

Return Day Souvenir Edition

CAPE GAZETTE

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Return Day - Thursday, Nov. 5, 1998

Sussex County celebrates a biennial tradition

People have traveled to Georgetown to hear election results since 1792

By Dennis Forney
Politicians and all the people of Sussex County have been assembling for Return Day ever since Georgetown was made the county seat in 1792.

The form of the celebration, which always takes place on the Thursday following election day, in all the even years, has changed considerably over the years. The purpose of the day, however, has remained the same. The residents of the county come to their county seat to hear the election returns, to celebrate victories and to drown the sorrow of defeat. Tradition has many of the opposing candidates riding together in horse-drawn carriages and convertible automobiles in the Return Day parade, while the leaders of the two major political parties "bury the hatchet" on The Circle in Georgetown - signaling the end of the political season.

In recent years, the Return Day celebration also has become the single-most unifying event that takes place for all of Sussex County. One of the largest parades held on the Delmarva Peninsula is the centerpiece of the Return Day celebration. The parade shows off the talents of musicians in bands from the middle school to high school and college levels, and a wide variety of floats, marching units and other exhibits put on wheels.

Thousands of Sussex County residents, and Delawareans from north and south, join together in Georgetown to celebrate the conclusion of campaigning and the democratic process.

W. Emerson Wilson, a frequent contributor of historical articles to the News Journal papers in Wilm-

ington over the years, compiled a history of Return Day that was published in the official brochure for the event in 1974.

Much of the historical information that follows comes from that effort.

Return Day as it is celebrated in these times is far more ceremonial than it was in the earliest days of our nation. In 1776, Lewes was the county seat for Sussex County and elections for state and federal offices were held there in accordance with rules adopted in the state's first constitution in 1776. People from western Sussex understandably didn't cotton much to traveling a whole day across poor roads and in the unpredictable weather of early November to cast their ballots.

Georgetown, equidistant from all points in Sussex County, was created in 1791 to satisfy those complaints. A gentleman named George Mitchell was among the three men appointed to come up with a location and layout for a new county seat. Surveyor Rhodes Shankland came up with the circle concept and laid out the streets from there. Mitchell must have won when straws were drawn for the naming of the county seat. The new town was to be called Georgetown.

The county seat was closer for voting purposes for many of the county's residents. According to Wilson's history, "Voters had to drive into Georgetown to cast their ballots and it is unlikely they would return two days later for the results. Undoubtedly, the results of the election were known that night or the next day and voters would stay over to learn the results."

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Angie Moon photo
Former Georgetown Mayor W. Layton Johnson serves as Town Crier for Return Day. He is shown here standing on the balcony of the Sussex County Court House reading the results of the 1996 elections.

Schedule of events

9 a.m. to dusk - Food and craft booths on The Circle and on North Bedford Street.

9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. - Music On The Circle, hosted by Light FM's Ron Letterman of "The Road Home" program. First act: Aimee Parker, country.

9:45 a.m. - Sarah Canady, contemporary, Circle

10 a.m. - Kamika Wells, contemporary, Circle; street dance with disc jockey Sky Brady on East Market St. next to Casapulla's

10:10 a.m. - Sussex Central's Take II Drama Club performs selections from "Welcome to Shakespeare's Nightmare" and "A Midsummer's Night's Dream," Circle

10:30 a.m. - "Monotones" - first place winner madrigal selections, Circle

11 a.m. - Reception and luncheon for for candidates and honored guests, Delaware Technical and Community College; Music on Circle continues with Third U.S. Infantry (Old Guard) Fife and Drum Corps

11:30 a.m. - Delaware State Marching Band, Circle; Banjo Dusters, East Market Street

Noon - Jim and Patty Jennette, country, Circle

12:15 p.m. - Jesus Is Lord praise team, East Market Street

12:20 p.m. - Jolene Cross, country, Circle

12:30 p.m. - Marie Mercy, contemporary, Circle

12:45 p.m. - Erin Williams, contemporary, Circle

1 p.m. - Miss Delaware, Jody Kelly, flute solo, "Dueling Banjos"

1:30 p.m. - RETURN DAY PARADE, from Sussex Central High School halfway around The Circle to King Street.

