

DOVER HERITAGE TRAIL



AN
ACCOUNT
OF THE
PRINCIPAL HISTORY
OF THE TOWNE OF DOVER
FROM EARLY TYMES
ALONG TOGETHER WITH
YARNS AND
GOSSIBE

When the first settlers came to the St. Jones Creek area of Kent County around 1670, they found friendly Indians, dense forests, rich soil, and a navigable river for their small vessels. Here too they found wildlife, including rabbits, foxes, raccoons, bears, turkeys, game, and an abundance of fish in the streams.

By 1680 there were only 26 families or about 72 people listed in this area of Kent County. Such names as Hodges, Jones, Humphrey, Bedwell, Brinkloe, Morgan, Webb, Claypoole, Young, Whiteley, and Walker appeared in the early land grants and deeds. The settlers laid claims along the tidewater, sometimes in large tracts of a thousand acres or more. Many, in addition to taking legal English title to their land, confirmed their claim by bargaining with the Indians using matchcoats, powder, whiskey, or other goods. Indeed, the 200 acre plot, purchased in 1694 for the site of Dover, had been included in a larger tract called Brothers Portion, bought in 1683 from the Indian Petequoque, Chief Sachem of the Lenni Lenape Tribe.

The early Kent County settlers owed allegiance to the Duke of York, and petitioned his representative, Governor Andros, in New York for a "court to be held in St. Jones Creek" because of the difficulty in reaching "the Whorekill Court" (Lewes). The petition was received favorably, and the new county of St. Jones was formed in 1680. It was renamed Kent by William Penn on Christmas Day, 1682.

Although it was not formally laid out until 1717, Dover enjoys the distinction of having been planned by Penn in 1683, the year after his arrival in America. It is believed that he selected the name Dover because of his happy association with the ancient port city of Dover, in Kent, England. Today the modern corporate seal of the City of Dover is in part emblazoned with the arms of Dover, England.

Although one early missionary wrote in 1711 for a transfer claiming that "... it is impossible for a Stanger to Continue there (Dover) without Extreme Danger." (He was referring to various "Bugs and Mascatoes!"). Dover grew and became the chief business center for Kent County. Semi-annual fairs were authorized and held from a very early date. In 1741 an Act of Assembly provided for the establishment and regulation of a market square. A year later, a rough census, taken privately by an Episcopal clergyman, estimated the population in Kent County to be 1,005 families.

Dover resounded to the noise of saws and brickwork throughout the early part of the 1700's. It was at this time that many of the notable buildings in the county and town were originally constructed. In 1722, a court house was erected on the site of the present Old State House, and six years later the venerable Ridgely House rose to command the north side of the Green. Between 1734 and 1747, the central portion of Christ Church was built. The 1740's saw Vincent Loockerman build his home, now known as the Bradford-Loockerman House; Nicholas Ridgely build Eden Hill Farm near Dover; and Samuel Dickinson, father of the "Penman of the Revolution," build the handsome plantation house now called the John Dickinson Mansion.

Succeeding years witnessed the construction of many fine homes by wealthy landowners throughout Kent County. Great Geneva, Wheel of Fortune, Wildcat Manor, Woodburn, Snowden, Belmont Hall, Aspendale, Loockerman Hall, Pleasanton Abbey, and Mordington, were erected before the end of the century. There were also numerous new smaller homes built for farmers and craftsmen of the middle income group. A few of these, too, have survived.

The friction between England and her American colonies influenced events in Dover. The tension mounted with news of the closing of the Port of Boston; in Delaware, as well as in other colonies, each new development was met with varying responses.

