

16 Miles From Anywhere

A History Of Georgetown, Del.

William J. Wade

I

Genesis

As seen from an airplane, Georgetown's four main streets fan outward from the tree-shaded circle like the spokes of a great wheel. If asked the derivation of the town's name, an informed native might note the possibility that Georgetown was yet another example of the national mania for honoring the nation's first president.

In these and in many other ways, Georgetown's history parallels the early development of Washington, D.C. Like Washington, Georgetown was created by legislative fiat and superimposed on a relatively unsettled area. Moreover, the locations of both communities were dictated by political rather than economic considerations. Despite their artificial beginnings, however, both Washington and Georgetown soon developed the economic and social accouterments that could be found in other American communities of comparable size. But in neither the nation's capital nor in the Sussex County seat would economic vitality include concentrated industrial development.

Because of the vast differences in population and in political importance it seems presumptuous to pursue the similarities between Washington and Georgetown any further. Nevertheless, it is instructive to view the founding of the two communities as part of the same worldwide trend - Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil is another, more recent example - of moving the seat of political power from an older, established community to a new, planned center. In the case of Sussex County, that older, established community was Lewes.

From the beginning of European settlement, Lewes had been the focal point of lower Delaware. It was both a trading post and the location of courts of justice from the time of Dutch sovereignty. Prior to 1680, Whorekill County encompassed the whole of central and southern Delaware, and Lewes was the county seat. In 1680, settlers of Whorekill County petitioned Governor Andros to divide the County in order to provide a more accessible county seat for residents in the northern portion. In response to the petitions, Whorekill County was divided in two and Lewes became the county seat for only the southern portion, known originally as Deale and then, after 1682, as Sussex County.

Because of the land claims and the exercise of authority by the proprietors of Maryland, old Sussex County was smaller than present day Sussex. The Calverts, as proprietors of Maryland, claimed all of modern Delaware and exercised authority over what is today southern and western Sussex County. But the Penns, proprietors of Pennsylvania, also claimed

all of modern Delaware as part of their grant.

The Lords of Trade and Plantations in England sought to solve this boundary dispute by dividing the lands lying between the Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware River and Bay; the western half to go to the Calverts. Lord Baltimore refused to accept this proposition and continued to claim the entire Delmarva Peninsula north of Virginia, and made grants of land in the disputed eastern portion. Disputes between the grantees of the two proprietors grew increasingly violent, but in 1732 a compromise was agreed to by the sons of William Penn and the then Lord Baltimore, Charles Calvert. The compromise agreement called for the laying out of boundaries, and gave the Penns the whole of present day New Castle, Kent and Sussex Counties. But the commissioners appointed to implement the agreement failed to act. Because the agreement was not implemented, hostilities resumed and soon a border war existed between the rival settlers.

In 1735 John, Thomas and Richard Penn filed suit in Chancery against Lord Baltimore, seeking to have him enjoined to render specific performance of the 1732 agreement. The wheels of justice grind slowly, however, and it wasn't until 1750 that Lord Chancellor Hardwicke rendered a decision in favor of the Penns. Hardwicke decreed that both parties must ignore the original grants and stand by the compromise agreement made in 1732.

To implement this decree, commissioners were appointed to lay out the boundary lines, and the transpeninsular boundary line across the southern end of Sussex County was completed in 1750-51. But again dispute led to delay. Finally, in 1760, Frederick, the sixth Lord Baltimore, grew weary of the controversy and accepted the decree of the Lord Chancellor. Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were then engaged by the two parties to run and mark the boundaries between Maryland and Pennsylvania, including the western boundary of Sussex County, and the dispute was finally settled.

With the boundary settlement, Sussex County almost doubled its former size. "New Sussex," as the additional territory was called, included the lands lying within present day Sussex County that are south and west of an imaginary line drawn from Farmington, in a southeasterly direction, to the mouth of Rehoboth Bay.

The residents of this western addition to Sussex County found themselves at quite a distance from their county seat at Lewes. As a result, what has been termed a "spirited agitation" arose for a change in the location of the county seat, and for the second time Lewes was the subject of petitions

which were to cost her some of the preeminence she had enjoyed as a county seat.

In 1786 the Delaware General Assembly received a number of petitions signed by Sussex Countians. Some of the petitions focused on the economy, indicating that the post-Revolution years were hard years in Sussex, and that many residents were in dire financial straits. These petitions requested the General Assembly to issue paper money as one means to alleviate the

scarcity of cash, the number of debts both public and private, necessarily contracted during the late War, and the consequent increase of taxes, (which) have reduced many of the good people of this County to the lowest State of Misery and Want.¹

To support their request, the petitions related instances of foreclosures and evictions which cost some inhabitants their homes.

The General Assembly was also forced with requests from "diverse inhabitants of Kent and Sussex Counties" that a fourth county be created, since

great inconvenience do continually arise to the Inhabitants of this State from the great extent of the Counties thereof and the consequent Difficulties of adjusting business in its Courts of Justice.²

No doubt part of the inconvenience alluded to dealt with the cost of a visit to the county seat. For residents of the Laurel and Seaford areas, this would mean an overnight stay in Lewes with its concomitant expenses. In addition, the county seat was usually the site of county elections. Inland farmers were unhappy with Lewes as the voting site because it was not centrally located and the elections held in Lewes often led to outbreaks of violence.

More important to Georgetown's founding were the petitions asking specifically for the removal of the county seat from Lewes. Between January and July of 1786 the General Assembly received twenty petitions, containing the signatures of more than nine hundred Sussex Countians requesting that the county seat be moved from Lewes to a more central part of the county. These petitions did not go unchallenged, for the General Assembly received responses from other "Sundry Inhabitants of Sussex County," arguing that Lewes should remain the county seat.