3 p.m. - Ceremonies On The Circle; oratory, patriotic music and traditional burying of hatchet.

3:45 p.m. - Ox Roast on The Circle; free open bit barbecue sandwiches.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

- First Amendment to the United States Constitution

How we voted in Sussex County

Polling Locations Sussex County 1998			U. S. Representative		Attorney General	State Treasurer	Auditor of Accounts	18th District Senator	21st District Senator	35th District Representative	36th District Representative	37th District Representative	38th District Representative	39th District Representative	40th District Representative	41st District Representative	Sussex County								
Election District	Representative District		Dennis E. WILLIAMS	Michael N. CASTLE	Kim Stanley BEMIS	John T. DORSEY	M. Jane BRADY	Jack MARKELL	Janet C. RZEWNICKI	Dianne M. KEMPSKI	R. Thomas WAGNER JR.	Gary W. DOWNES	F. Gary SIMPSON	Robert L. VENABLES	J. Benjamin EWING	V. George CAREY	John R. SCHROEDER	Harry W. CRYSTAL	Shirley A. PRICE	William O. MURRAY	B. Lynn MANGENE	Tina FALLON	Clifford G. LEE	Charles P. WEST	Thelma D. MONROE
4	35	Milford Middle School	102	374	2	172	311	257	235	119	349	232	257	381	296										187
5	35	Milford Middle School	76	265	0	103	252	140	213	81	271			296	610										112
6	35	Greenwood Fire Hall	204	535	4	279	492	357	415	223	543			610	725										253
7	35	Bridgeville Fire Hall	291	624	2	358	561	486	427	310	588			725	369										341
8	35	Redden Community Hall CR 40	170	325	6	215	296	261	250	175	327			369	301										222
9	35	Higher Ed. Bldg, Delaware Tech	132	254	6	154	250	202	204	144	256			301											185
1	36	Lulu M. Ross School, Milford	219	795	7	349	683	525	517	279	754	468	575	863											394
2	36	Lulu M. Ross School, Milford	114	425	0	169	377	267	279	141	397	238	317	450											194
3	36	Slaughter Neck Comm. Action Center	160	282	0	200	240	256	186	162	272	233	206	338											217
4	36	Ellendale Fire Hall	328	717	3	420	640	532	521	324	712			806											453
5	36	Jason Building, Delaware Tech	89	272	3	143	223	168	195	95	262			286	286										158
6	36	Milton Junior High School	217	459	2	203	382	369	313	231	444			521	521										339
7	36	H. O. Brittingham School, Milton	295	724	6	407	626	570	522	326	695	478	534	744											478
1	37	Cape Henlopen High School	439	1019	7	580	886	754	722	494	930	645	787	738	739										675
2	37	Shields Elementary School, Lewes	226	621	5	336	513	452	396	271	556	402	426	441	414										381
3	37	Lewes Middle School	246	916	3	483	732	644	566	398	772	537	637	719	485										545
4	37	Lewes Fire Hall	289	722	3	397	608	534	468	362	607	493	487	541	460										506
5	37	Rehoboth Fire Hall	202	728	5	371	563	488	457	310	598			565	385										391
6	37	Reho. Elem. Sch., Stockley St. Ext.	200	771	4	384	590	483	487	280	662			518	454										379
7	37	Cape Henlopen High School	414	857	3	550	718	667	591	483	751	648	580	597	672										583
8	37	Indian River Fire Company Substation	209	498	4	275	431	380	325	271	421			401	302										357
1	38	Oak Orchard Fire Hall	518	702	1	622	581	719	486	528	587														749
2	38	Long Neck Elementary School	450	697	0	544	607	636	574	526	595														626
3	38	Lord Balt. Elem. School, Ocean View	431	1163	12	602	997	783	819	585	959														716
4	38	Bethany Beach Fire Hall	358	1136	10	501	979	806	800	576	924														625
5	38	Milville Fire Hall	342	763	6	453	650	552	529	448	617														530
6	38	Roxana Fire Hall	107	288	1	154	239	193	192	139	241														209
7	38	Selbyville Middle School	172	395	4	230	333	313	249	215	324														316
8	38	Roxana Fire Co. Sub-Station	350	653	0	417	586	507	484	404	540														461
1	39	Seaford Middle School	147	513	3	195	416	328	339	180	416														206
2	39	Blades Fire Hall	280	738	3	338	679	487	534	324	677			745											376
3	39	Seaford City Hall	95	292	1	132	257	188	203	130	248			261											168
4	39	Seaford Sr. High School	88	407	3	139	359	246	248	113	368														139
5	39	Seaford Sr. High School	156	565	2	215	512	386	346	213	497			507											241
6	39	West Seaford Elementary School	224	646	2	299	597	459	435	276	587			652											327
1	40	Sussex Tech High School	83	258	0	120	213	159	175	77	254			248											288
2	40	North Laurel Elementary School	182	541	3	256	471	356	369	232	467			576											602
3	40	Alderman's Court, Laurel	154	242	3	193	207	229	169	174	215			345											281
4	40	St. George's Community Hall	249	635	4	329	555	457	425	317	534			671											719
5	40	Laurel High School	183	429	5	265	342	324	289	207	388			501											485
6	40	Delmar Fire Hall	200	567	3	228	528	327	421	267	487			570											629
7	40	Laurel Central Middle School Fieldhse	135	515	2	213	439	281	365	157	440			498											556
1	41	Georgetown Court House	114	403	2	189	328	251	265	142	367														348
2	41	Georgetown Elementary School	168	556	2	244	484	349	377	179	543														574
3	41	Sussex Central HS, Georgetown	98	248	2	147	205	188	165	111	242			269											269
4	41	Sussex Central Middle School	299	721	8	416	593	539	469	325	646			289											758
5	41	Dagsboro Fire Hall	241	529	2	330	423	419	342	284	461														546
6	41	Frankford Fire Hall	182	277	4	216	241	265	186	210	229														346
7	41	Gumboro Fire Hall	90	296	2	128	258	194	203	130	248														331
8	41	East Millsboro Elementary School	209	666	9	310	581	438	445	257	614														633

