

Sussex County Return Day



George Mitchell

Georgetown, Delaware
November 8, 1990



George Mitchell

In observance of Georgetown's bicentennial in 1991, the Sussex County Return Day Committee is honoring George Mitchell, for whom the Town is named.

Shortly after the boundary dispute between the heirs of William Penn and Lord Baltimore was settled in 1775 and Sussex County expanded to its present borders, two petitions signed by 979 inhabitants of Sussex County were presented to the General Assembly praying that the County Seat be removed from Lewes and more centrally located.

On January 29, 1791, an act was passed authorizing the removal of the County Seat from Lewes to a new site at "James Pettyjohn's old field", near the center of the county. The same act named George Mitchell, Robert Houston, William Moore, John Collins, Nathaniel Young, William Perry, Rhoads Shankland, Woodman Stockley, Daniel Polk and Thomas Balson as commissioners and charged them to purchase up to 100 acres of land and construct a new courthouse and jail.

On May 9, 1791, the commissioners met at the house of Abraham Harris and negotiated the purchase of 50 acres from him, buying also 25 acres from Rowland Bevins and one acre from Joshua Pepper. Commissioner Rhoads Shankland began to survey the new town the same day.

On October 26, 1791, the General Assembly officially moved the Seat of Justice to the new County Seat and named it Georgetown in honor of Commissioner George Mitchell, who was active in the movement to centralize the County Seat.

Little is known about George Mitchell, except of his career in the General Assembly. In January 1788, he was elected one of the three presidential electors from Delaware. Mitchell, along with Gunning Bedford and John Banning voted for George Washington for President and John Jay for Vice-President. Washington was inaugurated on April 30, 1789.

Mitchell was elected as a delegate from Sussex County on September 8, 1791 to the Constitutional Convention for the State. He served in the Delaware House of Representatives from 1784 to 1788. He was elected to the Delaware Senate in 1788 and served as Speaker of the Senate from 1788 to 1790.

(Return Day coin featuring George Mitchell designed by John T. Purnell)

The Sussex County Return Day Committee, Inc.

Officers

ROSALIE B. WALLS, President
GEORGE F. COUCH, Vice-President
ELEANOR RAYE WARRINGTON, Secretary
W. LAYTON JOHNSON, Treasurer

Directors

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RALPH BENSON County Council	GEORGE COLE County Council
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WILLIAM D. STEVENSON County Council President	ROBERT L. STICKELS County Administrator

1990 Program of Events

9:00 a.m. to Dusk	FOOD & CRAFT BOOTHS (The Circle & Market St. area)
10:00 a.m.	RETURN DAY MARKER DEDICATION (The Circle between banks)
10:00 a.m. to Noon	OLD COURTHOUSE TOURS (South Bedford Street)
10:30 a.m.	MUSIC ON THE CIRCLE Performance by "Back In Time"
11:00 a.m.	LUNCHEON FOR CANDIDATES AND HONORED GUESTS Sussex Central High School Prepared by Bread of Life
11:00 a.m.	CONCERT ON THE CIRCLE Delaware State College Marching Band Under the direction of Randolph Johnson
12:30 p.m.	SINGING ON THE CIRCLE Laurel High School Chorus Under the direction of Penny Denney
1:00 p.m.	RETURN DAY PARADE From Sussex Central High School, halfway around The Circle to King Street and westward on Pine Street, back to starting point at school.
3:00 p.m.	CEREMONIES ON THE CIRCLE
3:30 p.m.	MUMMERS ON THE CIRCLE Performance by Hegeman String Band A Mummens unit from Philadelphia
3:30 p.m.	OX ROAST ON THE CIRCLE Free open pit barbecued beef sandwiches, northeast corner of The Circle
4:00 p.m.	STREET DANCE ON THE CIRCLE Music by "Back in Time"
4:00 p.m.	BLUE GRASS ON THE CIRCLE Blue grass & country music by "E.Z. Pickins" at the Ox Roast
5:30 p.m.	FIREWORKS FINALE

1990 Return Day Parade

THE 1990 SUSSEX COUNTY RETURN DAY PARADE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CARL R. WALLS, A MEMBER OF THE RETURN DAY BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND PARADE CHAIRMAN FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. HE LOVED THIS BIENNIAL CELEBRATION AND WORKED DILIGENTLY TO MAKE OUR PARADE ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST UNIQUE ON DELMARVA.