In their arguments and syntax, the petitions not only advance the differing positions but also tell us much about the people who wrote and signed them. The petitions requesting the removal of the county seat from Lewes were short and succinct, reflecting the basic rural nature of the signers. By contrast, those petitions against the removal presented a more detailed argument, worthy in their sophistication of having emanated from the county seat where the best legal minds, of necessity, resided.

A representative petition calling for the removal of the county seat from Lewes proceeds as follows:

The petition of divers inhabitants of Sussex County in the State aforesaid humbly sheweth:

They conceive the holding of courts and confining several offices to be held at or near the town of Lewes makes it very inconvenient to the greater part of the people in said County, many having the distance of forty miles and upwards travel to said town. Whereas if the seat of justice and public records were at or near the center of said county, the people from any part thereof having business at court or said offices might set out from home, spend some time at said place and return the same day.

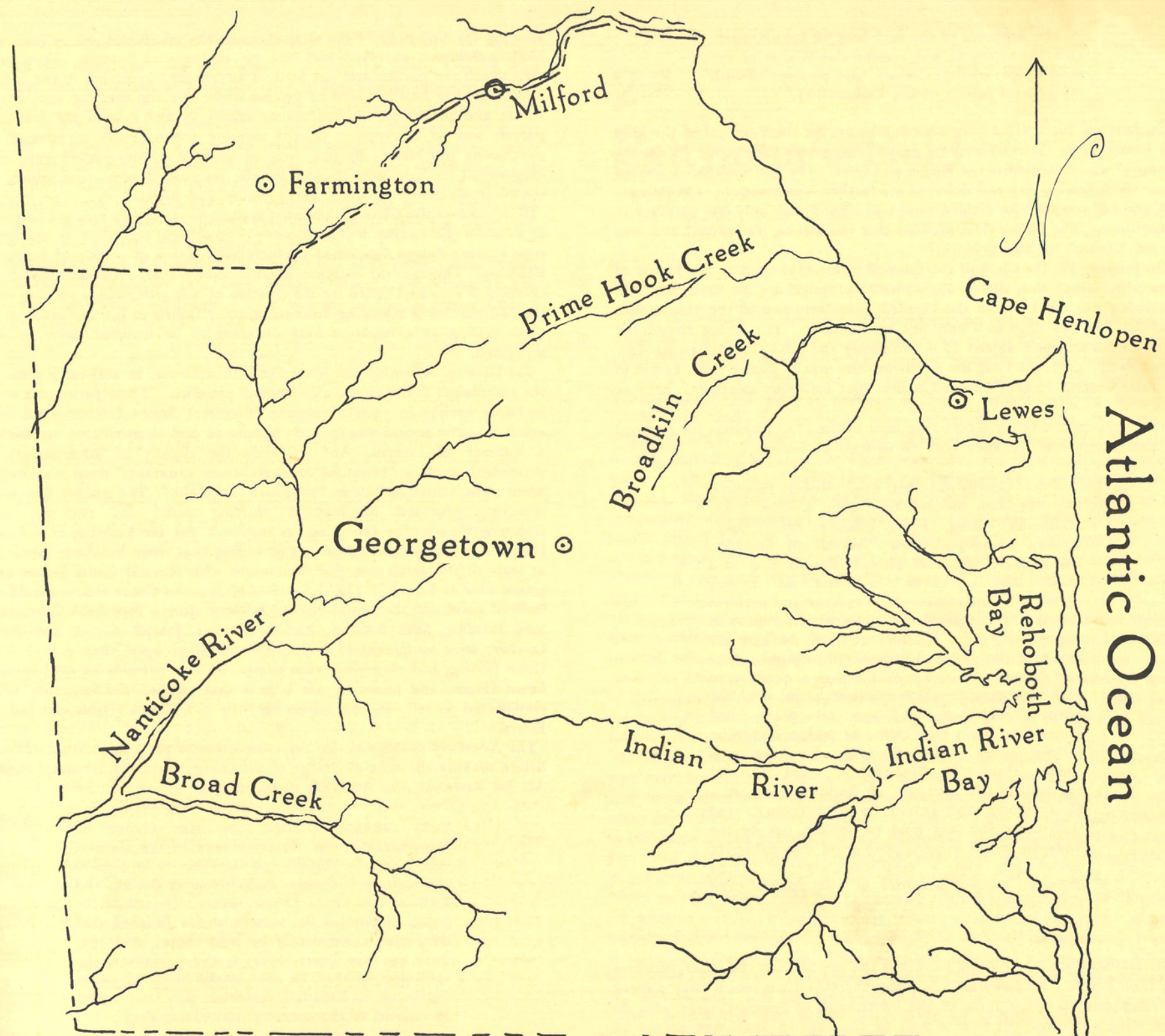
Your petitioners therefore humbly pray your Honors to take the laws respecting the holding courts and offices at or near the town of Lewes under your most serious consideration and repeal the same as far as respects the holding courts and offices at or near the said place and pass an act for the removal of the seat of justice from the town of Lewes as also the several offices aforesaid and pass an act for the holding of the same at or near the center of said county as you in your wisdom shall think best.³

The petitions for maintaining the seat of justice at Lewes proceeded at much greater length and with much greater sophistication of argument. A representative version of these petitions, because of its length, is reproduced in the appendix.