By June, 1776, Kent Countians were anxiously keeping abreast of developments at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Post riders and boats coming down river carried the news of the great debates centered in Philadelphia. In May, the Continental Congress had urged each colony to take over its own government suspending Crown authority. On Saturday, June 8, this step was debated in Dover by the Kent County Committee of Inspection before a large crowd. Excitement mounted. As Thomas Rodney and James Tilton related the story long afterward, a certain John Clarke was one of the few opposing the move. As he was leaving the meeting he was seized by the crowd, dragged toward the pillory, and pelted with eggs before he could be rescued by cooler-headed patriots. Clarke's supporters, aided by a Light Horse Company under Tory leadership, planned in revenge to surprise and to burn Dover. Throughout Sunday, June 9, grapevines hummed. The result was "Black Munday" when Tory units converged on Dover ready to fight, but hesitated on the outskirts upon learning that the Dover Light Infantry was armed and ready to defend the town and that the leader of the Light Cavalry had been put under house arrest. Their demand that four Whigs be turned over for hanging met stern refusal, and brought a warning from Thomas Rodney, commander of the Infantry, that they had best disperse while they had the chance to do so "unmolested." Rodney, in his account of the event, recorded that they fled like "Sea Fowl from the shore," and he later composed the following poem to commemorate the defeat of the "insurrection."

A
SONG
of
1776

Black Munday was a Mighty day
For Refugees and Tories
Three hundred bravely run away
Chock full of lies and Stories
Lang do Lang Diddle
The Captain of the brave Light Horse
Began the insurrection
His Videts flew on every course
To spread the wide infection.
Lang do Lang Diddle
Dark and Secret was their plan
To burn the Town of Dover
But e're their furious work began
They were all quite don Over
Lang do Lang Diddle
Tidings came about Midnight
The Town would be invaded
And the Infantry 'er Morning light
Like Lyons all Paraded
Lang do Lang Diddle
They placed bright Guards around the Town
Determined to Defend it
And bare bold insurrection down
And to the Devil Send it.
Lang do Lang Diddle
For Sattin first the standard reard
Of Impious Insurrection
And to him Each Evil Mind repaired
Who caught the foul infection
Lang do Lang Diddle
He was Ever deemed thence
The Prince of proud Rebell'on
And all Insurgents hurried Since
With all their crimes to Hellon
Lang do Lang Diddle
Tidings came they were undone
Their Captain was arrested
Their Impious plans were all made known
And all their Crimes detested
Lang do Lang Diddle

Action in the events surrounding the Declaration of Independence and the Revolution was generally centered in other states, but it was from Dover that Caesar Rodney, one of Delaware's foremost patriots and heroes, was called to cast his vote for Independence and assure the state's adoption of that document. His adventurous and inspiring gallop to Philadelphia has placed him in the annals of American History, and earned him the love and respect of succeeding generations of Delawareans.

It was from Kent County that the famous Delaware Battalion marched to join Washington's main army and win the timeless respect of all American warriors and the nickname, Blue Hens Chickens. This epithet refers to the spirited fighting cocks that Delaware men carried with them to the war. The bird has since been honored by its adoption as the State Bird.

The post-war years were ones of political change, and because Dover was the state capital, its residents were involved in the founding of the nation. The most important single event which occurred in Dover was the ratification of the Federal Constitution on December 7, 1787. Delaware was the first state to ratify the new document, thus earning her the nickname First State.

During these years, Dover continued to thrive. In 1785 it had an estimated population of 600, and according to one observer had "a lively appearance," considerable trade with Philadelphia, and about 100 houses, "principally of brick."

The tumultuous times in the new Republic, as the young United States was buffeted by the effects of a major European conflict, had their reverberations in Dover. Henry M. Ridgely, a Dover resident and United States Representative, joined his fellow Federalists in voting "No" to a Declaration of War in 1812. During the war, a British Squadron blockaded the Delaware Bay, cruised menacingly off the coast, and succeeded in bombarding the pilot town of Lewes, Delaware. Much to its credit, however, the town stoutly defended itself, and escaped with "1 chicken killed, 1 pig wounded!"

Dover was incorporated in 1829. It has remained one of the smaller state capitals. During the period 1830-1860, Dover prospered; the railroad arrived in 1856. The crops and provisions of the Kent County fields were shipped by train to Wilmington and Philadelphia. With the advent of the railroad, old river packets and river towns began their decline.

