



A HISTORY OF DELAWARE  
THROUGH ITS GOVERNORS

*1776 - 2008*

ROGER A. MARTIN

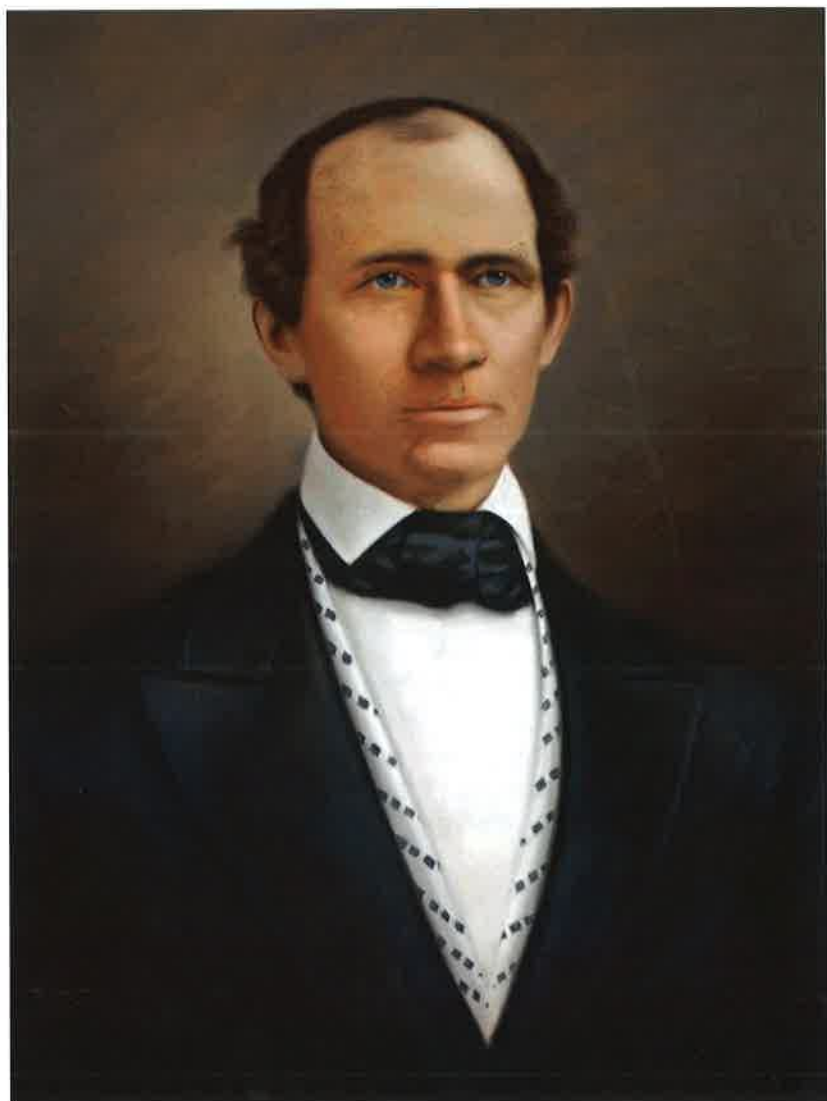


## 38. WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON ROSS

June 2, 1814 – June 30, 1887

*Ross was so outspoken in his attitude toward the Union in the Civil War he found it necessary to get out of town and go to Europe, once in the early part of the war and a second time in 1863 until the end of the conflict.*

He served as governor during the 66th and 67th General Assemblies, from January 21, 1851, until January 16, 1855. Ross was a Sussex County Democrat, a plantation owner, and a Methodist. He became governor at the age of 36.



Oil portrait of Governor William H. H. Ross at Legislative Hall was painted in 1898 by artist J. Paul Brown. It was presented to the State of Delaware that same year by the governor's widow (courtesy of the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs).

JAMES ROSS WAS THE FIRST MEMBER OF THE ROSS family to settle in what is now Delaware, when he put down roots in Northwest Fork Hundred near the present-day town of Seaford in 1730. That area was then considered to be part of the colony of Maryland and remained so until 1775. James Ross's brother, William, was Governor Ross's grandfather. William's son, Caleb, lived in Laurel and married Letitia Lofland. Governor Ross's mother was a stepsister to Dr. John Lofland, the "Milford Bard."

William, the future governor, was born on June 2, 1814 in Laurel, nine months after General William Henry Harrison soundly defeated the British in Canada. Caleb obviously thought enough of the future president to name his son after him. Two locations in Laurel are associated with the Ross Family. One was a home that once stood on the lot now occupied by the Bank of Delmar, and the other is the old Henry Clay Lewis home on the Sycamore Road, just opposite Lakeside Manor.

First educated at the local Laurel Academy, Ross moved on in 1832 to the classical Claremont Academy in Rising Sun, Pennsylvania. One of the most cosmopolitan governors, Ross accompanied his father on a trip to the British Isles in 1836. A year later, they traveled to Adams County, Illinois. Caleb owned interests in land, saw and grist mills, and other businesses around Laurel. William followed in his footsteps by embracing the new peach industry. As Caleb was a director of the Farmers Bank of the State of Delaware, so also was William after the Civil War.

William's sister, Sally Ann, married Governor Paynter's son, Samuel R. Paynter, in 1830. In the Paynter file at the Delaware Historical Society, there is a cryptic notation to the effect that Ross's brother, James, was murdered in Monticello, Georgia in 1833.<sup>1</sup>

Never serving in the General Assembly, Ross was a delegate to the National Democratic Conventions of 1844, 1848, 1856, and 1860. Militarily, he was head of a local cavalry company which was disbanded in 1849 after the Mexican War.

In 1850, Ross was ready for political office and was selected as the Democratic candidate for governor. The Whig Party was in a shambles and in its absence came forth a Temperance Party, whose candidate was

Thomas Lockwood of Frederica. The temperance issue had been building gradually in the state and was reaching its peak. George Read Riddle, a descendant of George Read, was running as the Democratic candidate for U.S. Congress. The campaign was heralded by the Democrats with the slogan "Ross-Riddle-Reform." Riddle was elected and Ross barely squeaked through in the closest gubernatorial election ever. Out of the total of 11,979 votes cast statewide, Ross won by only 23 votes. In addition, at age 36, Ross became the youngest governor ever to be elected to the office in Delaware. Democrats made a clean sweep of both the governor's office and the legislature.

On May 12, 1851, the new U.S. President, Millard Fillmore, stopped over in Wilmington on his way to New York with his entire cabinet. A reception was held for them in City Hall. At 2:00 p.m., the President's party left for Philadelphia on the steamer, *Roger Williams*.<sup>2</sup> No record has been found to indicate that Governor Ross met with the Whig President on that occasion.

Delaware's fledgling oyster industry was having its problems again. Demand was outstripping supply, so laws were passed banning oystering from May 1 to August 10. Boat licenses were required for out-of-state oyster boats and dredging was prohibited. The new laws provided the impetus for the establishment of a celebration at Bowers Beach on the Delaware Bay on the second Thursday in August each year in honor of the resumption of oyster season. People would come from all around to celebrate oystering after the end of each banned season.<sup>3</sup>

Demographically, the 1850s were years of immigration into Delaware by Germans from Philadelphia and Baltimore looking for jobs. The year 1852 was most eventful, for it made the long-sought goal of a railroad downstate a reality. Talked about since June 1836, the charter was revived and in 1852 the state subscribed to 5,000 shares to be paid from proceeds of the sale of the New Castle-Frenchtown Railroad. Though John M. Clayton was still avidly interested, the president of the railroad, and its prime-mover, was now Samuel M. Harrington, Sr. Plans proceeded, but one other momentary obstacle stood in the way—the issue of whether the railroad should

<sup>1</sup> Note: The following information was taken from James Ross's tombstone: "James Jefferson Ross, born 1809, a native of Laurel, Delaware, who was murdered on the night of October 8, 1833, aged 24 years, 19 days, at the theatre in Monticello [Georgia], where he had resided for three years. Beloved by all who knew him (his murderer excepted), his memory will be cherished, his fame can never die." (found on the website: <http://files.usgwarchives.net/ga/jasper/cemeteries/cm155ross-ceme.txt>, 2013).