THE SUSSEX COUNTY RETURN DAY COMMITTEE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPPORT IT RECEIVED IN THE PAST FROM FORMER U.S. SENATOR AND MRS. JOHN J. WILLIAMS, STATE REPRESENTATIVE CLIFF LEE, AND GEORGETOWN BUSINESSMAN WILSON G. BOYER. EACH LOOKED FORWARD TO RETURN DAY AND WILL BE MISSED THIS YEAR.

Grand Marshall

Sussex County Administrator
ROBERT L. STICKELS

Parade Judges

GROVER BIDDLE Director of Governmental Relations Delaware Development Office	TED CLARK Political Columnist The Whale & Sussex Post
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SCORCHY TAWES Feature Correspondent WBOC-Channel 16	MRS. CLIFF (JANET) LEE Secretary Centenary Methodist Church
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JOAN CRAFT Volunteer Services Coordinator Stockley Center	SYLVIA REYBURN President - Liberty Bell Chapter Telephone Pioneers of America
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JACK OWENS

Director - Southern Campus
Delaware Technical & Community College

Parade Announcers

<i>Judges Stand</i> (North Race Street)	<i>Speakers Platform</i> (The Circle)
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KEVIN SHORT MSA Recording Studios	DAN GAFFNEY Program Director
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BILL GRASTON WECY - Radio	WGMD Radio
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NORMAN TATE Past President	JOHN SMITH Delaware State Fire School
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Sussex County Volunteer Firemans Assoc.

Fire Equipment Judges

WAYNE HUTCHINSON Delaware State Fire School	JOSEPH MUROBITO Delaware State Fire School
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Old Timer Costume Judges

BLANCHE EPOLITO Past President Georgetown Historical Society	ETHEL ROCKEMANN Past President Indian River DSFSA
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Ceremonies On The Circle

Points of Interest

National Anthem	Sussex Central High School Band
	David Crede, Director
Soloist	Cathy Gorman
Invocation	Rev. Donald Clendaniel II
	Georgetown United Methodist Charge
Greetings	Frank Calio
	Master of Ceremonies
Welcome	Joseph W. Booth, Sr.
	Mayor of Georgetown
Introduction of Distinguished Guests, State, National and Sussex County Candidates and Incumbents	Frank Calio
Reading of Election Returns	Ronald F. Dodd
	Town Crier
Burial of the Tomahawk	Kenneth L. McDowell
	Chairman
	Sussex County Democratic Committee
	J. Everett Moore
	Chairman
	Sussex County Republican Committee
	Moss Wagner
	Chairman
End of Campaign of 1990	Sussex County Libertarian Party
Appreciation	Rosalie Walls, President
	Sussex County Return Day, Inc.
Presentation of Awards	Jay M. Stevens
	Parade Co-Chairman
Benediction	Rev. Michael Bye
	St. Paul's Episcopal Church

All around you are the accomplishments of proud Sussex Countians and Georgetown residents:

OLD SUSSEX COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Built in 1791, the original courthouse now stands on South Bedford Street just off the Circle. It was sold for \$22 and moved when the new courthouse was constructed. The old courthouse was built of equal size and style as the original courthouse in Lewes. It now serves as the home of the Georgetown Historical Society.

NEW SUSSEX COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Designed by famed architect William Strickland, the brick building was constructed in 1837, when the county outgrew the old wooden courthouse. It originally featured courts on the second floor and county offices on the first. A brick jailhouse was located at the rear as was the whipping post. Like the original courthouse, a lottery (raising almost \$15,000) was held to pay the construction costs.

THE CIRCLE

The Circle or Town Square was laid out by Commissioner Rhoads Shankland in 1791 to measure 100 yards each way. Legend has it that The Circle was beautified in 1860 when Dr. William Marshall purchased a slave girl named Liz, and with a mule she prepared the center of the Square for planting. Shade trees were secured from the Hudson River and shipped via Milford and planted.