The removal and anti-removal petitions, the petitions requesting the issuance of paper money, and the petitions for the creation of a fourth county are all relevant to the history of Georgetown because they all influenced the General Assembly's act for the removal of the county seat to a more central location. Perhaps it was in response to an anti-removal petitioner's plea for postponement until a "more convenient season," or maybe because of the phlegmatic nature of legislative bodies; but whatever, it was not until five years later that the petitioners of 1786 saw any action on their demands.

On January 4, 1791, a resolution was passed in the House of Assembly calling for the creation of a committee of five members who were to consider and report on "the several Petitions on the Files of the House, praying a removal of the Seat of Justice, from the Town of Lewes to a more central Part of the said County."⁴ Ten days later the "Committee upon the Petitions" brought in its report which was read but further consideration was postponed until the following Monday.⁵ On January 17, after further consideration of the committee's report and debate, it was

Resolved that Leave be given to bring in a Bill



for the Removal of the said Seat of Justice, upon such Principles as will answer the Wishes of the good People of that County, and correspond with the general Justice of the Community.⁶

On January 20, 1791, a bill entitled, "An act for the Removal of the Seat of Justice from Lewes-Town to James Pettyjohn's old Field, in Sussex County" was presented to the House and read. The bill was read a second time the following day and deferred for further consideration. On January 24, the bill was read for a third time and passed with only one member in opposition. The House then ordered that the bill be transcribed and sent to the Council for concurrence.⁷

On January 27, the Clerk of the Council returned the bill to the House of Assembly, along with fifteen amendments proposed by the Council. The following day the Clerk of the Council again returned to the House with the bill, but this time with only one amendment. The House considered the amendment and agreed to it, finalizing the bill. The following day, January 29, 1791, the "Act for Removing the seat of Justice from Lewes to a more central Part of Sussex County, and for other purposes" became law.

The act begins with an acknowledgment of the 1786 petitions for removal of the county seat. It then goes on to state in Section 1:

. . . that George Mitchell, Esq., Robert Houston, Esq., William Moore, Esq., John Collins, Esq., Nathaniel Young, Esq., William Peery, Esq., Rhoads Shankland, Esq., Woodman Stockley, Daniel Polk, Esq., and Thomas Batson, Esq. or a major part of them, be, and are hereby appointed, Commissioners to execute and perform the several trusts and powers reposed in and required of them by this act; and be and are hereby authorised and impowered to purchase, in fee, for the use of Sussex County, a quantity of land, not exceeding one hundred acres, near the centre of said county of Sussex, at a place called James Pettijohn's Old Field, or within two miles of the house where Ebenezer Pettijohn now resides, situate in Broadkill hundred, in said county, for the purpose of building thereon a Court House and prison for said county; and shall cause the said land to be laid out by the Surveyor of the county, with good and sufficient boundaries, and a certificate thereof to be delivered to the Recorder of said county, who shall forthwith record the same in due form of law.⁸

In Section 2 the act appears to reflect the impact that the other petitions of 1786 had on the Assembly. Starting out, "And whereas it may appear burthensome to oblige those of the inhabitants of Sussex County who do not wish a removal, to bear a part of the expense that may accrue in

erecting the buildings,"⁹ the section orders the commissioners to have the lands purchased, surveyed and laid out in lots and parcels. They were then to sell the parcels and lots for best advantage, "reserving to the use of Sussex County half an acre of ground each, for the erecting said Court House and prison on." The money raised by the sale of the lots and parcels was to be applied toward meeting the expenses occasioned by purchasing the land. By this same section the commissioners were also empowered to open subscriptions for the purpose of procuring money to complete construction of the Court House and prison.

In its wisdom the General Assembly managed, chiefly by means of section 2, to move the county seat to a more central location, while at the same time sparing Sussex Countians an increase in taxes in a time of financial hardship. The central location of the county seat even satisfied those petitioners who had called for the creation of a fourth county because now the "difficulties of adjusting business in (the) Courts of Justice," or at least those arising as a result of long distances to be traveled, were greatly mitigated.

The General Assembly was less successful, however, in answering some of the complaints found in the anti-removal petitions. These petitioners were certainly correct in their assessment of central Sussex County when they noted that the region was sparsely populated and incapable of supporting a number of taverns. And certainly the dignity of government, if dependent upon a "beautiful and salubrious situation," must also suffer when transplanted to "James Pettijohn's Old Field." The Act for Removal, however, provided at least a starting point for the necessary transmogrification by providing, in Section 3, for the building of a Court House and prison, and by further providing that these buildings "shall be at least of the same size and dimensions with the old Court House and prison now at Lewes." The Act provided that the Court House should be built of wood and the prison built of brick or stone. Five Kent Countians, John Gordon, John Ralston, Andrew Barratt, Joseph Barker and Peter Lowber, were appointed to inspect the buildings upon their completion. Upon finding and certifying "that courts can conveniently be held in said Court House, and prisoners safe kept in said prison," the inspectors were empowered to sell, to best advantage, the old Court House and jail in Lewes.

The Assembly didn't wait for the completion of the two public buildings before making the official change of the county seat. By Section 7 of the Act for Removal, the Assembly provided that

every annual election for the choice of Representatives or Representative in the General Assembly, the Sheriffs and Coroners to be held in said county of Sussex, shall hereafter holden and kept at the Court House herein directed to be built, as soon as the same is so far finished that they may conveniently be held there; and that until the said Court House is so far finished, the said election shall be held at the house of James Pettijohn, in Broadkill hundred; any law, usage, or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.