Thirty years of relative peace was broken by the Mexican War in 1846, and by the gathering clouds of social reform centering around the slavery question. Doverites were divided on this issue, as was the nation. Every shade of opinion was reflected. Free Negroes were kidnapped from the vicinity for sale in the South, and Southern fugitives found protection and help here on their road to freedom in the North. Some of the historic homes in and near Dover were reputedly stops on the Underground Railroad. Some of Delaware's prominent families were involved in helping runaway slaves escape to the north. The Mifflin house near Camden, the homes of the Hunns near Lebanon, and Woodburn, now the Governor's House in Dover, reputedly figured in many daring and adventurous episodes from this troubled time. It was in these pre-Civil War days that the infamous Patty Cannon and her band engaged in kidnap and murder to obtain slaves for Southern markets. A favorite legend, used in *The Entailed Hat*, by George Alfred Townsend, tells of a raid upon a group of free Negroes gathered at Woodburn for a servant's party.

Harriet Tubman, the famous Black patriot, made her way through Dover several times shepherding escaped slaves to the North. Her heroic exploits and impassioned belief in freedom earned her the title "Moses of her people."

Every possible attitude toward the Civil War had adherents in Delaware, although outright secessionists were rare. Among the overwhelming majority loyal to the Union, there were passionate patriots, others who criticized the Administration but accepted the war itself as necessary, and still others unwilling to force the South to remain. Governor Burton, a peace-loving elderly man, teetered between the latter two positions, to the despair and fury of more ardent partisans. Among the State's militia companies were a few suspected of disloyalty. Twice Federal troops came into the State to disarm such units, once late in 1861 and again in March, 1862. On this second "invasion," two companies of Colonel James Wallace's Maryland Home Guards appeared in Dover, blocked exits from the capital and, when arms were not promptly surrendered, forced an entrance into the State House. There, they were quartered for several days. One of the Marylanders, Lt. J. E. Rastell, left an interesting account of the incident. When the troops prepared to leave, taking five suspects from the immediate vicinity, a

hostile crowd gathered, apparently intending to rescue the prisoners, but fixed bayonets prevented open violence as the party marched to the railroad station. On two other occasions Federal troops entered Delaware for a few days, each time to act as guards at the polls in the elections of 1862 and 1864. This touched off intense protest, and was one element that helped embitter Delaware politics for a generation.

Dover continued to thrive in the post-Civil War era. The Dover Gas Works Company expanded and provided more of the elaborate street lights used until the advent of electricity. A building spree added the Post Office, the Roman Catholic Church on Bradford Street, and the new Kent County Court House. In 1874, the Wilmington Conference Academy (Wesley College) rose to four stories between State Street and Governor's Avenue.

The recession of 1873 caused hardship in the county, but by 1882 the economy was on its feet. A Public School on New Street was erected, and the Hotel Richardson, for many years the finest on the Peninsula, graced the triangle between State Street and Kings Highway at City Plaza. Around this time, the Richardson and Robbins meat processing plant moved to its present location, and the Robbins Hose Company, Dover's volunteer fire department, was organized. The first fire of record, a dwelling house, occurred January 28, 1883. In that same year, a fire house was built for the hose carriages "The Robbins" and the "Dover."

