History of Delaware

John A. Munroe

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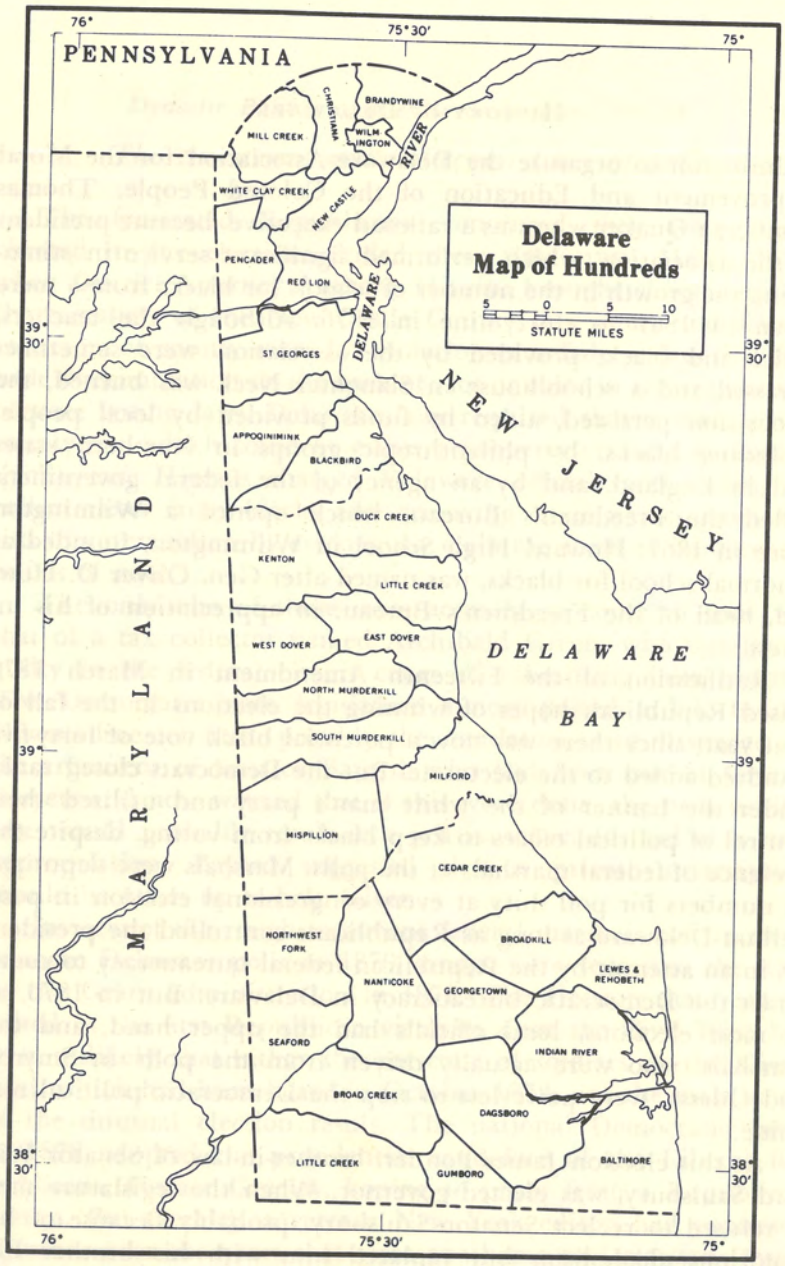
elections heatedly. One faction was called the "court party," normally the party that held office, and the other party was the "country party."

County elections were held only at the county seat, presided over by the sheriff, assisted by an inspector from each hundred. A voter had to own fifty acres of land, of which twelve acres were cleared, or have other property (for example, a mill, or tools, or livestock) worth forty pounds. Neither women nor blacks were specifically disfranchised, but (with possibly a few exceptions) they did not vote, though it is likely that by the end of the colonial period some widows and some free blacks could have met the property requirements.

"Little elections," as they came to be called, were held in the hundreds in September, a month before the county elections. A hundred is an old English subdivision of a county, its origin shrouded in mystery because the name is as old as the language and meant, in geographic terms, not much more or less when it was first used in this sense than it meant in colonial America. The name was used in many colonies but survived in America only in Delaware, probably because there the counties were all established so early—by 1680—that little reorganization was needed. In New England, the newer English term, *town,* replaced *hundred,* and in Pennsylvania and New Jersey the term *township* was adopted.

At the little elections the appointed tax collector presided, assisted by two freeholders of his choice, and the assembled voters chose an election inspector and (after 1766) an assessor. The inspector was needed at the county election to determine who was qualified to vote. Besides assessing the value of property for taxes, the assessor helped set the tax rate, but efforts to elect the entire levy court (as was done in Pennsylvania) were blocked by the governor until after the Revolution.

The general assembly in colonial Delaware was a very powerful body, since the bills it passed were reviewed by no one except the governor, who was eager to keep on good terms with this body. It was a unicameral body, a single house of representatives elected to one-year terms. After the separation from Pennsylvania in 1701, the governor's council, which was appointed, gradually lost responsibility for the government of Delaware. In the early eighteenth century, governors made it a point to have some Delaware residents on the council, but as time passed the Delaware representation was dropped except for one or two men,



Map of Delaware as divided into hundreds. The hundred is an ancient English territorial unit, of undetermined origin, used until recently for some functions of local government. Preserved almost nowhere else on earth, the hundred corresponds to the township in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and to the town in New England. From Delaware Place Names, *U.S. Department of the Interior Geological Survey Bulletin 1245 (1966).*