Lewes, for many years the most important town in Sussex County, had now lost the distinction of being the county seat along with the benefits that accrue from such a distinction. On the other hand, most Sussex Countians now had easier access to their county seat. Because fewer hours of travel were necessary in order to transact business at the new county seat, expensive overnight accommodations wouldn't be necessary. The latter point was especially important in view of the depressed financial condition of most of Sussex County. Perhaps the most impressive feature of the Act for Removal is the fact that the removal paid for itself and, therefore, did not cost the tax payers a cent.

The political focus of Sussex County would now shift from Lewes, which one resident described as "the most Suitable place I apprehend in this county for the Publick buildings . . .,"¹⁰ to a site in central Sussex County called "James Pettijohn's Old Field."

2 Pettyjohn's Field

At a time when the demands of transportation required that the major towns and cities of America be located on waterways or at least at major crossroads, the site selected by the General Assembly for the new seat of justice for Sussex County was an anomaly. Although little has been written about the central portion of Sussex which was to become Georgetown and its environs, some generalizations can be made. Topographically, the area is flat and included much swamp land. It lies on the watershed between the Chesapeake and the Delaware Bays, with water on the east side flowing toward the Delaware Bay and water on the west side flowing toward the Chesapeake Bay.¹ The soil, according to a geographer who examined the area, circa 1806, was "light, poor, and sandy, chiefly adapted to raising of Indian corn."² Others described the soil as a sandy loam. Heavy growths of pine and common deciduous trees abounded and gave way but slowly as portions of the area were brought under cultivation.

It has been said that Georgetown "was brought into being sixteen miles from anywhere, on low, swampy ground, in a place possessed of few natural resources and isolated from the routes of communication and trade."³ This statement is undoubtedly true and accounts for at least one of the reasons why the region was so sparsely settled. Another reason for the lack of settlers was the fact that large tracts of land in the area were held by absentee land holders.

Those persons who lived in the area prior to the removal of the county seat were, for the most part, subsistence farmers. Jackson Turner Main, in *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America*, notes that there were not many large farms in Sussex County because very few men of wealth lived in the area. Small farmers, "whose properties and geographical location prevented their raising any considerable cash crop,"⁴ were in the majority in the central Sussex area, as they were in the rest of the county.

Because they lacked cash, the farmers of central Sussex had to be largely self sufficient and had little need for "town" artisans and laborers. What supplies and services they did require could be obtained on infrequent trips to the county seat at Lewes. Thus there was little need for, and less ability to support, a town in central Sussex before 1791. However, the addition of "New Sussex" and the resulting outcry for a more centrally located county seat would lead to the creation of an artificial town on James Pettijohn's field in a swampy area, "sixteen miles from anywhere."

The act that brought the new county seat into existence provided that the

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ten commissioners were to purchase a quantity of land not to exceed one hundred acres. This land was to be laid out in plots and sold. Two lots of half an acre each were to be reserved for the Court House and Prison. On May 9, 1791, the commissioners met at the home of Abraham Harris and negotiated the purchase of seventy-six acres of land; buying fifty acres from Abraham Harris, twenty-five acres from Rowland Bevins and one acre from Joshua Pepper.

This same day Rhoads Shankland, one of the commissioners, began his survey of the purchase. Shankland described the plot of the town as follows:

In or near the Centre of the Town is a Spacious Square of one hundred yards each way for Publick use on the North East side thereof stand the Court House and Publick Offices. The Streets run as follows: Pine Street, Market Street, Laurel Street, Strawberry Alley (and) Coopers Alley Run South West and North East, at Right Angles with them are Race Street, Bedford Street, Front Street, North Lane, North Alley, Cherry Lane, Love Lane, South Alley and South Lane. The Lotts are laid off Sixty feet Front and one hundred and twenty feet back, each Lott having the conveniency of a Street or an Alley for an Outlet. There are Eighteen Lotts of one acre each laid out on the North End of the Town. Round the outskirts of the Town and on the Intersecting of the Common Lotts and Area are a number of Irregular Lotts, the Contents of which are wrote in each Lott. The Streets are laid off Sixty feet wide and the Alleys Twelve feet wide.⁵

Nine of the newly laid out lots were purchased in the first year of the town's existence, the initial landowners being George Cook, Jesse Grew, Joseph Richards, Nathaniel Mitchell, William Teague, Thomas Marvel, John Wills, Robert Prettyman and James Lowry. With the plots for the Court House and prison having been laid out and reserved, work must have soon begun on these structures.

In October, 1791, the General Assembly passed "A Supplement to an act, intituled, An act for removing the seat of justice from Lewes to a more central part of Sussex County, and for other purposes." It appears, from the preamble to this act, that there might have been some confusion over where the seat of justice resided or, perhaps, Lewes had just been reluctant to turn over the pre-eminent position she had held for so long in Sussex County. After noting that the Court House and jail had been built according to the earlier act, and that those at Lewes had been sold, the preamble goes on to state that the purpose of the act is to "remove any doubts that may or can arise, respecting the place where the courts ought to be held in the said county, or in any other respect whatsoever."⁶ The new county seat thus became officially and undoubtedly the locus of all

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county business, having become the place where the elections were to be held under the original act and the seat of justice under the supplement of October 26, 1791.

The supplement had two other provisions of great importance to the town. In Section 1, it stated that Georgetown "is hereby declared to be the name of the town in which the said new Court House and prison are erected."⁷ The second important provision is found in Section 3 of the supplement, where it was enacted that "all civil officers of the said county, who were by law heretofore obliged to reside at Lewes, shall, within twelve months from the passing of this act, reside either by themselves or their deputies, at Georgetown aforesaid."⁸ Thus the official community was required to people the infant county seat and added impetus was given to the growth of Georgetown, as the town was now formally known.

