and ducks. That was my thing. I enjoyed it. (When) I was in business for myself, I would slip out and go most anytime I wanted to.(3M30)

On one particular occasion, Terry was out gunning and was confronted by the game warden. A hunter had to have a federal and a state stamp along with a state license to do so.

It was a federal guy and he said: "Where's your license?" Terry said: "I don't have any." "You don't have any state license?" "No, I don't." "Well, you've got to have a state license." Terry said, "No I don't." "Why don't you?" "Cause I signed the law that said you don't have to have one." (3M30)

After the 1966 elections, Terry's fortunes as governor began to take a turn for the worse, some of it of his own making. A case in point was when, already having lost the House to Republicans, he lost the Senate with its 9-9 tie. Tribbitt tells how it happened:

We had a state senator by the name of Anthony Moore, Tony Moore we called him. He was a one-armed man. Tony Moore was a supporter of the Terry Administration. Most of the Democrats were. Earl McGinnes was chairman of a representative district in Tony Moore's senatorial district. Something developed between Moore and McGinnes. And Earl McGinnes was not going to support Tony Moore to run for re-election which meant that he might have a primary (and might get beaten). So Tony Moore was upset, and I

knew what the problem was. So, (Moore) threatened to leave the Democrats on several occasions to move over and give the Republicans the tenth vote.

McGinnes was budget director at that time. So I go up to see the governor. I said, "Governor, I think we can get this thing resolved with Tony Moore and we're not going to lose control of the Senate." I said, "I'm going to go up to see Tony Moore at his house," which I did.

I sat in his kitchen and we had a couple of drinks, the two of us. Well, I found out when I got there that what I was suspicious of was true, that all he wanted was support from McGinnes to run a second term. I go back to Terry. And this is one time we disagreed. I said, "Governor, it's very simple to resolve this problem and Tony Moore will stay right here with Democrats. All you've got to do is call your budget director in here and sit him in that chair and say, 'Earl, you're my budget director. You've done me a good job but you got a problem. You either support Tony Moore for re-election, who has supported me all along while I've been governor, or else, don't come to work tomorrow.'"

You know he wouldn't do it. Terry refused to do it. Well, as soon as Moore found out that nothing had changed he gave the word to Reyn (Reynolds) du Pont he was joining the Republicans. They had a resolution all prepared and du Pont gets up and said, "Mr. President, I have a resolution." The resolution named him President *Pro Tem*. They took out McCullough, named a new secretary of the Senate, and they passed the resolution with Moore's vote. (They) had 10 votes (and) they started changing committees all around.

I don't recall him (Terry) saying anything specific about that but he could have stopped it. He could be very cordial, but he could be very stubborn. He lost the Senate for the rest of the session.(3M19/20)

Tribbitt became baffled about another matter regarding Governor Terry about this time. Terry implicitly let it be known that he wouldn't be averse to a second term contrary to what he had

already told his lieutenant governor. Something had changed and Tribbitt didn't know what, but he mused about it.

Charlie Terry absolutely had told me that he wanted me to do the running because he had no intention to run again in '68. There had to be some reason to step out of the Speaker's chair to go to Lieutenant Governor. I had been assured that.(3M28)

Tribbitt thinks he knows why Terry changed his mind:

To start off with, Charlie was not a wealthy man like some other governors, and his judicial pension for his time on the bench amounted to about \$16,000 a year. He drew (that) while he was governor, which was within the law.

Well what happened, the legislature passed a bill raising the salary of the governor from \$25,000 to \$35,000. Terry let that bill become law without his signature so that the next governor would draw \$35,000 per year. Well, Charlie Terry got to thinking to himself. He had to think of himself, "Now look here, I'm feeling good and I like being governor and my pension's \$16,000 and I can live better on 16 and 35 which is 51 than I can on 16."

So, the conversations tapered right off and as time went along and it got closer to '68, he announced. We never discussed it and he never said another word to me and I never brought it up again.(3M28/29)

Tribbitt was boxed in and he couldn't do anything about it.

Well, he was the sitting governor and you got to be careful because it still wasn't the end of the road. If we were both reelected, I still might have been in the right position. I would be in a position to run for governor in '72.(3M29)

Across the nation two body sores on the social skin of America continued to fester and showed no signs of healing: Vietnam war



Sherman Tribbitt, the “campaigner,” at the April 4, 1967,
Delaware Safety Council Director’s Dinner — Gold Ballroom, DuPont Hotel.

protests and race relations. While the former raised its head from time to time in the state, the latter became the more obvious one. Despite the passage of the Public Accommodations bill in December, 1963, tensions increased at home and abroad with riots in nearby Cambridge, Maryland, involving activists H. "Rap" Brown and Gloria Richardson.

In Delaware Governor Charles L. Terry was about to experience a year that no one would forget. Outside the confines of Mapledale Country Club in Dover, the state's foundations, particularly up state, began to creak with protest. It was certainly not the kind of tenure in office that Kent County backers Vernon Derrickson and Sam Fox had envisioned for their protege Terry back in the summer of 1964.

Finally, in early 1968 protesters from Wilmington visited Legislative Hall in Dover on one occasion and made their presence known to very uncomfortable legislators. Human excrement was wiped on the walls while other persons urinated in the hall ways. Finally, legislators had enough and the order was given to state police to clear the premises of the agitators. Governor Terry was there; so was Tribbitt. He recounts that day:

To do that to state property to our capitol, I think that was intolerable and would have been (thought so) by most any governor.(3M23)

On another occasion, Governor Terry was asked to speak at the dedication of the new Martin Luther King Student Center on campus at Delaware State College. When it came time to deliver his message, student activist LeRoy Tate and others shouted, beat drums, and caused such a scene that Terry couldn't talk. Tribbitt:

Yeah, well when (Terry) got up to speak, Tate started a disturbance. I don't know whether (Terry) even got his speech started or not but just as soon as he took the podium the reaction

started, hollering and carrying on. Finally he walked off, Terry did. He never did deliver the speech as I recall.(3M22)

To Terry, who had been Secretary of State for Governor Richard McMullen back in the late 1930s, the old world of civility was turning upside down. Terry remarked on one occasion that while he had been Chief Justice no one would have questioned his motives. Now, as governor, he said people gave him hell all the time. There was even a state trooper guard who had been assigned for security reasons to Woodburn, the Governor's House.

I think there was an incident but Mrs. Terry was a very nervous woman, a nice lady but frail person. I could tell in my presence around her that all that civil rights movement in Wilmington, and the various incidents that happened in Delaware, (were) bothering her. I don't know whether she thought perhaps that her husband might be shot, or something, but she was concerned about it then. She absolutely despised the whole instance. It had to have been a decision between the governor and his wife (to station a trooper at Woodburn).(3M23)

In early April, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. The nation saw it happen, then it felt the sting and pain set in through city fires and rioting across the nation. Delaware was no different. Mobs began roaming the streets throughout Wilmington as the DuPont Company and other businesses began emptying their offices and sending employees home to the suburbs. Then the news came to Dover and Governor Terry pondered what to do.

The last time something like this had happened, civil unrest and disorder, was in Milford in 1954 when local residents vehemently protested school integration soon after the Supreme Court came out with its decision in Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka.

Governor Boggs told me himself that he stayed in Legislative Hall all night long toying whether to bring out the Guard or not in that situation. And whatever the deciding factor, he did not. The Guard never was called out in the Milford situation. If you're sitting in the governor's chair and you got something like a disturbance going on, you didn't have much choice but to do something about it immediately.(3M24/25)

Wilmington was no Milford. It was the state's biggest city and it was on fire. When firemen were called to put out the flames in the Valley (around 7th and Madison Streets), snipers began taking potshots amid the rising smoke.

As soon as he got word of what was going on, as commander-in-chief of the Delaware National Guard, his reaction was, put the Guard in there. I think he really got into trouble as far as the length of time he kept them there. If he'd phased them out, I think the people that he was immediately surrounded by, not his staff, the people that he talked to, long-time friends that lived locally (who were) more conservative, I'm sure those people that he was talking to were telling him he was doing the right thing. They weren't there, not that they weren't reading about it in the papers and the television, but it became a serious situation in Wilmington. You know it gets back to the same old thing. Downstaters don't worry about what's going on in Wilmington and that's just the nature of the game.(3M/25)

Despite the swirl of controversy surrounding the Guard on the streets in Wilmington, it was time for Charles Terry to think about campaigning and getting reelected. The Guard notwithstanding, things didn't look good. There was controversy in Legislative Hall, and among the electorate, over legislation which had been passed, namely the \$20 car tag (license plate) bill.

The \$20 tag was a big issue in the State of Delaware. We were short of revenue. The tags before were \$10 apiece, so he doubled the

little guy. And the guy that had a big car, like a Cadillac or something—the tag's around \$22—he lowered them to \$20. He doubled the little guy from 10 to 20 and he wouldn't bend on it a bit.(3M21)

In addition, some of Terry's closest backers and supporters fell away from him on this issue.

Carvel was upset about that \$20 tag and he went to see Terry. See, Governor Carvel, Derrickson, (and) Sam Fox (were) the key people in getting the nomination for Terry to run for governor and Carvel had appointed Terry to the bench. Terry and Carvel drifted apart and I would say for the last year they didn't associate even. If he came to Legislative Hall, Carvel'd go over to see Elisha Dukes in his office because Elisha was Secretary of State also under Carvel and he wouldn't ever go in Terry's office. They just didn't get along the last year or so. I know they had a distinct falling out about that. (There was) another problem. Terry fell out with "Doc" Hoey (Senator Walter F.) and (Senator) Curt Steen. They were movers and shakers in the Senate at that time even though they weren't in the majority.(3M21/22)

Tribbitt himself, powerless as he was as the lieutenant governor, felt the heat on this one back in Odessa.

I remember a farmer (who) lived down in Taylor's Bridge after that happened. Now, I'm lieutenant governor. He comes into town from the east at the light in Odessa. He's sitting there at the light. He starts up his pickup coming across the road. I said: "Hello, Paul." He said: "Goddamn you, boy, you damn Democrat mother—, to hell with you!" (3M22)

It was a hot issue. Campaigning was underway and the arguments pro and con about the Guard on the streets of Wilmington were already six months old. Governor Terry kept in

touch with Adjutant General Joseph Scannell and his deputy Preston Lee about the situation there.

I know that anything he went to in Wilmington he had increased his own personal security, the state police. There had to be certain limitations for him to appear on the East side before a black community. I'm sure there had to be decisions tough for him on where to go.(3M25/26)

Then, it happened. The first week had passed in October and the campaign was rolling when, on October 9, Tribbitt and Terry had a function to go to in Dover.

We were out to General Foods on the afternoon talking to employees and we left there separately and I went somewhere else and he had that spell, the so-called heart attack. They didn't call it a heart attack. Terry felt (it) would influence (the) vote if they thought the governor had a serious heart problem. I think he got offended as to how his doctors elaborated on his problem. He thought they went too far publicly.(3M26/27)

Tribbitt was having misgivings himself and he, as many other voters were doing, now considered the consequences if Terry were reelected.

I knew (the election) was going to be much closer.(3M27) If we had been reelected in 1968 he would have died in office. I know he would. He died before 1970.(3M29)

Terry hadn't exhibited any health problems until now, at least as far as Tribbitt knew and he was fairly close to him. He was a smoker, liked a good drink, was in his late 60s, overweight. But as Tribbitt said:

Governor Terry had a tremendous appetite and (was) a big eater. Ate anything, I say, anything.(3M/26)

Together, with the aforementioned liabilities, the year 1968 had been too much for Terry. His horribilis annus came to an end election night when he was defeated for re-election. With Tribbitt it was not so decisive. His agony was prolonged.

Well, after the polls closed election day '68, the returns didn't start to sound good for Terry and myself. And after the election you have people at your house having a good time enjoying (themselves.) Well about midnight, I was sure I was defeated. It was close. Back and forth. Before midnight I had decided I had lost. About 2 o'clock, Jack Russell called me on the phone (He was with the *Delaware State News* at that point) and said: "Sherm, how you doing?" (I asked,) "What's on your mind?" Jack said, "We got our figures together and we believe you won. Our figures show you won." I said, "They do?" He said, "Yes." (4M8)

At that late hour there was no way to confirm Russell's figures with the election commissioner. It would have to wait another day.

So the next day, Wednesday morning, I met Norman Baylis, a good friend of Gene Bookhammer (his opponent) and a good friend of mine; Norman Baylis, Gene Bookhammer, myself and a friend of mine by the name of Buddy Sartin from Port Penn; we met in the election commissioner's office in Wilmington at ten o'clock the next day. Well, after that meeting, I got a handwritten slip of paper with figures on it showing I won by 143 votes from the election commissioner. When he gave me that paper Gene Bookhammer was standing there and here's exactly what (he) said, "Son of a bitch, I'm the only Delaware Republican to lose."

I hadn't been to bed all night. Went home; went to bed. About 6 o'clock that evening I got a call from the election commissioner; I had lost. There was a recount and I did lose by a very narrow margin.

I went through that period from about 2 o'clock in the morning until about six o'clock the next day thinking I'd won. The election commissioner was embarrassed himself after having given me that slip (of paper).(4M8/9)

The next day after having found he had lost, Tribbitt, respectful of Delaware political tradition, attended Return Day in Georgetown even though he did so for the first time as a loser. Terry didn't go. He sent his brother N. Maxson.

When I came back from Return Day and went back to Odessa—if a guy ever had a broken heart—I thought that was the end of the trail for me.(4M8) Where do you go after you've been defeated (as) lieutenant governor? Where do you go politically? (3M30)

Minority Leader

For the first time in 12 years Sherman Tribbitt, the law maker, was out of a job and had no constituency to represent. To make matters worse, Governor Russell Peterson, the man who had beaten him and the Terry Administration, was riding high and was very popular. In the depths of his despair, Tribbitt felt he had had his 15 minutes to be famous, and now all was gone. He loved people and was good at mixing with them but as the days passed he was miserable and missed being in public life. Still a young man of 46, he had to find a way to get back into the center of things.

So I decided, my wife was opposed to it, to go back into the House, thinking that if we could recover the majority in the House of Representatives I'd be speaker again.(5M6)

E. Sherman (Skip) Webb, Jr., his brother-in-law, remembers those days well when Tribbitt was drifting and wondering what to do:

Well, you know, he kept his lines out and ran his small business there in Odessa and traveled the state and was a good Democrat. Come '70 he ran and won with a big plurality. I mean it was a big win for him.(8M3)

Present day Lieutenant Governor Ruth Minner, then an attaché in the House, remembers those days when Tribbitt was anything but adrift:

He made a point and made sure that he contacted every one of the people in the party, the executive committee, and the local committee in the counties. We were south of Milford and he'd be going to Rehoboth and wouldn't think a thing of swinging off to our house and saying, "How's everything in this district? Everything going all right?" He did it to every one of the committee, the district chairs, just to make sure they stayed in touch.(17M7)

Given to migraine headaches, Tribbitt had taken 14 aspirins on Election Day and savored his victory in the hospital with a bleeding ulcer.

Unfortunately we didn't have control of the House of Representatives. I ended up minority leader, and that's where Skip came aboard with us and worked with a minority party those two years.(5M6)

Tribbitt had been away from the house for seven years, and the General Assembly was undergoing great changes both in its physical plant and its membership makeup. Former Representative Clifford B. Hearn, Jr., Wilmington, Democrat (1968-70) spoke of those days two years before Tribbitt returned.



Campaigning.
From left: Charles Terry, Ted Kennedy and Sherman Tribbitt

We had two rooms for 13 members. We did not have enough chairs for all 13 members to sit. When we had caucuses I sat on the windowsill and, more often than not, on a table. We had one room, one office, for the leadership. The room that we met in for the bulk of the caucus was probably 15x18, if that.(13M2)

Swallowing hard and suffering voters' complaints that politicians were wasting tax money, the legislators had decided to expand the wings on Legislative Hall in order to acquire more office space. Despite the improvements Hearn said for a while the caucus room didn't even have heat. Air conditioning was simply a dream.

We didn't have air conditioning. Once in June, Representative (Jacob) Zimmerman, who represented Little Creek and had the Air Base in his district, was able to negotiate a cooling fan for jet aircraft to be placed in the chamber of the House against the window and it would blow cool air in. Of course, it made a hell of a racket. The deal was that the Air Base wanted a piece of land that the state owned, I guess along the highway, so they could enlarge a part of their golf course which they got, and we got the fan. So they would run the fan for 15 or 20 minutes and cool down the house. They'd shut off the fan and then it got stinking hot. In those days people smoked in the chamber as well. So the sky was blue with cigarette smoke and it was 8,000 degrees in that chamber. They worked at night then much more than they do now.(13M2)

In spite of the changes going on, old habits hung on in Legislative Hall and one of them was the ubiquity of alcohol. It flowed much more freely in those days than it does now. Due to the insufferable heat and humidity in June toward the end of session, legislators had to work many more nights since it was cooler. The danger in this was that, in the break for dinner, many would come back two or three hours later much more relaxed than when they left and work from nine to midnight finding it difficult to bring their business to a quick conclusion. Hearn elaborates:

They did fairly heavy drinking around Legislative Hall in '68 and '70. I mean some of the fellows had stocked refrigerators on both sides, particularly on the R(epublican) side because they're the only ones that had offices.^(10M37) One thing we did in the heat is we drank sodas, except it wasn't soda in those cans. I can remember one time when, for about three or four days, it was stinking hot in June and we had been drinking sodas and Zimmerman reached over to the majority leader who was Laird Stabler (Winder L., Republican, Montchanin, 1966-68) and he said, "Laird, how about a soda?" It was orange soda in Jake's hand. And Laird said, "I don't want orange soda." Jake said, "You would like this soda."^(13M3)

Frank Calio from Laurel, who came to Dover as House reading clerk when Tribbitt was there, talks about the old days in the General Assembly and how things were done by certain powerful legislators. One day Calio walked by the office of one particular legislator from downstate,

He was on the phone and says, "Come on in, Frank. Have a seat." So I sat down. Some guy wants a liquor license. And I hear him say, "Yeah, I'll get it for you." Now, the door's wide open and I'm sitting there and his voice is loud anyway and he says, "It'll cost you five thousand dollars." He started to mention names of guys he had to pay off. He said, "But I'll get it for you." And he got a lot of people liquor license(s). I thought, here I am a naive young kid just coming into politics and I'm hearing this s— for the first time. He made no bones about it. He was a powerful man.^(14M31)

The other change that was going on at the time was an enlargement of the House membership. For example, in the space of four years New Castle County's membership rose from 15 to 27 members which caused more crowding in Legislative Hall despite the added improvements. One reason for the added members was a court case in 1964. Hearn said it...

...might have been the Baker v. Carr case, a Supreme Court case on reapportionment which came down in 1962 out of Tennessee with Howard Baker (former US Senator). And then there was a reapportionment in '67 for the '68 election.(13M67)

Hearn relates a story when Ruth Ann Minner was called up on the House floor.

Jake (Zimmerman) and those guys had a bill on the floor, and Jake had a different position than I did. Something happened that day, I guess. I thought it was because I was getting too fat. I split the seat of my pants and I had to get it stitched up. So they gave Ruth Ann my pants. Well, when it came time for the roll call I was still in my skivvies, down in the basement and I wanted to take a position on this bill. They told Ruth Ann to hold my pants. So I came up in my skivvies to the little bill room outside the speaker's office of the chambers there and I was going to go out on the floor. I would! So they chickened out, and Ruth Ann said, "Jake, he's coming, honey, I can tell you he is coming out. He's standing there and he's giving you a second or two to tell me to give him back his pants or he's going to come on the floor." So, I got my pants and went out and voted.

Then when she was Sherman's secretary a couple of years later, I was down there as a lobbyist and I split another seat of pants. She had to stitch those up. She'll tell you that story—she embellishes it a little better than me.(13M38)

Skip Webb makes no bones about what Tribbitt's intentions were and they did not include staying in the House forever. Former Governor Terry had died in early 1970 and, one could say, Tribbitt was the top Democrat in the state. He had his sights set on higher goals. Webb said:

I went to work for him under the guise of being a page in the legislature and we started really from the day after that election to plan on running for governor in 1972.(8M3)

So once this '70 election was over and he was back in the House, he said to me, "You know, we're going to be in the minority but now, having been the speaker, I believe I can get the job of minority leader." And that came to pass. Well this gave him a platform. So he just sort of picked up and became the spokesperson. No one else was considering running for governor in 1970 or '71 because Peterson was so strong.(8M3/4)

Cliff Hearn talked about Tribbitt as minority leader and his modus operandi:

He was pretty good; he was pretty effective. He was partisan; he obviously was campaigning. It was everybody's knowledge that he was interested in running for governor from the day he got reelected until he actually got the nomination. It was clear in our caucus that's what he wanted to do so, when you looked at Sherman Tribbitt, you'd listen to what he'd do and you'd figure (what was) in the back of his mind. How would this impact upon his running for governor, which made sense? (13M4)

Tribbitt was not a desk pounder. However, with his legislative experience as former speaker, he used finesse to further the aims of his caucus. Hearn continues:

Everybody in the caucus got their opportunity to say their piece on the legislation on the agenda and then discuss it. By the time Tribbitt had gotten in office the additions to the building were completed and we had the minority caucus room that exists today, so our accommodations were better in 1970 than they were in '68.(13M5/6)

Since the Democrats were in the minority in both the House and Senate, the best they could do was to come together through their leadership in both chambers to form the loyal opposition to the Republicans and Governor Peterson. The Minority leader in the Senate was Allen Cook from Kenton (Democrat, House 1948-50, Senate 1956-72).

As you know in the government I guess the walls talk and every time there's a small scandal, the Democrats had a regular press conference, Sherman Tribbitt and Allen Cook, and it was called the Sherman and Allen show. And about every two weeks, I guess it was, they would take on Russ Peterson or somebody in the executive branch. And I think they were fed information by conservative Republicans, as well, who did not like Russ Peterson.^(13M5) We linked the two together as a duo and they would do press releases and come up with alternatives.^(8M4) They continued taking shots at Governor Peterson during the two years that Tribbitt was minority leader.^(10M4)

In his first two years Governor Peterson concentrated on and succeeded in streamlining the state's commission form of government into a cabinet form. He had worked on Governor Boggs' New Day for Delaware, a similar initiative back in the 1950s which failed because of an obstinate Democratic General Assembly.

Now Peterson turned his attention to saving Delaware's coastline. Skip Webb comments:

He had completed the reorganization in his first two years. He was now pushing the Coastal Zone and you know that was going to be the crowning achievement of the Peterson Administration.^(8M3/4)

Tribbitt reminds us that no one paid any attention at all to the Democratic version of a Coastal Zone bill:

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Pictorial, May, 1959

Two GB Alumni Lead Delaware Legislators



Leaders of the General Assembly of Delaware are both alumni at Goldey Beacom. Shown above discussing legislation agenda are the Honorable Allen J. Cook, President Pro Tem of the Senate; and the Honorable Sherman W. Tribbitt, Speaker of the House of Representatives.

We had our own Coastal Zone Act introduced in the General Assembly but I could not get Governor Peterson to even look at it or give it any consideration whatsoever.(4M19)

Cliff Hearn recalled what the atmosphere was like when the bill came up:

And the Coastal Zone Act, the day before the vote, I mean that was sort of like soiling a virgin, if you amended the Coastal Zone Act. It was touted as the greatest thing that had ever come down to the State of Delaware. The day before the vote people went around in Wilmington and in the suburbs putting pieces of paper under the windshield of cars saying, Vote for the Coastal Zone Act. I mean, you know, call your legislator and it really got a lot of hullabaloo and press pressure to vote for it so if you stood up to attempt to amend that act, it took some guts, because it was really touted as the greatest thing, much more important than sliced bread.(13M15)

Skip Webb felt like Sisyphus, the cruel king of Corinth condemned forever to roll a huge stone up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again on nearing the top. Peterson had a gem of an issue and the Democrats knew it.

Of course all the Democrats were afraid to oppose Peterson so you had people like Bert Carvel, and God knows who all coming down and saying: "Well, you know, Mr. Peterson's plan is a pretty good plan." Well, I was working with Tribbitt and with Cliff Hearn and some other people and we developed a counter Coastal Zone management bill because you can't just sit and allow the other side to get all the (glory).(13M16)

Hearn concurs:

Peterson's bill was poorly drafted from an administration standpoint. And I think it was vaguely drawn in some areas which

would have allowed economic interests to get into the Coastal Zone anyhow. So, it was flawed. It had vague language as I remember, that any halfway decent corporate lawyer or developer lawyer could have driven a truck through. And I think also the Coastal Zone itself may have needed some amendment as to physically where it was.(13M17)

Keep in mind there were probably about, and I'm going to have to guess, a dozen or more amendments proposed to the Coastal Zone. And about six or seven of them were put on the bill. Skip Webb and myself, and Sherman, were the primary people that got those amendments put on. We got some ideas about environmental stuff from "Mo" Udall's office (U.S. Representative Maurice Udall, Democrat, Arizona) and that was Skip's doing, and we cleaned that bill up. It was poorly drafted and crafted. There were a lot of technical flaws in it, a lot of pitfalls in terms of administering it, that would have caused real problems.(13M15)

Webb describes how difficult it was to mount a counter-offensive with the amendments:

You could have an oil refinery if, but you had to meet all of these criteria, that if you did meet all of those criteria you wouldn't do any harm to anybody. But it would be very expensive and very costly to meet those criteria. In fact I recall when our bill was introduced, one Republican looked at it and said, "My God, this is worse than Peterson's bill." It wasn't worse because it was more organized. It was modeled primarily off of the California statute that was considered at the time to be the most progressive and the most advanced approach to coastal zoning management in existence in the country.(8M6)

We covered a million things other than oil refineries. We talked about things like you couldn't build a high rise at Rehoboth if that high rise in the afternoon would cast a shadow on the beach. We would not permit shadow pollution. I mean we got into every element. We got into land-use planning. We got into residential

development in the coastal zone. This was comprehensive. This was not something aimed solely at screwing people in the petroleum business. This was designed as a comprehensive plan to protect the coastal zone.(8M7)

Now, the problem was there was no way of course that Russell Peterson was going to alter his approach and accept a Democratic approach but we did everything we could to make him look bad, and the problem we had, because we really had a better bill, we didn't have any of the good non-legislative Democrats on our side. I mean it would have been great if Bert (Carvel) had come in and said Mr. Tribbitt's bill is a better bill, but he didn't do that, you know. You can't imagine how strong Peterson was and how afraid people were (of him).(8M6)

Tribbitt explains what happened that day of the vote. As minority leader, his actions were predictable but they would be used against him later when he ran for governor. During his campaign for governor his detractors made off with a recording of the tape on the floor that day, played it on the radio so as to make him appear Mr. Flip-Flop and here's why.