TOTALS For SUSSEX COUNTY

10,997
28,024
174
15,071
24,085
19,979
19,150
13,183
25,001
4,394
4,806
6,132
2,682
4,008
4,520
3,911
5,166
3,398
1,143
3,028
3,560
3,765
17,818

1998 election brings lower-than-normal voter turn-out, few surprises

When the winners and losers had all finally gone home following Tuesday's election, Ken McDowell, administrator of Sussex County's Board of Elections, reflected on the lower-than-normal voter turn-out generated by this year's election.

"Out of 89,688 registered voters in Sussex, we had about 37,500 that cast votes. That's only about a 42 percent voter turn-out. That's the lowest I've ever seen. I thought we'd at least see 50 percent. Of course we have to set up for the election as if 100 percent of the voters will turn out."

"It costs Delaware a lot of money to run an election for only half of the voters," said McDowell.

As low as 42 percent is, however, that's several percentage points higher than the statewide voting percentage this year. "Here in Sussex we had four representative seats uncontested and a senate seat uncontested. That holds the vote down," said McDowell. "There was no governor's race, no president's race - maybe that has something to do with it. I don't really know."

Sussex County Republican Committee Chairman Bruce Rogers, who walked through the elections office in Georgetown earlier in the evening, said that a study of voting trends in Sussex on election day showed that a lot of those people registered as independents didn't turn out for this year's election. "I think the statewide turn-out was

about 37 percent and part of that is a result of what we heard was a very depressed city vote in Wilmington," said Rogers.

Rogers said he was especially pleased with Vance Phillips' victory in the 5th councilmanic race for Sussex County.

In the tightest race of this year's elections in Sussex, Phillips won over Charles P. "Chip" West 3,541 to 3,373. "That's really remarkable when you consider that Phillips is a Republican and there are 1,200 more registered Democrats than there are registered Republicans in that district," said Rogers.



PHILLIPS

Marlene Elliott of Laurel, who serves on the staff of Republican U.S. Sen. Bill Roth, said she was particularly pleased about Phillips' victory because he had brought so many young people into his campaign. "He had a group of young people who gave blood for him in this campaign," said Elliott. "The 20 somethings. It's great for them to see that their efforts made a difference."