The Ross Mansion, built between 1854 and 1860 on the extensive plantation of former Governor William Henry Harrison Ross north of Seaford. The structure, now maintained as an historic site by the Seaford Historical Society, is one of the finest examples of Italianate architecture in the State of Delaware and one of Sussex County's most beloved historic landmarks (photo by Dick Carter).

follow the creeks and rivers in the downstate coastal area near Milford or run in a more westerly fashion near the Maryland border. Finally, Andrew Gray of New Castle came forth with the present north-south alignment along the western corridor. With the controversy settled, construction on the project began at last. Isaac Trimble, West Point-educated engineer from Virginia, did many of the surveys of the railroad sites.<sup>4</sup>

On July 15, 1853, Wilmington received another president as he made his way through the state. Franklin Pierce and his Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, spoke at City Hall.

The two decades between 1830 and 1850 were years of conflict between downstate agricultural interests and upstate industrial interests. Social and political demands were made on state government for prohibition of alcohol, abolition of slavery, and, most importantly, more equitable representation for New Castle County in the General Assembly. For the first and only time in Delaware history, a proposed con-

stitutional revision was submitted to the populace in 1853 and it was soundly defeated.<sup>5</sup> Despite the growing mistrust, it would be more than 40 years before a serious attempt at constitutional revision would be tried again.<sup>6</sup>

On Thursday morning, May 30, 1854, just before noon, three five-horse wagons filled with five tons of gunpowder were en route to the wharf from the Du Pont Powder Works. As the wagons rumbled along 14th Street in downtown Wilmington between Tatnall and Market Streets, an horrendous explosion of unknown origin sent the drivers, horses, and wagons into oblivion. Hundreds of window panes in the neighborhood were shattered, with considerable damage to private homes. While the owners paid the losses, Wilmingtonians had second thoughts about allowing the transport of such cargoes again through their streets.<sup>7</sup>

Public education continued to grow, though slowly, with 236 school districts in the state.

When Ross left the governor's office, he retired to a private, but certainly not an inactive life. He



Restored structures on the Governor Ross Plantation include the gatehouse (upper left), the slave quarters (upper right) and a complex of farm buildings, including the granary in the center of the photo, below, which dates from the 1850s, a barn and a log corn crib or "stack," among other buildings (photos by Dick Carter).



continued to experiment with peaches and other new crops and to promote the expansion of the Delaware railroad. In 1859, he built one of Sussex County's finest homes, an ornate Italianate mansion on his extensive plantation north of Seaford, one of the largest in southern Delaware. More than perhaps any other Delawarean of his day, he was a true embodiment of the "Old South" aspect of life in the First State.

With the coming of the Civil War, Ross, one of Delaware's largest slave-owners, became the gadfly to those in the state who feared for Delaware's position in the Union. Ross trod a very thin line and was seen by many as a southern sympathizer, especially after

one of his sons joined the Confederate Army in 1861. At the time, Ross had written to a friend:

...My son, Caleb, left home yesterday...he intends to join the Confederate Army...Of course I shall be charged with having sent him...For that reason I had better leave the country for a while....

In early 1861, Caleb Ross did go south and enlisted in the Confederacy. Within the year, the 20-year-old was dead of typhoid fever in Big Spring, Virginia. Shortly after his son left home Ross went to Europe.

In the meantime, Federal troops raided his home near Seaford in October, 1861. When he returned a year later, he found Federal troops at the polls in Seaford on Election Day, 1862. He tried to reason with the commanding officer, old General John Wool from Baltimore, but all his arguments came to naught. Ross left the country again from 1863 until the end of the war. While in exile, he wrote few letters except to his wife, to whom he wrote the following:

...Not that I am guilty of any act against the government of the US but I am considered to entertain opinions which are pronounced by some people as disloyal. For that reason I remain out of the country, hoping that the American people may some day return to their reason when I may return in safety to spend the remainder of my days in a country ruined by the madness and fanaticism of its own people.<sup>8</sup>

When the war was over, Ross paid a dear price for his posture during the war years. For one thing, he had invested \$62,000 in border-state bonds which eventually became worthless. This did not prove to be a terrible financial calamity for Ross, for he was extremely industrious. After he returned home, he resumed cultivation of his extensive lands and attended to his agricultural interests. Ross was instrumental in having the railroad extended down the Delmarva Peninsula and through Seaford. He had his own whistle-stop on the edge of his estate, named *Ross Station*.

To some, Ross's actions during the war were as

worthy of condemnation as had, perhaps, been those of Thomas Robinson, the Sussex Loyalist leader of the Revolutionary War era, who eventually escaped to Nova Scotia. Yet, to assume that such men were voices in the wilderness, shouting out their personal feelings as solitary voices of protest would be a mistake. Many of their peers and neighbors felt exactly as they did but did not feel so free to express their true feelings. Such is the dichotomy of Delaware politics that has attended major issues since the foundation of the Delaware State and even before. Downstate is one thing; upstate is another, and vice versa. Perhaps it is true that never the twain shall meet.

After quietly tending his lands for some years, Ross went in the last year of his life to live with his daughter, Sarah, and her husband, Dr. S. R. Skillern, in Philadelphia. Ross died in that city on June 30, 1887, at 73 years of age. He was buried in the cemetery of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seaford. At his death, the value of Ross's estate was estimated at \$200,000 (equivalent to a sum in excess of \$5 million in 2013 dollars), mostly in stocks and bonds.

His wife, Emeline, daughter of George K. Hall of Concord, whom he had married in 1840, lived until June, 1909. She was a distant relative of Governor John Wood Hall and the granddaughter of General Jesse Green, a Delaware militia officer of the War of 1812 and a direct descendant of the Lords Baltimore of Maryland.<sup>9</sup> The Ross Mansion still stands today a short distance north of Seaford, where it is maintained as a historic museum by the Seaford Historical Society. A fine example of the Italianate style, it remains one of Sussex County's most important and beloved historical landmarks.<sup>10</sup>\*

## REFERENCE NOTES

1. Paynter Folder, Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware.
2. J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Delaware, 1609-1888*, (Port Washington, N. Y./London, 1888), p. 326N1.
3. Joanne O. Passmore, *Three Centuries of Delaware Agriculture*, (Dover, 1978), p. 64.
4. Hugh R. Gibb, *The Delaware Railroad*, (Master's Thesis, University of Delaware, 1965), pp. 114-118. It was Isaac Trimble who later went South to the Confederacy and helped lead Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg.
5. Paul Dolan, *The Government and Administration of Delaware*, (New York, 1953), p. 17.
6. Scharf, p. 316.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 656-657N1; John D. Gates, *The du Pont Family*, (New York, 1979), p. 50.
8. Harold B. Hancock, *Delaware During The Civil War*, (Wilmington, 1961), p. 153.
9. The children of the marriage were: Letitia Lofland (m. Victor Green, Esq.), James Jefferson (1846-1934), William Madison (1848-1910), Edward C., Caleb (1841-1861), Sarah A. (m. Dr. S. R. Skillern of Philadelphia), Mary G. (m. Montgomery Fisher, Esq. of Seaford), Laura F. (m. John Gray and died in 1916), John Wood and George Hall (1844-1861). James's son, Brooks, died in 1948.