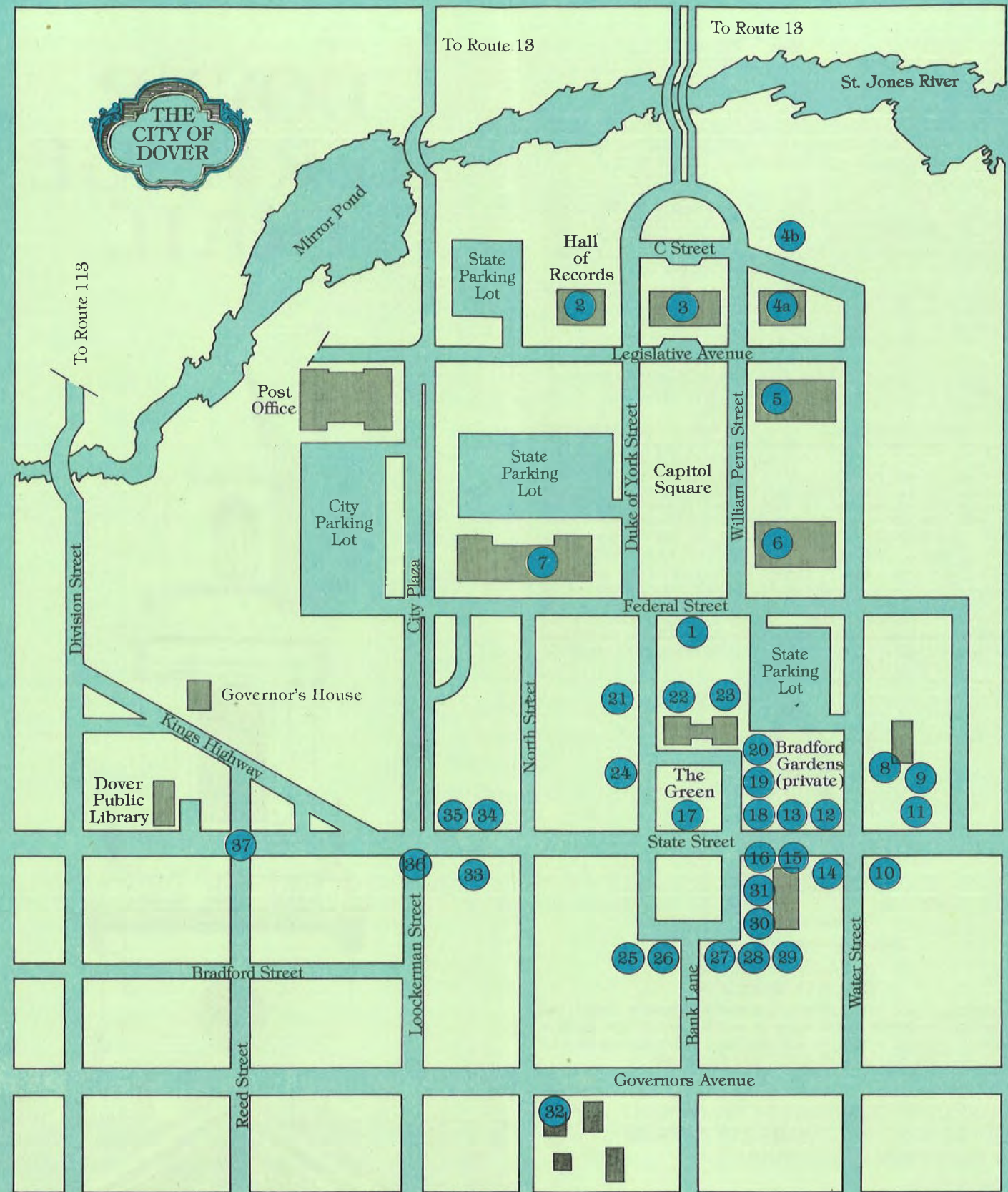
The nineteenth century closed in a blaze of glory. On New Year's Eve, 1899, fourteen stores on busy Loockerman Street, and 41 arc lights on the streets of Dover flashed on in a wondrous display of electric light. Dover entered the twentieth century in illuminated brilliance.

Caesar Rodney might be Dover's "Favorite Son," but Annie Jump Cannon is probably its "Favorite Daughter." A graduate of Wilmington Conference Academy, Annie Cannon went on to Wellesley. She was the first woman to receive an honorary degree from Oxford University, the second person elected honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society of Great Britain, and the first woman ever elected to be an officer of the American Astronomical Society.

From 1897 until shortly before her death, she was a distinguished member of the Harvard Observatory staff. Her work in the spectral classification of stars filled 10 quarto volumes, including 9 volumes of the "Henry Draper Catalogue." Her "extension to the Henry Draper Catalogue" included over 400,000 stellar bodies. Annie Jump Cannon watched the heavens; as a small child in Dover she took delight in the rainbow. Later, on the roof of her father's home on State Street she scrutinized the star-lit skies. She organized her first observatory in the attic of that house. She is buried in a modest grave in Dover's Lakeside Cemetery.