When it passed the General Assembly a lot of us recorded "Not Voting" on the original roll call. Then after the roll call was over, you know how it works: Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, I want to change my vote from "Not Voting" to "Yes" and that's what I did. It had the votes. It already passed. But I just added my vote to it, you see.(4M19)

Well, as Governor Tribbitt is fond of saying: "the sun doesn't always shine on the same dog's rump everyday." Russell Peterson, basking in sunshine after two years of extraordinary accomplishment with the cabinet form and to-hell-with-Shell Coastal Zone Act, was about to suffer a lethal blow from which he would not recover. It would be his Achilles heel. Skip Webb tells

about a press release Governor Peterson gave out shortly after the Coastal Zone Act passed:

I think in that press release he said that the year end in June '71 we're going to end up with, I think he said, a million dollar surplus. The next Monday, (Black Monday), he is speaking to a joint session of the legislature with tears in his eyes saying that instead of a million dollar surplus there was going to be a four or five million dollar deficit. And, of course, we'd been saying all along, one of the things we had been saying all that spring: Governor, the numbers don't make sense. You can go back and you can look in the newspapers. Tribbitt would have a press conference and we'd say, "We're going to have a deficit. The governor's lost control of the budget." We just cranked that one out all the time. And it was true. Nobody believed us, by the way. "That's just old Tribbitt talking and he don't know what he's talking about." And so the day after Black Monday, Tribbitt had a hell of a lot more credibility than he had had before because he had been predicting this. And then along comes Peterson having to admit that it was the case and, of course, we said, "Well gee, Governor, how could you lose five million dollars over a weekend?" And, of course, the answer to that was "You didn't have it to begin with. Your people didn't know what they were doing." Well I think what they had done is they had screwed up the estimate, I believe, on the franchise tax and they were expecting more money to come in than was going to come in and they got the last weekend, as I understand it, people on the phone calling folks all over the country trying to get the franchise tax in. Well the franchise tax was in. There were only so many payers that sent in \$110,000 or \$100,000, whatever it was, which at that time was the big payment. So after that event Tribbitt suddenly had credibility. He'd been going all around the state. He'd been talking to people. He'd been talking: "This is a problem, that the governor had lost control of the financial doings of the state." And so it came true. There was indeed a deficit. But, boy, people peeled away from him just like that. (8M8/9)

Cliff Hearn gives his interpretation of this event.

What happened on that one, apparently, there was an overestimation in the collection of the corporate franchise tax.^(3M10) What they tried to do is have the Secretary of Finance move the monies for one payroll into the next fiscal year by one day to cover the shortfall. And that would have covered the shortfall. OK? We filed suit, we, Harvey Rubenstein representing Council 81, State Employees, and Cliff Hearn, representing the Delaware Federation of Teachers, representing some of the teachers, this was the union, unlike DSEA(Delaware State Education Association).

So we fought, and we fought an injunction action saying this was illegal in the Court of Chancery. The Court of Chancery agreed and said what they'd done was illegal. Then there was an appeal. The Supreme Court upheld Chancery and they had to move the monies back into the fiscal year.

I can remember Sherman Tribbitt was as agitated in a positive manner as I ever saw him in my life. And he was like skipping for joy. I felt like he was going to pick me up and give me a bear hug and a kiss, you know, and that would have been unlike Sherman. But he says, "You won! You won." He had gotten the word from the Supreme Court before we did that those monies were going back into the budget which really helped trigger the fiscal crisis.

And there were about eight or nine tax bills, or ten of them, that they taxed this and that and the other thing to get enough money to do that, and that was the night session and George Jarvis (majority leader, House 1969-70, Senate 1972, Newark Republican) had to lead all those roll calls. Of course we were very helpful as Democrats. We did vote for one tax bill—corporate tax, income tax increase. We had great speeches on the floor. Jarvis was furious at Peterson and the administration.^(13M11/12)

I think a considerable portion of the state of Delaware, by the session of '72, had solidified and did not like Russ Peterson. All right, for whatever reason, whether they were born-again conservatives, or whatever they were, they did not like Russ

Peterson for a whole variety of reasons. I think he fell into the trap that, you know, he had good government at heart and his ideas were good and he couldn't say, "Well, that idea is flawed." And he could not accept negotiation and compromise within the Republican ranks. He had that problem. He was not one who could negotiate all that well. He had righteousness and justice and truth and the American flag and a halo all on his side. And how dare you challenge what he thought was a great project or something. I think that hurt him too.(13M13)

Once Governor Peterson appeared to be vulnerable, Tribbitt stepped up his efforts to get the nomination at the Democratic Convention in June, 1972. Hearn elaborates:

And keeping in mind, in that session, people started running for governor about February, they were going around the state, all these people running for governor. Sherman was campaigning to get the candidacy during that spring of '72. Sherman had a tough time getting any bills out. They weren't giving him any quarter, either, because they knew he was a potential candidate. So, you know, he had a tough time in the House. They worked against him. They weren't going to give him any breaks in those two years.(13M39/40)

Getting the Nomination

Tribbitt was at the edge of the abyss that night in 1968 after he came home from Return Day in Georgetown, when he had been defeated for re-election as lieutenant governor. Now, he had fought back and the prize, his party's nomination for governor, seemed to be within his grasp. However, there were obstacles ahead. With Governor Peterson's vulnerability very much in evidence after Black Monday, other Democrats wanted to run. The problem in that was a

few of the candidates were New Castle Countians where some 70% of the state's population lived. Tribbitt was perceived as a downstater even though he lived in the same county. Skip Webb explains the problem:

Now that was one of the tricky things because Tribbitt was New Castle County, but he was below the canal. So (the Democratic politicians) were trying to say, well Kent County had (the nomination for Terry in 1964) and then Tribbitt doesn't count, he's from below the canal. It should be somebody with an upstate persona. We're going to lop the county off at the canal and dump Tribbitt into Kent county.(8M9)

Tribbitt had strong support downstate in Kent and Sussex, but he had to look north to counter what might happen to him in populous New Castle County. His downstate support might be wiped out by a big turnout against him in New Castle, and he needed Wilmington's Democratic Party behind him.

It was sometime in late '71 we made a contact with Frank Biondi, because we needed the City of Wilmington to grease the nomination.(8MA)

Leo Marshall was the Wilmington Democratic city chairman, but O. Francis Biondi, a prominent attorney who had strong backing, had beaten Marshall on the streets in the bloody Sam Shipley-John Daniello fight for Congress two years before and as a result, Biondi was the de facto city chairman. He was the one Webb and Tribbitt sought out, but Tribbitt wasn't Biondi's first choice. It was only when William Quillen backed out from a run for governor that Biondi swung over to Tribbitt. Biondi explains his first involvement with the Tribbitt camp:

Skip Webb had called me about Tribbitt during the session and had me go down to a restaurant over in Little Creek and meet a guy

named Jack Malarkey. He was chief financial officer of the highway department. They persuaded me that Peterson's numbers were all wrong and he was going to have a deficit.(19M5)

Emily Womach, Delaware State Treasurer, a banking lady from Laurel, offered some opposition, but Cliff Hearn explains she didn't have much of a base.

She had run in 1970 for treasurer and had been mentioned possibly for governor, but she hurt herself. She did something wrong and she cried, and that kind of knocked her out of the box.(13M13/14)

Ted Sandstrom from New Castle County, former counsel to Governor Charles Terry, was another possible opponent but he fell by the wayside for lack of support. The only real opposition Tribbitt had was Earl McGinnes, one time legislator (House Democrat 1959-60, Wilmington) and budget director for Governor Carvel whose major support seemed to be in Brandywine Hundred and Claymont. He also had some labor support. Biondi explains what happened when the roll call started for the gubernatorial nomination.

The threat to Tribbitt from Earl McGinnes was before the convention. He realized all along that his chance of winning meant he had to divide the city. If he could divide the city and take a good part of the county he felt he had a good chance. He knew if he couldn't divide the city, he had no shot because Sherman was going to win below the canal.

I remember at the convention I stood up and voted for Sherman Tribbitt and Earl McGinnes walked out of the hall and said, "forget it!" (19M6/8)

Once Tribbitt had the nomination for governor, a more closely contested fight came with the lieutenant governor nomination. The night before the convention, Senate minority leader Allen Cook of

Kenton and his wife, Nancy (Senate, 1974-) decided that he should make an attempt to go for lieutenant governor. After all, it was he who was the other part of the Sherman and Allen Show, the loyal opposition to Governor Peterson and the Republicans for the last two years. The nomination having been secured for Tribbitt, the City of Wilmington then made its demands. Democrats there wanted the second spot for Clifford B. Hearn, Jr. over Senator Allen Cook and that really put Skip Webb on the spot.

Now, one thing that happened that was difficult for me was Biondi asked me to second the nomination for lieutenant governor of Cliff Hearn. So, I got up there and Tribbitt was not at all happy, but I said I don't have any choice. I have to do that. So, I got up and did it and I almost got beaten up by some downstate folks who really felt that Allen Cook should get the nomination. The problem was that the dynamic didn't work with Allen Cook and God knows nobody liked Allen Cook more than I did or Sherman Tribbitt. You had to think of where the population was. You had to have somebody from upstate on that ticket to balance (it). We had built up Allen Cook as we went along and, of course, Allen understood. The person who really had a great difficulty in understanding was Mrs. Cook. She never liked me very well after I seconded the nomination of Cliff Hearn.(8M15)

As expected, Allen Cook had strong support downstate and the roll call turned out to be a tug of war. Hearn tells what happened:

I mean that was a close roll call, 85 to 83, with about 13 or 15 switches. I had below the Canal three votes in Sherman's district out of six. I had one vote in Sussex County, none in Kent.(13M22)

Biondi remembers it as being even closer:

It was jumping back and forth and Mike Poppiti was chairing the convention and I think Josh Twilley was the parliamentarian. I went



Campaign poster during the 1972 run for governor (Tribbitt) and lt. governor (Hearn).

up on the stage to see what the vote count was and Mike said it was one vote either way. I leaned over the stage and one guy from Wilmington had voted for Cook and it was Senator Herman Holloway. I pointed at Herman and said, "Come on Herman, change your vote!" and Herman got up and changed his vote. Poppiti banged his gavel and they counted up the votes and Hearn had won by one vote.(19M10/11)

Frank Calio, delegate from Laurel and Hearn's only vote in Sussex, had his own problems that day.

That was the day my son was born and I told my wife at the hospital, I said, "Honey, you got to hurry up and have the baby 'cause I've got to get to Dover!" So she had it and I left and I got to Dover and the county wanted to go 100% for Sherman as a block and that put me in a hell of a fix too because Bill Gordy (his committeeman and representative, House 1970-78), wouldn't release me not to vote for Emily Womach (who lived down the road from Calio). She wouldn't release me.(14M30)

And I had to vote against Cook. Bill (Gordy) put me (in) as delegate because I guess Bill didn't want to have to vote, but I had to vote for Cliff. Cliff always sees me and says "You're the only man in Sussex County that voted for me." And I tell you they were all over me, all these guys were over me. I mean I had to take the damn heat.(14M29)

As to what happened to Emily Womach and Earl McGinnes after that, Tribbitt responded:

I tried my best after I got the nomination to talk Emily into running for lieutenant governor with me but she decided to stay where she was. Shortly after that she got back in the banking business.

McGinnes tried to be (a serious contender) but it didn't work out for him. He turned around and ran for (state) auditor and was elected in '72.(4M11)

Remembering that the City of Wilmington Democratic delegation walked out of the convention in 1964 when Tribbitt beat out its favorite James Latchum for the lieutenant governor spot, Biondi was asked what would have happened had Allen Cook beaten out Cliff Hearn in the 1972 convention. Biondi replied:

I would have supported him. I don't think that Cliff and I would have gone forward if we had known first of all that Cook was going to be an active candidate and, secondly, if we had known how popular he was. But when we beat Allen Cook, all of Kent County and a good part of Sussex and the people below the canal were upset by that .(19M11/12)

As the convention concluded picking its candidates for the coming election, Representative Cliff Hearn, minority leader Sherman Tribbitt and other legislators returned to finish the second and final session of the 126th General Assembly. Hearn noticed quite a different atmosphere in the chamber when they returned:

I can tell you that caucus, once Sherman got the nomination (for governor), was solidly behind him. If there'd been any quibbling or maneuvering before that, they were all solid now 13 or 14 votes.(13M14) I detected a different respect in that chamber. See, that hasn't happened many times where you have an actual candidate for governor, you know, the party's candidate, in the chamber.(13M40) It was interesting how that chamber changed the minute that Sherman became the Democratic candidate for governor. He was still sitting in the House working bills in the last couple weeks of June.(13M39)

1972 CAMPAIGN

In the latter part of his second term, Governor Boggs had introduced a modified version of the cabinet form of government called New Day for Delaware which got nowhere because of a Democratic General Assembly. Tribbitt explains how he and Peterson got to know each other:

He was around Legislative Hall and all the hearings that were held. Peterson was active in the corrections system of state government. He was trying to propose things that would help the system. He became very active in the 3-S program (salvage people, shrink the crime rate, save dollars).(4M12)

Clifford Hearn was challenging the incumbent Eugene Bookhammer of Rehoboth for the office of lieutenant governor. Bookhammer had served in the Senate from 1962-66 before he captured the number two spot with Peterson in 1968 and was renominated for that position during the summer at his party's convention in Rehoboth. Bookie was extremely popular downstate and, despite Hearn's coming from the more populous part of the state, he could only hope for a miracle.

The big news from that Republican convention that summer was 1) not only was Governor Peterson already wounded in his bid for re-election with the announcement of the State's financial shortage on Black Monday, but 2) he, as the incumbent, was bitterly contested for the nomination by David Buckson. Buckson was a conservative member of his own party and he took Peterson to a primary. Peterson won, but he was bleeding. Tribbitt comments:

As (my) campaign progressed, that primary at the convention with Buckson and Peterson had to be beneficial to a degree to me because there was a certain amount of resentment (among)

Republicans with Russ Peterson. He had changed the system of government (to) the cabinet (form).(4M19)

Tribbitt, despite his seeming edge in the campaign, had an albatross around his own neck. His virtue of being folksy, down to earth, and the ease with which he mixed among people stood him in good stead below the canal, but led some above the canal to question his abilities. Skip Webb, his brother-in-law, explains:

You had a problem with Tribbitt in that his hearing was bad. His vision wasn't that great and he had an Eastern Shore of Maryland dialect and, you know, that haunted him endlessly not so much in the campaign as it did during his time in office. I mean we were concerned with the fiscal health of the state. He couldn't say 'fiscal.' Like any good Eastern Shore person he said 'physical.' He meant 'fiscal' but he put an extra syllable in it.

During World War II on that destroyer escort, he had his action station right next to some rapid firing guns and so he lost his hearing. When I first knew him he didn't have the problem with his hearing and he spoke a lot better. As your hearing goes, so does your elocution because you can't hear yourself properly. This didn't bother people downstate because they all knew a lot of people from the Eastern Shore. They knew what that was like, but these people above the canal, you know, his way of thinking, talking, was something that they didn't really have exposure to.(8M16/17)

Webb explains the difficulties inherent in this predicament:

You can imagine that we spent tremendous amounts of time in rehearsal. You know when he did one of these speeches, I mean, we worked on that. We worked it over endlessly in order to get it right. And you know we would put phrasing into the thing because if you can't hear everything you're saying it becomes real hard to phrase.(8M17)

Despite the handicaps, Webb indicates how they tried to maintain momentum:

He was out there on a pole talking about how the state was in financial trouble for months before Black Monday. That gave him credibility.(8M17) In the campaign we went right for the jugular.(8M16) We ran right at Peterson, attacked him for being, in effect, fiscally incompetent. That's really what the campaign was all about. That was sort of the heartbeat of the '72 campaign.(8M17)

Ever the optimist, Tribbitt explains his attitude going into the campaign and going, for example, before the editorial board of the News Journal Company:

At the time I was elected governor, I knew as much about state government as any man living. I knew that I had completely educated myself in government of the State of Delaware. I was fortunate enough on that first term (in 1956) to get on a joint finance committee. (That) helps you to educate yourself more than any other slot probably in the General Assembly. So, I felt that I could answer just about anything and I didn't have any problem with the editorial board.(4M17)

When the legislative session was over on July 1, candidates Tribbitt and Hearn found themselves in a less than auspicious predicament. First of all, there was no money to speak of at this early stage of the campaign. Recalls Hearn:

Sherman didn't have much of a campaign staff. He had Skip. In fact the volunteers came in July or August, and I think that (there) was a nice woman that was answering the phone and Skip (was) reading a book on how to win campaigns, and eating a sub sandwich when this volunteer from Muskie (Senator Edmund) came in to work. Francis (Biondi) got involved very heavily then in Sherman's campaign and Judie Drexler became Sherman's scheduler.(13M26)

Biondi had spent some time at the beach that summer and when he returned home after Labor Day he had an unannounced visitor come to see him:

It was Harry Roberts. He came up to my office and I knew him. He had been a Levy Court Commissioner. Everybody knew Harry Roberts, Don Isaacs, and Sherman were all friends. He came in and said, "Francis, we've got to do something about this campaign." Harry said he would help but somebody had to put some organization into this campaign. Harry asked me if I had been down to the Democratic campaign headquarters. I said, "No." He said, "Well, you ought to go down there."

I went down there and it was a mess. Skip Webb was living on the first floor. I mean he was working night and day. He had his jacket hanging from the window where the shades were. The fund raising and the policy statements weren't organized. I was persuaded, I decided, to take a strong hand in it.(19M14/15)

Hearn, a veteran of two campaigns for the House in the City of Wilmington, talks about how it was to run in a campaign from Delmar to Claymont:

I mean I was naive as hell; I didn't know anything about a statewide campaign. I was no more ready to run statewide than I am to direct the National Symphony Orchestra. There was a lot of learning going on. When Sherman campaigned in '64 and in '68, I suspect the style of campaigning was a bit different. You know it was a big thing in those days to go to the Harrington State Fair.(13M28)

In those days Republicans were known by their 'running as a team' while Democrats seemed to go off on their own. Hearn said the...

...Treasurer was Stansky (Edward, New Castle, House 1968); he was pretty much on his own. Norma Handloff (former Newark mayor), was marching up and down the state, that was Skip's idea, against Pete du Pont (for the U.S. House). And Biden did his own thing. Sherman and I (were) working out of (his) headquarters. We were trying to run as a team. The coordination of the other candidates really wasn't there.(13M34)

So it wasn't until the end of September in that campaign, and that's pretty close to the election, that there was any semblance of a political organization running that statewide election. Really! The Republicans had a honed organization going the whole time. They had a little problem with their primary with Buckson and that helped.(13M30)

While Tribbitt campaigned up and down the state (and received good response below the canal), his campaign aides knew he had to make a good showing in New Castle County. Bear in mind, in making an appeal there, Tribbitt had to straddle the fence by retaining his more conservative following downstate while simultaneously attracting the more liberal elements in the north. To do that, he had to do well in the various debates where, in some, the opposition had their own little clagues. Biondi says the Democrats learned how to rig debates, too. Hearn concurred:

(Peterson's people) were running campaign ads, Mr. Walk-out (because he changed his vote on the Coastal Zone Act). It was a nasty campaign. I mean Russ Peterson's people were very angry and they were not nice to Sherman Tribbitt. They had a lot of people when Sherman went to places like the Unitarian Church (Peterson's church in Wilmington) in that audience. And Russ Peterson was considered much better on his feet than Sherman as a public speaker and they were going to run some points up on those debates. They had a lot of people in the audience, hecklers and stuff like that. Well, he did all right. I mean, (Tribbitt) held his own.(13M27)

The Jewish Community Center tended to be liberal but Harvey Rubenstein (Wilmington lawyer) and some guys tried to help Sherman there. I forget where the other (debates) were, but they were not on Sherman Tribbitt's home grounds; they were on Russell Peterson's home ground. And Sherman was real nervous about them because he was going into a stacked deck on those debates. He did all right. He held his own—did a lot better than people thought he would. Probably better than he thought he would.(13M35) It can be really disconcerting in a debate when you walk into a stacked deck. I mean you've got to bite your lip, tuck that belt in and gut it out with a hostile audience. So Sherman's debates, as I remember, were all really tough for him because they were really on hostile ground. They'd have been tough if Sherman were Daniel Webster.(13M36)

So they sent me to the more liberal places where Sherman would not be as comfortable, like at the University speaking to the students.(13M28)

Biondi remembers the debate at the Jewish Community Center.

Sherman had a real strong statement that we had prepared for him to give and he gave it. I was there that night and I thought he did okay. I think toward the end of the campaign Sherman got weary of the debates. There were several times when we told Sherman to take a night off and we'd send Cliff Hearn. That was an effective remedy because Peterson would get mad about that. He got angry when Tribbitt didn't show up and Hearn did.(19M18)

At one particular rigged event in Wilmington, Tribbitt, according to Hearn, called their bluff:

Sherman was coming to Howard High School, and (Peterson's people) packed the school assembly with some black leaders and they had a mock election. They had the thing stacked that Peterson was going to win like about five to one. They arranged that for Sherman Tribbitt. And for some reason they sent me down instead. And you

could see exactly what they did; they had some blacks that were Republicans in the school system and they had that whole auditorium stacked. Well, Sherman walked in there and they had the press lined up and he told them this was a Nixon-type stunt and they ought to be ashamed for doing something like that and using kids.(13M27/28)

Biondi reflects on what made the difference between Tribbitt and Peterson:

I tell you today, Russell Peterson is a fine man and a good person but he lost credibility with the public on that one issue. It affected everybody who was a taxpayer in the state. He focused the campaign on reorganization of government, the environment, but he couldn't get away from the fiscal issue.(19M17/18)

Two other important constituencies Tribbitt had to attract were the UAW (United Auto Workers-General Motors and Chrysler) and the teachers' organizations up and down the state-DSEA(Delaware State Education Association) and the AFT (American Federation of Teachers). Many of the auto workers sided with Peterson because of his stand on the environment and, of course, the teachers were looking for a raise. Hearn explains what was done for these two pressure groups:

I think Sherman did all right with the rank-and-file labor people. Some of the leadership of DSEA went with Tribbitt. I got the AFT leadership to go with Tribbitt because I was their lawyer. I don't know whether we got all the rank-and-file.(13M31)

In the end the UAW formally endorsed Governor Peterson. But after Tribbitt was elected he had his revenge:

I had a good labor record in the General Assembly and it really upset me about them endorsing Peterson. But come to find out the leaders endorsed him, but the rank-and-file voted as they damned



Governor Sherman Tribbitt and Governor Russell Peterson
in a spirit of comaraderie.
(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

pleased. So we had a big meeting in the governor's office after I was elected, on some labor issue, and the room was full of labor leaders of all the trades. They discussed what they wanted. I said, "Well, I'll take this into consideration." But I said, "I want to tell you something, there's some in the room that didn't endorse me. But I want to tell you one thing. I'm going to forgive, but I ain't going to forget." That's exactly what I told them. Boy, they never forgot that.(4M22)

Money is the life blood of a political campaign and Tribbitt was always needing more. He needed money for billboards and sundry things, but TV time was almost out of the question:

When you get to the Philadelphia TV stations, you're getting into big money. It was very easy to get on Channel 12. This is hard to believe with what we're spending today; the statewide campaign is two million. You know how much we raised when I was elected governor in '72? About \$165,000. And I ended up with a little surplus.(4M20)

While lieutenant governor candidate Clifford Hearn had no idea how he stood with the electorate (he guesses he had no more than \$10,000 in his campaign fund), polling was being done for Tribbitt. Biondi describes one of the last:

About two weeks before the election we had a poll done that was paid for by the Democratic State Committee. The pollster came by and showed the polls to Skip and myself. The poll showed that Peterson had caught Tribbitt. I remember I refused to give the poll to Mike Poppiti who was the state chairman who paid for it. I said, "Sue me!" We had talked the guy who was doing the poll into delivering it to us so we could look at it before it went to Mike. And, when it wasn't going to breed a lot of confidence, Skip and I decided to keep it. We never did show it to Mike Poppiti. Can you see the headlines? It would have leaked out. We didn't want any of that.

We just campaigned harder and went back to getting our Democratic voters out.(19M20)

Two weeks before the election Tribbitt met with the AAUP (American Association of University Professors) just over the Maryland state line in the Swiss Inn restaurant on Route 40. What happened that night ruffled the feathers of some on the University of Delaware Board of Trustees both before and after the election just a bit. Tribbitt tells what occurred:

(The AAUP) thought the time had arrived that one person ought to be on the trustees board from the faculty and that sounded reasonable to me. I didn't see how in the world that one faculty member could jeopardize that whole board by sitting in there so I made a commitment—and Trabant (University President E. A.) was there that night. And after I got elected governor a very prominent Delawarean, and a Democrat, came to see me and said to me, "I do not want to see you appoint somebody from the faculty to the board of trustees." So I said to that gentleman, "Wait a minute," I said, "I stood before a room full of people at the Swiss Inn on this subject and I made a pretty strong commitment. I appreciate you coming to see me and I'm listening to you but I said I would do it and I'm going to do it." And that's how Woo (S. B., a university professor and later lieutenant governor) ended up with me.(4M20-22)

Election night Tribbitt was at home just like he had always been after an election, not doing anything:

I had a good feeling and I felt like I might win. But that was just something I carried within myself. I didn't go around and stand up before a group of people: "I'm going to be elected next Tuesday." I never went that way but in my own thoughts I thought things were looking pretty good.(4M19)

Later on in the evening Tribbitt received a phone call from his son Jimmy who was working in the Wilmington headquarters and he told his father:

“Dad, it looks like we won.” I got ready and went to Wilmington, I remember, to the hotel.(4M18) We had a celebration going on in Hotel DuPont in the ballroom all night long. I came home some time (later).(4M24)

Biondi concurs about the excitement at that time:

Well, we were down at the Tribbitt Headquarters at 13th and West and then we walked up in a crowd with Sherman and Jeanne, Skip Webb and myself, and we had a helluva celebration.(19M21)

Tribbitt swamped Peterson in Kent County by 7,000 votes and in Sussex County by some 5,200 votes. As expected, New Castle was the tough one where he lost out to the incumbent Peterson by 4,500 votes. But his strength in the south pulled him out by slightly over 7,600 votes. In addition to Kent and Sussex, he carried the City of Wilmington as well.