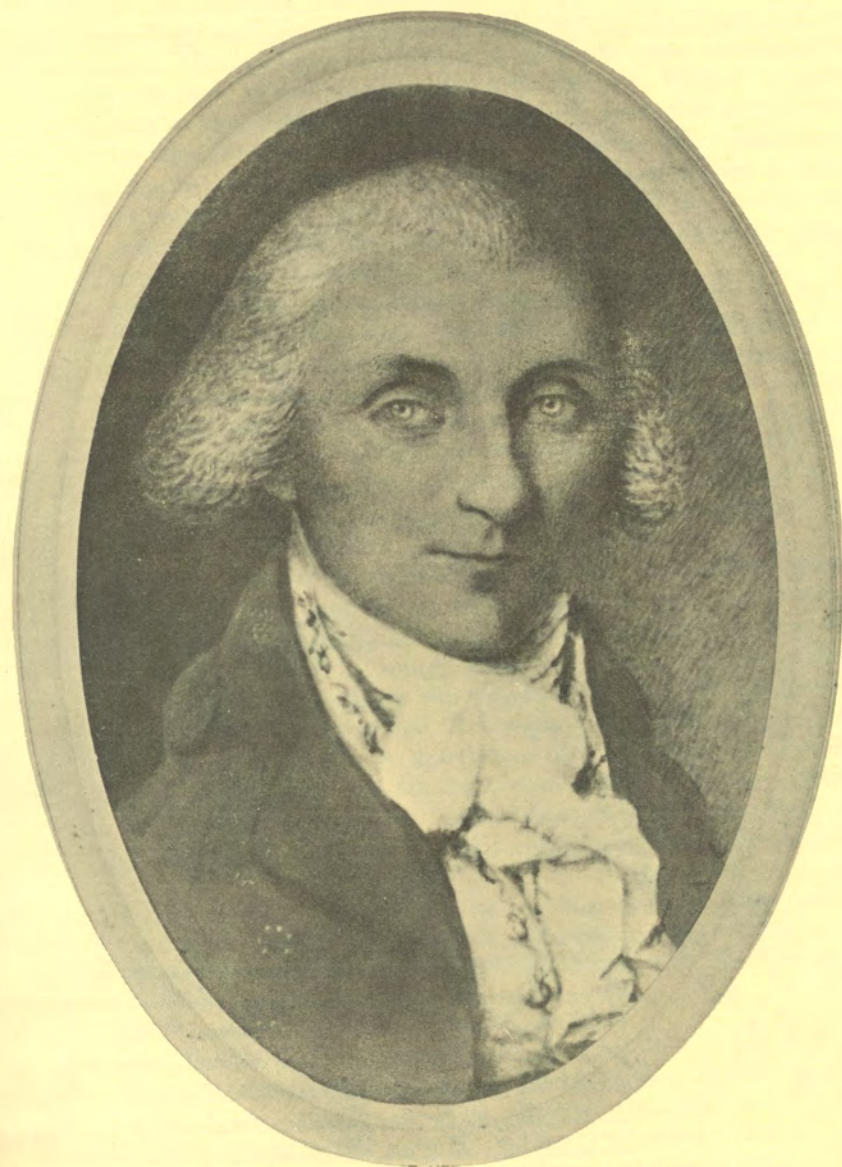
The origin of the name Georgetown is the subject of much speculation. One version has it that the town's name honored King George III of England. Although the Revolution had long since ended and Delaware had acquired the distinction of being "The First State" in the newly formed nation, this view maintains that heavily Tory Sussex, as a means of showing its true allegiance, gave its new capital the name of the English king.

A second theory may well have been conjured up to counter the Tory version. According to this latter version, there was strong sentiment to name the new county seat after the Revolutionary War hero and recently elected first President of the United States, George Washington. There was, however, one stumbling block to this display of patriotism and loyalty. At the time Sussex County already had a town known as Little Washington - the present town of Millsboro - and it would not do to have two villages with the same name in such close approximation. The solution arrived at was to name the new county seat after "The Father of Our Country," but to use his Christian rather than his surname; hence Georgetown.

The official version of the origin of the town's name holds that it was selected to honor George Mitchell, who had been active in the movement to have the county seat more centrally located. Mitchell, who for several sessions had been Speaker of the State Senate, was also one of the commissioners selected to purchase the land where the town was to be built. It is probably because the town was named "Georgetown" rather than "Mitchellville" or "Mitchellsburg" that so much speculation has arisen as to the origin of the town's name. Indeed, it does seem rather strange to use the first rather than the last name of the person being honored, unless, of course, the Christian name was selected as a compromise to allow all three of the men mentioned above to be honored by those who revered each.

The new county seat now had a name, a court house and a jail, and lots had been sold to those who would be its first residents. Nevertheless, growth was slow because much of the area was sparsely settled swampland. In addition, the new community was without means of communication and transportation. It is also important to note that Georgetown was not autonomous, but was governed from Dover by the General Assembly.

The next act by the legislature concerning Georgetown was passed on June 14, 1793. Most Delaware and Georgetown historians describe this



George Mitchell

legislation as an act to remove the whipping post and pillory from Lewes to Georgetown. A reading of the act does not appear to support this contention. The act states in Section 1 that,

the whipping post and pillory now erected in Georgetown shall be taken down and removed from the place where they now stand, and shall be put up on the public lot, on the east side of the Court House in George-Town, between that

and the goal, in such convenient situation as the Prothonotary of the county shall direct.⁹

From this language it seems reasonable to infer that Georgetown had both whipping post and pillory erected within the town prior to passage of the act and, in all likelihood, the existence of these implements of punishment dated from approximately the same time as the erection of the jail in 1791.