In 1933 Capitol Square was laid out, and Legislative Hall became the home of Delaware's General Assembly. The creation of the capitol complex, along with the expansion of City Plaza, has given Dover a spacious air, in keeping with William Penn's original vision of his county seat in Kent.

Broad, tree-lined avenues, shady side streets, expansive greens, and the meandering St. Jones River parks, lend a natural setting to Dover's Georgian and Victorian architecture. Park your car on Capitol Square and trace the friendly steps of Dover's Heritage Trail.



The Visitor Center in the State House Annex (1), is open from 10-5, Tuesday through Saturday, and 1-5, Sunday. Here can be found information on Dover sites, as well as others in the state. It is here that tours for the State House begin.

The Hall of Records (2), the home of the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, is the repository of preserved documents relating to the history of Delaware. Ask to see the Royal Charter, granted by Charles II to James, Duke of York, for the Delaware territory, and a series of three deeds and leases transferring this area to William Penn. In addition, don't miss William Penn's order for laying out Dover (1683) and the order for the new Kent County Court house (1691).

Legislative Hall (3), the home of the General Assembly of Delaware and the first Georgian-revival capitol in America, contains the offices of the Governor. Stroll through the halls, look into the two Assembly chambers, visit the Governor's Reception Area, and examine the portraits of Delaware governors and heroes of World War II. The exterior is of handmade brick; the interior is embellished with exquisite woodwork and other detailing characteristic of fine eighteenth-century buildings. It was opened January 3, 1933 and enlarged in 1970.

Capitol Square is surrounded by other State Office Buildings. The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's buildings (4a and 4b), the Colonel John Hasler Armory (5), the Department of Health and Social Services headquarters (6), and the Townsend Building (7) all lend to the colonial charm of Capitol Square and function as modern office installations.



Christ Church (8), an eighteenth-century church set in a grove of old trees, is a fitting site for the memorial to Delaware's colonial patriot and Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Caesar Rodney, whose remains were moved here in the early part of this century. The monument pays homage to a man who was also instrumental in founding the state government, in fighting the War of Independence, and in welding the basis of our modern democracy—Liberty and Independence. The church congregation dates from 1703 and the building was constructed between 1734 and 1747. It was enlarged in 1859, 1887, and 1916. In the yard are many early tombs, including the oldest, that of Captain Thomas Benson, 1748, many of the Ridgely family memorials, and the grave of former Governor Charles L. Terry, Jr. (1970).

Christ Church Parish House (9) was built in this century in the Georgian style, and houses a Bible presented to the church by Benjamin Wynkoop, Esquire, a merchant of colonial Philadelphia. It is on display in the church on Old Dover Days as is the 1766 silver communion service which has been restored to its original appearance.

Christ Church Rectory (10) at 502 South State Street was built around 1770 by James Belach, a Dover shop joiner. Since 1879 it has been the property of the parish and has been used as the residence of the rector of Christ Church.

The Old Academy of the John Banning House (11) is a private residence built by John Banning around 1766. As Treasurer of the Delaware State, he is said to have paid many returning Delaware veterans out of his own pocket from the porch of his house. During the nineteenth century, this house was the Dover Academy, a private school, and also, after 1832, a public school.

Travelling up South State Street, you will notice many eighteenth-century brick houses, including the Bradford-Loockerman House, which shares a party wall with the Eagle Tavern. Across the street the LeFevre or Richard Bassett House, the King Dougall House and Store House, and the McDowell-Collins Store House deserve your attention. All of the above,

except the McDowell-Collins Store House, are private, but are open annually on Old Dover Days.

The Bradford-Loockerman House (12) was built after 1747 by Vincent Loockerman, Sr., a local Dover merchant, whose descendants have owned the house to the present. A beautiful garden is adjacent to the house. The Georgian in detail; while the frame wing is nineteenth century. **The Eagle Tavern (13)**, once a part of the Bell Family Tavern complex to the north, was built before 1791 by John Bell II. Bell's son-in-law, John Freeman, the first Dover postmaster, ran the Eagle Tavern here in the late eighteenth century.

The LeFevre or Richard Bassett House (14), built in the early eighteenth century, was owned by Richard Bassett, a signer of the United States Constitution and President of the Delaware State from 1791 to 1801.