Hearn's greatest showing was, of course, in the City of Wilmington and New Castle County. Barely winning Kent County, he was defeated handily in Bookhammer's home county, Sussex, by over 3,000 votes. Regarding the latter county, Hearn commented:

They were polite, nice, pleasant, but obviously I didn't make out, right? I got killed down there.(13M27) I had a good time but you know, they may have been sticking a knife in my back, but they did it in a gentlemanly way.(13M32)

And I thought I'd be killed in (Odessa) even. Don Isaacs (Townsend senator,1962; '66-'74) came to me at the Middletown Lions or some meeting and he said, “Look, you're trying to help Sherman in the city and up north. We know that.” And he said to me; “You're only gonna run behind Sherman by a couple hundred

votes.” And I think Sherman won this district by about 2,400. And I won it by about 2,200 votes; there’s no way in the world I should have won this district by that much, but I did. That was Isaacs; kept his word and delivered.(13M30)

Two days after election the traditional Return Day was held in Georgetown and Tribbitt was there:

That year the election was on November seven and Return Day was on Thursday. I was 50 years old on Return Day in 1972. Thurman (Senator Adams, Bridgeville, 1972-) said, “I can always tell your age because you were 50 on Return Day in Georgetown in 1972.”(4M24)

As always in elections there are winners and losers, the sweet with the bitter, and Tribbitt recalls some very uncomfortable moments on that Return Day:

Mr. and Mrs. Peterson were there and Jeanne can tell this story. She can tell you that they hardly said a word to us from the time we got in that carriage and rode the length of the parade and came around to the viewing stand. I don’t think they said two words to us. Well, we saw that they didn’t want to talk and he was hardly waving at people. But the worst part of it all was this: When the parade formed right by the high school and it came down and goes around a circle in front of the Court House and then makes a turn like you’re going to Rehoboth, down that street, the first block there was a red light there. Some guy with one of those big baritone voices said: “Hey, Sherman, don’t talk to him. He’ll lie to you.” Honest to God, I felt bad. I don’t know how Peterson felt, but I felt terrible. It just embarrassed me.(4M22/23)

According to the State Constitution, the Legislature returns to Dover one week before a new governor is sworn in. Nothing was unusual when the 127th General Assembly returned to the state capital on January 9. What was different this time was what happened once the legislature, particularly the Senate, met. The House was Republican and the Senate had been so since Senator Anthony Moore walked across the aisle giving the Republicans control when Tribbitt was lieutenant governor. Now, membership still stood in the Republicans' favor, 11-10, until the chair recognized Republican Senator Donald Isaacs. Isaacs, in turn, deferred to minority leader Allen J. Cook who introduced Senate Resolution #1 naming Isaacs the new Pro Tem instead of Republican Reynolds du Pont. With Isaacs and his other Republican compatriot Anthony J. Cicione of Elsmere, who had been a member of the House in 1966 and the Senate from 1968-78, voting "yes" with the other 10 Democrats, Republicans, in shock, lost control of the Senate. When Tribbitt was asked whether he had any foreknowledge of this, he answered:

Absolutely I was aware of it. Allen Cook and I were the architects of that situation.(5M7) You've got to remember this. Donald Isaacs had been elected to the Delaware State Senate from a Democrat district. He beat an incumbent Democrat the first time he was elected by something like nine votes. He was a Republican. His whole family was Republican. It wasn't easy for Donald Isaacs to do that. He and his wife had been active in the Republican Party. (5M9) (but he) was beginning to ruffle feathers in his own party. And, he was less controllable by the upstate Republicans such as Reyn du Pont and Haskell (former Congressman and Wilmington Mayor Harry G., Jr.). He wouldn't be dictated to.(5M7)

Since Election Day, surreptitious meetings were held by the key players on back country roads in Maryland and at different houses plotting the takeover of the Senate. At times the scheme was on shaky grounds but another Republican outsider friend of Isaacs from Middletown, Everett Walls, helped keep the plot together. Isaacs only needed one vote to pull it off but, as any seasoned politician knows, you try to get an insurance vote just in case somebody backs off in the roll call. Tribbitt continues:

So that's how Cicione got to "eat at the table" because he made that number two and consequently played a part along with Isaacs all during that session when we went through that transition. And it worked absolutely fine for me all the way through. I got every appointment confirmed that I sent to the Senate.(5M8)

The plot was such a closely guarded secret that few, if any, of the other Democrats in the caucus knew anything about it until that day. Senator Nancy Cook (Kenton, 1974-), wife of Senator Allen Cook, recalls:

They came to my house and I had to leave, had to have the garage door up so they would drive in. I wasn't there when they came and I wasn't there when they left. It was not like I didn't know they were there.(18M9/14)

Former Senator Richard S. Cordrey (Millsboro, House 1970; Senate 1972-1997), remembers that first Democratic caucus:

The first day of session was the first time I knew anything about what was going on. Different ones asked Cookie and Cicione, "Why didn't you let us know what was going on ahead of time?" And they said, "If everybody had known, it would have never worked." (18M11/12)

A New Governor is Inaugurated: The Problems Begin

Under clear skies and a mild January temperature, Supreme Court Chief Justice Daniel F. Wolcott administered a ten minute oath of office to Sherman Tribbitt during a ceremony of barely an hour.

The euphoria of the inauguration for Sherman W. Tribbitt lasted slightly over two weeks. One foggy morning on the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal an incident occurred that would mark the kind of tenure he was to have in the next four years. A ship, the Yorkmar, rammed the railroad bridge knocking out all rail transportation on the Delmarva Peninsula. Tribbitt recalls that day:

When I finally got in the governor's chair and sat down to feel how nice the chair felt that ship hit the bridge and really created a major economic problem. Consequently, Delmarva Power and Light, that big power plant down in Dagsboro (which depended on coal cars on the railroad) and King Cole (produce shippers, who needed the railroad to survive), were unable to function. That rail line was sacred and I had to do everything working with the Corps of Engineers. They've got their own ways of operating and sometimes they're not very considerate.(SM10/11)

Skip Webb elaborates:

I mean, it turned this whole thing (the Delmarva Peninsula) into an island with the exception of motor vehicle traffic. This was hurting Maryland and Virginia. And if it had been all Delaware we'd have been in worse shape because we were able to call Richmond. We were able to call Annapolis and say you guys have got to pull your share of the load.(SM11)



Governor Sherman Tribbitt and his wife, Jeanne.

Energy Issues and Tax Refunds

The distraction of the bridge's being knocked out was a diversion that took away from some fairly serious state issues that needed immediate attention. One of them was the impending energy crisis that was getting a slow grip not only on Delaware but on the nation. By May, Tribbitt had been compelled to create the Delaware Energy Emergency Board with Lt. Col. James McCloskey as its head. Delaware's fiscal budget does not operate on the calendar year, rather, July 1-June 30. One of the many problems facing Tribbitt from the start was paying tax refunds in the same fiscal year. Tribbitt's predecessors were collecting taxes up to April 30. Refunds, because money was a scarce commodity, wouldn't be distributed until after July 1, 1971, thus pushing the liability for the state into the next fiscal year when new money was available. Webb elucidates:

People were screaming, if I file my taxes in January, why is it July before I get a refund from the state? And Tribbitt in his campaign in '72 said this ridiculousness will stop. If you file timely, you will get a refund if you're due one, timely. Well, that meant the refund was going to be paid in the same fiscal year that the tax was but then in fiscal '73 we had these \$17-20 million dollar refunds to be paid before June 30. Where were we going to get the money to pay for them? Because while this was a one-time change of position it was going to create a one-time hole that you had to fill. Now that's one of the reasons why in May of '73 we enacted that 10% increase in personal income tax.(8M11/12)

Women on the Police Force

During the campaign the year before Tribbitt had made a promise to try to get women on the state police force. As was often the case after he was elected, he would send Skip out to test the

waters and get the ball rolling on a given initiative such as this. One day the two were talking and the governor told Skip:

“Well, I guess you’d better go over and talk to the chief of police (Colonel James Ford, Delaware State Police) and see if we can get started.”

So I set up an appointment to go and I also was going to take Bob Carey, the governor’s lawyer. We had this meeting set up. At the last minute, Bob chickened out. So I had to go by myself. I got over there and the colonel was there and lieutenant colonel was there and maybe a major was there and they were all in uniform with silver and brass shining and guns in evidence and all were big burly men. And, you know, we went through the amenities and I said, “You know, we’ve got to get on with this idea of getting women on the state police.” They immediately started explaining how that wasn’t possible. “Women weren’t strong enough. They weren’t tall enough. They weren’t big enough, etc.” I said, “Well, you know, we’re just going to have to change all of these things.” The meeting wasn’t going all that well so, after a little more, I said, “Well, that’s enough for this meeting. We’ll get back together soon.” And then I left thinking to myself, a lot of work to be done here. And a few days later, the colonel and another fellow from the police showed up in the governor’s office and they chatted away and I guess the end of the conversation, the colonel said to the governor, “Well, Webb was over here and he was talking about women in the state police,” and Tribbitt was saying, “Well my, my, isn’t that just amazing that he would do that. Isn’t that something. I’ll just have to talk to him.”

So anyway, he gets me in there later on. He said, “Well, they came back.” And I said, “Yeah,” and he said, “Well, you’re just going to have to keep after them.” Just like that. “You’re going to have to keep after them.” And that’s what we sort of did. We kept after them. You’d meet with them and first you talk about the height. Then you’d have to go back and you’d have to fight on the weight issue. So it took about five or six months to cross all the bridges and then we finally got some women, I think five or six, in

the training class. I guess now today there are probably a lot of women on the state police.

You know you make promises and then you suddenly find that actually carrying them out is a heck of a lot harder than you ever dreamed because you don't realize how much inertia or perhaps outright opposition there is to the change, you know, and in this instance it required a lot of changes in order to make it happen that you could get women on the state police.(10M1-3)

Making Appointments

To incoming governors, the appointments that must be made to run the government and help the new chief executive execute his or her plans and policies can be a curse, a bane to daily life. To paraphrase former President Harry S. Truman, once you're in the hot seat of government, a president can't make anybody do anything. One can only try to persuade and hope she/he does right and carries forth one's policies. Tribbitt describes what he found:

Frank Biondi was working very closely with us, and Frank did a lot of the leg work. He was able to get material together to see whether people warranted consideration.(5M2) You've got people who know people. And then you've got to bear in mind geographical locations. You can't appoint everything from Kent and New Castle and nothing in Sussex. You've got to have some criteria there and, hopefully, I would get qualified people. But I've got to say this, appointments can kill you because it's impossible to know all the people you've got to appoint personally. (When a person) makes a recommendation to me on some friend of his and it turns out to be a bad appointment for whatever reason, (the executive takes the heat).(4M26)

Getting through an election without making promises to appoint someone to a post in the government is quite an art and Tribbitt says

that he did just that, but on the campaign trail he did talk about getting a woman in his cabinet and that was another matter.

I got through that election without making a commitment to appoint anybody, a cabinet secretary or anything else. I didn't have a woman in the cabinet. I got some criticisms from some of the women's groups. But this is the way it came about. I had a lady that was a very capable woman that I wanted to appoint Secretary of Finance. I'd (appointed) the other cabinet secretaries and I was holding it open for her finally to agree to take it. Well, at the last minute she decided she didn't want to leave private enterprise and turned it down. I didn't have at that point in time in my mind another woman whom I thought was capable in my judgment to be Secretary of Finance. So, I went through that criticism. But I did have the first woman press secretary, Irene Shadoan.(4M24/25)

Appointees Sometimes Make Controversial Decisions

John Bryson of Dover was appointed Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), a tumultuous and controversial post but led by an intrepid and conscientious Secretary who oversaw great advancement in the environmental movement in the state. Tribbitt recalls some heat he got for that:

John Bryson did a good job. Sam Fox (of Leipsic) was a waterman. Always messing around with the water. He was a great friend of John Bryson. Sam was one of the ones that recommended John Bryson to me. John wasn't in the job about a year and ruled something against Sam in performing his duties and damn if Sam didn't come to me and want to get him fired. I said, "Now, come on Sam. You've been in politics. You're the one that recommended him. Now just 'cause he didn't do something, whatever it was for you, you're in here and want me to fire him. I'd been better off not paying any mind to you the first time."(4M31)

Mud Slinging Occurs from Time to Time

Bryson was involved peripherally in a matter that again could have been one of great embarrassment to the governor. Tribbitt, almost smug, recounts how he scooped News Journal reporters Ralph Moyed and Joe Trento who were about to spring the story of the Piper Report in the papers. In it the Delaware State Police uncovered a story of a woman who was accusing Tribbitt of accepting \$50,000 toward his political campaign from a man who had a restaurant down near Ocean View.

Well, they also said that I sent one of my cabinet secretaries to the Super Bowl in Florida. Well, I knew nothing about this Piper (Report). Jim Ford, Colonel Ford, came to me and told me about what was in this (report). When I found out, I called a press conference. Colonel Ford told me that Joe Trento and Ralph had seen (the report) but they hadn't come out with it yet. I scooped them because they really thought they had me. And come to find out the lady was talking about Governor (Marvin) Mandel (of Maryland). And then they even said it was John Bryson (we) sent (to the Super Bowl). "John, have you ever been to a Super Bowl?" "No, I'd know whether I'd been to a Super Bowl or not." Well, come to find out the guy on Mandel's staff by the name of Frank Harris, who used to be a member of the House of Delegates in Maryland, that's the guy they sent to the Super Bowl. Because the (woman referred to in the Piper Report) was messing with a guy that owned the restaurant. She was trying to get at him and she told them that it was Governor Tribbitt. But then after that she reversed herself and said, "I got my governors mixed up." It never hurt me.(4M27/28)

Another appointment Tribbitt speaks glowingly about, though it wasn't at the cabinet level, was Robert (Bobby) Voshell (now State Senator and majority leader from Milford) as Motor Vehicle Commissioner. Unfortunately, a former state senator who had a drinking problem had been let go but wanted to get back on the job.

When offered the job by Tribbitt, Voshell expressed his gratitude but said he couldn't take it if the certain former senator was going to be put back on the job. Assured that the governor would not allow it, Voshell took the job. Tribbitt expresses his feelings toward his appointee:

Bobby had worked (at motor vehicles) through the years. That's the only place he'd worked in his life when he came out of high school and got a job in the Motor Vehicle Department. He went all through the system. I knew I wanted to appoint him because I knew Bobby was a good man. Everybody liked Bobby. That was an excellent appointment. He stayed all the way through the du Pont and Castle Administrations. All the automobile dealers liked him and he knew how to handle his work.(4M29/30)

It was left to Tribbitt because of his appointment of Voshell, to take the heat from the former senator whom he knew and whose name for obvious reasons has not been mentioned here. Tribbitt recalls what happened when he met with the disgruntled former legislator after his appointment of Voshell:

When I ran for re-election I was up to his house. I said, "I just can't put you up there (in the inspection lanes)." Well, he got sore as hell with me. His wife was so mad at me she wouldn't come out. He died without feeling very kindly toward me. But what do you do in those kinds of cases? You know, if I put him back up there and he got in some kind of trouble drinking on the job, right away, "he's one of Tribbitt's and he's got one of the political hats up there." So that's an example of some appointments.(4M31)

Robert Reed was Tribbitt's Secretary of State of whom he relates a little anecdote:

Bob was one capable cabinet secretary in my judgment. He owned a trucking company. He was born and raised out here in

Hazletville, where the country club is now, Wild Quail. Bob had been in everything. He'd been on the state Board of Education. He was involved on the industrial development committee, a committee set up a number of years ago—industrial bonds—you could get financed for industrial purposes. He was on that. He served on the Levy Court. He'd been Kent County chairman once or twice. He was a candidate once for Delaware State Senate. He was defeated. It was years ago back before my time. In fact Bob used to tell this story. After he accepted a Democratic nomination for the senatorial district he lived in, he started campaigning. He was out to Spence's Sale and he went up and shook hands with a man, said, "I'm Bob Reed. I'm running for Senate in this district." The man said, "You a Democrat or Republican?" Bob said, "I'm Democrat." "Huh," the fellow said, "you know there hasn't been a Democrat elected in this district for forty years."(6M21)

Tribbitt was accused of nepotism when he hired his son Jimmy to work in the governor's office:

You know that's another thing that bothers me just a little bit. He was a college graduate and had been to Vietnam. He got home while I was governor. He worked in the governor's office about two years, made about thirteen or fourteen thousand dollars a year. I got criticized for nepotism, several times (about) Jimmy being my son, in there in the governor's office, with a non-prime position, just back from Vietnam. I thought it was okay. But they didn't look at that. They just said it was his son so there was some criticism on it.(6M18)

Probably the worst criticism Tribbitt suffered with appointments was with his administrative assistant Wayne Ellingsworth of Sussex County.

Well I was the first Democrat governor to come in under the State of Delaware Merit System. We were faced with the same thing as prior Democrats Terry and Carvel, Democrats looking for

appointments and positions and whatnot. They found it difficult to understand why people working for my predecessor were still in position. That merit system didn't mean a thing to them. They tried to say Wayne was circumventing the merit system through the personnel department. (They thought he was) trying to get people located and disregarding the merit system tests and examinations.

There were some people in the personnel office that came under the prior administration. When (Wayne) would call over there and direct them to put somebody to work tomorrow without going through the merit system to get considered for employment, it was interpreted that he was violating the Delaware Code. He was indicted and he was exonerated. That was when Dick Weir was attorney general. It went before a case in court. And when he came back he worked for me about another six months. It was decided that probably it would be better for Wayne and for the administration both (to relocate) with Sussex County Council.

Wayne came from the old school. And even though the merit system had its rules and regulations and procedures, he disregarded them, apparently. I can't give you the specifics of what he was charged with, but the important part was that he was completely exonerated.(6M19/20)

Serious Problems Need to be Solved Early On

By April 17, Governor Tribbitt, in his continuing efforts to keep members of the General Assembly informed of Delaware's financial situation, reported to the representatives and senators that a \$17.5 million deficit faced them unless something was done before June 30.

Now we knew that the money was going to be a huge problem because we knew that we couldn't get through fiscal year '73; we couldn't get through the problem laid on our plate by the outgoing governor without doing some serious tax increases.(8M18) We got into this huge battle to raise taxes in order to get things going and

generate money so that we could get the state into the black. I mean one of the things you have to do if you're in office and you've got that kind of a problem, you need to fix it as quickly as possible and hopefully put that behind us.(9M2)

Money Was Nonexistent

Skip Webb, an English major from Bard College in New York, seemed the most unlikely person to be involved in finances on paper. But he had an uncanny ability to work with figures and analyze money problems which were aplenty. There was no end to them. By the first week of March Tribbitt issued an executive order instituting a hiring freeze and prohibited pay increases through the end of the fiscal year in June. To Tribbitt, his brother-in-law became indispensable. As Webb says:

I mean my primary duties involved the Department of Finance, the planning office, the budget office, and the governor's office. I worked on the bond bill.(8M22) We had a meeting on money at least once a week. And I probably had meetings on money three or four times. My job, my number one job, was the money. I watched the money day in and day out. I was immersed in the trivia of the stuff. I mean we were looking for money wherever we could find it—under stones, behind rocks, wherever. We didn't lose control of the money.(8M10/11) Getting that first tax package through, which was the first thing that we had to get done in order to get some cover, that was really hard. We were rais(ing) the state income tax to the highest level it had ever been. It was progressive and the top rate (was)18%. It was high but we really didn't have any choice. I mean we had so many holes in the ship that if we didn't get some money there was no way that we could operate.(8M19)

No sooner had Skip finished reading the book "How to Win Campaigns" and had inundated himself with trying to find money for the Tribbitt Administration to operate, he involved himself in

deeper obligations. He had the audacity to get married right smack in the middle of the tax package proposal. This is a man who is absolutely undaunted!

Oh, yeah. I met her in the 1972 campaign. I hired Matt Reese to come up and work on Tribbitt's campaign to do voter contact and he sent Kate up to run the Reese program in our campaign.

We got married on the 12th of May in 1973, a Friday afternoon in Washington and I had to be back at my desk on Monday, so we had Friday night, Saturday. Our honeymoon was in Annapolis, which is sort of on the way back from Washington, and then Sunday night we were back in Dover and we were living in Odessa then. Monday morning I was back in the office. I can remember working something like eight days with two or three hours (sleep). The work was so hard that about the first month that we were married I didn't see my wife because I was sleeping on the sofa in the governor's office. I'd go home every couple of days, take a shower and come back.(8M19)

A person can read all the books in the world about "How To Be Governor" but it will never prepare you for being hit from the blind side. Such was the case with the federal Title XX entitlement program and, of course, it came at a time when money was already a scarce item. Skip recalls:

This was an entitlement program where the money was used for health and social services, senior citizens and aging. Delaware, during Russell Peterson's administration when he was desperately looking for money, found titled money and he started putting in the applications and just pulling in the Title XX money. Well there were two problems with Title XX money. One, it got capped which meant that there was only going to be so much available to be divided up among all the 50 states. How do we deal with the capping of Title XX federal money coming in and operating programs? We would either, one, have to put in state dollars to carry these programs or we



President Gerald Ford visiting Wilmington on the Freedom Train.
Welcoming him, among others, are Sherman Tribbitt and Bruce Ennis (in police uniform with light trousers).

would have to axe these programs or cut back significantly. It might have been \$20-25 million.

We had a thing in Delaware called the Delaware Authority for Specialized Transportation, DAST. DAST was funded with wholly, or virtually wholly, Title XX money. And we had a whole list of programs and agencies like that getting all or most of their money from Title XX. Peterson, because of his need for money, was pulling the money in and using it. You've got to remember, one of the things that happened when you went from the commission form of government to the cabinet form of governor, there was a rapid increase in spending by government in the state. Not all of the spending was state money. A good chunk of it was federal money.

So there were programs we were going to have to cut back, programs we were going to have to eliminate and programs that we were going to have to find alternative state funds for. Now DAST was one organization that we saved. We could have said just, "Nope—we can't afford it." That was one that we saved.

Anyway, that was the first financial problem that we faced which was totally unexpected, this problem coming from the federal side. When you think about finance problems you don't often think of the federal government creating them for you. People in Wilmington getting services don't know. They think Tribbitt is mean because he cut off their program. They don't want to know about the fact that Washington has just turned off the tap.(8M19-22)

On April 19, two days after Tribbitt notified the General Assembly that there were money problems and a probable deficit would ensue, he gave his first address before a joint session of the General Assembly. In his address Tribbitt wanted to let people know that he was concerned with the environment and the quality of life in Delaware as well. In his speech he talked about strengthening the Coastal Zone law, protecting the Delaware River and Bay from oil spills, wetlands, water and air resources, etc. Webb added:

We wanted to start off with positive things. We knew that there was support for (quality of life).(9M1)

The daily struggle with money continued to the last night of the session on June 30 and beyond. It turned into one of the most bizarre and surrealistic sessions ever witnessed in Dover. The Senate, for one, went in session Saturday, 1:52 P. M. and did not leave until 11:13 A. M. Sunday morning—almost 22 hours! And still it wasn't over. The General Assembly could not agree on the tax proposals to end the fiscal year until July 12 when beleaguered legislators finally went home providing relief for all, particularly the governor's office. Skip describes what it was like when the legislature wasn't in session:

You know, the pressure was never as severe July to January as it was January to June. When the legislature wasn't there it was not as completely crazy a job as it was when the legislature was there, when it was totally crazy. Because you're not only running the government and got all the problems, you've got a legislative agenda and you've got, you know, Senator So-and-So coming up talking about, "Well can I get Mazey Jones an appointment to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission?" I mean, you've got all sorts of things, people with problems, not just the public but legislators with problems. I've got this road with all of these potholes and people are screaming at me. Can you do anything to change a priority somewhere and get me some roads? (9M21)

The Energy Crisis

Normally, Skip's comments on how quiet Legislative Hall was when the General Assembly was in session apply, but these were extraordinary times. There was very little quietude in Dover that summer and fall. The legislature came back again in July and in September to deal mainly with appointments, but the critical session

came on November 16 when Governor Tribbitt called them back for the Energy Crisis.

It is as difficult to explain to today's generation how hard times were with the crisis in energy in 1973 as it is to explain to someone nowadays, who didn't live through it, how difficult it was during the Great Depression. This country was brought to its knees when Arabs embargoed oil shipments to this country from the Middle East because of our close association with Israel. It was the end of cheap gasoline consumption in the country. At one point Governor Tribbitt in his speech mentions gasoline might rise to \$.65 a gallon and, if certain measures weren't attended to, it could go as high as \$1.00!

The energy problem had been growing worse and he had begun to prepare the state for a possible crisis two days after Tribbitt was inaugurated. Now, he was proposing to the General Assembly to restrict speed limits to 50 mph, shorten the school year, curtail outdoor advertising, eliminate unnecessary security lights and outside Christmas lighting, and the like. Skip Webb explains the temperament of the times:

We brought them back to consider legislation to give the governor the authority to take actions appropriate for this crisis.(9M4) We started talking right here in November in this speech about what impact, negative impact, this was going to have on Delaware's revenues. I mean the alert is here.(9M6)

Everything that hit having to do with the energy crisis hit worst from Maryland to Maine because it was the most dependent on Middle Eastern oil. It was in the wintertime so it needed the most heating fuel. It was just the worst possible place geographically to be and, even though prices went up in Georgia, the impact on Georgia was not as difficult as it was as you went north. It was colder and the natural delivery chain was coming from the Middle East rather than coming from Texas or from Venezuela or Caracas or any of those sources.(9M4/5)

Automobile lines started to build up at local service stations. Webb continues:

I can recall a driver got very upset and he drove (his car) right into the gas tank to knock the tank over. There was a person shot and either killed or injured at a gas station. There was a lot of fear among the people that ran and sold gas and I forget what the date was but we put in place the 7th odd-even rationing system done in the country. And in 36 hours the lines were gone. And the minute we did that the lines disappeared because people were going to the gas station with a 20 gallon tank with 18 gallons of gas in the tank and getting in line and topping up. And there w(ere) tons of gasoline being burned up just people sitting in line.(9M2)

I was the energy czar and we negotiated things like the outdoor advertising association. We got them to reduce the wattage on all outdoor billboards by 15%. We got companies to promote carpooling. We reduced the speed limit to 50 mph. We mandated the reduction of energy use in buildings. I mean there was just a tremendous amount of energy conservation.(9M3)

The operations of Delaware's two major auto production plants became a matter of grave concern because more layoffs meant more unemployment and less taxes paid into state coffers:

The price of gasoline went up. Gas-guzzling big cars were not in demand. People just stopped buying them. Everybody wanted little cars and there weren't very many sources of little cars, energy efficient cars. We were doing everything we could to stimulate Chrysler and General Motors. Both had layoffs in Delaware because they built big cars. We wanted them to shift to the production of small cars. We were trying to ameliorate the problem as best we could.(9M5)

People Couldn't Get Heating Oil

One of the most acute situations during the energy crisis was the lack of availability of home heating oil and when many people couldn't get it, they called the governor's office. Ruth Ann Minner recalls those days:

He came out of his office one day to me and said, "Can't you stop that phone from ringing?" Well, when you take 132 calls a day just people complaining about fuel, you know, there isn't any way you can stop the phones from ringing. And I said to him, "There's nobody in this building would be happier than me if I could just turn around and pull that plug and shut the phones off in this building." And he laughed and said, "Yeah, I know, but we can't do that, can we." (17M27)

Families who moved here associated with the air base who did not have a regular person to deliver could not get fuel. I remember one day (the governor) was in his office and really down because we were having a tough time with trying to keep enough fuel for everybody. He walked out to my desk and said, "How many fuel calls did you get today?" He sort of did a little soft shoe and said, "It's going to end, there's an end to it."