COURTHOUSE WEATHER VANE

The Courthouse weather vane used to sit atop the Courthouse in Wilmington, when it was constructed in 1880. When a new Wilmington courthouse was constructed in 1916, Sussex County Judge Henry C. Conrad obtained the weather vane and had it placed atop the Sussex County Courthouse cupola.

COURTHOUSE CLOCK

Citizens petitioned in 1858 for a clock to be placed in the Courthouse belfry. In 1859, the clock was purchased and installed for \$235. In 1944, its wooden workings worn, the clock stopped and was replaced with an electric motor and put back into operation in 1946.

TOWN GOVERNMENT

The Delaware General Assembly directly controlled Georgetown until 1851 and was responsible for passing nuisance ordinances like controlling the running at large of swine, which could be killed and used for the prisoners according to the act. The Town limits were extended to one half mile each way from a central point in the Public Square in 1863. The first Town Council was elected in March 6, 1869. The Town Hall on the Circle is a gift of the Wilmington Trust Company.

BRICK HOTEL

Now occupied by Wilmington Trust, the Brick Hotel served as temporary quarters for the court system and county government from 1837 to 1839, while the new courthouse was under construction. The hotel was built in 1836 and at the time was known as Burton C. Barker's hotel, its first innkeeper. During the Civil War, it was known as the Union Hotel.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The first fire apparatus was purchased in 1831 through the Georgetown Fire Association and was given the old jail in 1833 to house the pumper. The fire department later constructed a fire hall on The Circle north of Town Hall. The new firehall is located on South Bedford Street.

History of Return Day

Despite its mispronunciation by most non-residents, "Return Day" has less to do with hearing the election returns than with Sussex Countians and others coming together to celebrate the end of the vigorous campaign and to begin the political healing process.

Although the date of the first "Return Day" in Georgetown is uncertain, it could have been as early as 1792. The State Law in 1791 removing the County seat from Lewes to a new place later named Georgetown required all votes to be cast in the County seat on election day.

The same voters would "return" two days later to hear the results. In 1811 voting districts in the individual hundreds were established, but the Board of Canvassers presided over by the Sheriff would meet two days later in Georgetown to announce the final tally.

Naturally, the gathering of two or three thousand politicians, supporters and curious on-lookers made for a very festive atmosphere. J. Thomas Scharf in 1888 described "Return Day" in the *History of Delaware* as "one of the customs peculiar to the people of Sussex, from time immemorial, is to hold high carnival on the day when the results of a general election are announced.

"By early in the morning people from all parts of the county, and even from Maryland, may be seen coming to the county-seat, some walking, others on horseback, and still others in wagons and carts, drawn by one or more oxen, by an ox and a horse, an ox and a mule, or several oxen and a horse, the vehicle being gayly decorated with bright colors or flags.

"Often this crowd presents a motley appearance, some being dressed in costumes which were used in primitive times, and others purposely arraying themselves in an outlandish manner to give more zest to the spirit of the occasion. The successful candidates also come to Town and are met by a great crowd of admiring friends, who extend their congratulations in an unmistakable manner. Some of these candidates are taken up bodily, and are carried around on men's shoulders when the results are announced from the window of the courthouse to the congregated mass below.

"Booths, stalls and stands are erected near the courthouse, where all kinds of edibles, such as opossum and rabbit meat, fish and oysters, can be procured. The women, who constitute a considerable portion of the crowd, are generously treated to cakes, candies and the best the booths afford.

"The citizens of the Town hold a general reception and all are expected to help entertain the people, especially if they are friends of the successful party. Everyone endeavors to make 'Return Day' a hilarious one, and all seem willing to perpetuate a custom which is now peculiar to Sussex County alone, and which sometimes brings three thousand people to Town."

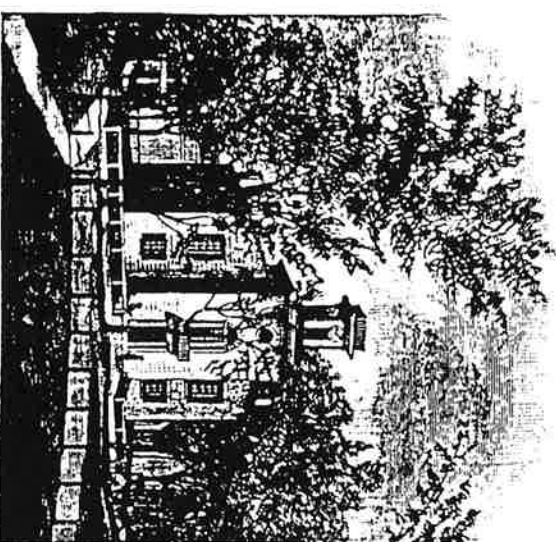
Return Day continued through the 1800s and on into the present century. But with the advent of automobiles, which made the visit to Georgetown from any part of Sussex only a matter of minutes, and with the arrival of radio which let the people know the results of elections even before the newspapers arrived, interest in the old custom began to dwindle.

