

RECORDS OF THE
COURTS OF
SUSSEX COUNTY
DELAWARE
1677-1710

EDITED
AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
CRAIG W. HORLE

Volume II: 1690 - 1710



UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS
Philadelphia

The Court Appointed Richard Paynter, Jun(i)or, & Swore him Constable of Rehat[h] Hundred in the Room of William Simmonds¹⁵

The Court Gives Liberty for a ditche to be Cutt through the most Convenient Place of the Town of Lewis into the Creek for the Conveniency of Drayning of the Savanna On the back Part, Next the Second Street Lotts, And Order that The Vacant Ground That Lies between the Lott of Nehemiah Field And the Four Acre Lott of Capt(ain) Pemberton Adjoyning upon Richard Holloway bee Reserved for a Markett Place and the Vacant Peice of Land Next Adjoyning on the South West Side of John Miers his Lott, to the Blockhouse Pond, and between the Blockhouse Field and that, To be used as a Com(m)on burying Place¹⁶

The Court Ordered Josias Wastcoat as Admin(istrat)or of Francis Cornwall To Pay unto James Heath Eight Shillings, being for Whipping of Thomas Canes which hee, the Said Heath, Swore in Open Court hee did soe Performe by bargain with the Said Cornwall In his Lifetime when Sheriff of This County¹⁷

[p. 39d, HSP]

William Piles Sworne in Open Court¹⁸ That Henry Bowman in his Life time Owed him One hundred Waight of Porke¹⁹ att 2d P(e)r Pound, / The Widow Owned the Debt And hee being sworne that hee never Rec(eive)d Any part Or Parcell thereof ^nor no Other Satisfac(i)on, ^ The Court Gave Judgm(en)t for the Same Ag(ain)st the Administrator ~~and Received no Satisfac(i)on for~~

[p. 689, Dover]

The Court Orders Susanna Draper, Daught(e)r of the Widow Kathrine Draper, unto Thomas Fisher to Live & serve from this Date untill Shee Arrives to the Age of Eighteen Years, hee finding her sufficient Dyett, Apparrell & Lodging Dureing the S(ai)d time²⁰

And The Court Orders Fourty Shillings To be paid out of the Publick Stock to any sufficient P(er)son Whatsoever that Will take the Youngest Daught(e)r of the Aboves(ai)d Widow Draper, And Also that shee shall serve such P(er)son till shee shall arrive to the Age of Eighteen Years, her Mast(e)r finding her Sufficient Diett, Apparrell & Lodging Dureing the said Time²¹

¹⁵This account can be found also on p. 39d, HSP.

¹⁶This account can be found also on p. 39d, HSP.

¹⁷This account can be found also on p. 39d, HSP.

¹⁸In another account of this case on p. 686, Dover, this reads: "William Piles Appeared in Open Court and being sworne Declared."

¹⁹P. 686, Dover, reads: "One hundred Pounds of Neat Pork."

²⁰This account can be found also on p. 40d, HSP.

²¹This account can be found also on p. 40d, HSP.

[*Sussex Co. Deed Bk. A, 1:330*]

Die Mercury 6th March 1699[/1700]

Justices Present

Mr William Clark, Capt(ain) Luke Wattson, Mr John Hill, Mr Thomas Oldman, Mr John Walton

Sam(ue)l Preston Appeared in Open Court and by Virtue of a power of Attorney from Griffith Jones of Philadelphia, Merch(an)tt, in Court proved did Acknowledge, Declare and Deliver unto Henry Bowman, Eldest Son of Henry Bowman, Deceased, According to Law 500 Acres of Land in this County on the South west side of Ceder Creek by Reassignment of the of* the* said Deceased to the said Griffith Jones for the Same, March 6, 1699

[*Sussex Co. Deed Bk. A, 1:84*]¹⁴⁷

John Kipshaven by petetion Acquanted the Court that he Resolveth to build A mill on the Bever dam lying between the Lands of Edmond Dyre and Roger Corbett, provided the Court will grant him An Order for Thirty Acres of Vacant Land Adjoyning to the said Bever dam, and that he will grind for the Tenth of wheat, and Eighth of Indian Corn and pay the proprietarys quitt Rent for the said vacant Land, / the Court granted the said petetion on Conditions and Terms abovesaid, and their be such vacant Land and he pay the quitt Rent thereof

Joseph Macknab Appeared in Open Court and Acknowledged, declared and delivered According to Law unto Edward Nixon One Hundred and forty Acres of Land In this County of Sussex, part of A Tract of Land formerly belonging to John Deprey, deceased, by Indenture of Sale then and their delivered bearing date the 20th day of Febr(uary) 1699(/1700)

Richard Holloway Appeared in Open Court and Acknowledged, declared and delivered unto Mathew Stevens According to Law Two four Acre Lotts in the Town of Lewes near the block house pond by deed of Sale bearing date the 5th day of march 1699

William Clampitt Appeared in Open Court and Acknowledged, declared and delivered unto Robert Burton, Attorney for that purpose, of Thomas Downes of Dorchester County in Maryland, and for the use and behoofe of the said Tho(ma)s Downes, Three Hundred Acres of Land in Sussex County on the South side of the Middle Creek of Rehoboath Bay and the South west forke thereof, by deed of Sale bearing date the 4th day of December 1699 / the said Robert Burton made some Objections ag(ains)t the Receiving the same, in that

¹⁴⁷The date for the records on this page is speculative, but appears to be the March 1699/1700 court session.