We had a little kid that called one day. By the sound of his voice he was maybe four or five. His family had moved here with the base and his dad was out trying to find somebody to service them with fuel and the little kid said, "I've been cold ever since I got to Delaware. It's awful here." Well, we made a couple of phone calls and found a distributor who could service them. Late that afternoon the little fellow called back and all he said was, "Thank you. I'm warm." I went in and told the governor there was a kid on the phone with something he wanted to say to him that I thought he should hear. And the little kid said the same thing to him and it made Sherman Tribbitt's day to know that he had helped someone who was uncomfortable. (17M10/11)

Truckers Had a Very Tough Time

One segment of the economy, the poultry industry, so vital to agriculture on the Delmarva Peninsula, felt the pangs of an empty gas tank during the energy crisis. Independent truckers couldn't get what they needed. Diesel fuel costs were skyrocketing. There was a truckers' strike. Some drove, some didn't. At the height of it all, one trucker was shot and killed for moving his truck. Still, chicken processors had to get to market for refrigerating facilities did not exist as they do today. This situation prompted formation of what was called the chicken convoys. Skip Webb remarks:

There was a huge problem, if you remember. The trucking industry was hit by the jump in the cost of diesel and so guys who were doing long-distance trucking were really working for half or a third or a fourth or 20%, a lot less than they had been working for. Because, one of the things that independent truckers had to do was buy their own diesel. And the contracts they had and the rates of pay they had were not adjusted to reflect the current cost of diesel. So you had a trucker's strike and the leadership in resolving the trucker's strike at the national level was taken by Governor Shapp (Milton Shapp, Pennsylvania) because the president ignored it.^(9M4)

Ruth Ann Minner recalls those days:

They had parked their trucks because of fuel and the increases in tax at that time, federally, not state. They were just so unhappy they all decided to park their trucks. Well, of course, there were some people who would not do that. I can remember the name of Hicks. That was one of the people who was involved and he was delivering his load and the people who were on strike were very unhappy about it and so he got shot.^(17M18)

Skip Webb continues:

We got ahold of governors' offices in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and got the agreement of the governors in question and got the state police in the four states. For about four weeks the only chickens that moved, moved in convoy. We organized the drivers of the chicken trucks who were having difficulty getting to Philadelphia, New York, wherever, and we organized an interstate convoy system involving the state police of Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York. We would start a convoy in Maryland of chicken trucks with state policemen at the front and rear and we'd bring them up to Delaware. We'd add the Delaware trucks. We'd run them either to the Pennsylvania border, if they were going on say to Philadelphia, or to the Jersey border if they were going to New York. The wonders of what happens in the governor's office! You just never know what you're going to be getting into from one minute to the other.(9M6/7)

Secretary John Bryson and N. C. Vasuki of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control felt otherwise. Not for one minute did they believe there was an energy crisis. Bryson explains his point of view.

Well, I'd already given a speech in Little Rock, Arkansas, when they had the oil shortage, so-called shortage, here. There was plenty of fuel. It was contrived to get fuel prices up. At that point I was just about a lone voice. The federal Energy Office and oil companies were all claiming how much shortage they had. The Governor of Arkansas (Dale Bumpers) was worried about getting his factories in the field running.(11M32)

Governor Bumpers invited Bryson and officials from Sun Oil and the Energy Office to dinner. The Sun Oil executive challenged Bryson to defend his position that there was no shortage and wanted to know where he had gotten his information. Bryson retorted:

"I got most of it from your president three days ago. The remainder I got from my own office, my secretary's husband. (He)

worked on a tanker and called in from off shore; they wouldn't be in for 30 days waiting for the price to go up." What does that tell you? That really happened. There was plenty of oil.

N. C. Vasuki was more specific about the situation:

Two things happened at that time. One was that there was a steady flow of oil from other countries: Venezuela; west coast of Africa; North Sea. What happened, there was a certain amount of panic. Everyone wanted to fill up their tank so that created an instantaneous demand on gasoline supply and the refineries just couldn't provide that extra amount of fuel needed to fill up every car in the country.

The second factor was many of these tankers which were full of oil enroute could be delayed because even a penny increase in crude oil price meant a lot of money to these people. They would pretend they would go to South America. They would change their routes and, when the oil prices went to a predetermined level, all of a sudden they would show up. There was a lot of speculation going on between the South American and the North American markets. People would go buy barge loads of fuel and then sit and wait because they knew in the next three weeks the price would go up and they could unload.(11M33/34)

Governor Bumpers called Governor Tribbitt to find out if Bryson knew what he was talking about. Tribbitt, in turn, called Bryson in on the carpet and told him he shouldn't be telling things like that. Bryson said it was...

...probably the only time Sherman ever got on me. I said, "Governor, do you want a tanker load of fuel? What do you want? You want me to buy you one today?" He said, "Yes, we can use it." I called him back the next day. I have your tanker. It will be here in 15 days. I hadn't finalized it. I had the contract with one phone

call.(11M34) We knew where every major fuel tank was in the state and how much it had in it.(11M35)

Thus ended Governor Sherman Tribbitt's first turbulent year in office. It had been the year of a fuel crisis, a budget crisis, the usual problems with appointments and a truckers strike. Would things improve?

Day-To-Day Operations

When Tribbitt became governor, he asked Mary Daley, the secretary who had been with him when he was lieutenant governor, to come and help him again. Though she was ill she consented, but after several months her health forced her to resign. Marjorie "Marge" Toop was to take that spot.

Marge Toop had come to Dover in 1955 with Frank, her Air Force husband, and had obtained a position in Legislative Council in the basement of Legislative Hall:

I wore a lot of hats. I handled the library. It was just stacks of books, boxes of books which nobody could find. It was a mess when I went there. Two of the girls who had worked there for some time had left and we were bare bones. In fact, we shared the office before they built the addition onto Legislative Hall, with the Budget Director Jim Zeller.(1RC2)

After Tribbitt was inaugurated, Skip Webb needed a secretary and Marge was offered the job, a role she filled for a couple of months. Because Mary Daley was missing days due to her illness, others, including Marge, filled in for her, but it was becoming a burden on the governor not having a permanent secretary. Marge didn't know Tribbitt too well because she came to work downstairs right after he had been defeated for lieutenant governor and he was



Governor Tribbitt and his office staff.

From left: Jerry Pepper, Bruce Ennis, John Quigley, Ruth Ann Walker, Marsha Wheeler, Sandy Dale, Dan Cook (behind Dale), Mary Daley, Ruth Ann Minner (behind Daley), Governor Tribbitt, Robert Cary (behind Tribbitt), Marge Toop, Irene Shadoan, Lucille Brown, Skip Webb, Edith Davis, Joy Pelliciaro, Hester Sadler and Lee Frankel.

out of Legislative Hall during those two years, 1969-70, that she worked there.

One day I got a message. I guess Mary Daley told me; she said the governor wants to see you in his office. And it was just like being called to the principal's office when you were a kid in school. I thought, "Oh my gosh, what did I do?" So when I got in there, he offered me the job as his secretary and that's it. And I said, "Well, I'll have to talk it over with my husband." I didn't say yes right away and of course, Frank thought it was great; I thought it was great, too. That's how I got that job.(1RC2/3)

Marge's desk was just outside the double doors of the governor's office on the second floor.

Skip (Webb) was executive assistant. Wayne (Ellingsworth) was administrative assistant. Later on Jim Tribbitt came to work there, the governor's son, and he was really the chief of staff. That's all we had. Each of them had a secretary. And we had two girls in another office, a file clerk and an extra.(1RC5)

There was a governor's office of sorts in Wilmington but nothing compared with today:

There was a girl, maybe two up there. And Jim Baker (present President of Wilmington City Council) was there. Later on Jane Tripp from Newark was there. They took care of problems that arose up in that area.(1RC5)

Back in Dover the receptionist out in the hall was not working out well and had to be let go. Waiting in the wings was Ruth Ann Minner. She had worked with Tribbitt as an attaché when he was minority leader.

Word got around the building; Ruth Ann came to me and said, "I'd like to get in to see him. You know, I'd love to have that job." So, I did get her in. All she had to do was ask him. She got that job.(1RC15)

The governor's wife, Jeanne, didn't show up too much at the her husband's office. She was too busy at Woodburn. It was as if he ran his office and she ran hers.

Over at the house she handled all the personal correspondence. She had for her secretary Phyllis Moore, who had worked on Governor Peterson's staff. I think Mrs. Tribbitt got her because she knew how to handle all that social correspondence.(1RC10)

Tribbitt's office inherited another former member of Governor Peterson's staff, Lucille Brown, who was the cook in the governor's quarters.

And he would invite different groups of them, small groups of them up, to have lunch with him. You know, in the governor's office there's a dining room and a small kitchen, and we had a cook on the staff. She was great. Anyway, he'd invite them up and Lucille would cook lunch for them.(1RC14)

Some Democrats objected to her being there as a holdover from the previous administration, so the Democrats determined to get their own cook. Tribbitt knew the previous cook from Governor Terry's days and had her come to work for him. Marge Toop tells what happened to Terry's cook:

She just didn't have the class. Comparing the two of them was just incredible. We were glad to get Lucille back. She was great. She used to bring me coffee. She didn't do it for anybody else—they had to get their own coffee in the morning. Of course, she brought the governor his, but she also brought me mine.(1RC14)

Toop tells about her attitude toward her job:

Every day was exciting. First of all, I always walked in there with a feeling that I was pleased to be there; I was proud to be there. I thought it was important. The other thing was, "Oh my goodness, what will the day bring?" It was never the same. Every day was different with different problems, different people you'd talk to and different things going on. It was never boring; it was too much work to do for it to be boring. And we did have too much work to do; we didn't get a lot of things done we should have done. I know that. We did not have enough staff. Our budget was too low. Things slipped by that people should have done. If they'd had time, they would have done it.

The governor would be there bright and early with the trooper when I got there. And there would already be phone messages on the desk and the governor would buzz whatever he'd want done, or to get something or come in and tell me something he wanted done. But the phone was the thing; that phone never stopped. I think we had four lines. It wasn't modern like it is now. I used to fuss because it was rotary and my finger used to get tired. Would you believe we had rotary phones then?(1RC36/37)

Marge Toop confesses what it was really like when things became hectic around her desk:

"Marge, there's somebody that wants to talk to you on line one," and somebody on line two and three and all the lights would be blinking in front of me, and there'd be somebody standing in front of my desk wanting to say something to me and about then the governor's buzzer. He had a little buzzer that rang on my desk; he'd want something. People would be sitting there waiting to go in and they'd say, "How do you stand this?" And I said, "Oh, it's easy. Four kids and one bathroom! It was the best training I could have had for this job." (1RC37) I wouldn't have time to eat lunch lots of

days. Sometimes she (Lucille) would say to me, "Come on down, I've got something in there left from lunch. Did you have your lunch today?" Often I skipped my lunch which was just being a martyr really but I hated to. Just the time you leave your desk is when the phone call comes in you've been waiting for all morning and somebody's coming in that you need to see so it was just better if I didn't leave my desk.(1RC15) But it was like that all day long. You hardly knew it was lunch time. The day is gone before you turn around.(1RC38)

Busy as she was throughout the day, she could never look forward to that magic hour of "quitting time":

Our hours were 8:30 to 4:30 but I never left there at 4:30. Never. The other secretaries, or anybody that had anything that needed the governor's signature, would all bring this stuff to me at the end of the day and put it on the box on my desk and it was my duty to look through those things and make sure they were OK, ready for his signature and sometimes they weren't too ready. I would do them over even. That's what he used to do first thing in the morning. And he always read them and signed them himself. I did put in long hours without compensat(ion).(1RC7)

In the beginning there wasn't much thought given to security in the governor's office until an incident occurred that caused the matter to be more seriously considered. Toop explains:

They didn't have any kind of security while we were in office; they put up that little thing in the governor's office that the trooper could see on a screen out there what was going on in the governor's office when it was turned on. And they put bulletproof windows in. The three big windows. I think there was a threat. Oh, there was some crazy guy called up one time, and I don't know who he talked to on the phone. He was going to come down. He was threatening.

He had a gun and all this. So, anyway, whoever took the message told the troopers. After that, they got thinking, you know, there really isn't any security here (and there are) so many really crazy kooks that you really have to have security NOW.(1RC39/40)

Lieutenant Governor Eugene Bookhammer was a part of the administration but he was Republican. Despite this, both he and Tribbitt were ideologically in tune with each other. In fact, they had more in common with each other than with the upstate factions of their own parties. Tribbitt explains his position about this anomaly:

In the State of Delaware there is much argument about whether the governor and the lieutenant governor should run jointly like the president and the vice president. I could argue either way. Anytime the people can decide an issue themselves, then, that's a better system. So I had a Republican lieutenant governor. And it's happened several times.(4M4)

Despite the amicable relationship Tribbitt and Bookhammer had with one another, the political reality was that the governor and lieutenant governor were of opposite parties. Toop explains how that worked out:

If the lieutenant governor had been of the same party with (all) the duties that Tribbitt did he could have turned (some) over to the lieutenant governor. But we did not do that. It was very, very seldom that we had him do things like that. So, actually Lieutenant Governor Bookhammer had a very easy time of it. They had an amicable relationship. (Governor Tribbitt) would more likely probably have asked somebody from the legislature or somebody from the cabinet to sub for him.(1RC17/18)

Frank Calio, Bookhammer's soulmate and fellow Sussex Countian, though of the opposite party, explained the lieutenant

governor's lack of participation in the Tribbitt Administration this way:

I don't think that Booky cared if he did or not. He just enjoyed being lieutenant governor. We'd say "Hi, Booky." We'd go in there in his office and we talked, tell him everything you know, just shoot the bull, but as far as being involved in any decision making—
NO.(14M19)

Toop talks about some of the crises such as Farmers Bank, the energy crisis, and the lottery that the governor had to contend with during his term in office.

Farmers Bank had their problems and that was one of the most frightening things and one that the governor was really interested in. The first thing he did besides talking to his cabinet and all that, he called our congressional people in. He had a meeting in his office and discussed this as a thing that was very important. He met with them and the head of the bank because the state had a lot of their money(in it).(1RC10/11)

Then, there was the gasoline shortage that threatened the state (and the northeast) all throughout 1973 and beyond:

It was of much concern to us but I think it was out of his control. We were getting lots of complaints. Everybody was told to conserve.(1RC24)

On top of that, the lottery failed. Toop tells about Tribbitt, the church man, and his soul wrenching decision to sign the bill:

When the legislature passed the bill to have the lottery and it came up to him for signature, this man literally walked the floor agonizing about signing that bill. It was late one afternoon. Everybody pretty much had gone home and the door was open. He

was walking back and forth and he signed it and he laid it on my desk and he said to me, "I'll be condemned from every pulpit in Delaware next Sunday morning." I don't think he believed in it or wanted to, but because he felt he had to (sign it). He needed the money and the political pressure was there. It turned out he made some money for the state.(1RC18/19)

The Bicentennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence in Tribbitt's last year in office was an occurrence which provided some relief from the relentless day-to-day crises. Toop says:

That was a big thing. Dan Cook on our staff was the one who was given the job of coordinating Bicentennial stuff. There were so many events that whole year that the Governor was invited to and, you know, he'd try to get to as many of those as he could. It was a big one. They had a big parade in Dover. It was just incredible, everybody went along for that Bicentennial. The rest took off and went to Washington. There was something there for different states. I didn't go that day, I had too much work to do. I used to miss out on a lot of the fun stuff because I thought I had to do my work. I did go the day they went to Philadelphia. I drove up myself. All these little towns had their thing for the Bicentennial. The women throughout the country were making quilts, Bicentennial quilts, and sent their little squares in for the governor's autograph. How many of those went over my desk? I'd get him to sign them and send them back, you know? It was amazing.(1RC42/43)

It was a Spartan existence being associated with Governor Tribbitt. But there were occasions to get one's mind off the day to day tribulation but they were few and far between. Toop remembers:

The Governor had us over to the Governor's House for a Christmas party, which was very nice. I can remember at least twice we did that at Legislative Council. They always had a party before



The Governor and Mrs. Tribbitt during the Bicentennial celebration of the U.S. Constitution. Photographed in New Castle, Delaware, on June 15, 1976.

Christmas, you know. But up in the governor's office, we didn't really do that. We did, the first year have a party upstairs in the office. Everybody was so busy, nobody really had too much time for fun stuff.(1RC42)

Tribbitt came early to the office and stayed late. It couldn't help but make an impression on those around him about how seriously he took his job:

He would always be there by 7, much to the frustration of some of the news media. And if they said, you know, when could he talk to them he would always say 7 in the morning. He discouraged them.

He never really used that Wilmington office at all. He very seldom spent a day up there. He went up there for certain meetings and things, but Dover was definitely his main office.(1RC6) He worked every day. Unless he went to a governor's conference, he never took a vacation. I think he was much more concerned with the local, Delaware, people and problems.(1RC7/8)

The governor's frugality with taxpayers' money even extended to the personal limousine that took him places he had to go:

The governor always had a Cadillac. (Then)Peterson had one. The state started out with a Cadillac, they started renting Lincolns instead of Cadillacs. They didn't buy them. It was a better deal with Schaeffer, the Ford/Mercury/Lincoln dealership. They said they saved money that way. They were quite happy. I think before that the Cadillac used to be bought, purchased by the state. But they stopped doing that the first year we were in office.(1RC40)

The rented Lincoln kept the governor on the go, Toop said.

I don't think people realize how many invitations the governor gets, for the same date, the same time. There used to be a real toss-up, and he would give that a lot of consideration, what he would

accept, or how many he could accept in one evening to give a small speech or something; he tried to cover everything. He did a lot, he worked hard. Lots of times it was all the way downstate or all the way upstate. He spread his time pretty thin.(1RC18) Accessible? Oh yeah. It was amazing how he saw so many people. That calendar that I kept was very, very busy (with) his appointments for the whole day. He wouldn't have been roaming around the halls or anything, no. He was in his office there, and people came in to see him. I don't think he ever went down to the legislators' offices or anything like that; they had to come up.(1RC35)

Visitors, visitors, visitors wanting to see the governor; it never stopped. Whether it was an old buddy from Odessa, a Girl Scout troop from Milford, labor leaders from Wilmington, or a disgruntled legislator wanting the governor's support for his bill. The procession through the doors ran the gamut, said Toop.

Where else could you go in and see the governor, you know what I mean? You can here. People who had foreign exchange students would ask, if they would call and ask, if they could get in to meet the governor, and you know you couldn't do that in lots of states.(1RC35)

When visitors, particularly groups, would come to the governor's office, Marge had to make sure the people were seated properly so that Tribbitt would not be compelled to listen to them with his completely deaf left ear:

You know, he has a hearing aid now. I thought, "Why didn't you do that when you were in the governor's office?" I know they make them better than they used to do but you'd have to always remind people which side was his good side.(1RC50)

Marge Toop thinks the problem with her boss's hearing could perhaps have been corrected had he not been so concerned with his

appearance. The governor, after all, has always been a fastidious dresser, neat in appearance:

He's very groomed, and I can't imagine him even waking up looking disheveled. I remember there was two mirrors in the office, those old colonial-type mirrors. In between appointments, the door'd be open, somebody would have come out and I had gone out in the hall to tell somebody to come on in or something, and I would look in and he'd be in front of the mirror doing his hair. He wanted to look right. I think the hearing had a lot to do with that. I remember there was a man with hearing aids that used to call all the time, and I think he maybe even tried one once and it didn't work well for him. A lot of people say they can't wear them, I think they've improved them now, but 20 years ago they weren't that great. But it was a handicap for him, yeah. But he was vain, and I don't mean that in a bad way.(1RC50/51)

Sometimes irate pressure groups would come in to vent their indignation about something and Tribbitt was there to serve as the pressure valve:

He could calm them down lots of times. He was patient, he listened to them patiently. I remember there was that organization, for pregnant teenagers, DAPI. They were very upset. You know, they would get in there, they'd demand an appointment and get the appointment and he'd see them, and he calmed them down, they'd get out, they wouldn't be as angry. Many times that happened, many times. He never got excited; he didn't show that it bothered him. He didn't lose his cool with them.(1RC49/50)

Sometimes members of his own party would come in and literally "give him hell" such as the time a very powerful downstate legislator came in to protest that his protégé, or his man down in his district had been let go as executive director of a certain state commission by Tribbitt because of drunkenness. Marge Toop

remembers that day because this particular legislator was known for his fiery temper.

(He) came storming in the office the morning after this happened, right? Wanted to see the Governor. Well, I could tell he had fire in his face, and he wasn't being quiet, you know. I buzzed the governor. "Send him in." It didn't take him too long, and he came out and his face was fiery red, and he banged his hand down on my desk, and he said, "He doesn't understand!" That's not the way it's done! He says, "I'll see him out of office! I'll see him out of this office!" That's exactly what he told me. He was so angry. He was frustrated because he didn't get his way, and I could tell, (he) was a man who liked to get his way.

I remember the Governor felt bad about that, that he was mad at him because after he left, he came out of his office to me, and he said: "(He) just doesn't understand. We can't do things that old-fashioned way any more. You can't get away with that stuff anymore. You can't get away with that stuff." He meant letting this man hold that office and be a drunk, didn't show up half the time. (The governor) shook his head; he was sad about it. He was a very sensitive man.(1RC47-49)

There were times when Marge Toop received inner satisfaction with the job. She did exert a little executive secretary influence when she was able to.

I had lots of good days, when people said nice things to me, or wrote me thank you letters. I would get a letter from somebody that they appreciated what I had done, to get them in to see the governor or something like that, and I appreciated that. I remember there was one woman, they had bought property at Bethany Beach right on the water, and they wanted to put a bulkhead up, and they had to get a permit from Natural Resources to do it. Well, they had put their application in 18 months before, and here their money was tied up in this property and they couldn't build a house. They couldn't put the

bulkhead up and they couldn't build a house. It was just held up. And this woman was absolutely desperate so she called the governor's office. I think she was from Washington, D.C. or Maryland someplace. She was a nice person, but she had given up calling Natural Resources. She didn't make any progress with them. So she called me up and I said to her, "Well, you know, let me see what I can do about it." So, I didn't even tell the Governor; I just picked up the telephone and called Bryson and said, "You got a permit over there waiting for this woman? She says she's waited long enough you know. Will you get back to me and let me know what the story is, what's the holdup?" Fifteen minutes later Bryson appears in my doorway with the paper signed. I loved doing things like that! That woman wrote me, like there was some power involved and I can understand why people get carried away with that. You know it was sort of a good feeling. And (the governor) didn't have to bother with every little thing. He didn't have to do that. I did lots of things like that on my own. I got to feeling comfortable about doing things like that.(1RC43-44)

At other times the governor's secretary received little compliments that didn't seem like much to anyone else, but it meant a lot to Marge. Once a lady and her daughter came to pay a visit to the chief executive. Toop explains:

She had waited quite a bit sitting out in the hall and eventually got in (to see him) with the girl, and she was very pleased. (When) she came out she thanked me and said, "There's something I want to tell you." She said, "First of all, I thank you for getting us in there. This is really a big event for this girl, you know." But she says then, "I wanted to tell you that you are how I think a governor's secretary should look." She says, "I've been sitting out in the hall watching these other women around here." I always wore a suit, I never went with pants or anything like that, you know. But, to me that was very complimentary. Some of them really got pretty sloppy over across the hall. It was really bad.(1RC43-44)

After working with someone so closely for four years a secretary gets to know her boss rather well. She witnessed the ups and downs, the daily routine, the bad times, and the good times. "Only a matrimonial relationship could have been more familiar," said Toop.

He couldn't have been easier to work for. He was never angry, never impatient, very kind. He cared about people a lot, older people. He reminded me more than once, "Don't forget, one day we're going to be old." And he tried to do everything; he worked very hard. He went in and was in that office an hour before everybody else in the morning. He was concerned with people's problems more than his own and it could be this is why he didn't get reelected. He was savvy politically, but I can't say that he played it to his own advantage all the time, which they do, you know.(1RC6)

Tribbitt's attitude to the press was like anyone else in a leadership position. One tends to recoil sometimes. Said Toop:

He was very sensitive to criticism. I suppose he felt like he was doing the best job he could and working hard at it. I don't think he felt (the criticism) was justified.(1RC8)

While he was not outwardly vindictive toward the press, he did have a sense of humor when he would tell a reporter to come into his office at seven in the morning for an interview. Toop:

He thought that was funny. He and the troopers, his security people, really had a lot of jokes going between them all the time.(1RC9)

Probably one of the most fun times the governor had was once during Harrington Fair.



Governor Sherman Tribbitt enjoying a day at the Harrington Fair in
“denim coverall.”

(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

He was good about going down to the fair on governor's day. Everybody had gone home and the governor's not back from the fair yet and I'm sitting there at my desk finishing up for the day and these two men come up, get off the elevator and come into the office. I was busy and somebody says, "Is the governor in?" And I looked up and there's this man with these old blue denim coveralls bib overalls straw hat and a straw sticking out of it and a scarf on his neck like farmers put around their necks. When I looked up again somebody was laughing and I think it was Bruce (Ennis, his driver) that was with him, chuckled behind him and I looked and it was the governor! And honestly I never saw him look like that in anything except strictly formal gear. He thought it was so funny that he fooled me. It was incredible the only time I ever saw him not really groomed to perfection. He looked just like any other farmer.(1RC51/52)

Sometimes the vexation of Tribbitt's predicament became too much. The turmoil inside him boiled up to the surface. Marge Toop describes this time:

He hardly ever lost his temper. But I can honestly say I did see him angry one time. He needed to be in contact with somebody on the staff who was not there, and he couldn't get in touch with him. And because he was so dedicated to his duty, I think he felt like everybody else should be, too. I guess that's why I got along with him just fine, because he knew I was working hard, too. I didn't goof off and take days off or things like that and, or disappear, you know. But, yeah, he was quite angry that time, not violently angry, no. He just vocally expressed his anger.(1RC14)

The balm that pulled him through many hard times was perhaps his religion which dated back to his youth when his mother was an organist in the Pilgrim Holiness Church and his grandfather Willard Thawley built the Holiness Campground in Denton.

