



SOUVENIR EDITION



W hale & Post

Return Day

Sussex County's Finest Newspapers

November 8, 1990

History

People Have Traveled To Georgetown For Results Since The Town Was Carved From Broadkill Forrest

Politicians and all the people of Sussex County have been assembling for Return Day ever since Georgetown was made 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 sorrows of defeat.

In recent years the Return Day celebration has also become the single-most unifying event that takes place for all of sprawling 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 high school and junior high school bands from throughout the county, features all statewide and county candidates riding in horse-drawn carriages and convertible automobiles, and a wide variety of floats, marching units, and other exhibits put on wheels.

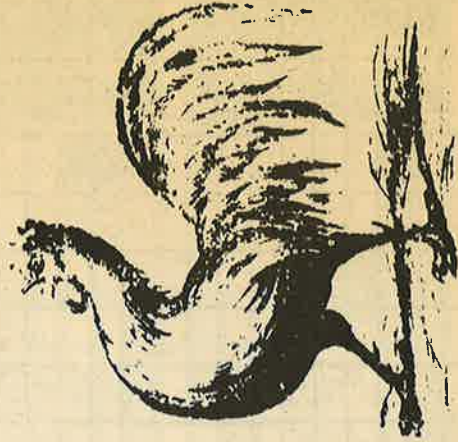
Thousands of Sussex County residents, and Delawareans from north to south, join together in Georgetown to celebrate the conclusion of the campaigning and the democratic process.

W. Emerson Wilson, a frequent contributor of historical articles to the News-Journal papers in Wilmington, 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 of Sussex County and elections for state and federal offices were held there in accordance with rules adopted in the first state's 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.

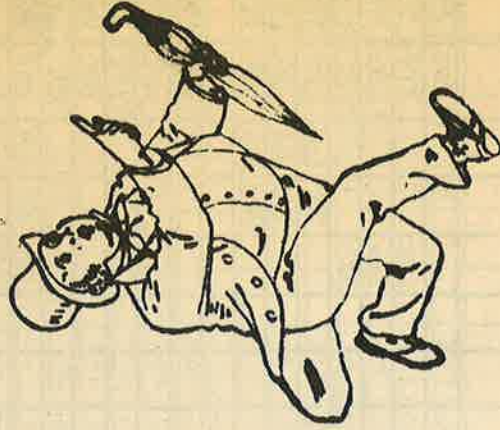
Georgetown, equidistant from all points in Sussex County, was created in 1791 to satisfy those complaints. A gentleman named George Mitchell was among the three men appointed to come up with a location and layout for a new county seat.

Please Turn To Back Page



Many politicians will be crowing like this Blue Hen Chicken as they celebrate election victories.

Complete Sussex County Election Results, From All Polling Places, Included Inside



Those who lost will be quickly seeking new alliances to head off on a different political path.

Return Day

When The Parade Ends The Returns Will Be Announced From The Court House Balcony

By STEVE HOENIGMANN

It's a tradition with roots as far back as 1792 - a heritage that Sussex Countians - unlike their counterparts throughout the country - have refused to let die.

It's a day when tens of thousands descend upon the County Seat in Georgetown to hear the ceremonial results of Tuesday's General Election - a day when the proverbial "political hatchet" is buried.

It's Return Day - Sussex County's biennial celebration of the democratic process.

This Thursday's Return Day promises to be as exciting and entertaining as those in the past - perhaps even better, according to Rosalie B. Walls, president of the Sussex County Return Day Committee, Inc.

The highlight of the day is an immense parade winding east through Georgetown featuring marching units, floats, bands and, of course, politicians of all political persuasions who can be seen riding in horse-drawn carriages and convertibles. Often times opposing candidates will ride in the same vehicle.

The end of the parade about 3 p.m. signals an appearance by Town Crier Ronnie Dodd, who for years has ceremoniously announced the election results from a perch above the Courthouse steps while the "hatchet" is buried below.

But the Return Day parade, which begins at 1 p.m., is just a portion of what Mrs. Walls and her committee have planned for the thousands of people planning to spend the day in Georgetown (see schedule on page 3).

Interesting additions to this year's event include:

- a 3:30 performance by the Hegeman String Band, one of the famous Mummies units from Philadelphia;

Schedule Of Return Day Events

9 a.m. to dusk - Food and Craft booths, (The Circle and Market Street area.)

10 a.m. - Return Day marker dedication

10 a.m. to noon - Old Courthouse Tours (South Bedford Street.)

10:30 a.m. - Music on The Circle (Performance by "Back In Time.")