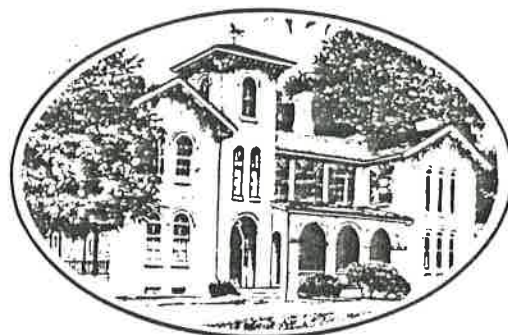
Governor Ross's great-grandson, James Ross, was still living in Seaford as of 1984.

10. "Seaford's 12th Annual Towne & Country Fair," 2005, Morning Star Publications.

\*NOTE: The Governor Ross mansion is located on a tract of land once known as Grape Vine Thicket, which was, prior to 1775, part of Dorchester County, Maryland. John Tennent purchased the property in 1776. He married Sally Hooper, a member of one of the first families to settle in the Seaford area. Caleb Ross purchased the 1,398-acre estate in 1836. After his death in 1841, the property devolved upon his son, William, the future governor. William and his wife, Elizabeth Emeline Hall, lived in Laurel until 1845, when

they moved into the 18th Century Tennent farmhouse on the estate Caleb Ross had purchased. Ross started construction of his Italian Villa style mansion in 1854, as he neared the end of his term as governor. The house was completed in 1860. Half of the original frame house remains attached to the rear of the mansion. The other half was moved to serve as a summer kitchen, but was later demolished. The mansion was purchased by the Seaford Historical Society in 1976. The society has carried out extensive restoration and renovation of both the mansion and other structures on the property, including a complex of agricultural buildings and an ornate gatehouse. In recent years, they have also acquired one of the original Ross slave quarter structures and have moved it back to the estate.

Recalling  
Yesteryears  
at the  
Ross Mansion  
by  
Elizabeth Robinson West



*Seaford Historical Society, Inc.*  
P.O. Box 715 • Seaford, Delaware 19973

## REMEMBERANCES OF PLEASANT DAYS AT THE ROSS MANSION

When I was old enough to ride my bike, I rode out to the Ross Home to play with Anne Ross almost every Saturday morning after I had finished my chores at home. I did not see very much of her brother Jim who was older and away at school. At the entrance road to the Ross Estate was the Gate House. It was built on the right side of the road. Some of the servants lived there and they were always happy to see you. I would stop and chat with them before going to the Ross Home. Out-of-town people who came to call on the Ross family would stop here and leave their names. A runner then took this information and was sent to the house to get permission for them to visit. The first Mrs. Brooks Ross was living then and was very gracious to Anne's friends. Many times she would have the maids take a linen cloth outside and serve a picnic lunch under the many trees which covered the yard at that time. Sometimes I was invited for dinner. I can remember Mr. Ross standing up at the head of the table carving a huge prime rib roast.

They had many animals in the big barns back of the house. Their horses were beautiful. Anne had her own horse and was an accomplished rider. One day, Mrs. Ross took us into Seaford in the prettiest tan buggy with a large beige umbrella over us. The buggy had rubber wheels and we quietly trotted along. That ride I will never forget. Mrs. Ross didn't live very long after the ride. When I would go out there, we tried to be real quiet with our laughter as we knew she was very ill. She died with cancer when Anne was about fourteen years old.

When wheat thrashing day arrived, the yards were full of farmers and workers. This was a big day in the lives of the members of the Ross family.

The ball room was used for parties and dances entertaining the friends of Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Ross as well as Anne's friends. Their servants always made everyone feel so welcome. Anne used to ask me if I would like to go down in the cellar and see where the slaves used to be kept. I never went, as it was too scary for me.

The second Mrs. Brooks Ross was also a lovely lady and was so nice to Anne and her friends. They all moved to West Seaford after this marriage. Later, Anne went into nurses training at Jefferson Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

## FATHER AND SISTER OF BROOKS ROSS

In a big country house across the road and the railroad tract lived Mr. James Ross, his daughter Mrs. Ethel Graham, and her daughter Sara Catherine Graham. Anne and I would go over there sometimes to play with Sarah Catherine. Mr. Jim Ross was Mr. Brooks Ross's father and Ethel Graham (we called her "Miss Ethel") was Brooks Ross's sister, and Sara Catherine Graham was his niece. They were a lovely family and always welcomed us. Ivory was their black servant and was a joy to know. I can see us out playing now in their big yard.

On Sunday morning the train would go by and the train men would throw out the Sunday papers. We would all run down to the station to pick them up. We were given the funny papers to devour. At that time there was a station called the "Ross Station". It was a small structure situated on the north side over the rails. We used to play on the station run way. It's too bad that the station was torn down. The Ross family would have the trains stop there so that they would board and travel to the cities. They used a red flag to flag down the train. Of course, one of the Ross's was chairman of the Pennsylvania Railroad Board. He was one of the leading backers who had the railroad come down to Sussex County. This made a big change in southern Delaware financially and socially.

Later, another exciting happening was to go down to the Seaford Railroad Station to see the train come in every Sunday afternoon after church. There you would see half of Seaford's people talking and laughing. I do remember the sailor boys in their uniforms on the train coming up from Norfolk, Virginia. They were on their way to visit their homes in the north. This was during the first world war. The Ross Family were the ones who made it possible for the railroad line to go to Cape Charles, Virginia, and also to Cambridge, Maryland. It brought prosperity to our community.

"Miss Ethel" drove a large black touring car and what a treat it was to be asked to ride in it. I can remember when I was about twelve years old, she invited my mother, Mrs. Sallie Robinson, and me to go on a picnic to Old Christ church near Laurel, Delaware. The church was opened for Whit Sunday Service. After the service the children were glad to get out of the church as the seats were so hard for sitting to hear the long sermon. The children played around the church yard. One of the Reverend Darbie's sons named Leonard

Darbie, found a grave which had caved in. We looked in and saw a skeleton head. One look was enough for me! We had a lovely picnic of fried chicken, potato salad, cold drinks and my first taste of a jelly roll which "Miss Ethel" had made.

Another day with the Ross family which I will never forget was the ride in the touring car with the top down. It was a big treat! Not many cars were owned in Seaford at that time - 1917.

## COUSINS

Mr. Edward Ross and his wife Miss Radie lived in the brick home on the main street in Seaford (now High Street). This house is now called "The Sugar Shell", an antiques business. My father, Walter B. Robinson, was mayor of Seaford at this time. He and Mr. "Ed" Ross (he was often called "Colonel Ross") were best of friends and I would go calling with my Father and Mother at their home. They had three children, Calhoun, Elizabeth, and Clara "Tids". I was invited to all of their weddings and receptions with my family. Elizabeth Ross Claiborne, and Clara "Tids" Ross Gage were beautiful girls. They were cousins of Mr. Brooks Ross and "Miss Ethel". Elizabeth had one child - a son named "Charles".

In those days there were big fourth of July parades in Seaford. I always went to their home with my family and sat on the porch to watch the parade go by. Black Fad Deshields always threw brick ice cream bars to those watching the parade. This treat was given by Ira Wright's Men's Clothing Store. He had a soda fountain in the rear of his store. This was a yearly treat especially for the children.

When the circus came to town, the roadman of the circus had to meet with my Father to make the arrangements. Of course, my Father would be given quite a few free tickets. He would give them to all his relatives, which were many, and the rest to friends. At that time, the circus looked as big to me as the Barnum and Bailey looks now. I was sure that when I grew up, I wanted to be one of the pretty ladies riding on the elephants. This was another time we would sit on Mr. Ed Ross's porch and enjoy the circus parade.



I remember when the show boat came up the river to Seaford. To me, the boat looked then like the Queen Mary did in New York harbor when I saw it later in life. The show boat had a real lion in a cage. The show the night my Father took me was "Ten Nights in the Bar Room" which I have never forgotten.