He had a real, strong, personal conscience, and he was a very religious man, you know. They'd always gone to the Methodist church in Odessa, but later on, after they moved to Dover after he got out of the governor's office, I believe that they went to the church where Secretary of State Bob Reed went, which I think is People's Church of Christ on Bradford Street.(1RC20)

The ambivalence that many Americans felt during Tribbitt's Administration regarding this country's participation in the war in Vietnam affected the governor as well. He was particularly involved because his son, Jimmy, had been there. Toop remarked:

He would ask me, I guess, just to get a different opinion. I remember Jim, you know, was in Vietnam when the governor was elected, or had just come back, and apparently didn't talk much about it or say much, but he seemed to be trying to sort himself out. He didn't know what he wanted to do but the governor knew that Frank had been in Vietnam, and one day he said to me when there was nobody else around, "Tell me, what does Frank think about the Vietnam war?" And I said, "Well, I'll tell you what he really thinks. Because he's a good military man, under orders, he went because that was what he was told to do." And I said, "But he didn't really think we had any business being there in the first place." And he said to me, "Hmm, that's very interesting." And I helped; I think it was on a problem about his son. I think Jim came back with some kind of an attitude about it. A lot of people never got over it, unfortunately. I saw a tremendous change in my husband.(1RC21)

The relationship which existed between the governor and his secretary was strictly formal, at times perhaps too formal. Marge Toop described this relationship:

He was very formal with me. I don't know how he would have been with anybody else. I think he would have been that way with anybody, I really do. It was a respectful relationship between both of

us. Lots of times he would say something to me, and I didn't know that he had thought that all along, so I mean he was a deep thinker. What did he call me at this party in November (1997), "Miss Efficiency" or something like that? I thought, "You never told me I was being efficient when I was doing things for you." I (was) always making sure that when he was going to give a speech or anything, he had that speech in the folder. I made sure he had it, that everything he needed to know was written, the time, the place, and I worked very closely with those troopers. They will tell you that. They have commented on that with me. I made sure that they knew where they were going, and what time they had to be there, and what it involved. (It) was a good relationship I had with them. And we made it easier for him that way. He didn't have to think about these things.(1RC44/45)

Tribbitt was termed by Marge Toop as a workaholic.

He was very conscientious and he didn't goof off at all. As a matter of fact, it's funny, one thing he said to me once after everybody had gone home. He came out to my desk with papers he had signed or something, and he said, "Marge, I don't know what we're doing wrong; we're doing something wrong." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you know, I can remember when Governor Terry was governor," he said, "About this time in the afternoon he and his secretary Trish Messick would be down there having a drink at this hour, down at the dining room area, you know." He said, "We're doing something wrong. We're both working!"(1RC53)

He didn't want people to think he was enjoying himself on "company time."

He didn't play golf. He didn't do anything like that. Now, they had a house down in Rehoboth in the summer, and they spent a lot of time down there, so I suppose he had recreation down there. Once his youngest son (Tip) was still in Middletown High School playing

baseball and he wanted to watch him play ball. He told me, "Now, I'll tell you where I'm going to be in case you have to reach me. I am going to be at the Middletown High School, and I'm going to watch Tip play ball." He said, "Don't tell anybody where I am." I wasn't to let anybody know that he was taking that hour or two off, that's how conscientious he was. I never knew him to go fishing or anything like that.

The only recreation I can remember him taking for himself was duck hunting, or whatever kind of birds they were shooting; he loved doing that. He had a certain group of people that he went hunting with, and he'd come in the office. He'd been out since 4 in the morning or something in a duck blind, and got home, I guess, and showered and cleaned up and came in. Maybe he didn't get in until 8 that morning, you know, but he'd been duck hunting. And I said, "You were out in weather like this?" He said, "Oh yeah, this is good hunting weather." And he acted like it was just wonderful; he did really enjoy that.(1RC52)

In November, 1997, Lieutenant Governor Ruth Ann Minner hosted a get together in Dover with Governor Tribbitt and his staff to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his being elected. There was a lot of reminiscing about the good and the bad times. Toop recalls:

It was great, I got a chance to see her new office. It's quite impressive compared to what we used to have, you know?(1RC56)

There amidst the merriment and joviality, Marge dared, but only for a moment, to think about the worst of times when the Tribbitt Administration, despite its efforts, came crashing down in defeat in the Bicentennial year of 1976. Then, putting the thought aside, they seized the moment and concentrated their thoughts on the main guest that day, Sherman W. Tribbitt.

Now, the worst day was the day after the election. There were a lot of long faces around there, but the work went on. The whole staff lost heart once that election was over, you know. It's amazing.(1RC43)

One trait so characteristic of Tribbitt, particularly now since he has more time to do it, is going to funerals of friends and acquaintances. It was no different for his long time secretary:

I don't even know how he knew about it, but he came down when Frank died to the viewing which I really was grateful. I appreciated that. I don't see him. I respect him and all that, but he's a busy person. He's still working. He looks young, he doesn't look a day older than when he left office. It's amazing, I don't know what his secret is but I'd like to know it.(1RC56)

It was kind of a good thing for me, I had been somebody's mother for so many years, or PTA or Girl Scout person or something like that for all these years and always my husband's wife, but that job gave me a sort of a second wind as far as my own personal life is concerned. It was very good for my self-esteem. First of all, the opportunity I had to do it, and secondly, that I was able to do it. I felt good about that. It was a good experience for me, a great experience.(1RC56) It was pressure, it was never what am I going to do next kind of thing, never. I work better under pressure. I don't have enough pressure on me these days to do anything.(1RC57)

Pressure cooker job that it was being in the governor's office, Marge Toop reflects on how loyal she was to her boss and how important it was and is, to have a good staff around you.

It was an interesting study in human nature, believe me. And one of the things I came out of this with, I think it's very important for any executive, whatever position, governor, whatever, his staff is so important to him. It's very hard to know exactly how they're going to handle their jobs. I think there were some disappointments, some shortcomings in the governor's staff; he deserved more

cooperation, more teamwork than, I know personally, he got from some of them. It was a letdown, maybe he didn't feel that way, but I felt like it was a letdown, really. But I enjoyed it, I worked hard. I know I never worked that hard before in my life, I don't believe. But it was good, it was a great experience.(1RC67)

1974

Greater Unemployment and a Shaky State Pension Fund

Haunted by the specter that overwhelmed Governor Peterson overnight on Black Monday in 1971, Tribbitt vowed to keep the General Assembly apprised of the state's desperate financial plight. Painting a rosy picture one day and having to come before them the next to admit being waylaid by an unexpected deficit was not going to be his plight. To this end, Tribbitt planned a sensational two-day presentation; first, the economy, finances, the energy crisis, budget and taxation. Second, program expenditures and his legislative proposals. Skip Webb put it succinctly:

Tribbitt was always delivering messages that were bad news. "I'm in front of you today to tell you that our economy is turning to s— because of what's happening in the Middle East." And guess what, we're not getting any help out of Washington. So we've got to do the best we can. You know, that's sort of the sum and substance of this speech.(9M7)

The taxes imposed in the previous year helped the state keep its head above water regarding day-to-day operations, but the energy crisis had, and was, still sapping its resources. Unemployment had gone from 4 percent the previous October and was now heading toward 6 percent, which made it extremely difficult to anticipate revenues when more and more people were out of work. The old

way of predicting revenues did not work anymore because times had changed and something different was needed. Tribbitt tells how it used to be:

Back through the years the governors estimated revenue themselves and adjusted their estimated revenue to the budget bill. Well, that works fine as long as you don't get into any kind of a recession where revenue drops off from what it's anticipated to be.(6M1)

No governor had experienced such a lethargic economic situation as Tribbitt had when he took office unless it was Governor C. Douglass Buck during the Great Depression. His enemies gradually became inflation, recession, unemployment, all exacerbated by the energy drain. From this abyss came the birth of the very important Governor's Council on Economic Advisors, forerunner of present day DEFAC, so vital in today's state economy in projecting revenues. Skip Webb relates how it started:

One thing (Tribbitt) said to me was Peterson lost three million over a weekend. "I ain't never going to lose any money over the weekend."(5M18) We first started doing the governor's Council on Economic Advisors initially as sort of an *ad hoc* group to evaluate the impact. We called the School of Economics at the University of Delaware and said we need some help in trying to figure out what's going on. We drew on the planning office (and) the budget office. We drew some people from the DuPont Company. This group met and stewed and studied and helped us develop estimates.(9M10) It met monthly and it would revise the current budget it needed, you know the estimate for the current fiscal year.(5M18)

It used to be when they were estimating revenue in the state they'd see what came in the previous year and they'd say, well let's add three percent or let's add five percent. It doesn't work that way.(9M10)

This innovation in estimating revenues was not without its backlash. Some legislators resented revenue estimating being farmed out to "outsiders" when it had been the province of the joint finance committee. Opposition legislators questioned the revenue estimates themselves and formed their own conclusions. When Tribbitt came before another joint session on finances in June, some legislators during this financial crisis were still submitting tax repealing bills and bills that cost additional monies. There was even talk of building a north/south toll road. Webb talks about the folly in that:

Talk about bad timing. Here you are semi-talking about building a turnpike at the time when the existing Delaware Turnpike usage was dropping by 10 or 12%. The tolls on the bridge were down. Traffic was down so you don't know where this thing is going to end. This was not really the right time to talk about spending \$300 million to build a turnpike.(9M9)

Aside from tax refunds not being paid on time, another disconcerting thing passed down to Tribbitt from the previous administration was the shaky grounds the state pension fund was on. Not so today, for the fund is very healthy, well run and considered one of the best in the country. To correct the situation, as with the tax refunds, Tribbitt had to increase his own deficit by stabilizing it. He explains:

It takes money each and every year to fund the pension fund in addition to the contributory part by employees. If you didn't have the money, they borrowed the money. I took it out of anticipated revenue.(6M9)

Webb explains it as well.

What Peterson was doing was, in effect, running the pension system on a pay-as-you-go basis. He would simply put in the budget

for pensions the amount they were going to pay in the given year to retirees. We had to start dumping money into the pension fund to create a fund, an endowment and that put a tremendous strain on the budget.(5M15/16)

During (Tribbitt's) tenure the corpus of the fund (went) from \$27.9 to \$88.5 million and that's largely because we were pumping more money into it.(10M15)

Planning for the Future

The Coastal Zone Act of 1971 awakened many Delawareans to the environmental movement and caused them to realize the state's 2,000 square miles ought to be protected. Concurrently, the act caused jitters in the business community and some people, in and out of the state, were now saying Delaware was taking on an anti-business image. While the former was a breath of fresh air, the latter was frowned upon because the state needed to encourage industry and stimulate the economy. Tribbitt had said that while the Coastal Zone law was a good thing, it didn't go far enough, but he had to be careful. As a politician he knew if he touched it, it could be like dry ice. You could burn your hands, particularly regarding the environmentalists. His answer was the Delaware Tomorrow Commission which Skip had started to think about. Webb says:

Well, there were things we wanted to do: 1) push modifications to the Coastal Zone Act; 2) state-wide land use planning, looking at ways to control the cost of government on a long term basis. We needed some kind of organization, some kind of entity that was not a creature of state government. And I went to the governor and I said, "Look, I have this concept, that if we can put this thing together, we can make it function." I really felt at that time that Frank Biondi was the only person in the state who could handle it and so the governor talked to Frank about doing it and Frank got really interested in the idea. Frank was appointed the chairman.(9M15)

Biondi tells how he became chairman of the commission:

One night I came home and Anita (his wife) said to me, "Governor Tribbitt called." I said, "Does he want me to call him tonight?" She said, "No, he seemed to be pretty happy about the fact that you weren't home." I asked her, "Is he in Odessa, is he home, or is he at the governor's mansion, or where is he if he wants me to call him back?" She said, "No, he said he would wait." The next day I found out I had been appointed chairman of the Delaware Tomorrow Commission.(19M30/31)

Webb comments:

That commission had the blue-bloods of business, industry, labor, legislative, university. I mean it had some of the very best minds in the state working away and signing off on the results. Truly, it had a major impact.(10M17) The purpose was to look at all aspects, government, private industry, the history of the state, where taxes were, where they were going, population trends, jobs, education and try and come up with a view of where the state was going and what we might do to make that better.(5M3) You know there is some argument that the Delaware Tomorrow Commission spurred what was done (to bring) the banking industry to Delaware.(10M17)

Frank Biondi, the chairman, talks about the purpose of the commission:

If you looked at the membership of the Delaware Tomorrow Commission, we put on that commission everybody who was involved in what to do about the economic problems of the state. You've got the business people, the industrialists, the farmers, the labor people all on this commission. I thought that one of the most important things that had to be done was to change the rhetoric, change the public attitude from this hostile environment where

business was attacking labor versus the environmental people and then you had the agricultural interests in the state. What we wanted to try to do was get everybody in the same room. My theory was, and is, that it's easy to attribute bad motives to somebody who you are not facing. The way I put it more indecorously is that it is easy to call somebody an s.o.b. when he ain't sitting across the table.(19M31).

Tribbitt's Hearing Gets Him in Trouble Once Again

In addition to being his brother-in-law, Skip Webb was in an excellent position to observe his sister's husband as he presided over the day-to-day operations as governor of the state.

This guy is so scrupulously honest. It's amazing how honest. I mean you know the pain that he would go through some times with, "Do I sign a bill or do I not sign a bill or how do I react to this or can I support this, or do I oppose this?"(9M18)

He was very good at handling people. He understood that the buck stopped on his desk and you know he expected to take blame. I think he had to learn. The first year he was in office he looked over things to a degree that was silly, but it took him a year to realize that that was silly. He tried to not only micromanage but micro-examine everything that came through and he was working these merciless hours, reading stuff. Most of the time he ate in. His working day was when the Legislature went home. I remember once during some period where he was out 67 nights in a row. Sixty-seven nights in a row, that he did not eat at home at Woodburn.(9M19/20)

Brilliant as he was in analysis and finding innovative ways to reduce the state's deficits, Webb himself was not so cool, calm, and collected. He relates the story of the certain monsignor from Wilmington who was a lobbyist for Catholic Charities and came to Dover one day.

I'm the guy who can go "whssss" and just steam comes out of my ears. Thirty seconds later it's all gone. I've always been a person who allowed himself to vent.

There's a monsignor, a nice guy, and I worked with him a lot and I think it was '74 or '75. He wanted some extra money for something and I got him \$250-300,000 into some line of the budget and then as we got down near the end he was down there trying to get another \$2-3,000. I said, "Damn it monsignor, you s.o.b., how can you do that to me. Damn it!" And I was yelling at the top of my voice to the monsignor and I heard somebody in the outer office say, "Oh, God, there's Webb. He's in there cussing out the monsignor." He took it and he said, "Yeah, you're right." I said, "Look, if there'd been another dime, I'd have given to you. I'd have given you the blood out of my arm but there wasn't any more to get. Try next year." You can only do so much at one time. Oh, he made me mad.(9M18/19)

Try as he might, Tribbitt was given to malapropisms and, on one occasion when the newspapers were present, it was picked up. The next day all Delaware heard about it. Webb tells what happened:

You know I worked with him and knew him for so long that I could read him pretty well through his body language. And I would sort of know sometimes what he was going to do at the end of the meeting. Sometimes he would call me over and tell me, go do this or that, and I would already have figured out that's what he's going to do. But this particular meeting, which was typical of many, there were two groups. There was an issue and here's the governor sitting behind his desk and he's got one group on the left in chairs drawn up to his desk, one group on the right side in chairs drawn up to the desk and I'm sitting with Irene (Shadoan, press secretary) and a couple of other people on sofas .

He turns to the group on the right and says, "Well, explain your position on this" and while they're talking he goes through a cigar, so

there's a lot going on back under that wavy black hair. And then they finish and he turns to the other group and he said, "Now, tell me what your position is." And so they start and he reaches in the drawer and out comes another cigar and he goes through that. Then, when it's over he looks around and he leans forward on his desk and he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, I understand exactly what's going on here. We're talking about a question of ceramics." Well, of course, he meant semantics, but he said ceramics. Now, Walt Rykiel and another news guy from somewhere else were sitting there and the next day the *News Journal* is trumpeting, "Tribbitt says, 'It's all a matter of ceramics.'" And this becomes a comment that they use in a way to symbolize Tribbitt is a rube. Tribbitt was not a rube. Tribbitt was remarkably intelligent, extremely adept at the business of government, but he was prone to the occasional malapropism. You never knew when it was going to happen and you know when it happened, you know, it happened. You'd try to clean it up afterwards, but...(9M13)

Tight Money Affected Everyone

Lieutenant Governor Ruth Ann Minner has been around Legislative Hall since Governor Carvel's first administration in 1948. Over the years she has worked as an attaché in the House and has served as a member both there and in the Senate chamber. She first came to know Tribbitt when he was in the House, and it wasn't long after he became governor that Minner went to work in his office. Soon, because of her competence, she became indispensable as a file clerk and receptionist. It was then she found out how frugal Tribbitt was, particularly with the state's money. Offered a salary of \$2,400, Minner first said she couldn't afford to work for so little.

He says, "Well, don't worry about it. After June 30, when we get our new money, I will boost your salary to compensate you decently." So I said, "Okay, I will do it then."

I'd take a half a day off because of a doctor appointment. The one I remember, I'm sitting in the doctor's office and I get a phone call that says, "You've got to rush to Dover because the governor needs his paper for this meeting." And I would say, "But I'm in the doctor's office. I have an appointment in 10 minutes." And they said, "The governor said 'get here', he needs his paper." So I canceled my doctor appointment to run to Dover.(17M8/9)

When July 1 came, Minner was raised up to \$5,200, but she felt that still wasn't enough. After talking to the governor he referred her to Skip Webb but it was in vain.

So I figured at that point my trying to get a raise to get what I thought would be sufficient for the hours that I put in, going in at 7:30-8 in the morning and working until 6 or 7:30 at night. I didn't think it was very well paid, but I figured that was my last resort so I accepted it.(17M12)

Vacations Were Not Encouraged

Salary wasn't the only thing scarce around the governor's office. So was vacation time. Recalls Minner:

I remember I took a vacation to put a pool in my house. My family was doing it ourselves so I was helping. I was off for the one week, five days. The governor called me every one of those five days to come to Dover to find something in that file room that he needed. I didn't get one full day out of my five. I said to him when I came back, "You owe me another week's vacation." "Oh, no, we can't do that. The record shows you've been on vacation for a week and you're only entitled to one week's vacation." It was just a good thing I decided to stay home instead of going away for a vacation. I always wondered if state government would have stopped for a day or two until they could have flown me back.(17M9)

“You can’t leave!”

In the summer of 1974 Ruth Ann Minner thought she would test the political waters herself and decided to run for a House seat from Milford. The governor reluctantly told her to go ahead. Mysteriously, a few days later Jeanne, the governor’s wife, came over and told her she should stay where she is and help the governor out. Unwavering, Ruth Ann persisted, but as time went on Tribbitt became more sullen about it. Minner continued:

I told him I wanted to take a leave of absence the end of August and run my campaign. And then it was sort of like, “Well, we’ve got this really big project we’re working on, you can’t leave right now.” Then, it came close to the middle of September and I said to him, “I have really got to get out of here so I can campaign.” “Well, you get off at 4:30 every day.” I finally said to him one day, “During your campaign for governor, how many hours did you put in campaigning?” And he said, “Oh, 12,14 hours. No, you can’t leave!” He realized right away what I was going to say to him. “You can’t leave!” So, it was finally the first of October when I got to take my leave of absence.

I won the election and quite often I was in the building and somebody would say, “The governor needs you real quick.” I would have to run upstairs and find some papers and run back down and do my job as a member of the House so it was interesting.(17M12/13)

In the Modern World There is Too Much Pollution

John Bryson was considered by Tribbitt one of his better appointments. Outspoken and forceful, he had a knack of working with legislators to gain passage of necessary programs. In this he was ably assisted by the present director of the Solid Waste Authority, N. C. Vasuki.

Bryson came to Delaware during Carvel's last term in the early 1960s and was first employed in the old State Board of Health. In those infant days of the environmental movement a myriad of things came under the purview of this board including air and water pollution. Vasuki explains:

The Board of Health was really not too keen on enforcing a lot of rules on pollution control. And John took the responsibility very seriously and started going after some of the major sources of pollution. He was pretty much warned that he was reaching too far. He took upon himself to say, "there's need for changes." Water pollution, industrial water pollution, was not the only environmental problem. There was air quality.(11M2)

Vasuki met Bryson through the former's employ with the old Water Pollution Commission. Vasuki's job at the time was surveying conditions in the Delaware River.

I wasn't a chemist, but John taught me a lot about chemistry and about methods of sampling and analysis. In 1964-65 we were looking for a source of industrial pollution near New Castle and John and I tromped through what was then known as the Llangollen dump. We proved that the whole dump was actually polluting. John took the initiative and went to the legislative leaders (noting) that the normal method of dumping into the nearest hole was not the best thing for Delaware because 70% of Delaware depends on ground water.(11M4/5) John wrote an editorial in the *Delaware State News* suggesting Kent County have a sewer system and he almost got fired.(11M6)

Bryson explains his modus operandi and how he was able to get 99% of his very important environmental legislation passed by the General Assembly.

About two years later somebody thought it was their idea and then it went fine. This is the way you get legislation passed. You let them think it's their idea. You plant the seed and let it grow.(11M6)

Until forced, some industrial sites only paid lip service to environmental concerns. Bryson continues:

Some of the plant managers were more interested in production than they were in environment and they got in trouble for it. The (DuPont) Newport plant was a real interesting study. They were discharging a highly acid waste into the New Castle County sewer system. The acid would eat up the impellers in the county pump station. So every few months DuPont would buy a new set of impellers and give it to the county to put in.

Tribbitt was always environmentally oriented and he wanted to see something done. I think he had enough trust in us to back what we wanted to do.(11M10)

During the oil embargo situation Getty Oil in Delaware City offered a challenge of its own, said Bryson.

Getty Oil was a particularly interesting situation. They were supposed to switch to low sulfur fuel on a given date or have a system for removing sulfur from their gases. They had a by-product that was horrendous. When it came time to switch the fuel to low sulfur fuel, they pretty much told us they weren't going to do that. They would go to the Legislature to get relief. They actually convinced EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) attorneys that they shouldn't do anything and EPA told us they were not going to back us. I went to Washington and I went over and they had 15 people sitting there. "There's no use your coming over here to try to convince us." I said, "I didn't come to convince you. I came to tell you, you damn well are going to. You adopted our regulations. They became EPA law. It's your job to enforce them, now do it."

Jake (Kreshtool) sued. EPA was brought into the law suit. Getty lost it, went to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court refused to review the case.(11M24/25)

Oil Spills Were a Continual Worry

During this time oil companies were lobbying to have a pipeline constructed from Big Stone Beach in Kent County whereby oil could be piped up the Delaware River instead of being carried by vessels. When they found out that Bryson was going to charge them five cents a barrel, they thought it was too much. Consequently, lightering (transferring oil from bigger ships to smaller ones) continued in the bay much to the dismay of many people who feared an oil spill, one of whom was Governor Tribbitt. Vasuki states:

Governor Tribbitt wanted to go look at it one time so we made arrangements. So, it's this huge 70-foot-draft super-tanker (that) came into Big Stone Beach and (we) climbed up on the side, went to the top. (There) was a German captain, (with a) partly Greek and partly Filipino crew. The captain was drunk and the governor goes in and could smell the captain five feet away. The guy on the pumps couldn't understand the guy on the bridge because he spoke a different language. The oil company lobbyists totally lost it that day.(11M31/32)

According to Bryson and Vasuki, the most important environmental legislation passed under Tribbitt's administration was the Environmental Protection Act. Until then, Bryson said,

...the most fine you could levy against anyone was \$50 a day. For industrial pollution, raw sewage going into the streams, that was the maximum fine. It was cheaper to pay the fine than make the correction and it would take six months to go through the process to get a fine. We completely revamped it. The secretary could levy

\$10,000 a day. They could appeal it, of course, but I could levy it and \$25,000 a day for a criminal offense.(11M9)

An important complement to the Environmental Protection Act was the Environmental Appeals Board. Said Bryson:

This was a bridge between the courts of law and the citizens where you really didn't need a lawyer to go appeal before the board.(11M11/12)

Game Warden Training Needed to be Upgraded

Sometimes Bryson ran afoul of the legislative process and locked horns with the President Pro Tem of the Senate, J. Donald Isaacs. One positive wire crossed the other. Vasuki explains:

John wanted to make sure that the game wardens were properly trained in law enforcement procedures. He wanted to put them through the state police academy for training. I was in his office and he was hauling the phone away from his ear because he was getting chewed out. Finally, at the end of the conversation John said very simply, "Senator, you want to run this department or am I the secretary? If I'm the secretary then these people are going to get trained whether they like it or not."

Bryson states:

He told me I didn't have any authority to do it. "Oh, yes sir, I've got the authority." Now, he had four men from his district who thought they were very good politicians. They had to go to class and they were bitching to him. I said, "Senator, as soon as they get through class, I intend to ask for their salaries to be equivalent to state police so they can start doing the job." "You'll never get such legislation passed!" I guess, rather tritely, I said, "Not only will I get it passed but you'll introduce it for me." He said, "You s.o.b." He

did and he had no choice. His people would work for me then. All I had to do was tell them what I wanted to do and they'd go right back to him. Don and I had some beautiful times and some turbulent times.(11M11)

While Bryson meant well, sometimes his ideas went awry—particularly in Sussex. Frank Calio, who was Democratic Party Chairman in Sussex, remembers one time this happened:

I remember they hired these officers and gave them weapons to come down, you know, and check on people if they were violating the laws hunting. I was getting a lot of complaints about it. So I called Sherman (and) Bryson, and I'll never forget that meeting. I said, "You know, I've heard the guys pull guns on people in Sussex County." Little did I know that one of the persons was Senator Earl Tull (Seaford, 1956-62) after he had retired, and Bryson said, "Are you talking about Senator Tull?" And I didn't know about Senator Tull and Sherman had a cigar in his mouth and that thing rolled from one side to the other. He said, "You mean to tell me your man pulled a gun on Senator Tull?" Sherman just, he just, rolled that cigar. I tell you, when Sherman rolled a cigar you knew you were in trouble. Well, Bryson apologized and said (that they) talked to the people (and) told them not to pull their guns unless something violent happened. Sherman's eyes really just opened up and that cigar started rolling. It was funny and, old Bryson, he just sort of slowly sank down into that seat.(14M12)

Downstate, particularly in Sussex, people had been accustomed to placing drinking wells almost anywhere. Sometimes they were 20 feet from a cesspool. That had to be changed to a minimum of 100 feet. Beach and wetlands protection was afforded areas that had never known regulation before. People were building houses on the beaches and filling in marsh land.

Delaware's marsh land is some of the most productive land we've got. For the first time everywhere in the state you had to have the same regulations for septic tank installations. They couldn't build east of the dune.(11M16-19)

The governor called the General Assembly back into extraordinary session in August and October to consider appointments and wrap up certain legislation left over from the session in June. Thus ended the second year of Sherman Tribbitt's tenure. It may not have been as tumultuous as the first year, but there was plenty of work to do, money continued to be very tight and there were nagging problems.

Driving Governor Tribbitt

Despite the honor attached to it, driving the governor around for a state trooper can be a daunting task. Once he leaves home in the morning, there's no telling where he will go that day or when he will get home that night, if indeed, he gets home. In Governor Tribbitt's case, the poor trooper might wind up sleeping that night in the hot windowless loft of the Tribbitt cottage on Rehoboth's Stockley Street. Or, sometimes, the trooper would make a hurry-up call home to his wife for her to send up (or down) a change of underwear and his toothbrush because the governor unexpectedly must be out of town overnight. All in a day's work, being the governor's driver.