There was a big celebration in 1936 when Franklin D. Roosevelt won in a landslide and the Democrats carried the State for the first time in many years. Return Day was cancelled altogether in 1942 because of World War II, but it was too good an event to let die in Sussex County where traditions are important. It was not long before a group of interested citizens of both the Republican and Democrat parties joined together to revive it in 1952.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s enthusiasm grew beyond all expectations as was evident with a bill being passed in the State Legislature in 1965 making "Return Day" a legal half holiday for Sussex County. From that time to the present this celebration has attracted more and more Delawareans and residents from nearby states to join in all of the activities of the day.

In modern times, when election results are often known before the polls close, Return Day serves as a reminder to all Sussex Countians of their past. An ox roast with free sandwiches to the public has replaced the possum and rabbit but craftsmen and vendors still hawk their wares. A large parade still highlights the celebration, but now the victorious candidates and their former opponents ride together in open horse drawn carriages and convertibles in the spirit of cooperation for the good of the citizens.

Return Day is still considered the official end of the campaign in Delaware illustrated by the ceremonial burial of the hatchet by political party leaders ... until the next Sussex County Return Day in Georgetown, two days after the election.



Return Day Volunteers

Evelyn Baker	Joan Hitchens	Margaret Short
Sue H. Barlow	Jim Hodgson	Joe Smith
Gail Brown	Debbie Holson	John Spicer
Helen Buchanan	Olive Holson	Violet W. Stout
Mark Cashden	Steve Kremer	Wayne Thornton
Jean Chafin	Joyce W. Lambden	Henry Vogt
Vera Coleman	Kirk Lawson	Buffy Walls
David Crede	Kris Lawson	Harvey L. Walls
Susan Crockett	Tom Lockerman	Francis Walls
Gus & Teresa Croll	Walter McFall	Kevin Walls
Tammy Dorey	Hazel Meegan	Linda Walls
Jimmy Dukes	Joan Messick	Mary Walls
Amber Esham	Joseph Messick	Tony Walls
Robin Esham	Isabelle Morris	Russell V. Warrington
Betty Evans	Greg Pettyjohn	David Webb
Harvey Gregg	Mark Pettyjohn	Joyce Weston
Constance Holfield	Steve Pepper	Al Wilkins
Charles Hawk	Levia Robertson	Shelley Wilson
Walt Headley	Tom Rust	Mary Lou Workman
Bob Hitchens	Lawrence Sammons	M. Lawrence Wilkins
Ira & Shirley Hitchens		

Special thanks to the following people, businesses and organizations for making Return Day 1990 a great success:

Greater Georgetown Chamber of Commerce	Meadows of Georgetown, Inc.
Georgetown Package Store	Delaware State Fire Marshall's Office
Grotto Pizza - Lewes/Rehoboth Beach	Georgetown Fire Police
Burger King - Georgetown	Georgetown Fire Company
Jamesway - Georgetown	David A. Banks, Inc. - Georgetown
McDonald's - Georgetown	Bill Norwood
84 Lumber - Georgetown	Rogers Graphics, Inc.
Southern States	Captain Paul Cunningham - Troop 4
Draper King Cole - Milton	Captain Joseph Forrester - Troop 5
Morgan & Co. of New York - Smyrna	Lt. Michael Cunningham - Troop 7
Thriftyway - Georgetown	Wayne Hudson
Food City - Georgetown	Walls Builders, Inc.
J.G. Townsend, Jr. & Co. - Georgetown	Delaware Technical & Community College
Showell Farms - Showell, Md.	Delaware National Guard
Townsend's, Inc. - Millsboro	Robert Martin for artwork services
Salisbury Pepsi - Salisbury, Md.	Kevin Short - Mid-South Audio
Perdue - Georgetown & Salisbury, Md.	The Insurance Exchange, Inc.
Vlastic Foods, Inc. - Millsboro	GFWC - Zwaanendael Club
Schmidt's Bakery - Salisbury, Md.	The Ribbon Outlet - Rehoboth Beach
Salisbury Coca Cola - Salisbury, Md.	Peninsula Bluegrass, Inc.
Nutter D. Marvel Estate	Roy Whaley
Downes Center, Inc.	D.B. Screen Printing - Georgetown