Letitia Ross, Eleanor, and William were all beautiful and attractive children of Mrs. Harry Darbie whose first husband was Caleb Ross. Later, she married Mr. Harry Darbie. One day Letitia Ross (called "Tish" by everyone) sent word for me to come down to the Sussex Hotel owned by her Father, Caleb Ross who had passed away. Her family was getting ready to live in a new home with her new Dad, Mr. Harry Darbie. When I arrived, Tish's beautiful bisque doll was standing on the floor. After a minute, Tish informed me that she was giving me the doll. I was spell bound and she knew I would appreciate it. My thank you's were many. Later, I realized that Tish was getting older. Dolls were out of fashion for her and boys were in fashion. Tish was about ten years my senior.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Darbie and the family lived in a house on the corner of High Street and Pine. They had a large front porch which was right on the street. We children would love to walk by there at night and look through the windows. We could see the girls with their dates in the well lit parlor. One day, Eleanor was sitting on the front porch when Frederick Marvil, from Laurel, parked his car in front of the house. He got out of the car, walked to the porch, picked Eleanor up in his arms and walked back to his car putting her in the front seat by his side and drove off. We children thought that was so romantic! They were married soon after and lived in Laurel. They had one son, Frederick, Jr., and she has a grandson also named Frederick.

Tish married a Lt. Kaufman in the Navy. They has one child named Anne. Later in their lives they settled in California. I was invited with my family to her wedding which was beautiful. The reception was in their home. William Ross was the nicest fellow and so good looking!. He developed tuberculosis and had to live in Colorado. He never married.

## SEAFORD

Seaford was a pretty little town. Beautiful trees lined the streets until the highway coming through Front Street had them torn down. The other streets being paved followed suit. It was such a damage to the town's beauty a long time ago.

Seaford was always known for being one of the most hospitable towns in Delaware. The people used calling cards, served beautiful teas, and danced at lovely balls held in Colbourn's Hall. When I was young, I had the privilege of taking a corsage from my brother to his date, Lillian Anthony (Mrs. Gilbert Frederick) so she could wear it at the dance that night at Colbourn's Hall. My mother was a patroness at these affairs. She was in the receiving line with about eleven other Seaford ladies. The dancers always spoke to them and shook hands with the patronesses. At the end of the line, they were given dance programs so that names could be listed for the exchange of dances with their friends. The dance cards were numbered from 1 to 12. The ladies always danced the first and last dance with the partner they arrived with. The ball was beautifully decorated and the girls wore beautiful formal gowns. The music was provided by orchestras from the big cities. During intermission, platters of chicken salad, pickles, olives, home-made rolls, and coffee were served. The dances were beautiful and exciting affairs - the end of the Victorian Era.

Once when I was a child, I was allowed to attend the dance to sit and watch until after the Grand March. What a treat! When I was older (age 5) I took dancing lessons from Cousin Mary Martin. Much later, I gave dancing lessons to Seaford, Federalsburg, Preston, and Easton teens which I very much enjoyed.

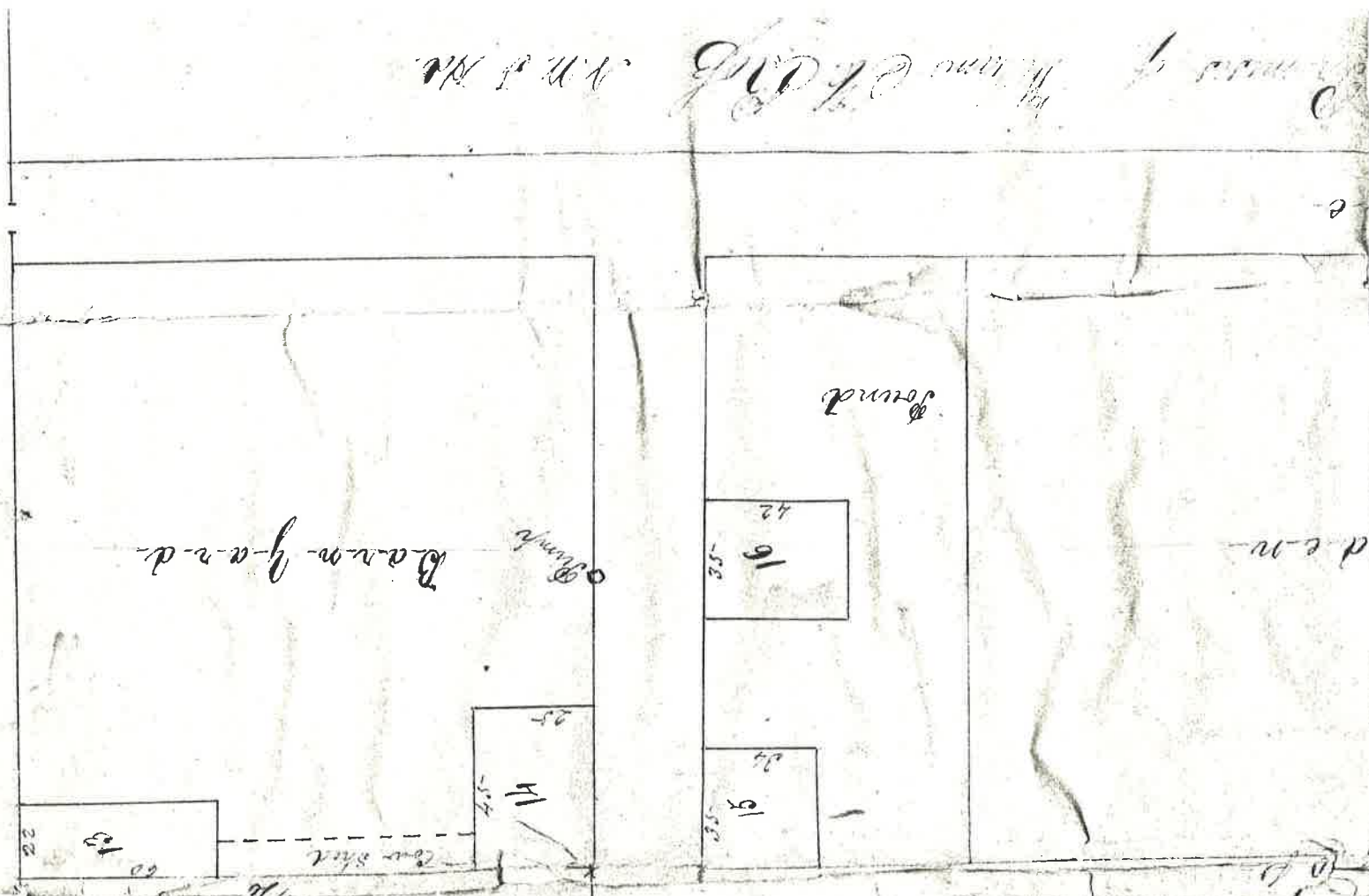
These memories are very dear to me. I have tried to record them as well as I could for the Seaford Historical Society in 1991.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Robinson West was born in Seaford, Delaware on April 24, 1911. She was the youngest child of Sallie and Walter Robinson. She married Everette G. West of Laurel, Delaware. She has one son Halbert G. West, and a granddaughter named Whitney. Her grandson drowned when he was fourteen years old. All of her life has been spent in Sussex County Delaware. She has been devoted to both Seaford and Laurel where she now resides.