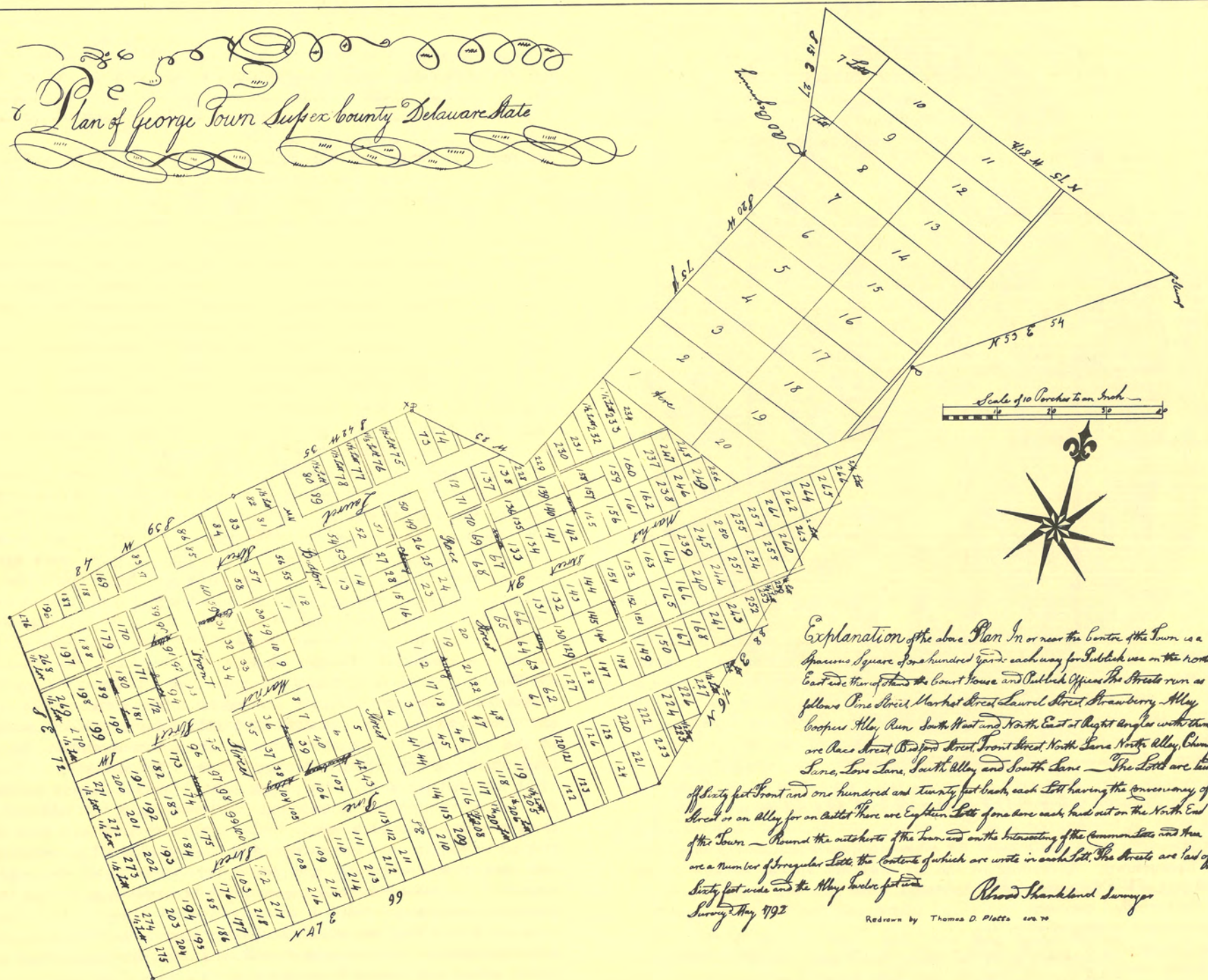
As previously mentioned, the building of the Court House and jail in Georgetown were to be accomplished without any additional levy of taxes because of the cost of the buildings were to be paid for out of proceeds from the sale of lots within the town and from money procured by subscription. In 1795, the General Assembly authorized a lottery to be held for the purpose of reimbursing the subscribers to the construction of the Court House and jail in Georgetown. This act, passed on February 7, 1795, authorized the managers of the lottery to raise a sum not exceeding three thousand five hundred dollars from which all subscribers were to be paid. Named as managers of the lottery were John Wise Batson, Thomas Laws, Isaac Cooper, Nathaniel Mitchell and John Collins. The act delineated the mechanics of the lottery and also provided that the managers should receive, "for their trouble in the discharge of the duties assigned them by this act," five per cent of the total sum raised by the lottery, a not insubstantial reward for their public service.

The same day that they passed the lottery act, the General Assembly tackled another problem that was to plague Georgetown for many years. The problem was pig control, or more correctly, swine control. To deal with this issue the General Assembly passed "An Act to prevent swine running at large in George-Town." The first of many such acts, it declared that beginning May 1, 1795, it would be unlawful for any inhabitant of Georgetown to "suffer or permit any of their hogs to run at large within the limits or bounds of said town, unless the said hogs are or shall be ringed through the nose, or yoked."¹⁰ The penalty for violating the act was a two dollar fine for each hog running loose. In addition to the fine, the act made it lawful for anyone to kill the offending hogs, provided that the pig killer then gave notice to the keeper of the public jail. The jailor, in turn, was authorized to take any hogs killed, pursuant to the act, and to use the meat, if fit for consumption, for the maintenance of any prisoners he might have in his custody.