Sussex County Democratic Chairman Tim Willard said he was very pleased with Shirley Price's strong showing in winning against Republican

can challenger Bill Murray. Price beat her challenger in each of the 38th representative district's eight precincts to post an unexpectedly strong 5,166 to 3,398 win.

"On the other hand," said Willard, "it's disappointing to see Chip West lose his race to Vance Phillips after he worked so hard."

Sussex County Council President Dale Dukes, who spent a good while at the election office on election night, said he thinks Phillips will be a team player as a council member. "I played softball with him many a year and he's a tough competitor," said Dukes. "I think once he sees how we go about things he'll fall in line. You don't get things done if you don't."

Dukes, a Democrat, said he will have no problem continuing to work with George Cole who defeated challenger Bob Frederick by a comfortable margin. "I've worked with George [a Republican] for 10 years. We differ on a lot of issues but we don't get mad and stay mad."

"George wants more restrictions on development, even though he's a Realtor. And Vance wants less restrictions. There will be a leveling process."

Dukes is finishing his eighth year as president of Sussex Council. With Phillips' election, Sussex Council now includes two Republicans [Cole and Phillips] and three Democrats [Dukes, Lynn Rogers and Findley Jones].

Return Day officers and directors coordinate event

The effort to produce Sussex County's unique biennial election holiday is considerable. Here is a list of Sussex County Return Day Inc. officers and directors. Officers include Rosalie B. Walls, president; Eleanor Raye Warrington, vice pres-

ident; Ann Couch, secretary; and Alan Kujala, treasurer. Directors include Sue H. Barlow, Joseph W. Booth, Richard M. Calhoun, Charlotte P. Campbell, George F. Crouch, Claire T. Croll, Terri Croll, James Dukes, Dallas Green, George

Sen. Bill Roth, former Gov. Elbert Carvel serving as Grand Marshals for 1998 Return Day Parade

Two of Delaware's most venerable political leaders - U.S. Sen. Bill Roth and former two-term Gov. Elbert N. Carvel - are serving as Grand Marshals for this year's Return Day Parade.

"Both men have made enormous contributions to Delaware and we wanted to honor them both this year," said Rosalie Walls, president of Sussex County Return Day Inc.

Carvel served as governor from 1949 to 1953 and from 1961 to 1965. Sen. Roth is in his fourth term as a U.S. senator. As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, he is now recognized as one of the most

powerful elected officials in Washington D.C.

Honorary parade marshals for the 1998 Return Day Parade include Orlando George, president of Delaware Technical and Community College; Timothy Kavel, vice president of Delaware Technical and Community College and campus director of the Owens Campus in Georgetown; and George J. Collins, who is retiring as a Sussex County councilman after serving from 1991 until 1999.

Parade judges include Delaware State Police Sergeant Lewis W. Briggs, Sussex County Tourism's executive director Cindy Small, Sussex County Emergency



CARVEL



ROTH

Register Of Wills	Sussex County Recorder of Deeds	4th District Councilman	5th District Councilman	Sussex County Sheriff
Charles J. ROGERS	Ann Margaret TANSLEY	Richard H. BELL II	Robert V. SIGLER	Robert L. REED
263	180	254	31	293
201	104	209	37	242
388	289	393	63	460
389	393	447	50	506
219	219	250	30	263
155	174	192	24	208
528	386	528	80	637
295	199	290	37	342
170	216	187	10	283
449	433	518	80	590
155	134	198	17	209
289	303	328	28	339
346	436	519	37	561
175	609	752	37	802
435	380	437	25	489
161	457	656	37	676
432	422	467	29	507
469	346	493	41	532
520	344	551	33	613
593	534	594	41	684
353	323	346	17	390
442	677	428	29	493
508	593	482	25	547
802	780	726	36	900
783	669	732	35	911
493	549	478	26	577
186	177	172	16	202
249	258	260	15	289
458	459	475	12	506
352	204	372	33	382
481	423	503	55	637
192	178	199	6	202
300	139	297	19	310
391	247	388	30	426
241	339	455	48	492
156	122	188	10	171
342	288	356	21	330
158	200	164	6	150
395	344	416	33	431
284	277	283	15	282
385	309	372	30	410
346	240	370	18	344
229	208	254	20	293
331	237	428	22	435
130	151	175	7	173
425	456	465	26	511
343	379	322	19	374
172	271	157	12	188
169	168	184	11	176
428	370	454	36	484
18,593	16,583	19,168	1,455	3,373
16,404	3,541	6,877	4,954	16,404
21,152				