## CREDITS

Cover Designed by Julie F. Slatcher  
Edited by Madeline A. Dunn  
Typed by Claudia F. Melson

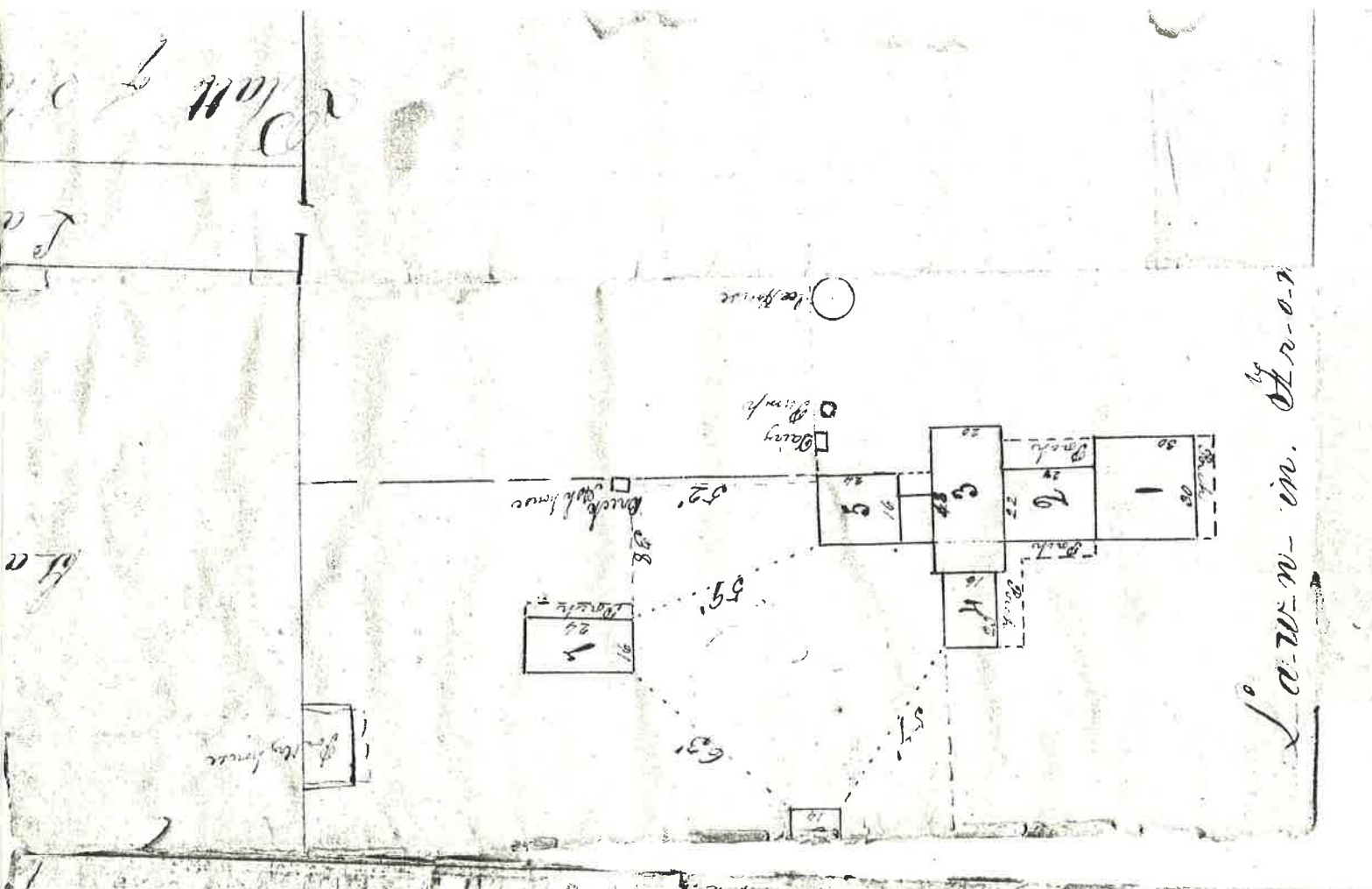


*Explanation of the connected plan*

No. 1 is a Brick Dwelling - 11 x 30 x 30. No. 2 is a small building 8 x 16 x 23. No. 3 is a 48 x 20 all of which is the stable high with cellars below. No. 4 is a frame Office attached to No. 2. No. 5 is a frame kitchen connected with No. 3 by a Corridor and is 16 x 24. No. 6 is a high all of which is 12 x 24. No. 7 is a frame Dwelling, No. 8 is a frame Dwelling, No. 9 is a frame Dwelling, No. 10 is a frame Dwelling, No. 11 is a frame Dwelling, No. 12 is a frame Dwelling, No. 13 is a frame Dwelling, No. 14 is a frame Dwelling, No. 15 is a frame Dwelling, No. 16 is a frame Dwelling.

*Distance from a front office to the back of the barn - 130 feet, from the front of the barn to the back of the barn - 101 feet.*

*Distance from a front office to the back of the barn - 130 feet, from the front of the barn to the back of the barn - 101 feet.*



*Received of* \_\_\_\_\_

**THE KENT COUNTY MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY,**  
OF REHOBOTH BEACH, DELAWARE.

**THIS RECEIPT DOES NOT BRING THE COMPANY ON UNOCCUPIED PROPERTY UNLESS INTEREST DEPOSITS OBTAINED BY PERMITTS REQUIRED FOR THE USE OF GASOLINE.**

DUE JANUARY 1, 1902 IN FULL TO JANUARY 1, 1903.

Interest ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Less 7 per cent. interest on balance to credit, December 31, 1900..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Amount due..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

190 \_\_\_\_\_

AGENT. \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation of the connected plan*

No. 1 is a Brick Dwelling - 11 x 30 x 30. No. 2 is a small building 8 x 16 x 23. No. 3 is a 48 x 20 all of which is the stable high with cellars below. No. 4 is a frame Office attached to No. 2. No. 5 is a frame kitchen connected with No. 3 by a Corridor and is 16 x 24. No. 6 is a high all of which is 12 x 24. No. 7 is a frame Dwelling, No. 8 is a frame Dwelling, No. 9 is a frame Dwelling, No. 10 is a frame Dwelling, No. 11 is a frame Dwelling, No. 12 is a frame Dwelling, No. 13 is a frame Dwelling, No. 14 is a frame Dwelling, No. 15 is a frame Dwelling, No. 16 is a frame Dwelling.

*Handwritten notes at the top of the page, including 'Hall' and 'L.A.W.-in. Dr-r-o-r'.*



Application of William H. Robt of N. H. & S. C. Sec. Del

FOR INSURANCE AGAINST FIRE BY THE

**KENT COUNTY MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY,**

For the Sum of Five thousand Dollars, to wit: On

(Here describe the property: its situation; description; value; by whom owned, and how; by whom occupied, and how; how warmed; how the stove-pipes are secured; where the ashes are kept; and if any manufactory is carried on in it; what kind; the estimated distance to the next house, and to the pump or well; the kind of contents; whether not hazardous, hazardous, extra hazardous, or specially hazardous; also the estimated value of each No. separately, and the amount to be insured thereon.)

**No. 1.**— A brick Dwelling House with frame Kitchen and Office attached. Brick part 7.8 ft front and 30 ft <sup>wide</sup> at one end <sup>west</sup> and the other <sup>east</sup> side of the building. The kitchen is on the north side and south side of the building. The kitchen is of wood, 1 1/2 story high 24 x 16 ft, separated from the brick by a frame colnade. It is marked on the plat No. 5. The office, marked No. 4, of wood, two stories high 23 x 16 ft. There is a large cellar under the brick building. The whole building is warmed with stoves and open fire places, both wood and coal being used. There is a force pump in the kitchen, and a suction pump 100 ft from the kitchen, also a suction pump near the barn and stable.

| Estimated Value. | Insured Value. | Per cent. |
|------------------|----------------|-----------|
|                  |                |           |

On the above described brick Dwelling and frame Office and Kitchen, I have insured in the Farmers Mutual F. Ins. Co. of New Brunswick Co. Del. the sum of \$4000, and the furniture the sum of \$1200. I wish to effect in the Kent County office an additional insurance of \$3000, on the Dwelling and \$800 on the contents.

|         |        |  |
|---------|--------|--|
| \$10000 | \$3000 |  |
|         |        |  |

I also wish to insure the following buildings and contents decided in the accompanying plat.