For almost three years Bruce Ennis, Democratic representative from Smyrna, performed such duties.

I first met Tribbitt I guess really way back during the Terry Administration. James Mood was in charge of executive security and on occasion I would drive to take Jim's place when he got tied up on some other event and Terry had to go somewhere. So I sat in,

pinchhit more or less several times. That was the first exposure I had to Sherman Tribbitt.(1P1)

Later Ennis was assigned to Delaware State Police Troop 9 in Odessa diagonally across the street from Tribbitt's hardware store.

That was located right on the corner of Main Street and High right at that intersection. It was actually a leased building but he had a hardware store there for years and of course being at the troop across the street I had occasion to make contact with (him) from time to time. At that time he was lieutenant governor. (H)e was a very visible candidate and elected official anyhow and I'm sure there were many occasions that our paths crossed.(1P2)

After Tribbitt was elected governor, Ennis expressed an interest in being a part of his staff. He explains how that came about:

(T)he procedure is that if any troopers or officers are interested in serving executive security they submit an application. At that time I believe I was just a corporal out of Troop 3 and had just recently been transferred to Odessa and I did put a letter in to request an assignment and was fortunate enough on January 15th, 1973, to not only go into executive security but be the NCO (non-commissioned officer) in charge.(1P2)

Once the trooper becomes the driver, he takes on the same schedule as the governor:

Governor Tribbitt really had a busy schedule as governor. And weekends really were no exceptions. He had as many commitments on weekends as he had during the week.

Ennis wasn't the only one on the staff. Corporal Gerald Pepper and Trooper Lee Frankel were two others.



Governor Sherman Tribbitt with
Bruce Ennis of his security force who shared his "schedule."

They were assigned to the governor's staff, right to executive security, Delaware State Police. Usually when we were in session, when the Governor was at Legislative Hall, or during the day shift, we'd have one on assignment. For the evening occasions we'd have another assignment of an officer. We tried to work closely in our shifts. The officers had on an average of two days off, except when we went out of state (and) he took three people.(1P6) Anytime he was away from the Governor's House, and that included the cottage at Rehoboth, anytime on a weekend during the summer we had a man assigned to him.(1P3)

The troopers did have some relief. They weren't required to be with him 24 hours a day. Once they had him back at Woodburn, the Governor's House, they were usually done.

(A)t that time and even presently, security in the house itself is provided by Capitol Security, so they have men on duty 24 hours a day whether (the governor is) in the house or not. But usually our duties ended once he was safe in Woodburn.(1P3)

Despite Governor Tribbitt's having an automobile befitting his station as the state's chief executive, he was sometimes scrupulous to a fault as to his demeanor in public. Ennis remarks:

At that time we had a limousine. We had the Cadillac (black, four doors). Lincoln Continentals were made available. In fact the first (Lincoln Continental) was green. It was nicknamed the "green pickle."

(T)he governor was very conservative and he didn't want any red lights on it, or didn't want to have a habit of being seen or actually operating in excess of the speed limit. (H)e was very conscious of the law enforcement. In fact I remember that one time he wanted me to try to catch up with a speeder and of course I immediately got on the state police radio and notified a troop we were in pursuit of a vehicle speeding and the remarkable thing was

when we passed, (to) overtake another car on the way to try to apprehend the speeder, he'd say "slow down" because he didn't want the other car to think we were speeding, you see. I said, "Governor, you've got to make up your mind. You want this speeder stopped or not?" He wanted the speeder stopped. He didn't want to pass anybody doing it. It was just a guy in violation, a 70-75 mile an hour, violation of the posted speed limit.(1P4)

In relating this incident to interviewer John Paradee, Representative Ennis was trying to be discreet in deference to his old boss. When Tribbitt was told this anecdote, he exclaimed that Ennis had only told half the story. Tribbitt related that when they came abreast of the speeder, he recognized an old buddy from New Jersey with whom he had attended college. Recognizing each other, they proceeded on up to Buena Vista for a college toast.

Tribbitt insisted on being prompt for his appointments but, due to heavy traffic, it didn't always work out that way. Ennis:

I recall very distinctly often we would get the red light there at Duke of York Avenue and U.S. 13. I suspect over a three-year period that I spent on that detail I probably spent three weeks total out of that three years just waiting for that light to change at 13 and Duke of York.(1P3/4)

Awareness of what was going on around him was another trait that Tribbitt had, Ennis said:

(H)e was a governor who was very observant about what was going on around him. He had a lot of luck, too. I noticed many times that we would be walking to a certain destination and he would look down and he would see a dollar bill or a 20 dollar bill laying on the ground where a hundred other people had just walked across the same thing and never saw it. I mean that's how observant he was, you know?(1P12)

Tribbitt's cognizance didn't escape his drivers either:

Another recollection I have is that the governor took a lot of pride in the Delaware state police officers who he had contact with, whether it was executive security or throughout the troops. In fact, when he was invited to dinners, he always made sure that the trooper who took him there was provided a dinner also.(1P5)

Driving the governor meant long trips where the two forged a special camaraderie. Sometimes, the two would indulge in a Garcia and Vega cigar taken from the box that Ennis kept in the trunk:

Well, as you can imagine, most governors have a considerable amount of paper work and reading that they have to do. Even though we spoke, and I think we both jointly smoked cigars at that time, by and large he was generally catching up on his paper-work or preparing, reviewing a speech he had to give or signing documents. It just seems like those issues were endless and he had a number of them to do just like you would expect probably any governor (would have). In my recent contact with him over the years, I haven't seen him smoking. He's probably given it up now. But he smoked cigars at that time.(1P12)

All through the various crises Governor Tribbitt endured in the ebb and flow of his term, a state trooper driver was certainly in a position to see what effect the daily grind had on him. Ennis gives his impression:

I think the governor handled those very well. He prided himself on having good advisers and if someone on staff didn't have the information he knew where to get good advice, I can say that.(1P13)

A driver could never tell where he would go in a day's time.

I know the schedule of events would on occasion be changed without notice to us. It didn't happen often but it happened sometimes. For example, one Saturday I was to pick him up at Woodburn, which I did and I was on my way to the Delaware Correctional Center, which was supposed to be some type of surprise tour. Just when I got in Smyrna I found out that the schedule had changed. He had to be at Villanova (Pa.). I had to drive him to the front door of Villanova and I had never been there in my life.(1P5)

Despite Dover's being the state capital, it had parking problems like any other city its size.

Parking was never a problem in Washington, D.C. and we went quite a number of times. In fact they would wave you up on the parking lot. Parking was a major problem in the city of Dover. I know one time we went into a commitment into the Dinner Bell (restaurant) and we put money in the parking meter and, before we got out, the meter had run out and photographers were all over the place taking pictures of the governor getting in his car with the ticket on the front windshield.(1P5) (He) wasn't upset. As I say he's very respectful of law enforcement. He wanted to make sure we paid the ticket. And we had to have a receipt.(1P18)

Governor Tribbitt is one of those people who is not overly fond of commercial airplane flights so, on one particular occasion, Ennis drove him to Georgia.

Governor Tribbitt didn't really care much for commercial flights. However, he didn't mind at all riding in a state police helicopter. So when we went places, particularly any distances, we drove usually his limousine. I recall one time for instance when we went to Jimmy Carter's Governor's Mansion in Georgia. I don't recall the exact year but I suspect it was probably in the first year and a half of the assignment, which probably'd be about '74.

When we arrived there, the Georgia troopers who were assigned the detail said that there were a number of lifers from the inmates that are assigned at the governor's house that did a lot of work and they said that you want to take your boots off and your leather and even give them your gun. They'll clean your gun and clean all those boots for you. They do it for us all the time. We declined to give them our gun or our boots. One thing we didn't want to do was come back from Georgia and have a governor who might have been shot. (I)t was an everyday occurrence to let the inmates clean their weapons as well as shine their leather up.

(P)robably it was the governors' conference and Governor Jimmy Carter invited him to the mansion. (That is the reason) he was in that area.(1P7/8)

Tribbitt rarely took trips out of state unless it was to attend the Southern Governors' Conference meeting in various cities. Consequently, one of the more pleasant security duties troopers had was when the governor went to the family cottage in Rehoboth, located a house or two off the beach.

Governor Tribbitt was a workaholic and I don't recall many vacations that he took out of state. We would have at least one person down with him the entire time. The state rented the (beach) cottage by the way. There was a room upstairs and one of us would actually sleep right at the cottage, second floor. Anytime that he was out of the governor's mansion he'd have security with him, whether he was on the beach, at or actually in the surf. (I)f he was on vacation more likely we'd be in plain clothes. On occasion, if we knew he was going to be spending vacation down there, we'd even take a bathing suit with us.(1P17)

Anecdotes aside, the real reason the security force was there with the governor was to protect him and his family. In the spring of 1975, Ennis attended a seminar in Washington, D. C. dealing with just such a subject.

(W)e'd get a certain amount of training in Delaware State Police with regard to issues like this but when you're dealing with protective operations it's kind of a specialized field. So we actually met with the experts in this class that we had back in '74. They showed various techniques in the protection of people and they deal(t) with assassinations and profiles of criminals involved in those assassinations. So it's kind of a specialized field.

(A)s you know he was a very sociable and personable individual. And oftentimes when we went to social gatherings where he and his wife both were present, he would go one way and she'd go the other. So there were occasions at some of those social events that we actually sent two people, one to stay with her and one to go with him. Being the personality he was, he liked to make his contacts throughout the audience and we had responsibilities for both. If we made a recommendation to him he'd generally follow it.(1P20)

And when there w(as) a large assembly of people expected we sent an officer from our unit well in advance to site the place out and just be respectful of the fact that there were large crowds there. There was more of a security risk.(1P5)

At least once there was good reason to be concerned about the governor's person:

(O)ccasionally like any other public official there'd be threats made on the governor. I won't say there were an excessive number but it just seems like it's something with public officials that's pretty common. I recall one day we'd gotten a telephone call from a fellow in Philadelphia. He threatened the governor. He said he was coming to Dover. Within an hour and a half he was sitting on the second floor of Legislative Hall. Well, of course we took him into custody and pretty well interrogated him and turned him over to criminal unit to check him out. (H)e wasn't armed, but you never know. You have to be prepared just in case. It just seems like elected officials, particularly in high stature, are prone to receive some type of threats because it's hard to please everybody.(1P6)

Toward the end of Ennis's duties as chief of security, he helped out at the wedding of the governor's daughter, Carole, at Woodburn in June 1975.

We had our full staff there as I recall for that one. In fact, the fourth officer may well have come aboard by now. I'm almost sure he was. His name was John Quigley from upstate. As I recall, it was an outside wedding. I'm sure we had a full staff there. It worked out well. (T)here's always concern when you have things in the open and you expect large gatherings. But we seemed to come away with no incidents.(1P19)

In summation, Representative Ennis, now a seasoned lawmaker himself, recalls those days of a quarter century ago when he was driving Governor Tribbitt:

I think that Governor Tribbitt had a lot of respect for people and in turn they had a lot of respect for him. (H)e was a great man to work for. His wife was a great first lady and I appreciate the opportunity I've had to serve with him.(1P23/24)





Woodburn

**The Governor's Mansion which Tribbitt occupied during his administration.
(Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)**

Fiscal Change

Governor Tribbitt opened his third year in office with the annual State of the State message in the Senate chambers and, for two and a half hours, spoke in some detail about the devastating effects unemployment, inflation, recession, and energy were having on the state's economy. Despite the gloom of the situation, there was at least some good news for the governor for, in the preceding election of 1974, the electorate had bestowed on him not only a Democratic Senate, but a Democratic House as well. Tribbitt said:

If a person's elected governor with a House and Senate of his own party, like Governor Terry was and then, in the middle of his term, loses both houses, that would indicate certain things going wrong. But, in my case, when I was elected with a Republican House and Senate my first two years, and in the middle of my term both houses elected Democrat, that would indicate logically speaking that things were going along fairly well.(5M23)

Still the search went on for revenue, unencumbered revenue, to feed the never-satisfied hungry stomach of the state treasury coffers. Webb relates:

We were always doing little things like we changed the way corporations deposited withholding on income tax from quarterly to monthly and we picked up two months in one fiscal year. I mean we looked at the way every tax was collected to see if there was some way we could manipulate the collection of the tax to get windfalls. In this period of time there was so much pressure because of things like the oil crisis, the high rate of growth in the CPI (consumer price index: 2.4% in 1997; it had jumped to 12.2% in 1974) which had an effect on the cost of government as well as on your revenues.(5M27)

One of the ways they found money was to enact the much-hated gross receipts taxes which are still on the books. These hit small businesses particularly hard. Ruth Ann Minner gives her opinion on the tax:

I didn't vote for them because I thought then they were wrong. I think now they're wrong because you're paying on your gross receipts whether you lose money or not. You pay the tax. I argued my point and I was the only member of the House who did not vote for it in our Democratic caucus. I just absolutely refused to vote for it. It helped, there's no question, and it still helps but I still feel it's unfair. How can you pay a tax when you lose money? (17M17)

Senator Richard Cordrey, then majority leader, remembers those leadership sessions trying to cope with the financial situations:

We stayed here many a night. I mean nights. Sundays, I have been here on Sundays trying to figure out stuff. And that was not just the first year. That was during almost all four years of the Tribbitt Administration trying to make sure things were balanced out.(18M20/21)

Should There Be Tax?

Sometimes they were lucky finding money and sometimes they failed miserably. Frank Calio of Tribbitt's Department of Public Safety explains one of the lucky finds:

In the Division of Revenue they had what they called a motor fuel division but they never ordered anything, they never did anything. If you had an account you couldn't place anywhere else, you put it in the Department of Finance. Jimmy McGinnis (Rep. Dover) introduced a bill to create a new division, a division of motor fuel and a transfer from Division of Revenue to Public Safety.

I went to meet in Wilmington with these guys. They had no records. They had nothing. They had never done an audit. We brought in \$500,000 that year. We hired auditors and went out in the field. People that drove trucks had never paid any taxes. If you voluntarily paid that was fine, but there was no audit. There was no documentation at all.

I mean the truckers didn't mind; that went smoothly. They just wanted to make sure everybody was paying their fair share.(14M15/16)

The newly found motor fuel tax was a gift, something unexpected for the Tribbitt Administration. The other instance had to do with the Getty Oil Refinery at Delaware City, Delaware's only refinery. Ever since the Coastal Zone Act, Getty and Shell Oil Companies (because the latter owned huge tracts of land in southern New Castle County) had become pariahs to many people except those who worked at Getty, of course. Skip Webb explains how they set their sights on Getty:

Getty's Shenanigans

You were always looking for money, OK? And one of the things we looked at was, what companies were big doing business in the state, and were they paying corporate income tax? We looked at a lot of them and indeed most of them were. We came across the Getty Refinery and discovered they were paying, for all practical purposes, zero.

We hired a consultant, a petroleum industry specialist in taxation for the petroleum industry. He came in and says, "They're showing this as a loss. They're taking their profits elsewhere in the chain so it's not subject to state income tax, nor indeed federal income tax." They were taking a lot of their profits over at the wellhead in Saudi Arabia.(5M24/25)

Skip Webb says the administration also found another reason to go after Getty:

They were also considered a major polluter. It was the sulfur byproduct they were burning. They had to do something with that stuff because otherwise they would have had this huge mountain of oil (byproduct), the cheapest, dirtiest, filthiest oil which you could acquire in the Middle East. I mean this was not your low sulfur sweet crude. So anyway we got the idea that they should pay something. They were paying a gross receipts tax but it was at an absolutely minimal amount. We might have been getting \$50,000.(5M24/25)

Pressure was brought to bear on legislators to line up the votes to pass the bill and, when they did, the governor and party leaders pondered what to do. Webb tells what happened:

What we proposed was a tax of three mills per gallon to be effective April 1, 1975, which would realize \$.85 million for fiscal year '75. This is the biggest mistake I made in four years because I answered the question that was asked and I didn't answer the unasked question. There's no doubt in my mind that the 3-mill tax would have gone through and there wouldn't have been any problem with Getty. It would have been a foot-in-the-door thing and then over time you might have been able to ratchet it up a little once you had it in effect. But, when they got to doing all of these taxes, greed set in with some of the legislators. At a caucus meeting one night Senator Isaacs asked me, "Well, if we were to make this 10 mills instead of three mills, do you think Getty would close his refinery?" And I said, "No, I don't think Getty would close his refinery." Now, that was the question he asked and that was the answer I made. The answer I should have made was, "No, but he's going to make you think he will." In other words, he'll fight you if you raise the tax initially and I should have made that point and I didn't.(10M13/14)

Opposition to what the governor and the legislature were about to do enveloped them. Anxious and irate Getty employees in

Delaware City inundated legislators' homes and offices with phone calls for fear of having to move and/or lose their jobs. One legislator's phone, whose constituency lay in the neighborhood of the plant, rang so much each time he answered it, he was accused of keeping it off the hook. When J. Paul Getty himself got wind of this in London he called Tribbitt's office. Tribbitt tells what happened next:

He called me personally on the phone. He threatened that if this came about, he would move his refinery out of Delaware. We had to think about that seriously. He was diplomatic to the extent that I understood where he was after the conversation.(5M23/24)

Tribbitt, in the end, vetoed the bill and stated laconically:

Well, you still needed money but that was the end of that particular pursuit.(5M26/27)

Some of the legislators who were persuaded to vote for it groused and were none too happy about the governor's veto. Senator Richard Cordrey, majority leader at the time, said:

I have said a hundred times, the worst vote I ever made in the Delaware State Senate in my entire life was that Governor Tribbitt talked me into supporting a Getty oil tax. We sat right upstairs on June the 30th; the total tax was going to go on Getty Oil Company. We all came downstairs, passed the gas tax, passed the budget and we went home. The next morning the phone rings, July 1, Sherman said, "I got to have you back up here right away." Getty, J. Paul Getty, was calling from overseas saying, "I'll close the damn plant down if that tax is implemented." (They said it was from a pay telephone in his castle.)

We went and hired a former Exxon oil man to intervene to see whether or not he thought that J. Paul Getty would shut down. At that time I remember sitting right up in the governor's office upstairs

and the guy says, "If you were Exxon in Delaware or Sun Oil or any of those, no, I don't think they would, but J. Paul Getty, yes." Sherman sat up there and vetoed the damn bill that he begged us to sign.(18M34-36)

Webb relates the effect the fiasco had on Tribbitt's remaining term:

The failure to get the Getty tax through was one of the reasons we had so much financial difficulty at the end of the administration. Because that was the only possible place we could find to get a new source of money that was not going to hit the taxpayers particularly hard.(10M13/14)

Administration Scrambles to Find New Source of Income and Be Fair to Employees

One of the pieces of legislation passed in the last year of Tribbitt's term was the COLA, cost of living allowance for state employees. While it was born of good intentions, rampant inflation neutralized its effect and in fact made things worse as far as the state budget was concerned. As a result COLA had to be repealed in the succeeding administration. Skip tells how COLA came about:

It's the only time the governor ever came into the Legislative Hall when a bill was before the Legislature and he went up and sat down next to the speaker. He wanted them to see that he wanted it.(9M24)

The merit system has steps, and every time you go up a step you can get a raise. The only other way a state employee gets a raise would be because there is a general 2 percent raise enacted. What was happening is (the) cost of living was accelerating. We couldn't afford to give them a raise. With the rate of inflation, people's actual take-home pay was shrinking. COLA was a means of getting around

having to give them periodic huge catch-up raises which would come along and knife you whenever they thought there was some money.

Then, boom, almost instantaneously we got into high cost-of-living increases. We thought maybe it's going to be 3 1/2 percent, maybe it's going to be 4 percent. At the outside it's going to be 5 percent. We didn't expect 7 or 8 percent. We did it and then the CPI (consumer price index) started getting out of control. We were doing it trying to solve a problem, but what we did was exacerbate it.(9M25/26)

Food Stamps and Increasing Unemployment Enter the Equation

In the previous year legislation was passed initiating the food stamp program in Delaware. A new program, yes, it required some innovation. But due to the sluggish economy, there were even here land mines along the way. Skip explains:

Delaware had been a total commodity state and we had to convert to a food stamps operation, which means we had to hire. Food stamps were totally different. We had to start from zero and get everybody on board.(9M12) There were a lot of complaints. We didn't do it fast enough. Looking back on it over this period of time over nine months we went from no recipients to 35,000 and all the paperwork that was federally required. I think the newspaper unnecessarily chided us for taking so long. I might add we weren't expecting unemployment to be going up at the same time and people being laid off. All (this) had the impact of increasing the initial load of people who would be eligible into a number that was higher than we'd expected.(10M4)

A Rocky Start for a State Lottery

On May 8, Governor Tribbitt went before a joint session in the Senate chamber regarding the failed lottery. It was one of the few times the captain, trying to steer his ship of state through perilous

and turbulent waters, exhibited annoyance and frustration in a public forum. The bipartisan Legislative Lottery Study Commission, headed by Representative Robert T. Connor of New Castle (House 1970-78, Senate 1980-1997), had recommended and commissioned an out-of-state firm to undertake a state lottery but after five weeks it failed. Delawareans refused to buy tickets in the complex game and during the period of operation not one first prize had been awarded to anyone. When it started to go sour even the legislative committee began to denounce it and the press began to lay the blame on the governor. Tribbitt was plainly peeved and vexed. Webb comments:

The governor had considerable respect for legislators and he thought here was something where we can let them play, let them do their thing. Well, it was a terrible mistake because the plan was totally flawed. The way you start a lottery is to do what other people are doing that is successful. I couldn't play it. It just didn't work. What they should've done was to start the instant lottery based on some other state's model. It taught him a lesson that if you're going to have to stand in pain, you'd better be able to claim the gain.(9M16-18)

Signing the lottery bill had already cost Tribbitt votes among church people and its initial failure provided a double whammy to the governor. Webb continues:

And don't think it didn't cost him some votes undoubtedly in 1976. When the lottery bill was on his desk there were tons of people writing in about "sign," "don't sign." Well, Delaware's Bible belt is largely western Kent and western Sussex County. That's where we were getting people saying "no" and if you look at his comparative results in '72 and '76 (there) you can see that he lost maybe two, three, four thousand votes. If you'd shifted that many votes in '72 he wouldn't have been governor. I think this might have been a major learning experience for him.(9M20/21)

Labor Was Making More Demands on State Finances

Senator Lemuel Hickman of Dagsboro served as Secretary of Public Safety during the Tribbitt Administration but, due to illness, he wasn't around too much. It was when he was in the hospital early in Tribbitt's term that Frank Calio of Laurel was called in to help run the department:

Yeah, that was quite an experience and I mean I jumped in this thing not knowing anything about running state government. Before I left, Sherman had said to me that it was one of the best-run (departments) that he had.(14M7)

Calio was put in a difficult situation when he had to negotiate the state police and motor vehicle employees' contract. Wouldn't you know it, these five-year contracts came up for renewal during Tribbitt's term.

(Tribbitt) just lacked money. He didn't have the money to do the programs. Sherman was so busy putting out fires he didn't have time to start one of his own.(14M11)

Jake (Kreshtool) represented the state police. Lem Hickman did not like confrontations, so he said, "Fine, you deal with them at the bargaining table." "So," I said, "boys, you know we don't have any money. But if we can work out some overtime to try to compensate for the job you're doing..." We came to an impasse and then Jake finally said, "Calio, I'm tired of dealing with you. I want the secretary." So (Hickman) reluctantly came to the meeting. Lem started talking about their chickens, about grain and soybeans. He talked about everything except what state police wanted, money.

Finally Jake threw up his hands and said, "Calio, I can't do this anymore." He said, "I'll deal with you anytime." So, the next meeting we set a contract. But then we had the motor vehicle

contract. They were understanding and we just extended their contract.(14M10/11)

Calio quickly learned about log-rolling in politics:

It was tough during Sherman's time because we just didn't have money to deal with people and he knew they needed raises. Everything was frozen. I needed a man in the motor vehicle lanes in New Castle bad, and Tony Cicione (Senator, member Joint Finance Committee) would not let me have a man. He said, "Don't have any money." I went to him and finally he said, "Frank, I've got a friend who needs a job in the lanes." So that's how I got my job. I had to give him a job, too. I learned how to make things work without money.(14M11)

Debt Service Legislation

One of the other major pieces of legislation beside the budget bill which must be approved each session is the bond, or the capital improvements, bill. In it are road projects, school construction, and other long-term projects spread out over 10, 20, and 30 years. Now, the trap in all this is that passage of the bill requires a three-fourths vote of each House, something that can be rather difficult if enough legislator's pet projects are not included. Once passed, the bill adds to the state's bonded indebtedness and over the years each budget bill passed must take into account past years' indebtedness. Tribbitt comments:

One of the biggest problems, and a major concern of mine, was the amount of money it took to carry the debt service. It's called debt service in the budget act to pay the interest and the principal payments on our bonded indebtedness.(6M2) It was taking at least 20% of the total budget.(6M3) It just kept, like Topsy, getting bigger and bigger, satisfying all the wishes of legislators throughout the state.(5M20)

I was able to get the legislature to pass legislation where the bond bill, each and every year, couldn't exceed more than three-fourths of what you paid off in the prior year. That started a reduction process and it worked up all through the du Pont Administration. In fact, Governor du Pont said to me one day (after Tribbitt left office), "That's one of the best things you ever did putting that lid on bond indebtedness" and Pete Nellius, who was his secretary of finance, said it was a great piece of legislation.(6M3)

Webb relates that this modification of the bond bill came out of the findings of the Delaware Tomorrow Commission:

We had just had one (bond bill) that was \$125 million, (and) if something wasn't done it would contribute to ever-ballooning costs of debt service that were really going to create problems in the future. To limit capital authorizations to 75% conservatively estimated, this program will save the taxpayers a quarter of a billion dollars on a cumulative basis over the next decade. One of the things that hurt Russell Peterson when he became governor was the constant strain of dumping more money into the debt service account.(10M16)

New Environmental Regulations Were Going to Kill Us All

While Tribbitt had always counted downstate as his greatest support, many of the new rules and regulations regarding the environment and otherwise were nettling some Delawareans, particularly Sussex Countians, despite being for their own good. As Bryson himself said as Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control:

That (DNREC) secretary comes in contact with everybody in the state at one point in their time frame. Think about it: fishing license, hunting, well permits, septic tank permits and right on down the line, park fees. There's not a few citizens that don't come in contact with the department at least once or twice during every year.(11M11)

Frank Calio described the environment from his angle:

More people were becoming aware of environmental problems and (Bryson's) agency was doing a lot. The federal laws were coming down the state. It was like, nothing had been said all these years. Everything was dormant and, when Sherman got in, it was like the world had awakened. All this fell in Sherman's lap.