In 1796, the General Assembly passed an act to make access to the county seat much less difficult by ordering that three roads be "laid out and straightened" in Sussex County. The first of these was to run from Milford Bridge, through Georgetown and Dagsboro, "until it intersects the west line that divides the said county of Sussex from the state of Maryland."¹¹ The next road was to begin at Lewes "and to run thence through George Town, untill it intersects the north line that divides the county aforesaid from Maryland."¹² Finally, a road was to be built to run from Georgetown "to the west line that divides the hundred of Little Creek, in the said county from Maryland."¹³

These three roads were all to be state roads and were to be forty feet wide, with thirty feet cleared. Richard Hayes, Nathaniel Mitchell,

Plan of George Town Superior County Delaware State



Explanation of the above Plan In or near the Center of the Town is a spacious Square of one hundred yards each way for Publick use on the North East end thereof stands the Court House and Publick Offices the Streets run as follows One Street Market Street Laurel Street Strawberry Alley Coopers Alley Run South West and North East at Right Angles with these are Race Street Bedford Street Front Street North Lane North Alley Cherry Lane Love Lane South Alley and South Lane The Lots are laid off sixty feet front and one hundred and twenty feet back each lot having the convenience of a Street or an Alley for an Outlet There are Eighteen Lots of one acre each laid out on the North End of the Town Round the outskirts of the Town and on the Intersecting of the Commons and there are a number of Irregular Lots the Contents of which are wrote in each lot. The Streets are laid off sixty feet wide and the Alley Twelve feet wide

Redmond Shankland Surveyor
Survey May 1792
Redrawn by Thomas D. Platts 1870

Woolley Burton, Rhoads Shankland, Isaac Cooper, Abraham Harris, Jr. and Thomas Laws were appointed as commissioners for the roads. Of the commissioners, Thomas Laws, at least, must have had some knowledge of local roads because, as the foreman of the Grand Jury, he had a public notice printed in the *Delaware and Eastern Shore Advertiser* of June 17, 1795, stating that the Grand Jury had received complaints that roads were not being kept in proper order and warning that if the overseers of roads and bridges failed to have their roads and bridges put in "ample and sufficient order," they could expect no further indulgence from the Grand Jury and might in fact face indictment.

Laws, along with John Wise Batson, was also authorized to accept subscriptions for the *Delaware and Eastern Shore Advertiser* in Georgetown. Residents of Georgetown and other Sussex Countians made use of the newspaper, if not to make themselves more aware of national and international news, at least to advertise for the return of runaway slaves. Thus, in the January 9, 1796, edition of the paper, Burton Waples ran an advertisement offering a twenty dollar reward for the return of his runaway slave, "Peter", who "Ranaway on the 6th day of October inst. from George-Town Election."

Three years later another advertisement in the same newspaper indicates that eighteenth century residents of Georgetown, at least the wealthier portion, made occasional excursions into the outside world. Twenty-four year old Peter Robinson, a future judge and Secretary of State of Delaware, made a business trip to Wilmington where he lost one hundred dollars. Hoping to recover his loss, Robinson published in the *Delaware and Eastern Shore Advertiser*, a description of the missing one hundred dollar note and the promise of a ten dollar reward for the finder. There is no record of whether the young traveler recovered his lost note, but perhaps in that day and age chances of recovery were much greater than today.

In the nine years of existence prior to the turn of the century, Georgetown made great advances in developing its "low-ground." Additional town lots were sold by the Commissioners, with the lot owners, as listed by J. Thomas Scharf, including the following:

Jacob Hazzard (1792)	Joseph Melson (1796)
Joseph Wilson (1792)	John Russell (1797)
David Shockley (1792)	George Hazzard (1797)
Robert Jones (1792)	Eleanor Redden (1797)
John Evans (1793)	Peter P. Harris (1797)
Thomas Bevans (1793)	Kendall Batson (1797)
William G. Moore (1793)	Joshua Morgan (1797)
Wingate Hall (1793)	Benton Harris (1797)
Kendall Batson (1793)	William Russell (1797)
James Anderson (1793)	N. Mitchell (1797)
Abraham Harris (1794)	Nicholas Ridgely (1797)
George Hazzard (1794)	Isaac Wilson (1797)
Benton Harris (1795)	N. Mitchell (1797)
William Russell (1795)	Benjamin Bullin (1797)
Lacy Morris (1795)	Dr. Jacob Wolfe (1797)

William Freeman (1797)
John W. Batson (1797)
Philip Kollock (1797)

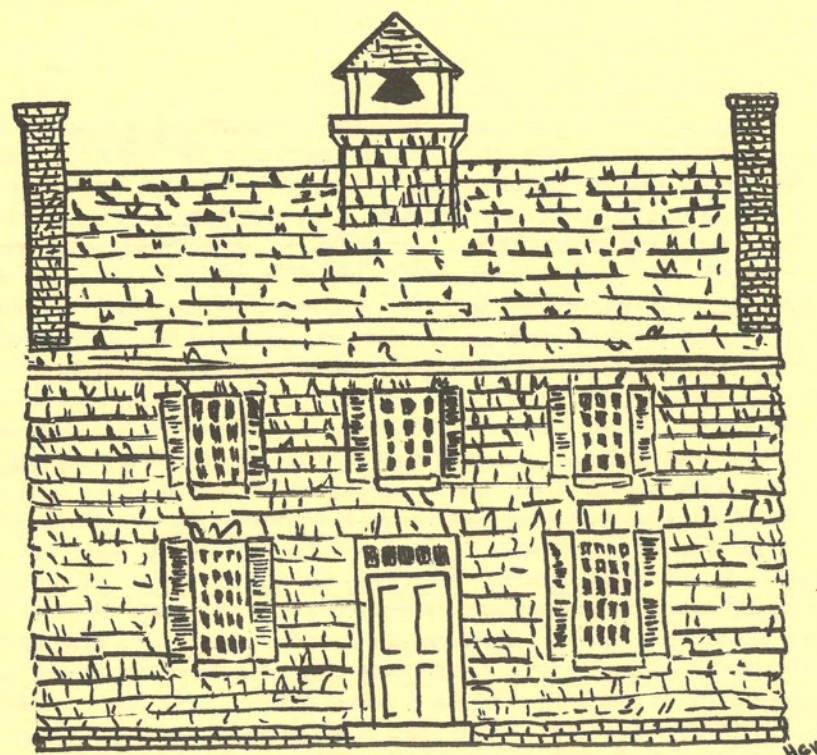
Thomas Bevans (1799)
J. Anderson (1797)