History

Continued from front page
sults. Under that arrangement, the earliest Return Day would have been the day after the election. Celebrations were held informally by those who had won.

"It wasn't long though before voters complained about having to drive all the way to Georgetown to cast their ballots. Although it took more than two decades to change the system, the state's General Assembly passed laws in 1828 which set up polling places in the 13 hundreds of the county. That meant votes had to be gathered from polling places throughout the county and carried to Georgetown for tabulation, where they were turned over to the sheriff . . . and the results announced from the courthouse at noon on Thursday."

Those were the beginnings of Return Day " . . . since there were no county newspapers in those days there was no way of knowing who had won the election. So, many of the farmers decided to take the day off, load their whole families into wagons and go to Georgetown on Thursday to get the results."

Wilson's history continues:

"It would seem that Return Day as we know it now probably started with the election of 1830 or the presidential election of 1832. Certainly by the 1840s the custom was well-established. Several thousand persons would pour into Georgetown that morning coming on foot, in wagons drawn by mules, horses or oxen, in carriages of all types, and on horseback.

"While waiting for the results the crowd listened to band concerts, wagered on cock fights and engaged in other pastimes. Soon merchants saw an opportunity for gain and stalls and booths selling all kinds of food, clothing and other articles were set up.

"The results were read from the door of the courthouse at noon and were printed on a white sheet hoisted over the courthouse door. The winning candidates were placed onto the shoulders of their

adherents and paraded around The Green. A large pole was erected in The Green and the emblem of the winning party was run up it. Generally an ox roast was provided by the winners.

"However, the spirit of good feeling and reconciliation which marks the Return Day of the present was not always there in the old days. The losers quite often did not take their defeat with good grace and in one fight in 1844 a Dagsboro man was killed."

The Return Day tradition grew and grew throughout the 1800s and represented a major festival in Georgetown every other year. With the turn of the century, however, new forces came on the scene.

The automobile and telephone and radio brought people closer to the county seat and they no longer had to go to Return Day to find out who own. Interest in the old tradition began to fade. World War II was raging in 1942 and Return Day was canceled altogether.

Following the war, however, a group of Republicans and Democrats got together and made plans to bring Return Day back bigger and better than ever. While in previous years the celebration was dominated by whichever political party had been victorious in the elections, the goal of the bipartisan Return Day committee was to have a bipartisan celebration.

A "Burying of the Hatchet" ceremony was begun and continues today. The county chairpersons for the Republican and Democratic parties join together on the reviewing stand and signify a reunification of purpose, following oftentimes bitter campaigns, by burying the hatchet.

Return Day has been a festive celebration throughout the second half of this century - and has even gained national prominence as several nationally televised shows have often focused their cameras on Georgetown for this event that is unique in all the land.

This year, under the guidance of Return Day veteran organizer Rosalie Walls, hundreds of volunteers will staff Return Day activities which have been scheduled from 6:30 in the morning to dusk.



Angie Moon photos

Scenes from Return Day, 1996

These photos, clockwise from top left, show Roland Derrickson, Jack Dalton and Myrtle Shockley - chairs of the Sussex Republican, Libertarian and Democratic parties - burying the hatchet; Sussex County Return Day President Rosalie B. Walls enjoying herself in the Return Day Parade; and five Delaware governors - (l-r) Russell Peterson (partial), Elbert Carvel, Tom Carper, Mike Castle and Pete duPont - on the reviewing stand after the parade's conclusion.



The Sussex County Return Day Committee
would like to thank the hundreds of volunteers
who have helped make the 1998 Return Day

A Huge Success!