American flags have been donated by American Legion Post 8 of Georgetown in honor of our flag and American troops in Saudi Arabia. Distributed by Boy Scout Troop 95 of Georgetown.

Yellow ribbons donated by Rehoboth Unit of Disabled American Veterans and Chapter 8 Auxiliary to show support for the American service men and women in the Persian Gulf. Distributed by Junior Girl Scout Troop 701 of Georgetown.

Letter of Appreciation

On behalf of the Sussex County Return Day Committee, I would like to say, "Greetings", and welcome you to our historic Town of Georgetown, the County Seat of Sussex.

Not only is Delaware the First State, but as far as we can tell we are the only one in the country that celebrates this unique tradition, which may date back as far as 1792.

The celebration today is also the kickoff for Georgetown's bicentennial celebration in 1991. We invite you to join us as we celebrate our birthday throughout the year.

Since the early part of September, the new Board of Directors has faced many challenges. However, through the combined efforts of the Committee and many, many volunteers, everyone who attends Return Day 1990 will experience a potpourri of entertainment, events and enjoyment.

This Return Day will be a dawn to dusk affair appealing to all age groups. When this day ends with a burst of colorful fireworks over The Circle, the time and talent volunteered for this event will be clear.

I have been inspired by the actions, accomplishments, and staunch support received from my friends, because, to quote George Washington, "Actions, not words, are the true criteria of the attachment of friends."

I am especially grateful to the Sussex County Council for once again providing the financial support necessary for this county-wide event. Several Sussex County communities graciously donated funds and police services and it is greatly appreciated.

The greatest praise must be reserved for the Town of Georgetown. Return Day simply could not happen without the Town's support. I received complete cooperation from Mayor Joe Booth and Town Council, the administration, the maintenance department and the police department. I thank each and every one of the Town employees for their kindness and generosity.

It is our hope you will enjoy your visit with us today so much that you will want to bring a friend to the next Return Day on Thursday, November 5, 1992.

Best Wishes,
SUSSEX COUNTY RETURN DAY, INC.

Rosalie B. Walls

Rosalie B. Walls
President



*Join us in 1991 as Georgetown
celebrates its bicentennial.*

JANUARY 26 - FEDERAL COTILLION
FEBRUARY 22 - 53RD ANNUAL OYSTER EAT
MARCH 7 - 9 - HISTORICAL PLAY
MARCH 16 - 200 YEARS OF FASHION SHOW
APRIL 13 & 14 - OLDE GEORGETOWN ANTIQUE SHOW
APRIL 20 - EARTH DAY IN GEORGETOWN
MAY 4 - BICENTENNIAL FESTIVAL
MAY 9 - PURCHASE DAY
JUNE 15 - MUSIC FAIRE
JULY 4 - OLDE FASHIONED 4TH OF JULY
AUGUST 3 - LIVING HISTORY IN GEORGETOWN
SEPTEMBER 7 - NEW COUNTY SEAT ARTS & CRAFTS SHOW
OCTOBER 6 - HOMECOMING SUNDAY
OCTOBER 26 - GEORGETOWN JUBILEE (LIKE RETURN DAY)
NOVEMBER - VARIETY SHOW
NOVEMBER 29 - HANGING OF THE GREEN
DECEMBER 5 - COLONIAL CHRISTMAS PARADE
DECEMBER 7 - HISTORIC HOME TOUR
DECEMBER 9 - CAROLLING ON THE CIRCLE

For more information about Georgetown's Bicentennial Celebration
Call (302) 856-7391 or write:
Georgetown 200 Committee, P.O. Box 446, Georgetown, DE 19947

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