



**DEDICATION OF RESTORED ORIGINAL
SUSSEX COUNTY COURTHOUSE OF GEORGETOWN
10:00 a.m.**

National Anthem Sussex Central High School Band Ensemble
Eugene Bowne, Director

Presentation of Colors Cub Scout Pack 95, Brownie Troop
Boy Scout Troop 95, Girl Scout Troop

Invocation Rev. H. Sterling Green

Salute to the Flag Eagle Scout, Thomas P. Veasey II

Welcome and

Introduction of Dignitaries Mr. Houston Wilson, Esq.

Governor Sherman W. Tribbitt
Lt. Governor Eugene D. Bookhammer
Secretary of State Robert H. Reed
Director of the Division of Historical
and Cultural Affairs Lawrence C. Henry
Architect Robert Raley
Senator Thurman Adams, Jr.
Senator Richard S. Cordrey
Senator David H. Elliott
Representative Howard A. Clendaniel
Representative Lewis B. Harrington
Representative Harry E. Derrickson
Representative Thomas A. Temple, Sr.
Representative William J. Gordy
Representative Donald J. Lynch
President of Sussex County Council John T. Cannon, Sr.
Mayor of Georgetown W. Layton Johnson
Chairman of Return Day Committee Mrs. Jean West

Dedicatory Address and Ribbon Cutting Governor Sherman W. Tribbitt

**SUSSEX COUNTY BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE
TIME CAPSULE CEREMONY
10:30 a.m.**

Welcome Mrs. Joyce Dyer, Co-Chairman
Sussex County Bicentennial Committee

Introduction of Sussex County Bicentennial Committee Kenneth Douty,
Co-Chairman Sussex County Bicentennial Committee

Purpose and General Contents of The Time Capsule
Miss M. Catherine Downing

Sealing and Burial of Time Capsule

Our Delaware Sussex Central High School
Band Ensemble

Benediction Rev. H. Sterling Green

November 4, 1976

We who have placed this Time Capsule here today charge the people attending the Return Day Celebration in Georgetown in the year 2076 with the responsibility of opening the capsule and placing all items contained therein on display in a public place, for the citizens of Sussex County to observe and appreciate.

We do this as our Horizons Project for the celebration of the Nation's Bicentennial.

Joyce Dyer
Kenneth Douty

RETURN DAY PROGRAM

10:00 a.m. DEDICATION OF RESTORED ORIGINAL SUSSEX COUNTY COURT HOUSE OF GEORGETOWN

10:30 a.m. TIME CAPSULE CEREMONY
S. Bedford Street

10:30 a.m. CONCERT AT CIRCLE
Don Murray's "Old Time Religion" Gospel Singers

11:00 a.m. LUNCHEON FOR CANDIDATES AND HONORED GUESTS
Sussex Central High School
(Prepared By Students of Sussex Vocational Technical School under Direction of Joseph Heacock and William Gemberling)

11:30 a.m. BAND CONCERT
First United States Army Band
Fort George G. Meade, Maryland
Conductor, Warrant Officer James C. Choates
Assistant, Sergeant Richard L. Jansen

12:00 noon FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY JUMP TEAM
Fort George G. Meade, Maryland
(Performing at The Sussex County Airport)

1:00 p.m. PARADE
(Starts Promptly at 1:00 p.m.) From Sussex Central High School - Will travel East on Market Street

3:00 p.m. PROGRAM AT CIRCLE
Official Returns
Announcement by Ronald F. Dodd
PUBLIC SPEAKING
(At The Circle)
AWARDS

4:30 p.m. OLD FASHION OX ROAST
(Just off Circle on North Bedford Street)

6:00 p.m. DELAWARE STATE LOTTERY DRAWING

PROGRAM AT THE CIRCLE

National Anthem Sussex Central High School Band
Eugene Bowne, Director

Soloist Rosemary Martin

Invocation Dr. Brooks E. Reynolds

Greetings Mr. Houston Wilson, Esq.
Greetings Mrs. Jean West, President
Sussex County Return Day Committee

Welcome W. Layton Johnson
Mayor of Georgetown, Delaware

Announcement of National, State, and County Returns .. Mr. Ronald F. Dodd

Address Mr. Harvey B. Spicer

BRIEF REMARKS:

Gov. Sherman W. Tribbitt
Lt. Gov. Eugene D. Bookhammer
U.S. Senator William V. Roth, Jr.
U.S. Senator Joseph R. Biden
U.S. Representative Pierre S. duPont, IV
Former Gov. Elbert N. Carvel
Former Gov. Russell W. Peterson
Former Gov. David P. Buckson
Former Sen. J. Caleb Boggs
Former Sen. J. Allen Frear
Former Sen. John J. Williams

Introduction of County Candidates Mr. Houston Wilson, Esq.