- No. 6 Smoke House 14 by 15.5 ft from dwelling \$50.
- No. 7 Negro Quarters 1 1/2 story high 24 x 16, peak in front \$150. Ashes kept in brick ash house 28 ft from the Quarters.
- No. 9 A frame carriage house 22 x 28 — \$50.
- No. 10 A frame Cat house & warm room 39 x 28 — \$50.
- No. 11 A frame Cow crib or cubs 24 x 40 two stories high \$100.
- No. 12 A frame Building in course of erection 50.
- No. 13 A new Barn 2 stories high 22 x 60. \$200.
- No. 14 So. Old Barn 25 x 45 — \$250.
- No. 15 " Stable room 11 1/2 story high 34 x 35 — \$150.
- No. 16 " Stable, 35 x 42 — 150.

|        |  |  |
|--------|--|--|
| \$50   |  |  |
| 150    |  |  |
| 50     |  |  |
| 50     |  |  |
| 100    |  |  |
| 50     |  |  |
| 200    |  |  |
| 250    |  |  |
| 150    |  |  |
| 150    |  |  |
| \$6000 |  |  |

There are some other buildings as laid down on the plat of but little value not insured.

There is an insurance on buildings and contents No. 7, 11, 13, 14, 15 & 16, in Farmers Mutual F. I. Co. of \$1800.

Estimated value, \$22000.00  
 Insured value, \$5000.00  
 Premium note, \$200.00  
 Interest to Jan. 1st, next, \$18.00

Approved by Wm. H. Robt Applicant,  
Seaford Post-Office, first  
 day of January A. D. 1861  
 Approved, J. M. Fisher President.

A. B. Wingate Surveyor.  
J. M. Fisher Director.  
J. M. Fisher Director.

On two story, shingle-roof, occupied as a Dwelling  
 On frame smoke house,  
 On frame Cow Barn  
 On frame Mule Barn  
 On frame Grain Barn  
 On frame Sheep Barn No. 1 and attached  
 On frame Hay Barn and staples sheds attached  
 On frame Breeding Staples No. 2  
 On frame Sheep Barn No. 3  
 On frame Cow Barn and Sheds  
 On frame Wagon House  
 On frame Machine and Tool House  
 Situation on land of Assured as Delaware, on line of the Delaware.  
 Total Insurance \$ 9850.  
 Valuation 13133.  
 Lightning Clause.  
 Three-fourths Value Clause.  
 Privilege to make additions.  
 Other insurance permitted with consent to and forming a part of Policy  
 KENT COUNTY MUTUAL INSURANCE COMP.

250  
 83  
 33  
 352  
 740  
 750  
 225  
 58

\$3000. On the two story brick, shingle roof building and additions,  
 occupied as a dwelling. Value \$3000. Insurance \$6000.  
 50. On frame ~~Stable~~ <sup>Stable</sup> House. Value \$67. Insurance \$50.  
 150. On frame ~~Stable~~ <sup>Stable</sup>. Value \$467. Insurance \$350.  
 150. On frame cow barn. Value \$467. Insurance \$350.  
 250. On frame grain barn. Value \$668. Insurance \$500.  
 200. On frame barn and stable. Value \$67. Insurance \$500.  
 50. On frame stallion barn. Value \$533. Insurance \$50.  
 100. On frame corn crib. Value \$933. Insurance \$400.  
 50. On frame boat house. Value \$135. Insurance \$700.  
 50. On frame carriage house. Value \$135. Insurance \$100.

\$4050. Situate on land of the assured, about one mile north of Seaford,  
 on line of the Delaware Rail Road, in Sussex County, Delaware.  
 Total insurance \$9800.  
 Valuation \$12,663.  
 Lightning Clause.

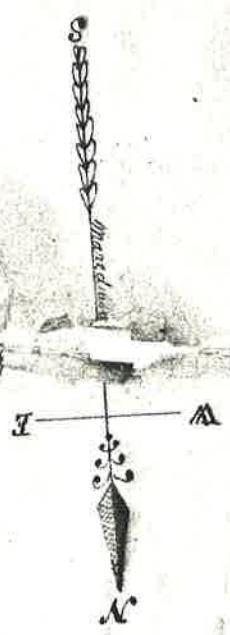
Attach to Policy No. 1035.

KENT COUNTY MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY.

*Wm. P. ...*

It is agreed between the Insured and Insurer that the value of the insured property (buildings only) is of the sum of \$12,663

Examination of the ...  
 No 1283 is a Brick Dwelling - 11 x 30 x 20 ...  
 No 4 is a frame office attached to ...  
 high - all of which ...  
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 No 100 is a ...



Office attached to brick part of 75 ft front and 30 ft wide at one end and 48 ft at the other, with porches on the north, west and south side of the building. This building is described in the accompanying plat as Nos. 3 and 4. The floor is of wood.

JAMES H. ROSS.

|         |  |               |                   |
|---------|--|---------------|-------------------|
| \$3000. | On two story, shingle-roof, Brick Building and additions thereto, occupied as a Dwelling | Value \$8000. | Insurance \$6000. |
| 25.     | On frame smoke house,  | value 67.     | Insurance 50.     |
| 100.    | On frame Cow Barn  | Value 467.    | Insurance 350.    |
| 100.    | On frame Mule Barn   | Value 467.    | Insurance 350.    |
| 100.    | On frame Grain Barn  | Value 733.    | Insurance 550.    |
| 100.    | On frame Sheep Barn No. 1 and sheds attached   | Value 266.    | Insurance 200.    |
| 100.    | On frame Hay Barn and stables, and sheds attached  | Value 667.    | Insurance 500.    |
| 200.    | On frame Breeding Stables No. 1  | Value 1333.   | Insurance 1000.   |
| 75.     | On frame Sheep Barn No. 2  | Value 200.    | Insurance 150.    |
| 100.    | On frame Corn Barn and sheds attached  | Value 533.    | Insurance 400.    |
| 100.    | On frame Wagon House   | Value 266.    | Insurance 200.    |
| 50.     | On frame Machine and Tool House,   | Value 133.    | Insurance 100.    |

\$4050. Situate on land of assured about one mile North of Seaford, Delaware, on line of the Delaware Railroad, in Sussex County, Delaware.  
 Total insurance \$ 9850.  
 Valuation 13183.

Lightning Clause.  
 Three-fourths Value Clause.  
 Privilege to make additions, alterations and repairs.  
 Other insurance permitted without notice until required.

Attach to and forming a part of Policy No. 1035

KENT COUNTY MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY.

August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1917

121  
 Estimated  
 Insured  
 Premium  
 Interest

*Wm. Lemmy*

SECRETARY.

Post-Office,

A. D. 18

1898

President.

Director.

Director.