The King Dougall House (15) and Store House are typical of the house-and-store brick structures which once lined State Street. King Dougall used the larger portion as his home and the smaller wing to the north as his store during the eighteenth century. A part of the property was a tavern called The Sign of the Bleu Anchor which was sold in 1724 to Nicholas Nixon, a tavern keeper.

The McDowell-Collins Store House (16) is an early nineteenth-century frame structure built while Wesley McDowell, a Dover merchant, owned the property between 1828 and 1861. In the late nineteenth century Robert Collins ran a store here. It is to this period that the building was renovated by Dover Heritage Trail, Inc., a local, non-profit tour and preservation society, and the Dover Bicentennial Committee.

The Green (17) was first laid out in 1717 to the south of its present location in accordance with William Penn's orders of 1683. By 1723 it had been moved north to its present location. The true center of life in a county seat and state capital, it was the site of early fairs and markets, and today hosts political rallies, public events, and the festivities of Old Dover Days in May. It was on the Green in 1776 that Delaware's Continental Regiment was mustered for service in the Revolution, and from here they marched to the main corps of Washington's Continental Army. In 1776 the Declaration of Independence was read to the public, sparking a celebration which witnessed the public burning of King George III's portrait. On January 23, 1800, John Vining delivered a eulogium on the death of George Washington. It was near here, in the jail yard, that the infamous "Red Hanab", or Delaware whipping post, was located. The Green was not landscaped until the mid-nineteenth century.



The Kent County Court House (18) was erected in 1874 on the site of an earlier Kent County Court House. For over a century, the site was occupied by a tavern under a long series of owners. During the eighteenth century, the Bell family ran the tavern complex under the names of the Sign of the King George, the Sign of General Washington, and Liberty Hall. John Bell II is said to have had his sign, a portrait of King George III, painted out and replaced during the Revolution with likeness of Washington. The legend relates that in later years the old name and portrait of the King began to show through and overlap the new and thus George Washington and old King George shared the same sign, and gave Doverites quite a chuckle.

The John Bell Office, is the earliest frame structure on the Green and was a shop in the Bell Tavern complex during the eighteenth century. It is also known as the **Old Post Office (19)** because a nineteenth-century post office was reputedly located here. Throughout its long history, it has served as various shops and offices.

The Dr. James Sykes House or the Sykes Building (20) houses the offices of Attorney General of Delaware. It was built between 1812 and 1815 by Sykes, a noted surgeon, and enlarged in the 1850's by Mary S. Reed, mother-in-law of John A. Nicholson. It was also the home of many noted Dover lawyers, including Chief Justice Thomas Clayton, Judge George Fisher, Nathaniel Smithers, Robert Frame, Chancellor John R. Nicholson, and James M. Satterfield.

The Old County Building (21) which originally stood to the north of the State House fronting the Green, was designed by the architect Alonso Reynolds and was built in 1858. It was moved to its present location facing Court Street in this century.

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Presbyterian Church, located on Meeting House Square, one of the original squares in Dover. Distinctive features of the church are the circular stair to the gallery and belfry, a corner alcove furnished with original pews, a memorial tablet to the first minister, the Reverend John Miller, communion silver, and two original tin sconces. In this building and the second, there are exhibits on Delaware's Indians, natural resources, industry, agriculture, commerce, and transportation. There are also displays of early Delaware life as shown by period furniture, silver, woodworking tools, costumes, and volunteer firemen's exhibits. The Eldridge Reeves Johnson Building or Building Four, contains records, recording equipment, and memorabilia of Mr. Johnson and the Victor Talking Machine Company of which he was the founder and president. Among the notable Delawareans buried in the churchyard are John M. Clayton, Thomas Clayton, the Reverend John Miller, and Colonel John Haslet.