Presentation of Awards Mrs. Charlotte Campbell
Parade Co-Chairman

Benediction The Reverend William Hitchens

1791-1976 A TIME TO REMEMBER

BY: William P. Frank

History books and historical records do not tell us when Return Day was started in Sussex County.

Back in 1791, the General Assembly granted a petition of Sussex Countians that the "seat of justice" be moved from Lewes to a more central and convenient part of the county. The General Assembly authorized a board of 10 commissioners to buy not more than 100 acres "near the center of the county at the place called 'James Pettijohn's Old Field' or within two miles of the house where Ebenezer Pettijohn now resides."

The same board of commissioners had orders from the General Assembly to build a court house, a jail, a pillory and a whipping post.

Later in 1791, the General Assembly decreed that James Pettijohn's Old Field shall be known as George-town, in honor of George Mitchell who was the chairman of the acquisition commission.

For years, Sussex Countians seemed to have the idea that Return Day was peculiar to and characteristic only of their county and its county seat. The historical fact is much more interesting and certainly more to the credit of Sussex County. The truth is that Sussex County and Georgetown have been more faithful to Delaware customs than two upper counties of New Castle and Kent. For in the early days, according to the law, all election inspectors were required to deliver their tally sheets to the court house of their respective counties on the Thursday after Election Day.

That made it an occasion for the people from far and wide to gather in their county seats to hear and learn the results. Only Sussex Countians seemed to have taken such a personal interest in their elections; and so down through the years, in good season and bad, they flocked by the thousands to the hub

of Sussex and settled in and near the court house. Of course, it wasn't always that the people were able to learn the results of the elections, particularly in the tight ones, but they all had a good time.

Return Day was usually an occasion for rivalry among the election officers - to see who could make it by horseback first to the court house. In the meantime, the air of festivity and the spirit of rustic carnivals prevailed in the vicinity of the court house square. All kinds of food - and bad liquors - were sold from booths and stalls - Delaware biscuits and hot corn pone, rabbit roasted on spits and of course fried chicken, oysters and clams, white and sweet potatoes baked in hot ashes.

The people made for Georgetown by horse and buggy, farm wagons, on horse or mule back - and later of course, by excursion trains.

The town's two hotels did a lively bar business and it must have been through the influence of their managers that eventually, a crackdown was made on the itinerant vendors of moonshine.

On most Return Days, large strips of muslin were extended from one side of the court house to the other in the years of presidential elections. The names of the states that had gone one way or another were painted on the muslin with the approximate majorities.

The festivities of Return Day, of course, varied according to the excitement of the elections. For example in 1882 when Charles Stockley was elected governor, people cheered and guns boomed out as a victory procession moved through Georgetown. The "center piece" of the parade was a boat, named "The Constitution," decorated with a large blue hen and a coonskin cap suspended from the mast.

And there standing on the quarterdeck of the boat on wheels was the victorious governor-elect. When the ship arrived in front of the court house, the new governor was lifted on the shoulders of brawny men who carried him triumphantly into the court house and up to the balcony to speak to the cheering throng.

It can not be said that all Return Days were orderly. The newspapers of the past century always commented on whether there was any trouble. For example, the Morning News in 1884 noted: "Everything considered, the crowd was remarkably orderly and seemed jubilant over the county victory and the prospect for the inauguration of a Democratic president on the 4th of March next."

As it happened, the Return Day crowd in Georgetown that year didn't learn that Grover Cleveland was really elected president until several days later.

If the weather was pleasant, Return Day festivities would extend over Friday and Saturday, marked by plenty of entertaining, old fashion eating and drinking, and even cock fights behind the barns on the outskirts of the town.

In the early days, a Sussex farmer would never think of missing Return Day in Georgetown, although as the years passed and so-called sophistication seeped into Sussex County, Return Day dwindled to a somewhat perfunctory occasion. In 1942, because of the war, it was canceled but was later revived as people began to realize that Return Day was one of the few genuine folk customs in this part of the country, different in many ways from the more synthetic fiestas.



Notes & Autographs