11 a.m. - Luncheon for Candidates and honored guests (Sussex Central High School, prepared by Bread of Life.) 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 p.m. - Return Day Parade (From Sussex Central High School, halfway around The Circle to King Street and westward on Pine Street back to school.)

3 p.m. - Ceremonies on The Circle

3:30 p.m. - Mummies on The Circle (Performance by Hegeman String Band of Philadelphia.) Ox Roast on The Circle (Free open pit barbecued beef sandwiches, northeast corner of The Circle.)

4 p.m. - Street Dance on The Circle (Music by "Back in Time.") Blue Grass on The Circle (Blue grass and country music by "E.Z. Pickins" at the ox roast.)

5:30 p.m. - Fireworks Finale

"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 the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." -- First Amendment To The United States Constitution

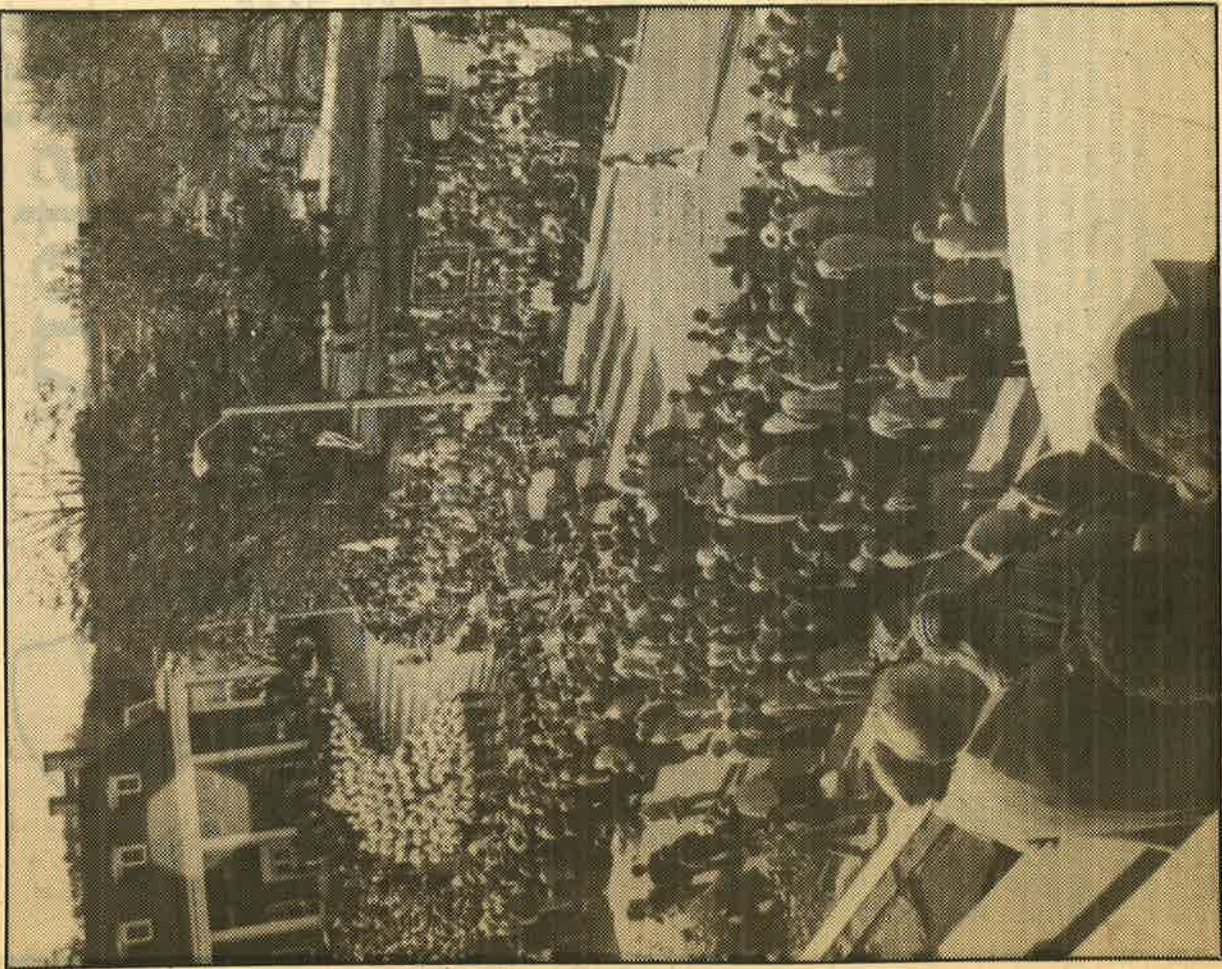
1875

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How We Voted In Sussex County