130  
 133  
 333  
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 340  
 230

# Governor Ross Mansion and Plantation

N. Pine St.

Seaford, Delaware



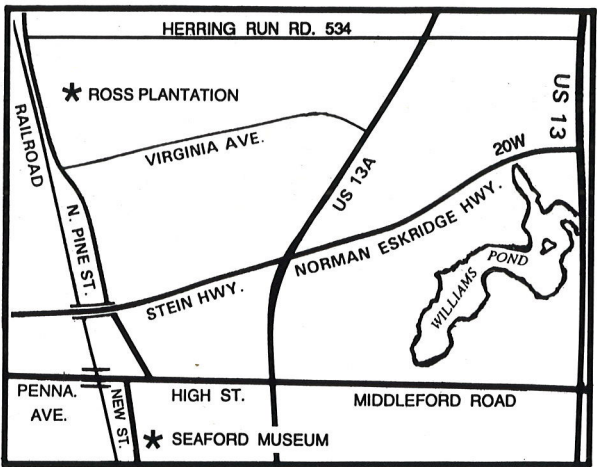
*Front parlor of the Ross Mansion*



*Slave quarter*

Visit this Civil War era plantation and  
tour its eleven room Italian Villa  
Mansion and unique outbuildings





- Governor Ross Mansion (c. 1859) is a brick Italian Villa style structure featuring a 3-story center entry.
- Once part of Maryland, the original 1,398 acre tract was known as "Grape Vine Thicket." In 1836, owner James Tennent (whose family's 18th-century farmhouse was incorporated into the Mansion) sold the property to Caleb Ross, who later willed it to his son, William.
- William Henry Harrison Ross was born in 1814 in Laurel, Delaware and died in 1887 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was a Democratic governor of Delaware from 1851-1855.
- This Sussex Countian was a leader in agriculture, politics and business. He was instrumental in having the railroad extended south from Dover to Seaford.
- Ross was a "Southern Sympathizer" who aided the confederate army and fled to England during the height of the Civil War. Ross had 14 slaves.
- Owned and operated by the Seaford Historical Society, this 20-acre property includes a granary, stable, corncribs, smokehouse, and Delaware's only documented log slave quarter.

Open for tours: Every Saturday 1 to 4 p.m., 4th Sunday of every month 1 to 4 p.m. or anytime by appointment.

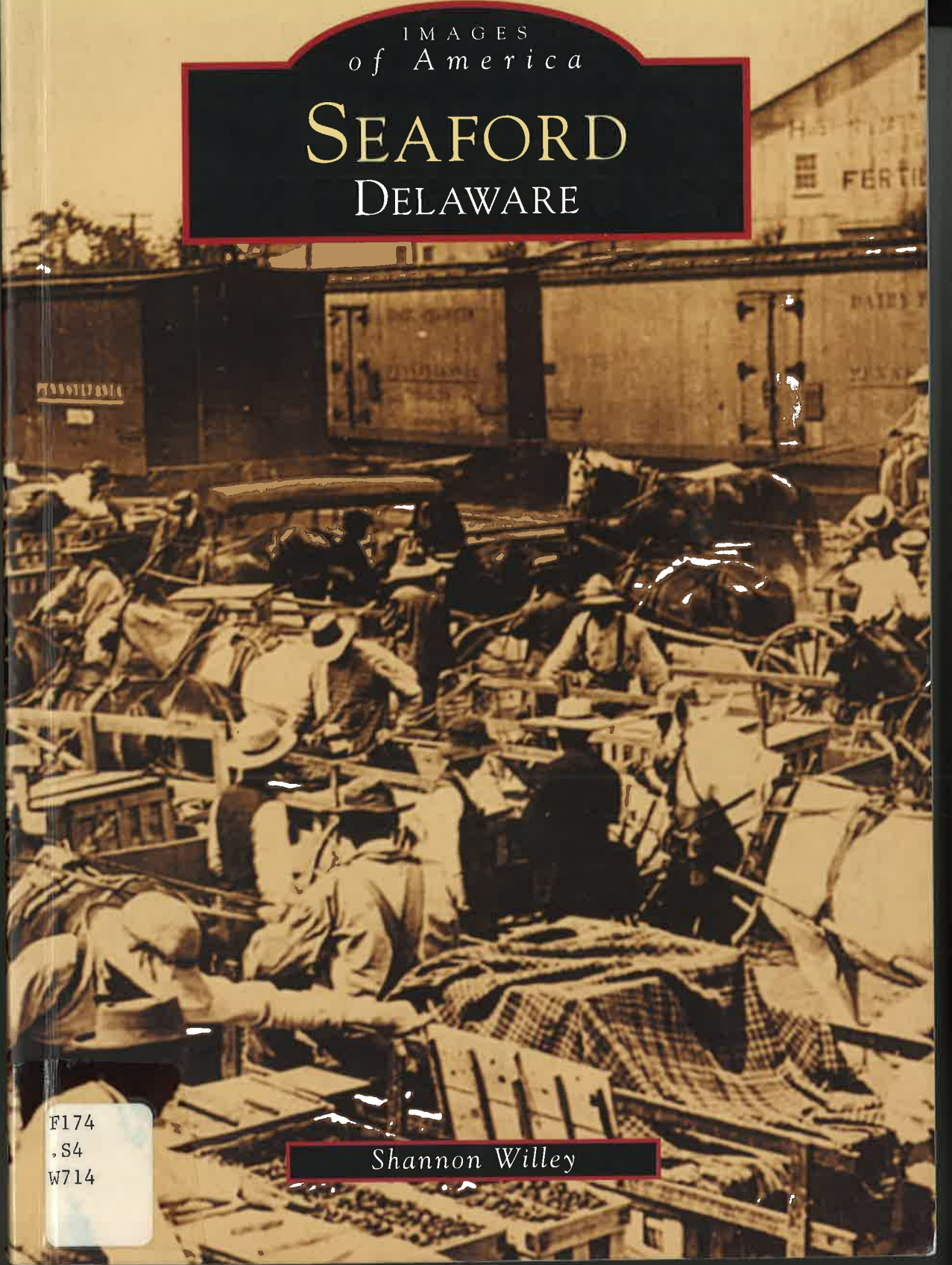
Admission \$2 per person. Members and students <sup>12</sup>~~18~~ years and under admitted free.

Visit the Seaford Museum on New Street. Open every Sunday 2 to 4 p.m. or by appointment.

For information or appointment, contact:  
 Seaford Historical Society  
 Rt. 1, Box 393  
 Seaford, DE 19973  
 302-628-9500 Fax (302) 628-9501

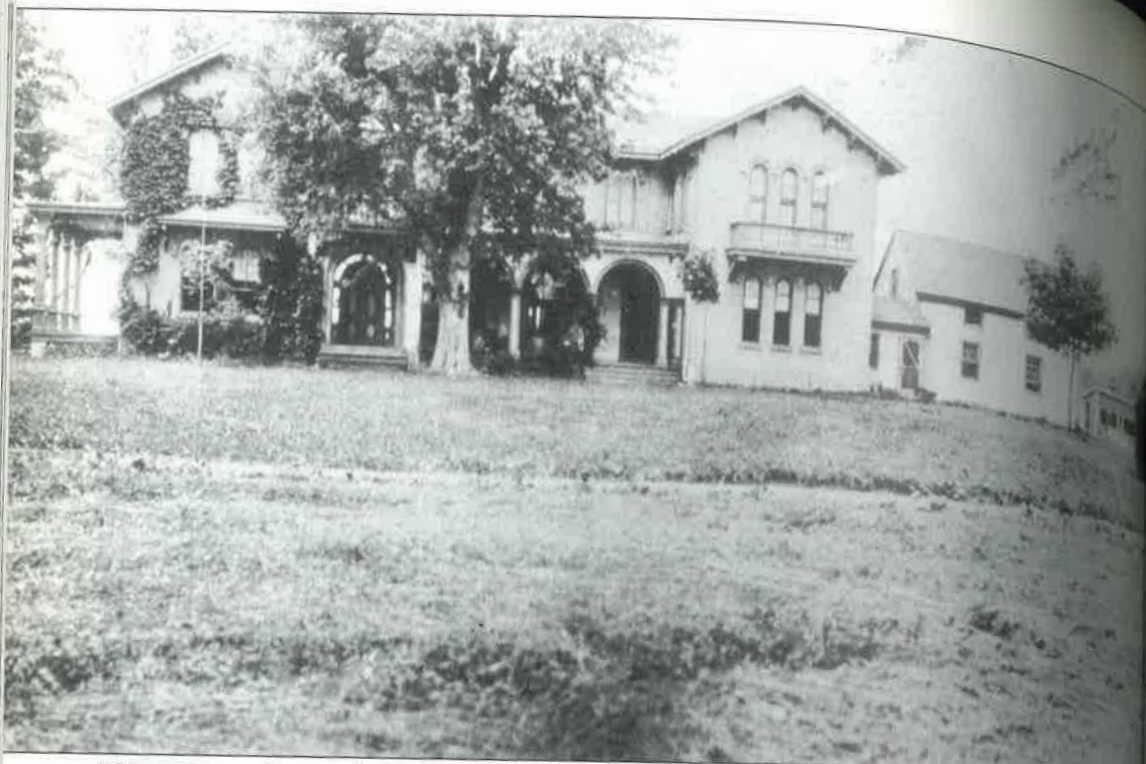
IMAGES  
of America

# SEAFORD DELAWARE



F174  
.S4  
W714

Shannon Willey



This Italian-style mansion, built in 1850, was the principal place of residence for William Henry Harrison Ross. Ross became the governor of Delaware in 1850 and was responsible for bringing innovation in agriculture and a railroad line to Seaford. This picture of the Mansion was taken around 1905. The home still stands in its original location in Seaford.