I don't know how the man got through the four years, to tell you the truth. People hadn't been used to regulations. A person could more or less do what he wanted to do on his own land. If you wanted to dig a ditch, you could dig a ditch. If (he) wanted to build a septic system of his own; (if) he wanted to add more lines, he could add more lines. He could do whatever he wanted to do. And then, all of a sudden, you're telling these people, "Hey, you can't do this anymore." Farmers started talking. The farmers were one of the bad guys according to the new regulations and they just couldn't do anything right anymore.

Calio makes his point when he recalls an incident with a woman he knew in Laurel:

When Mary Cordrey was living, I was on a town council and our town charter had not been revised since the '40s. So, I thought, I had experience up in Dover and I knew how to make ordinances. So I went through the whole book and updated the ordinances and threw some out, like, you couldn't play baseball on Sundays and some old things in there. One was for annexation. We updated the way that we could annex. If an area wanted to come in they'd have to vote to come in; the town would have to vote to bring them in.

Well, the rumor got around that I had changed the charter, that we were going to pull you in whether you wanted to come in or not. (Mary) was just out of town limits and I was brushing the sidewalk one day and she came up. After she chewed me out, she finalized

her statement by saying, "Things have been like this for years; just leave it the hell alone." (14M13/14)

The Creation of the Solid Waste Authority

In an era when the concern for ecology has grown geometrically, Delaware has done something that puts it in the forefront among most other states about waste disposal. It created a Solid Waste Authority and it came about by a check from the federal government. N. C. Vasuki explains:

Under (the) Department of Natural Resources we had applied for a federal grant to build a material separation process for New Castle County to take care of the county's waste. EPA gave us the grant. They had sent us a check for \$900,000. The question was, who was going to run this? Should the state go ahead with the project?

We all got into the governor's office and John said, "Governor, do you want us to return the check to the federal government or do you want the county to take care of the problem? If the counties are willing to take care of it, fine, I'll back off, but I will enforce the environmental laws against the county." The counties were really upset because they had the responsibility and they were faced with the problem of complying and they didn't want to raise the taxes to do that.

So after about an hour and a half discussion the governor said, "How about if we create a state solid waste authority?" And that's when everything started gelling.

Since the authority was created solid waste has not been a political issue. It has created a truly long-term program for the state. We're probably the only state which can say we have 20 years landfill capacity left and the landfills are some of the best in the world today. It brought in both technical competence, economic freedom from the state government process and built in the long range planning. (11M37-41)

The governor called the General Assembly back in July and October to consider mostly appointments. This year had brought Getty, COLA, food stamps and greater unemployment, a rocky State Lottery, labor contracts, debt service, new environmental regulations, and the creation of the Solid Waste Authority. Thus, perhaps somewhat more calmly than previously, ended Tribbitt's third year in office.

Woodburn, The Governor's House

There can be little doubt, especially among those who know her, that Jeanne Tribbitt enjoyed being First Lady in Woodburn, The Governor's House, more than any other. First of all, she and her husband actually lived there throughout his entire term in office. While there were many times he wasn't there but to sleep due to his heavy schedule, she "held down the fort" to make it as comfortable and homey as possible for him when he was able to get there and escape the cares of the day. In the meantime she reveled in being the mistress of the House, used her own recipes (whether she or the staff cooked), decorated with flowers, oversaw shopping, held open house, received innumerable guests, helped write correspondence, etc. She truly enjoyed it.

Governor Terry and his wife lived in The Governor's House in the last two years of his term because it took two years to get it ready for habitation after it was purchased. Jeanne had been to visit them several times but she never was there again until the Tribbitts moved in inauguration night, 1973:

Mrs. Terry had told me according to protocol the outgoing First Lady is supposed to have the incoming First Lady for lunch, tea, or something and go over things with her. Well, I kept waiting for Mrs.



Front entrance hall of Woodburn after renovation in 1967.
(*Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives*)

Peterson to call me but she never did. I don't know whether it was Sherman or who but somebody must have called because the Petersons said we could meet them there at Legislative Hall. They never had us to Woodburn.

We went around to Mrs. Terry's; she invited us around there to change our clothes after inauguration because they (the Petersons) weren't out of The Governor's House. They weren't out (until) later that night.(7M23/24)

After the Tribbitts arrived in Woodburn, Jeanne was anxious to get started preparing to have the house open for Old Dover Days, the first Saturday in May. But then she received a letter from the Department of Administrative Services (which oversaw the operation of the house) shortly after moving stating the interior of the house needed a great deal of attention.

Every single room had to be completely painted and some other things recovered, sofas, chairs, bathrooms done. It had to have a real overhaul. (They) thought it might be better if we didn't move in until after it was redone. I wanted to move in because I wanted it done my way, not their way. That was my privilege. Each First Lady can do it the way she wants and I wanted to do it my way so we lived under drop cloths for six or eight months. All the furniture and everything was covered up.

The fireplaces were not usable but I had them opened. We had a masonry contractor come down from Odessa and they had to be cleaned. They had to have new flues. I found a place in Philadelphia that would make the screens because they were the off sizes. (They) came down and made the screens for the three fireplaces in solid brass and we had andirons.(7M4-6)

In addition to having enough silverware to serve 50 people, the furniture was ample. Tribbitt added:

It was Queen Anne, Chippendale, Sheraton. Mrs. Terry and her sister, Miss Urbe, who was an interior decorator had chosen the china, the silver, the furniture and had it redone. There were some pieces given to the house by different people when the Terrys were there but most of the furniture had come from Mr. Ealy's up at Duck Creek Antiques in Smyrna. The only thing we brought was for our son (Tip) in the basement. We brought the rec room furniture and a TV down for him.(7M7)

See, our youngest son lived there with us. He was 13 when we moved there. And he could go to school in Middletown. He didn't have to go to school in Dover because he was the governor's son. He could go where he was already going.(7M5) Carole was already out of nursing school and she was working in Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. She had an apartment over there. Jimmy, of course, was out of school, out of college and out of everything, war. And he had an apartment in Newark. So when we moved to Dover, we couldn't decide at that point whether we wanted to sell it (their home in Odessa) or what we wanted to do with it. So Jimmy moved in(to) our home and then he lived there until we decided to sell it.(7M14)

Knowing there were rumors around Dover that Woodburn had once been used as a stop on the Underground Railroad and that the house itself was supposed to be haunted, the super-sleuth First Lady summoned her courage and made it her business to investigate herself:

They said there was a little girl around the fish pond with a sun bonnet in the spring and summer. Governor Terry pretended he believed all this stuff but I don't really believe he did. I never saw the little girl with the sun bonnet. Then there was supposed to be Mr. Higgins. Somebody'd be going upstairs. He'd meet them on the stairway and say, "Good morning." He was in colonial garb or something. Well, Mr. Higgins wasn't there when we were there. And then there was supposed to be the tale that if you put a glass of wine on the landing as you go to the third floor when you get up in

the morning the wine would be gone. I put the wine out about three different times. I didn't tell my husband because I was afraid he might drink it and make me think that the man was there and had drunk it so I never told him. The wine was always there so there were no ghosts. I was in every closet in that house and in the attic. The only thing I ever heard were pipes creaking. That's the only thing I ever heard.

I don't think any of the other governors or wives ever saw any ghosts either. But I used to tell the children when they would come. It was something to tell the fourth graders and I always told them.

There was supposed to be an Underground Railroad that went under the Governor's house for the slaves. (There) is nothing but a door down there. It's just a room with dirt in it.(7M7/8)

As Governor Tribbitt was strapped trying to run the state without any money, so was Woodburn on a tight budget. When Jeanne would mention needing something for the house, Administrative Services would either say "yes" or "no, we don't have any money." Most times it was "no." Jeanne Tribbitt said:

It was one of these that I wouldn't have done anything without asking the man in charge, Mr. (Thomas) Murray. And, if he said we'd like to do it for you, Jeanne, but we don't have the money, then that was all there was to it. I never saw any money. He would say, well you can have a sofa covered or a chair covered or whatever and send us the bill.(7M5) I do know a lot of entertaining, groceries and stuff came out of our money. I don't know whether it was supposed to or not but it did.(7M11)

She did get a pitiful monthly allowance of \$300 and a staff to go with it:

I had my cook Mary Perry who was fantastic. I had Ethel Sullivan who was the upstairs maid. I had Lilly Harris who was the downstairs maid and I had a gardener named Brownie. Walter

Brown was his real name and that was my staff. I worked right with them. If there was anything that needed to be done and it wasn't done to suit me, I went ahead and did it because I was a stickler that that house looked perfect.(7M17)

In addition, she had a social secretary:

I had a great one. Her name was Phyllis Moore. She did all my invitations. She did most of my thank-yous. I wrote a lot of the thank-yous, ones that I felt should come from me. But others she did and she set up all the appointments like on Thursday for instance. That was tour day for buses, senior citizens, an awful lot of senior citizens—two or three buses at one time.(7M9)

Decorating the house was a pastime she found very pleasant:

I never had a garden club come in and decorate. I did all my own flowers and I would go to the florist and get the flowers. We had loads of them right in the yard that you could use. Back when the house was built in 1792 you were supposed to use what was on the land and that's what I tried to do. We had magnolia and beautiful things in that yard to use. We had beautiful gardens in the spring and summer with all fresh flowers so I didn't have to buy an awful lot.

I am a flower person and I had hanging baskets in the great hall, hanging in the window, had them hanging in the kitchen on the window. The security men used to tease me because I had a big fern that hung in the window by their desk and every time they turned around the fern would either tickle them or was in their faces.(7M13)

Cooking and planning meals received the same amount of devotion that decorating the house did. Jeanne Tribbitt and her cook, Mary Perry, did them with alacrity:

I chose all the menus all the time. Mary used my recipes. She did all the grocery shopping but I made the list out for her and we

planned every meal from Monday through the next Monday. For a lot of the meals he was not there but we always fed the security man. And of course my son was there and I was there so we had to eat.(7M12)

I never had help on the weekend until we were entertaining but, other than that, I love to cook and I wanted to do it. So I gave them the weekend off.(7M11)

Once Tip, the Tribbitt's 13-year-old son, told his mother that they were having a guest for dinner that night. When his mother asked, "Who?" Tip answered, "Dad. He's going to eat dinner with us tonight." This was during a period when Governor Tribbitt hadn't been home to eat dinner for over two months.

We didn't do too much with exotic recipes. If we were going to have anything like that, that's when I had it catered. Then I would have something really fancy. Mary and I, we had nice good wholesome meals. We'd have Cornish hen, we'd have ham. We always kept things in the big freezer beside the fridge because he might call up some night and we'd have good news and bad news. "Give me the bad news first." "Well, we're going to be there for dinner but it may be six, it may be ten, and it may not be until midnight." But, honey, we put them out a spread because this would be during the times that there were night sessions and he'd want to bring some over for dinner. And we could feed 'em all. We always had the freezer to fall back on.(7M11)

Yes, and wine was served:

When we moved in there wasn't anything. They had a wine cellar but nothing in the wine cellar. That's when the newspaper picked it up because I think we spent something like \$700 to stock the wine cellar and I guess they thought we were going to drink it up in one week or one day or something. Oh, Lord, they'd crucify us

for that—\$700 to stock the wine cellar. There wasn't even a bottle of wine there when we moved in.(7M12)

Entertaining in The Governor's House, as far as Jeanne Tribbitt was concerned, was another important part of her job:

I had teas for various people. I had Mother of the Year teas each year I was there. I had the foreign students for tea, for lunch. I had all the children in the 4th grade because they studied Delaware history and I don't think there was a school in Delaware that didn't come through. Now, those kinds of things were scheduled tours and I would have hostesses in the various rooms and I showed the entire house, the basement, the first floor, the second, third—all the way up. I showed every room.(7M3)

Woodburn was open every day of the week, including Christmas. This necessitated having help:

I truly loved it. I treated that house like it was mine and it was a home. It was not a museum, it was a home.(7M3) I thought if The Governor's House is for everybody, (the hostesses) should be a mixture. So I had Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. I even brought some friends down from Odessa.(7M10) I greeted everybody when they came in and told them about the great hall and then I'd have a hostess in the dining room and one in the drawing room and then I would have two or three upstairs.(7M9) I never knew when anybody was going to knock on that door and I wanted it to be right. Now, I'm one of these people that would run around in the summertime barefoot. I always kept a pair of shoes on the sofa. The security man would buzz me if he saw somebody coming to the door because they had these mirrors. They could see everything. He said, "Mrs. Tribbitt, you're having company. Get your shoes on!"(7M17)

Of course, in addition to ladies' teas and 4th graders, there was a certain amount of entertaining of government officials that went with her husband's position.

Now the first year we didn't entertain because it wasn't fit. You know we had to get it together and you couldn't entertain with drop cloths, paint smell and all that all over the house. I entertained the legislators: the judicial people; state officers; cabinet. Now when we did any personal things that came out of our own pocket.(7M12)

Christmas was a special time for Jeanne and she went all out for the Yuletide season:

I really love Christmas. We had a Christmas tree and Mr. Bill Wollerton had a nursery and every year he gave me my Christmas tree. It would be from the first floor to the second floor landing. It was gorgeous and I decorated it myself. It was beautiful and people came to see the tree and brought me an ornament and I still use them.

There were so many Christmas cards and my secretary had done them. Some of the secretaries over at Sherman's office had done some too. It just got out of hand. It got very expensive and very tiresome. We gave money to charity in lieu of the Christmas cards. There were just too many. What we decided to do instead of Christmas cards was to have an open house on New Year's Day. We had tea and cookies.(7M13/14)

Jeanne Tribbitt talks about some of the guests they hosted at Woodburn:

We had the secretaries of state from all over the country, all 50 states. I think it was the first time and I don't think it's happened since. We had them for a reception and sit-down dinner in the garden. It was the national conference and we wanted it brought to Delaware to the First State and we did it.(7M2) I remember Mr. (Robert) Reed saying every state came. The Dinner Bell catered it.

Tom Stone was in charge and the tables were gorgeous. They said it was the greatest outing they'd ever had.(7M16)

We had a gentleman from England and he was in the Parliament. He had dinner with us and spent the night.(7M16)

By far the most interesting guests she ever had were the foreign students who had come to the local high schools:

I just loved them. They came from mostly the Dover area, Caesar Rodney and Dover. Mr. Foote, who was a teacher in Dover, contacted me the first year we were there. He was in charge of foreign students and he asked me if I would be interested in having them for a little tea or something and show them the Governor's House. I said I would be glad to. I must have had 40 or 50 of them. They'd sit on the floor or anywhere they wanted to sit, we'd have our tea and cookies. I'd ask different ones if they'd get up on the stairway and tell everybody about their country, which they did. When they would come to The Governor's House they would dress in their native dress and they would get up and talk and they loved it and I used to get the nicest notes from them after. That was one of the big things for me that I loved.(7M15/16)

During her tenure as hostess of The Governor's House, Jeanne Tribbitt authorized a First Lady's cook book to be published which has since become somewhat of a collector's item:

The Lawyers' Wives Organization contacted me to see if I would be interested in doing it and I said I would. So I worked very diligently with them and Fran(ces) Allmond. I had all the legislators' wives, the cabinet wives, and I had the other First Ladies put recipes in. We had two printings, 5,000 copies the first time. We sold everyone of those (at) \$7.50. Now, once in a great while you see them in an antique place and they're \$20-25. Then we had the second 5,000 printing and sold everyone of those. We tried to get more and

the IRS wouldn't let us get any more. I autographed most of them. I went up and down the state in each county autographing.(7M17/18)

Far and away the most spectacular event that took place at Woodburn during the Tribbitts' stay was the wedding of their only daughter Carole to Philip Suchanek of Baltimore June 29, 1975. The date is significant for two reasons. One, it had originally been planned for Saturday, June 28, but at the last minute, Carole, as loving daughters are want to do in cases like this sometimes, moved it up one day. To an ordinary father, this would have been condoned as the whimsy of an excited daughter about to go aloft on the gossamer wings of matrimony. But Sherman Tribbitt was not just any father. He was the Governor of Delaware and June 29 is one day before the night of all nights—the hellish end of the legislative session of the General Assembly which certainly caused the governor some trepidation. What's a governor to do? After all, it was their only daughter. He swallowed hard and the show went on.

The other reason the date of June 29 was significant will become apparent as the story unfolds. Jeanne Tribbitt recalls the day Carole broached the subject of getting married at Woodburn to her mother:

She wanted it. It was her idea. She said, "Mom, would that be okay?" I said, "Oh, it would be great." In fact I said, "The only thing is we've got to make sure to get Dad there. We're not sure about him. He's gone all the time. We've got to have Dad there."

We planned it for a year, the two of us. She had definite ideas of the colors she wanted. The men wore big yellow tuxedos. The girls dresses had to be yellow background with all the spring flowers colors in them and the groom's mother had the shade of green that was in the dresses. I had to wear the apricot that was in the dresses.(7M19)

Wedding plans proceeded and the date was set for Saturday night, June 28, but:

She changes her mind before time to do the invitations to send them out. She wants it 4 o'clock the 29th. That was the day they met.

Now, Phil's parents did the rehearsal dinner and we all went to the Blue Coat (Dover restaurant) for the dinner but, before we had the rehearsal, I say 6 o'clock or something in the yard and it was just gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous, warm, lovely.

The wedding was scheduled for four in the afternoon, June 29 and the Dinner Bell again did the catering. I'd had a bath but I was not dressed. I was still in the yard at 2:30 checking with Tom Stone. We had 50-some round tables set up in that yard with all these beautiful colors. All the flower centerpieces, the candles, everything. We had all the chairs in the back where she would walk down the long path there in the backyard where the ceremony was to take place.

And then it happened, the mother of all thunderstorms. It wasn't enough that the fates had dealt Sherman Tribbitt a cruel blow with a moribund state economy beleaguered with one crisis after another. Now, the fates were getting personal:

About 2:30 the bottom fell out. It poured rain and it didn't stop raining until about 4:30. The girls were crying and Carole was saying, "Now please don't do that. My mother's upset enough. Don't be crying. We can't help this you know." She held up great for me. She was trying to straighten them out.

And poor Jim. (She had put him in charge of the ushers.) Well, he was soaking wet. His hair was dripping. His tux was soaked and wet. We had to send somebody out for more paper towels so he could try to keep the seats dry for people.

And where's the governor when all this was happening?

He's on the phone to the Dover Air Force base upstairs asking about the weather and they said, "Well, governor, it's not raining here." And he said, "It's raining like hell here!"

It didn't rain at the Dover Air Base. It didn't rain at Rehoboth. It didn't rain in Smyrna. It didn't rain within ten miles of Dover. So, anyway, the wedding cake was five feet, that many tiers with real yellow roses. It rode around in the back of a woman's van for hours not knowing where to put it.

Then, the decision was made to bring all in the house and what had originally been planned as a garden wedding on the lawn came under roof.

So we ended up, she got married in the great hall. We had people in the garage. We had them in the basement. We had them on the second floor, the third floor, the kitchen, on the verandah. We had people everywhere because the great hall wouldn't hold that many people.

Ed Thomas, our preacher from Odessa Methodist Church, went right on with it. He was great. And we had to bring the things in from the outside that were set up. We forgot to bring the kneeling bench 'cause it was soaked anyway, the beautiful white leather kneeling bench. The minister said, "Oh, we can use these pretty pillows on the sofa." And then the kids, the attendants had gone up the back stairway so they could come down the front stairway so she could come down the front stairway with her father. My two boys brought me down. Both of them were soaking wet.

The tables and settings outside were a shambles:

Then, we couldn't eat outside. (Tom) changed the tablecloths three times on these 50 tables. He called me on the phone. He said, "Jeanne, I'm out of your color. I don't know what to do," he said, "because everything had to be yellow and white." I said, "Well, have you got the white ones with yellow napkins? Can you do that?"

He said, "Well, I'll try." That's what he did. I'm telling you. I never saw such a day in my life and I was awful close to tears. I didn't do it.

Then, the skies cleared and all was right with the world again.

I mean it soaked everything and it didn't stop raining until about 4:30. Five o'clock you would never know it rained. The sun was out. It was gorgeous. The tablecloths, the last ones he put on the table, they were dripping wet.

Anyway, (Carole) is concerned, "Where is my wedding cake?" I said, "Honey, I wish I could tell you." At that point I didn't know where it was. Tom Stone came to the rescue as he always did and he got us a table, put a dry cloth on it and she got the wedding cake on it. The wedding cake was just perfect. It hadn't fallen or anything. And of course the flowers looked kind of bedraggled but he brought them all back and put 'em on. And honey, they had the best reception you've ever seen in your life. They danced and danced and the funny thing was Tom had a man shucking oysters at a raw bar out in the yard. All through the rain that man never stopped shucking oysters.

They had their reservations for that night at the Sheraton because they danced at the party so long. Jimmy and his girl took them. Then the next morning they went to Philadelphia and to Jamaica on their honeymoon for a week.(7M19-23)

Twenty months after the sweet (the wedding) came the bitter (Governor Tribbitt's loss to Pierre "Pete" du Pont in the 1976 elections). Jeanne Tribbitt had to leave Camelot and abdicate her role as reigning First Lady in The Governor's House but she did it in style, the same style she had exhibited throughout her 4 years. She once told this author, "Honey, enjoy it while you can." And she did. Magnanimous in defeat as well as in victory, she nobly and



June 29, 1975

The Governor dancing with his daughter, Carole, the bride.

graciously performed her last duties at Woodburn and it's never been the same since:

I had Mrs. (Elise) du Pont down for lunch and explained everything. I did all the right things. She was lovely, delightful. And then the day of inauguration we invited them to The Governor's House and I had fresh flowers all through the house for her and everything and Pete told me, "Jeanne, it's so clean and so pretty. We're going to leave it just like this." Honey, in two weeks she had done something else to it.

But it was beautiful when we were there. It truly was.(7M24)

1976

A Tumultuous Final Year

The bicentennial year dawned as Sherman Tribbitt prepared for the last year of his term. It would be a remarkable year to him for two reasons; first, it was the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Delawareans were filled with pride and celebration up and down the state. Secondly, after three consecutive years of one crisis after another, he would be confronted with one last great hurdle. Clearly, it would be the gravest he ever faced— saving the Farmers Bank. It was as if he was the captain of a ship that had been tossed and thrown about on a long voyage and was now returning home and had to weather the treacherous and tempestuous waters of Cape Horn to order to arrive safely in port. First, the light-hearted.

On the first day back on January 13, the 128th General Assembly convened in the House chambers in joint session, the governor in attendance, to witness a special Bicentennial Observance program performed by faculty and students of the University of Delaware. It would be the kickoff to a year's

celebration commemorating the 13 original colonies' breaking formal ties with their mother country, Great Britain.

Two weeks after the bicentennial ceremony in the House chambers, Tribbitt returned to that very chamber and gave his State of the State message outlining a drastic modification to the cabinet form of government and stating: "As governor I have had the frustrating task of running a government that doesn't work and I've spent three years patching it up." His plan entailed eliminating five departments, reorganizing three, and leaving three unaltered. In an era of great change and upheaval it would not meet with much legislative success.

For 169 years the Farmers Bank and the State of Delaware seemingly had a symbiotic relationship and as times went on, their relationship became even more intertwined. Though a private institution at its inception, more and more state and local government accounts were deposited therein making the state a majority stockholder. Just the title, "The Farmers Bank of the State of Delaware," would lead one to believe that it was an actual agency of state government but it wasn't. Though there were some directors elected from the General Assembly, the bank itself was run by a board of directors and a president who were not state employees. They were answerable to the stockholders but not necessarily to the state, the major stockholder. Many of the stockholders, aside from the state's majority share, were ordinary citizens living up and down the state. It had branch offices in New Castle, Kent, and Sussex Counties. Downstaters seemed to have a special affinity for it as "their bank."

During the Tribbitt Administration more and more people began to question the state's close alignment to the bank. Tribbitt explains:

A lot of people thought we've got no business being in the bank and a lot of our competitors couldn't benefit because the law required the depository to be in the Farmers Bank. John Rollins had

expressed an interest in the Farmers Bank but he knew what the problem was with the scale voting.(5M32/33)

(Scale voting: the more stock one owned, the fewer votes one commanded. Thusly, though Delaware was a majority stockholder, it could be outvoted. Scale voting was installed at some time in the past to prevent someone from becoming the major stockholder.) Tribbitt continues:

Some legislator put a bill in to do away with scale voting in the charter of the Farmers Bank. So I got to thinking how the magnitude of doing away with that would make the value of the state's holdings, for John Rollins or anybody, (worth buying) because they were buying to control the bank. Now this doesn't sound right to me. The Farmers Bank is a private corporation just like Wilmington Trust or CoreStates. So I decided to put the question to the Supreme Court whether we could amend the charter of a private corporation to take out scale voting.(5M34)

The Delaware Constitution requires that such an opinion from the Supreme Court shall be rendered from the justices, plural. The Supreme Court comprised three justices and, even though a bill to increase it to five languished in the General Assembly, Tribbitt still had a problem. He had been trying to get an opinion from the Court for over a year and couldn't get even an informal one because, as he said:

Herrmann (Daniel F.) was the Chief Justice. He disqualified himself because his two sons were with Richards, Layton and Finger, the law firm for the bank. McNeilly (John J.) disqualified himself because his wife owned Farmers Bank stock. That left it up to Associate Justice (William) Duffy. So, consequently, I could not get an opinion from the Delaware Supreme Court. If that scale voting wasn't in there the bank could have been sold.(5M34)

Tribbitt was receiving snippets of rumors along the way some time before 1976 that things were not well with the bank:

I found out the seriousness originally from a state director. We didn't know it, but one particular state director came to The Governor's House on a given day when I first heard about it. He said, "You got to do something. This Farmers Bank's in trouble." And I didn't know exactly what he was talking about. The problem was they ended up (with) about \$60 million in what they call non-accrual assets—bad loans.(5M29)

He then enumerates the chinks in the armor of this financial institution and what made it ripe for a fall:

You had nine people representing the State of Delaware on that board. Whatever legislators collectively could get enough votes with nine names on it, that's how you got elected. And in most cases the nine state directors are only interested in going to a board meeting and getting whatever they got, \$40 or \$50 per board meeting. That's what they were interested in. They were not necessarily bank orientated individuals.