The Governor's House (c. 1790) (Kings Highway, Dover)—this home is an excellent example of middle Georgian architecture. A pretentious structure, it features a wide entrance hall with adjoining reception rooms. Its interior carving, in the Chippendale manner, is among the best in Delaware, and the house is furnished in fine, period antiques. The home of Delaware's Chief Executive is open on Thursday afternoons from 2:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Included in the tour are the upstairs living quarters of the Governor and his family, and highlights of the visit include many objects of "Delawareana"—artifacts and antiques reminiscent of Delaware history. The home, known for years as "Woodburn," was according to tradition, a stop on the famed Underground Railroad in the pre-Civil War era.



The John Dickinson Mansion—(South on U.S. Rt. 113, to Rt. 68 and Kitts Hummock). This structure is a fine example of Delaware plantation architecture, and was built by Samuel Dickinson, around 1740. It was the boyhood home of John Dickinson, the "Penman of the Revolution," and the author of the Articles of Confederation. He was President of the Delaware State in 1781 and 1782, and was prominent in Delaware's delegation at the Constitutional Convention. The house and out-buildings are open to the public Tuesday-Saturdays, 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Sundays 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.; closed on Mondays and holidays. There is no admission charge.

Barratt's Chapel—(near Frederica, Rt. 113) Here, in November, 1784, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury first met, communion was first administered in America according to Methodist rites by authorized Methodist ministers, and preliminary plans were made for the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. This chapel, long a focus of pilgrimage for Methodists from all over the country as the "Cradle of Methodism," now has an added museum and reception area. Open Tuesday through Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Sundays 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. There are Sunday evening services in summer at 7:30 p.m.



The Allee House (Bombay Hook Wildlife Refuge, off Delaware Rt. 9)—this is a Queen Anne style house built by the Huguenot Allee Family, c. 1753. It features interesting brickwork, old pine floors and antique furnishings. Open 2:00-5:00 p.m., Saturday-Sunday—Admission free.

Duck Creek Village (one and a half miles north of Smyrna on Duck Creek)—the settlement at Duck Creek occurred about 1700, and a survivor of the original village is "The Lindens"—erected as a miller's house before 1765. Adjacent to this Dutch gabled dwelling is The Plank House, a log cabin moved to its position by the Duck Creek Historical Society. The Quaker Cemetery is used by genealogists for research back to 1750. Duck Creek Village is open to the public every day 9:00-5:00 p.m. Admission is free.



Camden Friends Meeting House (Camden, Delaware, 3 miles south of Dover on Rt. 13)—The Camden Meeting was organized in 1795 and the House built in 1805 on land given by Jonathan Hunn. Tradition states that either this Jonathan or a later namesake lost his large landholdings at sheriff's sale because of his activity in the Underground Railroad. Camden, a Quaker center, figured in many episodes from the pre-Civil War era.

Octagonal School House—Located on Route 9, 1.5 miles north of Little Creek. Built in 1836, this unique one room school has been restored to its original appearance with an exhibit of textbooks published from 1800 to 1920's. Open Saturday and Sunday, 1-4 p.m. and by appointment.

To return to the Visitor Center, retrace your steps or follow North Street eastward to the Townsend Building and then go southward. On the way see the John Bullen House, Wesley United Methodist Church, and the former parsonage just to the north on South State Street.

The John Bullen House (33), 214 South State Street, is a rare, documented example of the work of Dover master builder, John Bullen. It was built between 1775 and 1781. **Wesley Church** (34) was built in 1850 and is a two-story, Gothic-revival, brick structure. The tombstone of Richard Whatcoat, third Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has been framed and hung near the front entrance. **The former parsonage of Wesley Church** (35), or the front portion of the house at the corner of South State Street and the Plaza, was built in 1856 and was furnished through the efforts of the ladies of the church. Today, it is a law office and private residence.

Loockerman Street (36) is noteworthy because of the numerous nineteenth-century commercial structures still standing and being used by merchants today. To the north, on **South State and South Bradford streets** (37), is the Victorian part of Dover, originally laid out in the 1850's by the Reverend Thomas Bradford as a planned community. The tree-lined streets have numerous well-proportioned examples of the various styles of architecture which encompass the term Victorian.



Delaware State Visitors Service
630 State College Rd.
Dover, Delaware 19901

No person or group shall be excluded from participation, denied any benefits, or subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any facility or attraction listed in this publication in full compliance with Title VI, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

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