As the town grew in these final years of the eighteenth century, so too did the number of miscreants and debtors, and in 1798 the Levy Court recommended that the jail be enlarged. The addition was of brick, sixteen feet by sixteen feet, and two stories high. The jail stood on the corner of Market Street and Cherry Alley, and contained six cells, three on each floor, with one of the upper cells being reserved specifically for the imprisonment of delinquent debtors. It is worth noting that individual debtors could be freed from jail by the General Assembly's passage of a "private act." Such an act, for example, was passed on January 24, 1798, "for the relief of William Prentiss, an insolvent debtor confined in the public jail at George Town . . . but who is not an inhabitant of this state."¹⁴ Presumably as a result of such a private act the debtor would be released from custody if he, in turn, promised to leave the area.

The jail and the courthouse were not early Georgetown's only institutions. For those who respected both the laws of man and of God there was, of course, the Christian church. In 1794, Georgetown's first church, St. Paul's Episcopal, was organized by lawyers and county officials. In the years before St. Paul's first building was erected, services were held in the Court House. Thus began a rather close association between church and state that was to continue well into the next century. The first trustees of St. Paul's were Rowland Bevin, Edmond Dickerson, Abraham Harris, Philip Kollock, Isaac Wilson and Warren Jefferson. On March 8, 1797, the Commissioners appointed to lay out and sell lots in Georgetown, donated lots numbered 102 and 103 at Front and Pine Streets to the trustees for use as a church site. However, the lots were never used for this purpose and the church site was not settled on until after the turn of the century.

Although Episcopalians were the only organized congregation in Georgetown before 1800, Methodists were also being ministered to. Methodist preachers visited the area of central Sussex County several years prior to the actual founding of Georgetown. Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop consecrated in America, noted in his journal that on September 24, 1779, he had traveled from Lewes to the home of Abraham Harris, where he met a gathering of neighbors to whom the Reverend Allfree was preaching. Although Methodists were in the area at quite an early date, the history of the first Methodist congregation in Georgetown dates from 1802 when Wesley Chapel received a lot on Pine Street.

In her book, *Churches in Delaware during the Revolution*, Elizabeth Waterson indicates that there was a Presbyterian Church in Georgetown during the eighteenth century. If a Presbyterian Church did exist in the area in Revolutionary times, it must have died out shortly thereafter and there is no indication of the formation of another congregation of that denomination until 1860, when the Georgetown Presbyterian Church was officially organized. Formed at the request of twelve persons, the Georgetown Presbyterian congregation had only sixteen members in 1867 and no church building until 1872. This indicates that if a Presbyterian congregation did exist in the area in the eighteenth century, it had almost



First County Courthouse in Georgetown

completely disappeared during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In addition to divine directives, the residents of Georgetown were also receiving more worldly messages. The townspeople received newspapers and were, therefore, aware of events outside of Sussex County. Knowledge of the outside world was further enhanced by Georgetown's postal service. The history of the Post Office in Georgetown can be traced back to the year 1799, when James M. Broom was appointed the first postmaster and a home on Pine Street served as the post office. In October, 1799, Burton Harris was appointed postmaster and his homestead on South Bedford Street became the new post office.

While Georgetown's adults were increasingly aware of activities in the outside world, the youth of the town, or at least the children of the wealthy and influential, had some opportunity to obtain a limited education. Schools probably existed in Georgetown from almost the very beginning, with private homes, churches and the Court House serving as classrooms. These early schools were strictly private in nature, for although attempts were made to establish public education in Delaware as early as 1796, free public education was still many years in the future for both Georgetown and the rest of the state.

The earliest students in Georgetown were primarily the children of lawyers and county officials. It is unlikely that farmers in the area had either the ability or the inclination to pay so that their children might be given a formal education.

The history of Georgetown from its founding to the end of the eighteenth century is a story of growth. An artificial town was planned and laid out in the midst of a virtual wasteland, and then received a name. Public buildings were erected and enlarged, and private building lots were surveyed and sold. County officials made their homes here because of legislative mandate, while other newcomers, notably lawyers, settled in Georgetown because it was the county seat and, therefore, the place for the practice of their profession. These earliest years also saw Georgetown lose some of its insular character as new roads were opened, making the town the hub of Sussex County. From 1791 to 1811, everyone in the county had to come to Georgetown to vote in county elections. Also helping to lessen the isolation were the opportunities to acquire newspapers and the beginnings of a postal system. The development of a rudimentary system of private education and the organization of its first church were additional indications that Georgetown was ready to enter a new century which would bring a great deal of growth and maturity to the fledgling county seat as it increased both in size and importance.