# ROSS MANSION QUARTER

Prepared by

Claudia F. Melson

For the  
Seaford Historical Society

May, 1994

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I have spent the past seventeen years working for the Delaware State Museums, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, Delaware Department of State, and learning from its varied properties and projects. As a resident of Seaford, Delaware, I have been a member of the Seaford Historical Society for the past seven years, and its President since 1991. My deep interest in the history of the State of Delaware extends especially to this small corner of western Sussex County, and the property that reflects the life of one of its antebellum Governors, William Henry Harrison Ross.

Several years ago, an old house hidden in the woods adjacent to the Governor Ross Plantation, with a log structure as its core was brought to the attention of Dr. Bernard Herman, University of Delaware. After an initial visit to the site by Dr. Herman, his enthusiasm grew when an 1860's map of the property showing the size and location of the slave "Quarters" was found. This structure was determined by the College of Urban Affairs, University of Delaware, to be the only documented slave dwelling standing in Delaware. The Ross Mansion Quarter Committee was appointed by President David Roselle of the University of Delaware to review the architecture and historical documentation of the Ross Mansion Quarter, and to formulate an historic structures report. Fieldwork on the Ross Mansion Quarter was supported by a state Historic Preservation fund subgrant awarded to the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.

### OBJECTIVES

Local interest in the Quarter led the University to give the building to the Seaford Historical Society for restoration and interpretation as part of the Governor Ross Plantation. As a first step towards this, the Seaford Historical Society applied for and received a grant from the Historic Preservation Fund to produce historical background information. The Ross family and property in relationship to other Northwest Fork Hundred farms was the focus of this research with an emphasis on the history of slaves and associated free blacks. It attempts to place their history within the broader context of the African-American history of Sussex County in the mid-19th century, and Delaware in general.

This project attempts to inform the surrounding community of the unique opportunity that the Seaford Historical Society has to incorporate a multicultural interpretation of this structure in the context of the Ross Plantation. It involved the community through the presentation of public

talks, and solicited input through the distribution of questionnaires. These suggestions were gathered to help determine appropriate interpretation of the structure and African-American history during the Civil War era. Additionally, this research serves as a link in the Delaware State Preservation Plan:

Zone: Lower Peninsula, Cypress Swamp  
Period: Industrialization and Early Urbanization: 1830-1880+/-  
Themes: Major Families; Agriculture; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change

Finally, a plan of action for dealing with the relocation of the structure, subsequent restoration, and interpretation is presented in this document, which is publicly available through the Seaford Historical Society.

#### METHODS

Research was conducted on many primary document sources located in the Delaware State Archives. These included the Assessment Records for Northwest Fork, Seaford, and Laurel Hundreds; U.S. Census Records; Legislative Papers, Petitions, Negroes and Slavery; and Governor's Papers. The account books of Dr. John R. Sudler, Bridgeville, DE, and the Burton - Wooten Papers belonging to the Historical Society of Delaware were also researched. The Hagley Museum contains the only surviving farm account book belonging to William Ross. Secondary sources of published materials were found in the following libraries: University of Delaware, Delaware State University, Salisbury State University, Delaware State Archives, Maryland State Archives, Historical Society of Delaware, Delaware State Museums, Hagley Museum, Winterthur Museum, Seaford Historical Society, and the Dover and Seaford Public Libraries.

Slides and script were organized for a forty-five minute presentation on Governor William Ross and life in antebellum Sussex County. Statistics of African-Americans in Delaware in general, and the discovery of the slave quarters in particular were included. This slide show was advertised and open to the public. It was presented at the Seaford Public Library, the Governor Ross Mansion, and Delaware State University. A questionnaire was distributed to all individuals who attended each presentation with the request that it be returned for compilation in the final report.

#### EXPECTED RESULTS

This project was begun with a general expectation for success because of the Rosses standing as a wealthy and prominent family with

known existing records. All published sources dealing with the Seaford area included information on this family. It was expected that there would be extensive documents of a political nature generated by William Ross as a Delaware governor. In addition, it was hoped to establish a direct link between the slaves once owned by William Ross, and the African-American Rosses still residing in the Seaford area.



THE ROSS MANSION SEAFORD, DELAWARE

The Ross Mansion, property of The Seaford Historical Society, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built about 1859 by Governor William H. Ross. It is a brick Italianate style villa with three main two-story blocks of the house forming an H shape plan with a three-story tower in the center space. The round headed windows in this structure are varied in width. The main entrance is in the tower which faces south. A large veranda once faced the west; it has now been replaced by a concrete slab porch with an iron railing. The canopy over the first floor windows, the balcony over the front door entrance, and the cover over the balcony have been removed as has the scrollwork spire which once topped the tower. At the rear of the house is attached a frame wing which predates the main house. The inside of the house retains the plaster mouldings and the ceiling medallions, its Victorian trim doors and the original inside shutters. The original mantel remains in the ballroom. This style of architecture is unique in rural Sussex County and is often used as an important example to illustrate this type of architecture. The mansion is situated in a park laid out in the picturesque style popular during the middle of the 19th century. To the rear of the property are several farm outbuildings.

William Henry Harrison Ross, son of Caleb Ross (1784-1841) and Letitia Lofland Ross (1787-1832), was born June 2, 1814. He attended the schools in Laurel until 1832 when he was sent to study for two years at Claremont Academy, a Friends' School in Pennsylvania. He returned to Laurel and became a clerk for his father who was engaged in a large mercantile and grain business. He and his father traveled throughout Europe in 1836. In 1837, he spent the year in business in Adam's County, Illinois. On his return to Laurel from 1840-1845, he engaged in milling, tanning, and merchandising. Purchasing the Tennent farm near Seaford, he moved there and improved and enriched his land and became a very successful farmer. On June 7, 1840, he married Elizabeth E. Hall of Middletown. In 1846, he was elected captain of a Cavalry Company which was organized in the vicinity of Laurel and Seaford. They furnished their own horses, equipment, and uniforms. This troop was disbanded at the close of the Mexican War. He was always a Democrat, as was his father. At the age of 36, he was elected Governor of Delaware and served from 1851-1855. During the Civil War, he lived in Europe to avoid words with his contemporaries over his pro-South sentiments. His son, Caleb, died while serving the Confederate cause. William H. Ross promoted the growth of the railroad on the Delmarva Peninsula, and was the founder of the first agricultural society in 1849. He was the senior partner in the business of importers and manufacture of fertilizer and agricultural supplies. He died in 1887 and is buried in the churchyard of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seaford. A pastel portrait of Governor Ross by J. Paul Brown hangs in The Hall of Governors, Sussex County Court House, Georgetown, Delaware.

Compiled by Madeline Arnold Dunn

Compliments of The Nylon Capital Shopping Association