REP. DISTRICT 40	REP. DISTRICT 41	CLERK OF PEACE		REGISTER OF WILLS		RECORDER OF DEEDS		SUSSEX COUNCIL DISTRICT 4		SUSSEX COUNCIL DISTRICT 5		SHERIFF																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																												
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Return Day 1988

Crowds throng around the Circle in Georgetown on Return Day in 1988 as a high school band makes its way past the front of the courthouse. The 1990 Return Day Parade is expected to be one of the largest ever as Georgetown prepares to launch its bicentennial celebration in 1991.

Whale & Post

A publication presented by the Whale and Sussex Post, newspapers proudly serving Sussex County, in celebration of Return Day, 1990. For information about the Whale, please call (302)645-2265. For information about the Sussex Post, please call (302)934-9261.

Sussex County's
Finest Newspapers

History

Continued From Front Page

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 the voters would stay over to learn the results.

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 thirteen 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.

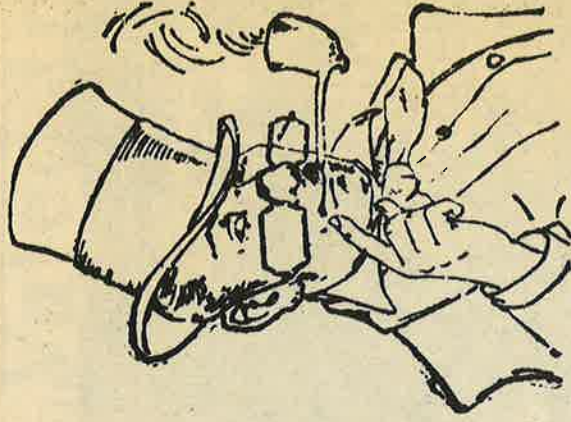
"The results were read from the door of the courthouse at noon and were printed on a white sheet hoisted over the courthouse door. The winning candidates were placed onto the shoulders of their adherents and paraded around the Green. A large pole was erected in the Green and the emblem of the winning 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 won. Interest in the old tradition began to fade.

World War Two was raging in 1942 and Return Day was cancelled 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 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 Democrat parties join together on the reviewing stand and signify a reunification of purpose, following often bitter campaigns, by burying the hatchet.



Many Volunteers, Many Hours Make Return Day Success

It takes many hours and a lot of people to make Return Day the success it is every two years. In fact, not even before this Return Day is over, planners will be busy thinking about Return Day 1992.

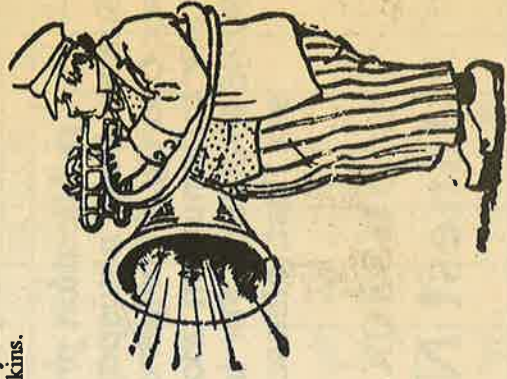
The people who are responsible for Return Day include the officers of the Sussex County Return Day Committee, Inc., its directors and honorary directors and hard-working volunteers. They deserve a tip of the hat.

Officers: Rosalie B. Walls, president; George F. Couch, vice president; Eleanor Rayne Warrington, secretary; and W. Layton Johnson, treasurer.

Directors: Joseph W. Booth, Richard M. Calhoun, Charlotte P. Campbell, Ann Couch, Claire T. Croll, Ronald F. Dodd, Carolyn Green, Dallas Green, Richard T. Hudson, Allan Kujala, William G. Lambden, William H. Lawson, Christine Lecates, William Lecates, Daniel L. Milburn, John T. Purnell, Cindy Pusey, Anthony Racaniello, Jay M. Stevens and Elmer Walls.

Honorary Directors: All five members of Sussex County Council - Ralph Benson, Dale Dukes, William D. Stevenson, George Cole, R. James Marner - and County Administrator Robert L. Stickle.

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



Georgetown Is Planning A Grand Bicentennial Year

By RHONDA H. TUMAN

Georgetown's mayor, town council and Georgetown 200 Committee have been busy for the past year planning a year's worth of activities to honor the County Seat's bicentennial to be celebrated in 1991.