To start off with, the people of the State of Delaware never understood the seriousness of the Farmers Bank fiasco. People thought the Farmers Bank and the State of Delaware were like state agencies. The State of Delaware was the largest single stockholder in the Farmers Bank.(5M27) I don't think even until this day that the people of the State of Delaware realized the magnitude of what would happen if that bank had closed. The Delaware law required that the repository of state funds and in most cases school districts and even municipalities, even county governments, used the state Farmers Bank as a depository for their funds. When they started getting in serious financial difficulty, the law still required that bank to be the depository. If I had violated the law and (elected) to pull all of our funds out of the Farmers Bank at that point in time and deposit elsewhere, I would have caused a run on that bank that

would have absolutely collapsed it. Soon as you saw the State of Delaware taking the money out of the Farmers Bank, and you had money there, the natural thing for you to do is go draw it out, if you could get it out.(5M27/28)

The Deposits Were Not Collateralized

Skip Webb adds another element to the puzzle:

Deposits were not collateralized, by law. That was something that at some time in the dim past, the lobbyists for the bank got through the legislature, which meant that they got to use the state deposits. If you go back to 1890 or 1930, the state deposits weren't a lot of money, but when you get up into the '70s, and you've got all the federal funds flowing in from Washington, you've got the state funds now generating three or four hundred million dollars a year. They didn't pay any interest, see. They said, we'll do the bank transactions at no charge.(5M28)

The state did try to get more interest on state deposits over and above what the bank was paying, said Webb.

Now in the beginning, early on in our administration before this problem came up, you went to them and said it's not fair, you've got to start paying some interest. I mean that was a place where we found a little money. And they started paying, like a million, million and a half a year, I mean some reasonable amount, rather than just having this, maybe fifty million dollars a day, that they could just put out in overnights and not give us a dime.(5M28)

John Poplos of Wilmington remembers that day in January, 1976, when he, as vice president and investment officer of the Farmers Bank, and others were suddenly briefed by President A. Edwards Danforth of a crisis in the bank. A week later at the board

meeting it was announced publicly that the bank's capital had "gone negative." He explains:

We knew it was serious because when capital goes negative, then there is nothing to back up the bank deposits. It's that ownership of the company that is its net worth, and when it goes negative, it's net loss. And if you were to liquidate the bank based upon the values in the books, at the time, you would come up (with) a red number; you couldn't get enough to pay the stockholders anything.(12M1-3)

Once the news was out, Poplos said things really began to happen:

The bank had to report the problems to the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation). That's an absolute because they're the insurance agency that was insuring our deposits. And you inform the state because they're major stockholder and major depositor. Then the state also has a department that examines banks and they do it jointly with FDIC.

We lost over half of our staff. We had to do that to save money. We couldn't pay them. We cut back; went from over 900 full time employees down to just over 400.(12M21-14)

Richard Carter, administrative aide to the State Senate, remembers the latter well:

I was on a Rotary group study exchange and we had two members, two employees of the Farmers Bank with us including one of the vice presidents, and both of them lost their jobs while we were in New Zealand.(18M22)

Farmers Banks assets totaled somewhere between \$600-700 million and the state's about \$120 million yet the FDIC insured each account, including Delaware's, only up to \$40,000! Once the

gravity of the situation was realized, it sent shock waves all across the state and beyond. To the little stockholder in Roxana, Milford, or Claymont, the result was electrifying. Ruth Ann Minner tells of what effect it was having locally and in the governor's office:

We did have a lot of folks who called and said, "My life savings are in that bank. Don't let it go down!" and would call you every other day to see where we were. They had worked all of their lives and everything they had was in that bank. There were businesses that would have gone under; people would have been out of work. There were individuals who had everything they owned in the bank who would have been just flat broke.(17M27/28)

It was the same kind of effect that the Peterson thing (Black Monday) had. It was like everything's going well, everything's going well and then, bang, it's wrong.(17M29)

Frank Biondi describes the major banking industry in the state at that time:

Kent, Sussex (and) lower New Castle people had a lot of money in that bank. People depended on (it). The Wilmington Trust Company 25 years ago was not a community bank. The Delaware Trust Company was as elite as it could be and Bank of Delaware wasn't that big. Farmers Bank was an important financial institution to people in the state, particularly people from below the canal. I mean, it was a state institution in more ways, not just owned.(19M41/42)

Poplos well remembers the next meeting of Farmers Bank stockholders:

The first contact that we had with the stockholders was in April. (There was) a lot of anticipation about that meeting on my part because I knew that the stockholders were going to be angry. I remember Bert Carvel got up and gave a real tongue-lashing to the bank. He did. He was blaming greed. That's how the bank got into

trouble. I mean, he just gave this very, very tongue-lashing type speech at the stockholder's meeting.(12M38)

Tribbitt described that first visit to the FDIC:

The first time we went over there to the FDIC it was Skip, Bob Reed, myself and Mary Jornlin (State Treasurer). (We went into) a great big room, great big oval table and here we are, five or six of us, looked like down homers. Here come about 15 people walking in, all carrying about two brief-cases and we're sitting there scared to death. We went back a second time; it was a different ball game but that first time we came away from there we didn't look too good.(5M31)

Senator Richard Cordrey, longest serving President Pro Tem in Delaware history, adds his point of view to the story:

I don't think it could have been handled any better than what Sherman Tribbitt handled it.(18M25) Sherman was in Washington one to two days a week, and the rest of the time he was here he was working to go to Washington. That took his total time I would say during that period.(18M26)

John Poplos adds:

The FDIC will not come in and save a bank for the stockholders. Their concerns are the depositors. The stockholders are like a residual. They benefited from the FDIC and the state coming in. Many times when they go into a bank they close it or they try to find a buyer. The stockholder may get nothing many times. We saw that a lot with the savings and loan industry.(12M30)

Bank consultants were brought in and Governor Tribbitt appointed a committee headed by Fred Krapf to oversee the negotiations, and Farmers Bank was given top priority on the

governor's agenda. Nothing else was more important at this point than saving Farmers Bank. In the meantime, in addition to having to negotiate with Farmers Bank and FDIC, Tribbitt had to fend off some legislators who saw an opportunity to feather their own nests. Ruth Ann Minner tells how she saw it:

There were individual members of the General Assembly who wanted to tie something that they wanted along with the proposal and you'd go to Washington and those people would say, "Absolutely not! You can't do that." We'd come back and the governor would say to the caucus, "Well, I asked them and they said No." And they'd say, "Oh yeah, just because you didn't want to do it you got them to say no." And so he finally said to them, "Look, why don't I bring those people here so you can talk to them." Well, at one point they did and what they were telling us was even worse than what Sherman was telling us. So then, everybody was saying, "You (didn't) tell us how bad things really (were)." He said, "I told you and told you but you (didn't) listen."

The group out of Washington said, "This is what you've got to do. Either this or nothing. It's going to go down." And everybody kept saying, "Well, we don't have to do what they tell us we have to do in Washington. We know what we're doing. This is Delaware's Farmers Bank." Finally, there were some compromises and we did get some of that done the way we wanted it but it was a fact that the bank would have gone down.(17M31)

Tribbitt explains how the bank situation turned into a nightmare and how it hounded him:

If you ever saw the movie "Patton," well, in that movie there was a group of press (people) and whatnot in his bedroom and on the nightstand was a Bible. And somebody said to General Patton, "General, do you have time to read that Bible?" He said, "every God damn day." Well, that was our case. Keep that bank open one God damn more day. It was just keep it open another day.(5M30)

Skip Webb relates a phone call during this period that couldn't have come at a worse time:

Now the worst day in my whole life during the four years happened over this thing. Right in the middle of this I get a telephone call one morning from the guy who is the county executive in Sussex County and he says, "I got a two million CD that's expiring in the Farmers Bank at the end of the week on Friday." This was on Monday. He says, "Should I roll that thing over?" And I said to myself I don't care what I say I can go to the slammer, but there was only one thing you could say. "Yes, of course, roll it over, everything's okay." I mean even though you knew that we were one inch away from the whole thing (collapsing), but if I had said no...(5M34/35)

One prominent citizen of Wilmington whose son later became a judge wrote Tribbitt a sizzling letter blaming him for the Farmers Bank mess:

He wrote me a terrible letter blaming the whole thing on me. The governor had nothing to do with the operation of the bank. Those nine directors representing the state's share were the only connection between the bank (and the state) and they were put on there by the General Assembly by just a resolution that the governor wasn't required to concur in. He wrote me a scorching letter. Now here's an educated man blaming me (for) the downfall of the bank and how much he had lost and in the end he made out like a bandit. That's an example of an educated man in government not realizing anything.(5M32)

Finally, on May 20 Sherman Tribbitt signed an agreement with FDIC. It was a complicated agreement that began to restore capital to the bank through preferred stock purchases, bond sales, belt tightening and the state's leaving deposits in the bank without

accruing interest. The idea was to build up the bank's position in order to attract a buyer. It was eventually bought by Girard Trust of Philadelphia. The massive state account heretofore kept in Farmers, by law, was disbursed. Accounts were let out to other banks on competitive bids. The Farmers Bank of the State of Delaware, in operation since 1807, would never be the same. John Bryson relates how even after Tribbitt had saved the bank, some people couldn't fathom what he had done:

That was the damndest thing on Farmers Bank. People did not understand even when Sherman ran again. I had a highway engineer tell me, he said, "I could support Tribbitt if he hadn't saved Farmers Bank." I said, "What?" He said if he hadn't saved Farmers Bank. I said, "And you're an engineer. You don't know that the legislature many years ago put the state's money in Farmers Bank. Had the Farmers Bank gone belly up the state (would) too. You didn't know he saved your damn paycheck and your job while he was saving Farmers Bank, your whole future?" "No!" Well, when you have an engineer with the highway department (who) doesn't understand, no wonder people on the street didn't. Now that was appalling to me to find a guy that with that kind of education didn't know any more about his state than that. Yeah, he just thought, why in the hell did he save Farmers Bank when there's all these other banks? He didn't realize that (it) was Delaware he was saving.(11M35)

Minner commiserates:

It would not have mattered who was governor or who was serving in the General Assembly. When that happened whoever had to deal with it, had to deal with it.(17M27)

Skip Webb analyzed it this way:

It was really bad real estate loans. Nobody embezzled money. Nobody did anything that was, near as I could tell, particularly

illegal. They just made real estate loans, a lot of them having to do with resorts down in Sussex county.(5M29)

Senator Nancy Cook, chair of the Joint Finance Committee, associated with state money matters since coming to the General Assembly in 1974, talks about the gravity of that crisis:

The Farmers Bank to me still stands out as the most serious problem we have ever had.(18M26)

Ned Davis saw Tribbitt's involvement as critical in the Farmers Bank situation.

Sherman (went) right to work to save that thing. Of course, (he) had a great deal of help out of Washington, the banking people there. I forget the initials. But, in any event (he) hired some very fine professional people from around the country to work with the legislature and the feds to put that bank back in order and saved Delaware not just an embarrassment but literally loss of revenues that probably would have set us back a couple of decades. We probably wouldn't be enjoying the economic picture we are enjoying today if that hadn't transpired.(2P3)

Frank Biondi offers his assessment as to why Farmers Bank ran into trouble:

There was a crew running the bank who were in effect trying to convert it from the local community bank to a bank that was financing economical development in other states. It was trying to become a big credit card operator. The executives who were in control were trying to change the character of the bank. They tried to grow too fast and got themselves into speculative and unprofitable lines of business.

They wound up with a lot of bad real estate loans out of state. They wound up with a lot of uncollectable loans, credit card loans.

The bank had its problems and it was working in a difficult economy. You might say it was too aggressive with respect to growth and it probably was not adequately capitalized for what they were trying to do.(19M42)

The Farmers Bank Solved; Other Problems Arose

Before Governor Tribbitt could really start enjoying Delaware's Bicentennial, two other developments occurred that continued to complicate his last year in office. New Castle County Executive Melvin Slawik was convicted of perjury and wouldn't resign. It was left to Tribbitt, per the Delaware Constitution, to relieve his fellow Democrat from office on March 11 with Slawik still maintaining his innocence. The other problem, a prison break, will be described shortly.

The Bicentennial Celebration

One of the highlights of the state's bicentennial celebration was Separation Day on June 15 in Old New Castle when the legislature held a mock session with the governor in attendance. Despite the very hot and humid weather, practically all involved wore 18th Century costumes.

I was very fortunate to be the Bicentennial Governor. I enjoyed every minute of it and I participated as much, if not more, than I had time for in a lot instances. I appeared throughout the state, very much involved in the reenactment of Caesar Rodney's ride from Dover to Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Jerry (Gerald) Pepper who was one of my security officers, (who) was quite a horseman (and) was to have made that ride originally, had a heart attack very close to when that ride was to be and Jerry wasn't able to do it. I selected Wally David to do that. I met here at The Green and followed all the way from there to Philadelphia.



A campaign party for Sherman Tribbitt.

The Southern Governors' Conference was in Williamsburg that year. It wasn't specifically in honor of the State of Delaware. It was a very enjoyable event. I enjoyed it most here in the State of Delaware really where the people were more conscious of Delaware's Bicentenary and the fact that little old Delaware is "The First State." That meant more in Delaware than it did to people in other states who were also part of the original 13.

Bill Frank (William P., long time *News Journal* reporter), came out with a hardback book on Caesar Rodney. I joined with him on the book signing up at Clayton Hall.(6M10/12)

Could Tribbitt Win a Second Term?

It was a fait accompli that Congressman Pierre S. du Pont IV was going to challenge Governor Tribbitt in the 1976 elections. Everyone knew this before the campaign really started. Republican Lieutenant Governor Eugene Bookhammer by rights should have been in line for his party's nomination but Tribbitt said that's not the way Republican Party bosses saw it:

I knew that it was going to be a difficult campaign, but I still think that I was well enough thought of to win again. However, my good friend Herman Brown, who was very close to Pete du Pont, told me that their polls showed that, of the prospective Republicans who might run against me in '76, Pete du Pont was the only one that could win even with all these major problems. Poor old Gene Bookhammer had served eight years as lieutenant governor and he wanted to run bad for governor in 1976 when I was up for a second term. It didn't work out that way for Gene. Du Pont was their nominee.(6M13/14)

Of the four Democratic governors up until 1976, McMullen, Carvel, Terry, and Tribbitt, none had ever succeeded himself. Carvel did, but it wasn't consecutive. Tribbitt made his announcement to run for re-election at the Jefferson-Jackson Day

dinner held at Shrine Nur Temple on State Road, New Castle, and went back to the Odessa firehouse to open his campaign.

I thought we had a chance. I knew it was going to be a tough fight.(6M15)

Skip Webb thinks du Pont did not really want to run for governor, that his eyes were set on something higher such as Senator or President of the U.S.

This represented a more serious problem for the Republicans than for us because, by and large, Pete du Pont did not want to be governor of Delaware.(10M25) So in the end the Republican party put unmerciless pressure on Pete to change his mind. Ultimately he did change his mind. My thought to the governor at that point in time (was) let's us change. Let's us run for Congress. Let him have governor because we know that he can beat us. We also know that we can beat anybody else running for Congress, but the governor didn't want to be a congressman, so that was out and he decided to run for re-election knowing that there was a very high likelihood that he would lose.(10M26)

If du Pont had been reluctant to run for governor, as Skip Webb says, he must have been convinced to do so long before the election. Du Pont was sniping at Tribbitt as early as February. It happened when Tribbitt took a rare trip out of state to Florida for Delaware Day and du Pont was quick to seize the opportunity. Ruth Ann Minner remembers:

We had a teacher walkout during that time. They didn't strike; they just didn't go to work. It was the day he left or the day after he left that they announced the teacher walkout. They didn't do it before he left. So he didn't go to Florida knowing that the teachers were going to do this. Du Pont had this little jingle on the radio "When the teachers are on strike and your kids can't go to school,



Governor Sherman Tribbitt with fellow Governors.
Top row: Sherman Tribbitt, Russell Peterson, Cale Boggs and David Buckson.
Bottom row: Pete du Pont and Elbert N. Carvel.

where's your governor? Basking away in the sun in Florida" kind of thing. It was so damaging that the governor flew down one day and came back the next. He did not stay for Delaware Day.(17M16/26)

A Prison Break Provides Campaign Grist

On the day before Tribbitt signed the agreement with FDIC to bail out the Farmers Bank, seven prisoners escaped from Smyrna prison. Though the prisoners were soon captured, the incident offered challenger Pete du Pont yet another opportunity to take advantage. Tribbitt explains:

Our correctional system's always been a problem for governors. It's a problem right today with the amount of buildings that the present governor's got to build, but here's an example. I was up to the football game at the University of Delaware for the All-Star football game, for retarded children. While I was there, there was a prison break down in Smyrna. Immediately I left the football game and went directly to Smyrna. Later on they were reincarcerated. Well, the people in the immediate area were upset because they didn't want the prison there to start with.

About two weeks after that, I appeared somewhere before a group of people with Congressman du Pont. When Pete made his remarks he said, "Well, we've got to do something about our correctional system." He said, "Under Sherman's administration it's easier to get out than it is to get into prison." Well, how do you defend yourself? I couldn't defend myself very well on that one.

Well, he wasn't governor too long before he had a break under his administration. So I wrote the governor a letter: "Dear Governor: From time to time I have difficulty agreeing with you but, during the campaign, you told the people we were jointly appearing before that it was easier to get out of the prison system, under Sherman's administration, than it is to get in. I want you to know I fully agree, Pete. It is easier to get out than it is to get in." To this day he never responded to it.(Laugh) (6M15-17)

Skip Webb recapitulates the results of that campaign.

We did close the gap to 57-43 from 64-36 by showing a linkage between Pete du Pont and people interested in off-shore drilling. That gave us one good punch on Pete's job which was one step in closing the gap. But you always need two, if not three punches, to make it a tight race and we could never put a second or third glove on Pete. So we lost 57-43 and that was that. We ran a reasonable campaign but not a great campaign by today's standards. We spent very little money on that campaign.(10M26)

We probably could've gotten more if we'd worked at it harder. One of the problems was that I was working in the administration. We didn't have the same kind of focus on the campaign in '76 that we had on the campaign in '72 because, when you're in office you know, it's different. What I should have done was taken a leave of absence from government and spent more time running the campaign. Or, we should have had a better grade campaign manager.(10M26)

On election day Sherman Tribbitt suffered one of the worst defeats in Delaware gubernatorial campaigns. du Pont won by 33,000 votes. Tribbitt lost Sussex County by 2,500 votes, won in Kent by 5,000 and lost New Castle by 35,000 votes. Democrat Representative James D. McGinnis of Dover won as lieutenant governor defeating the Republican candidate with du Pont, Andrew Foltz.

Thus ended Sherman Tribbitt's final year in office. The time spent shoring up the state's finances just might have taken time and energy away from running a better fight against du Pont.

Epilogue

On January 13, 1977, Governor Sherman Tribbitt entered the House chambers and gave his State of the State message addressing the General Assembly for the last time. There was no weeping or wailing but, per usual, a business-like presentation of what had been, where the state was headed and what should be done. There was no acrimony or sour grapes on his part upon leaving. He had been vanquished and anybody who had been in politics as long as he had knew there are winners and there are losers. That's the chance you take in public office. Meanwhile, others began to assess the difficulties he had during his tenure.

Biondi believes that:

...the happiest day(s) Sherman had as governor w(ere) the day he was sworn in and the day he left. There were some good times in between but it was a bad time.(19M39) If the Farmers Bank had happened in another administration anybody would have been in trouble with it.(19M40)

Sherman took office with a state that had the worst or maybe the second worst personal income tax in the country and nothing happened in the national economy which helped it.(19M43) And then you had this train wreck with the Farmers Bank and he began to look like a non-successful governor. The fact of the matter is that, if the economy had boomed, all those real estate loans made by the Farmers Bank would have turned out to be pretty good. They would have made a lot of money and we could have sat back and said Sherman was the governor when the Farmers Bank had the most profitable years in its history. To say that he was responsible for it is just absolutely irresponsible. The economy was not good when Sherman was in office and that was the worst thing that can happen to a governor. The budget was very sensitive to the economy.(19M42-44)

Richard Cordrey thought he was the best:

I served with six governors. And to handle the situation that he handled (Farmers Bank), I consider him as good if not better than any governor I served with.(18M26)

Ned Davis' assessment was...

I think that Delaware has been well served by most of its Governors. I don't know how I would rate Governor Tribbitt, certainly not at the top but not anywhere near the bottom. I think he did a highly credible, able, dedicated job. I have a lot of respect for him.(2P4)

Sherman did not have the opportunity to be what I would call an aggressive Governor in terms of initiating programs because, as I say, he had so many fires to put out. I think he did that very effectively and with a great ability, to recognize a problem, focus on it and get it resolved. He was an excellent fireman because there were brush fires throughout his time in office. I think he left the state certainly as well as he found it, perhaps better. What could have been a time of disaster he brought out on a level, even keel and kept the ship going smoothly. I have a great deal of admiration for him for having had the ability and talent to cope with things that lesser men might not have been able to.(2P5)

Biondi generalizes about the office of governor:

After watching all these governors, you can't have successful administration unless the times are good and you have a good economic base. If you can keep taxes steady or cut taxes you are going to be fine unless you really foul up. If you are in an environment where the economy is bad and you have to choose among a series of bad choices about where to get the money to run the government, your chances of success are not very good.(19M29/30)

Reflecting on the cards he was dealt, Tribbitt said:

When it comes to politics, you can't really (pick) your time. You've got to take it like it is. You can't say, well, I'm going to wait. Things don't look good to me. I'm going to wait four or six years. You may never ever get the opportunity again so you got to, when you think you can be elected, go with it.(6M5)

Biondi responded to Tribbitt's statement:

He was right about that. In my view he probably would have never had another shot at it. If you want to have a nightmare and say I hope so-and-so doesn't run against me, Pete was the worst possible candidate. Sherman had to run against a powerhouse.
(19M41/43)

Once In Power

In October, 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed Tribbitt a commissioner on the Delaware River Basin Commission.

The Delaware River Basin Commission has jurisdiction over the water system and its water sheds of the Delaware River from its mouth to up around Port Jarvis, New York, where the river originates. The (commission board) consisted of an individual from each of the four states (Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey) appointed by the (respective) governors. John Bryson served on there as my man when I was governor. It's a four-state compact with the federal man representing the Secretary of Interior. And they have control of all dams and water use from the area of the Delaware river. Strangely enough, several years before that, maybe ten years before I was appointed by President Carter, I introduced legislation, when I was speaker, to join the compact from the State of Delaware. I sponsored the legislation and it passed and Governor Carvel signed



Governor Tribbitt joins President Jimmy Carter and baseball's Hank Aaron.

it. So it was purely coincidence that I would become the federal member. Now I had an office in Washington and I had an office also up at West Trenton, New Jersey, where the Delaware River Basin Commission's offices are and where it houses probably 35 or 40 people working for the commission. But, like I've already said, I served roughly from October 1977 until March 18, 1981. Now as I read this letter I want you to fully understand that I accepted it as it was given to me because it's a purely political appointment. I replaced a gentleman from the State of Michigan that President Ford had appointed to this position. So you get the position by politics and you lose it by politics. I've already told some friends of mine this is the first position I ever had in my life I got fired from.

The salary of governor when I was there was \$35,000. It seemed to me this position was \$55,000 or \$60,000. (The letter) reads this way:

"The White House"
March 18, 1981

Dear Mr. Tribbitt:

This is to notify you that your appointment as the United States Commissioner for the Delaware River Basin Commission will be terminated today.

Thank you for your dedicated service and please do not construe this action in any way as a reflection upon your personality.

Sincerely,
Ronald Reagan (6M24-26)

In 1984 Sherman Tribbitt entered the Democratic primary in a bid to seek another term as governor and was defeated.



Governor Tribbitt celebrates "Return Day" 1982.
From left (in back seat): Elbert N. Carvel, Gary Hindes and Sherman Tribbitt.

I had a direct primary against Bill Quillen. I barely lost it but I did lose it. I didn't get the nomination. That was when Mike Castle ran for governor. He was elected the first time in '84.(6M26)

Skip Webb was working on another campaign at the time:

I offered to help him but I reminded him now that I was a reasonably high-priced political consultant and I don't think he wanted to spend the money and he didn't raise sufficient money. He didn't run a proper campaign. I think he could have won the primary but, whether he could have won the general, I don't know. I was working for Jim Hunt in North Carolina trying to defeat Jesse Helms and I really didn't spend much time thinking about Tribbitt and his primary.(10M27)

Frank Biondi wistfully recalls Tribbitt's attempt to get back in the governor's chair:

Tom Wolfe, you can't go home again, you know. I don't think he did much by way of organization. I don't think he did much by way of raising money. We didn't run into people who said they were working for him, who said they were raising money for him. He was sort of a lone wolf out there. There was no animus toward Sherman but most of us were very sorry to see him try to get into that race. It was one of those things where you couldn't go back again.(19M39)

On reflection, one milestone was passed during Tribbitt's Administration that very few people realized at the time because it was so subtle. It had to do with the public's accessibility to Delaware's governor. Perhaps Tribbitt was the last where a citizen could go to his office unannounced and expect to get in to see him and most times did. Sometimes, because of his accommodating demeanor, it became a real chore. Personalities in chief executives do make a difference but, more aptly perhaps, it is that state government has grown so large. That, coupled with the

transformation from commission to cabinet form, day-to-day operations of the governor's office tend toward a more business-like atmosphere rather than old-time politics. This is not to denigrate the personalities of the governors that followed him but simply to say the times, they had changed. Senator Nancy Cook of Kenton remembers:

I think one of the most difficult things that Sherman had to deal with was that he was such a grass-roots person that anybody (who) had a problem, they still wanted to talk to just him. They didn't want to talk to one of his lieutenants. They didn't want him to delegate. They wanted to tell him (their problems themselves). I remember when they first took over there were stacks of pink slips of messages coming in. They all wanted to talk to the governor.(18M29/30)

Ruth Ann Minner recalls:

I've seen people come to my desk, not announce that they're going to be there, not call for an appointment and say, "I want to see the governor." It didn't matter what meeting he was in; he would take a few minutes to walk out in the hallway to say, "I'm really sorry, I've got 20 people in my office in a meeting. I can't visit with you long, but I just want to shake your hand and say "thank you for coming." He'd do that hundreds of times every year.(17M11)

The Tribbitts sold their house in Odessa Heights several years ago and reside at 39 Hazel Road in Dover. Jeanne still doesn't drive and often Sherman is the designated driver to the hairdresser. Jeanne spends as much time as she can, particularly in the summer, at their house in Rehoboth at 11 Stockley Street. He still works a few days a week at the Diamond Group in Odessa and in his 76th year still looks, as Frank Biondi says, better than anybody else who was around in 1972. He continues to turn up visiting old friends when they're ill or in the hospital as well as attending funerals of old acquaintances.

Carole is still happily married to Philip Suchanek, often recalling that unexpected cloudburst that attended their wedding that day at the Governor's House in 1975. Jimmy and Sherman, Jr., "Tip," are both married, respectively, to the former Sharon Toomey and Mary Beth Peck. Sherman and Jeanne have three grandchildren.

Now, in his twilight years, Tribbitt recollects the tough row he had to hoe as governor. Like Job in the Bible when Satan placed one calamity after another on his shoulders, he never lost faith and derives solace in the fact that he suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and triumphed in his greatest test: the Farmers Bank. He saved it.



Sherman Tribbitt shares a few moments with President Clinton,
November 1992.

Illustrations

All photographs not otherwise identified are from Governor Sherman Tribbitt's private collection.

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