



**GOLDEN FLEECE TAVERN MARKER:** On Delaware Day, Saturday, Dec. 7, an unveiling ceremony was held for the historic marker for the location of The Golden Fleece Tavern on South State Street, near The Green in Dover. The tavern was a meeting place for early government activities. Built in the 1730s, the Golden Fleece was the location for Legislative Council meetings in 1777. In 1787, the first drafts of the Constitution were reviewed by 30 delegates at the tavern. On Dec. 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the Constitution. In 1790 the Council met there to review the Bill of Rights. Pictured are: Harriet Smith Windsor, Delaware Secretary of State, and Justice Henry Horsey, historian and present property owner. Photos by Betsy Gustafson.



**HISTORICAL DAUGHTERS:** Present for the historical marker dedication ceremony were members of the Daughters of the American Revolution Colonel Haslet Chapter from Dover. Pictured (from left) are: Emily Thompson, Ann Happoldt, Caroline Abbott, Audrey Gardner, Molly Revels and Claire Senato. After the ceremony, a reception was held at the Schwartz Center for the Arts. Guests were treated to hors d'oeuvres, pastries, beverages and Christmas music by the Dover Early Music Consortium.

DELAWARE DAY

# TOAST TO THE TAVERN



Staff photo/Jason Minto

C. Russell McCabe, outreach services administrator for the Delaware Public Archives, stands next to the historic marker for The Golden Fleece Tavern in downtown Dover. The marker's official unveiling is today.

## Marker honors Dover's 'Golden' oldie

By Heather Dunnville  
Staff writer

DOVER — It is no secret that a rich history runs through Delaware's veins.

A piece of that history in Dover will be celebrated today during Delaware Day. **If you go Page 4**

Dec. 7, 1787, was the day Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

That event took place at The Golden Fleece Tavern.

Once at the northeast corner of The Green and State Street, the Golden Fleece Tavern is receiving recognition during today's celebration.

A historic marker will be unveiled at 11 a.m. to commemorate the site's value.

"This is long overdue," said C. Russell McCabe, outreach services administrator for the Delaware Public Archives. "But this is perfect."

### Marker's text

#### The Golden Fleece Tavern Birthplace of the First State

This was the site of the Golden Fleece Tavern, scene of some of the most important and dramatic events in Delaware history. Built in the 1730s, the Golden Fleece was a center for community and government activities. It was a place of great importance during the American Revolution and the early years of our Nation's Independence. Also known as Battell's Tavern, it hosted the meetings of the Committee of Inspection and Observation, and was a vital point for the exchange of wartime communications. With the transfer of state government from New Castle to Dover in 1777, the Golden Fleece became the meeting place of the Assembly's Upper House, the Legislative Council. It was the home of that body until a State House was completed in 1791. In September 1787, a new framework for our Nation's government was sent to the states for consideration. Thirty delegates were elected to meet and review the document. The meeting was convened here on December 3. Approval was unanimous, and on December 7, 1787, Delaware became the first state to ratify the Federal Constitution. A fitting climax to its role as Delaware's "Capitol Tavern" occurred in January 1790, when the Council met to approve the Bill of Rights. The Golden Fleece was demolished circa 1830, and replaced by the Capitol Hotel. The hotel was closed in the 1920s, and renovated to its present appearance by Henry and Mabel Lloyd Ridgely.

Delaware Public Archives-2002

See Tavern — Page 4

# Tavern

Continued From Page 1

"It's 215 years to the day, and for we history types, that is big stuff."

The Golden Fleece Tavern also was the scene for other important events in Delaware history.

Built in the 1730s, the tavern also was known as Battell's Tavern.

It was a crucial place for wartime communications during the American Revolution and was the meeting center for state government for several years.

The Legislative Council also approved the Bill of Rights in January 1790 at the tavern.

James B. Jackson of Dover wrote a book about the tavern a number of years ago.

That book served as the main resource for the marker's historical information.

"He's the individual that really brought The Golden Fleece and its importance to light for Delaware historians," Mr. McCabe said.

The tavern was demolished in 1830 and replaced by the Capitol Hotel.

The hotel was closed in the 1920s and renovated by Henry and Mabel Lloyd Ridgely.

"I think this is a wonderful

use of taxpayers' dollars," Mr. McCabe said of the marker. "Because 50 years from now, that marker will still be there."

The Delaware Day activities in Dover don't stop at the marker dedication.

Before that event, there will be an awards ceremony at 10 a.m. at the Old State House on The Green. The ceremony will honor winners of a statewide visual-arts contest for fourth-graders.

Following the marker dedication, there will be an informal reception at the Schwartz Center for the Arts.

Events are open to the public.

Free horse-drawn car-

## If you go

**What:** Dedication of historic marker at the Golden Fleece Tavern

**When:** 11 a.m. today

**Where:** The Green, Dover

**Cost:** Free

riage rides through the streets of historic downtown Dover will be available from noon to 4 p.m.

They begin at Loockerman and Bradford streets.

*Heather Dunnville can be reached at 741-8233 or [hdunnville@newszap.com](mailto:hdunnville@newszap.com).*

# Delaware Day observed by students, teachers, parents

Delaware led the nation on Dec. 7, 1787 by being the first state to ratify the Constitution. Thirty deputies - 10 men elected from each Delaware county, attended the ratification convention held at the Golden Fleece Tavern (Battell's Tavern) on the Green in Dover, beginning Dec. 3, 1787. By Dec. 7, deputies had unanimously agreed to "fully, freely and entire approve of, assent to, ratify and confirm the said Constitution." One-third of the states required to approve the newly written Constitution ratified this historic document during the month of December. Pennsylvania ratified the Constitution Dec. 12, 1787, followed by New Jersey on Dec. 18, 1787.

In recognition of the 215th anniversary of the writing of the Constitution and Delaware's ratification, Secretary of State Harriet Windsor invited fourth grade students to participate in a special contest. Students were challenged to study the Constitution, define it and explain why it was written, identify the three branches of government, cite examples of responsibilities, summarize Delaware's role in the ratification process and create a four-panel display. Almost 1,000 students and 48 teachers accepted the challenge.

On Delaware Day, Dec. 7 of this year, students, teachers, principals and parents participated in an awards presentation at the State House on the Green in Dover. Certificates honoring Delaware's five signers of the Constitution - George Read, Gunning Bedford Jr., John Dickinson, Richard Bassett and Jacob Broom - were presented to award winning entries by Windsor. Awards were given to Brandywine Springs Elementary School in Wilmington. Etta J. Wilson Elementary School tied with

Southern Elementary School for the New Castle County Award, Booker T. Washington Elementary School received the award for Sussex County and The Jefferson School in Georgetown won the award for this year's private school category.

During the month of December and through Jan. 5, the public is invited to view the award-winning displays at the State House Museum on The Green in Dover. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday and from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m., Sunday. Admission is free. In addition to the award-winning displays, photographs albums contain snapshots of all student entries as well as a Delaware Day Honor Roll, listing each student's name along with their respective school.

In Sussex County, participating schools included Lewes Middle School, Frederick Douglass Intermediate School of Seaford and Long Neck Elementary School.