Monthly events - from a Federal Cotillion to the Georgetown Jubilee - has been planned by the 200 Committee and town officials.

Four historical markers will be erected in each of the four corners of the Town Square that will tell about The Circle, the history of the new courthouse, why the County seat was established at Georgetown and about Return Day. A fifth marker will tell about the old courthouse and will be posted near the restored building which is located on the corners of South Bedford Street and Pine Street. State legislators, Rep. Charles P. West, Sen. Thurman Adams and Rep. V. George Carey provided funding for the markers.

Other planned activities include cultural events, a downtown revitalization project, colonial street lighting, the performance of an historical drama, which is in the process of being written, and will be performed by the Possum Point Players.

Debbie Holson, president of the 200 Committee, has asked that each Greater Georgetown Chamber of Commerce member light a candle in their storefront during the year-long celebration, "as a special welcome to all persons during the bicentennial."

Georgetown residents gathered on many nights to sew a bicentennial signature quilt and a pictorial quilt which is hanging in Georgetown Town Hall and will be auctioned off - and officials hope - donated to the town to be hung in the town hall.

An historical book, "Georgetown - From Crossroads to County Seat" is available for sale at the town hall for \$25. An historical time capsule will be buried to commemorate "Purchase Day" ceremonies May 9, 1991.

Highlights of the year-long events are:

- January 26, 1991 - Federal Cotillion (black tie ball; colonial dress is encouraged);
- March 7-9 - Possum Point Players historical play;
- March 16 - 200 Years of Fashion Show
- April 13-14 - Olde Georgetown Antique Show & Sale
- April 20 - Earth Day in Georgetown
- May 4 - Bicentennial Festival
- May 9 - Purchase Day (time capsule burial)
- June 15 - Music Faire
- July 4 - Olde Fashioned July Fourth Celebration at Delaware Tech
- August 3 - Living history in Georgetown (battle re-enactments)
- September 7 - New County Seat Arts & Crafts Show & Sale
- October 6 - Homecoming Sunday
- October 26 - Georgetown Jubilee (like Return Day)
- November - Variety Show-Hoedown
- November 29 - Hanging of the Green
- December 5 - Colonial Christmas Parade
- December 7 - Historic Home Tour
- December 9 - Carolling on the Circle

Various And Sundry Facts And Other Information About The Return Day Celebration

Return Day will end with a bang this year as fireworks burst over The Circle in Georgetown beginning at 5:30 p.m. Return Day planners are also expecting a burst of pride as American flags and yellow ribbons are given to the crowd on Thursday, Nov. 8, 1990, in honor of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia.

The day-long celebration will feature entertainment from the Heqeman String Band, a unit of the world famous Mummies of Philadelphia. The Mummies, wearing their colorful costumes, will perform a concert on The Circle and march in the Return Day parade.

In addition to the Mummies, the Sussex County Return Day Committee has scheduled the Delaware State College Marching Band and Laurel High School Chorus for Concerts on The Circle. "Back in Time" will perform at a street dance on The Circle and "E.Z. Pickins" will perform at the Ox Roast.

The parade will feature a Percheron One Horse Hitch sponsored by Southern States, Miss Delaware Lisa Maria Munzert, the First U.S. Army Band, the Delaware State College Marching Band and almost a hundred other bands, antique cars, fire apparatus, and floats. The Return Day parade is one of the largest on Delmarva and attracts almost 20,000 people.

"This parade will be extra special with the Mummies and Percheron horse," said Return Day Committee President Rosalie Walls. "We have added fireworks to this year's celebration to give it a festive ending. The flags and yellow ribbons will add color to the parade and honor our troops in the Persian Gulf too."

Return Day activities will begin at 9 a.m. on The Circle in Georgetown and conclude just after dark. Hundreds of food booths, bargain tables, crafts and more will be featured. The parade will step off from Sussex Central High School at 1 p.m. and proceed down Market Street and around the Circle.

Return Day is considered by many as the official end of the political campaign. It brings together all the candidates and supporters on The Circle to hear the election returns and ceremoniously bury the hatchet. The event began in the early 1800s when votes were counted at the County Seat and the results were announced two days after the election.

In honor of Georgetown's bicentennial in 1991, the Return Day Committee is minting a gold plated bronze coin and a numbered silver coin. The coins will be available on Return Day for \$5 for the bronze coin and \$20 for the silver coin. The coin will feature George Mitchell, for whom the town was named, on the face, and the Sussex County seal on the back. The Committee will also have T-shirts and hats featuring a special Return Day logo for sale.