The Parties, Pl(ain)t(iff) and Def(endan)t, were both Called / The Pl(ain)t(iff) Appeared and by his Diclaration Set fourth that the said John on the Twenty Second Day of November 1709¹¹⁶ became held and firmly Bound by his Certain Bond or Writing Obligatory Sealed with the Seal of him, the Said John, and as his Act and Deed Delivered and here In Court Produced In the full and Just Sum of Thirty Pounds Current Money of Pennsylvania to be Paid unto him, the said Pl(ain)t(iff), his Heirs &ct when he should be thereunto Required, yet Notwithstanding the said Def(endan)t the said Thirty Pounds to the said Pl(ain)t(iff) hath not Paid but further to Deceave and Defraud this Pl(ain)t(iff) Therein is Runaway Out of this Govern(en)t, Whereupon the said Pl(ain)t(iff) hath been forced to Cause his, the said Def(endan)ts Said One Hundred and Thirty Acres of Land to be Attached and Therein Humbly Craves Judgment of this Court ag(ains)t the same In and for the said Sum of Thirty Pounds Moneys as Above Said besides Costs of Suit, Whereupon the Def(endan)ts Said Obligation was Produced and and* Read, and he Three Times Called to Defend the same, but Appeared Not and withall this being the Third Court Sence the Attachment first Served, Therefore on the Request of the said Pl(ain)t(iff), the Court Past Judgment for the said Pl(ain)t(iff) ag(ains)t the said Def(endan)ts said One Hundred and Thirty Acres of Land In and for the said Sum of Thirty Pounds moneys as Abovesaid besides Costs of Suit / Execution Issued Out Ag(ains)t the Same on the ninth day of this Instant February By me Nehemiah Field, Cl(er)k

Richard Paynter Appeared In Open Court and Acknowledged and made Over unto John Coe all and Singular Those Two Lotts of Land In the Front Street of the Town of Lewes In this County of Sussex Called the Roman T To Have and to Hold the same with Houses and other the Appertinances unto him, the said John Coe, his Heirs and Assigns According to the Contents of a Conveyance In Open Court Delivered, bearing date the 3d day of Octo(ber), Ano Dom(ini) 1703

Mathew Stevens Appeared In Open Court and Acknowledged and made Over unto John Crew all and Singular Those Two four Acre Lotts of Land at the Lower End of Mulberry Street In the Town of Lewes and next Adjoyning on the Southwest Side to the Block House Pond To Have and to Hold the same unto the said John Crew, his Heirs and Assigns According to a Conveyance In Open Court Delivered of date the first day of May Ano Dom(ini) 1704

[*Sussex Co. Deed Bk. A, 1:313*]

John Paynter Appeared In Open Court and Acknowledged and made Over unto Joseph Macknabb a Certain Lott of Land In the Second Street of the Town of

¹¹⁶Probably a mistake for 1703.

HIDDEN HISTORY

of

LEWES

Michael Morgan

Michael Morgan

Charleston  London
THE
History
PRESS

that dotted the waters around Cape Henlopen. The pilot also knew that a sailing ship's delicate balance could be quickly upset by the Delaware coast's fickle weather.

After Drew's sharp exchange with Allen and his order to reset the sails, almost immediately, the squall that had been brewing over Rehoboth Bay slammed into the *De Braak*. The sudden wind filled the sheets, and the force tipped the *De Braak* to one side. In heavy weather, hatches and other deck openings would be covered with canvas and secured with battens to prevent water from flowing down to the lower decks. But when the *De Braak* arrived at Cape Henlopen, the weather was clear, and the hatches had not been battened down. When the squall forced the top-heavy vessel on its side, the ocean began to cascade across the deck, down the open hatches and into the hold of the British brig. Aboard the *De Braak*, the vessel's sharp shift sent some of the brig's contents careening to the low side of the ship, and this shift in weight made it more difficult for the brig to right itself.

Within seconds, many aboard the *De Braak* realized that the vessel was doomed. Some of the sailors were able to get into a small boat that was next to the brig. Others swam the short distance to the beach. Those who were below decks had to fight against the water that gushed down the ladders as the trapped sailors attempted to reach safety. In addition, the network of spars, sails and rigging ensnared some of those who had managed to escape the inside of the hull. A few minutes after the spring storm had struck, the *De Braak's* hull settled on the sea floor. The water's surface was covered with debris that some sailors used as improvised rafts. Amid the flotsam, the upper ends of the *De Braak's* masts stood silently above the waves.

Over half of those aboard the *De Braak* did not survive the disaster. Captain Drew was among the forty-seven British sailors and Spanish prisoners who were lost. Pilot Allen was only a few feet from Drew when the storm struck, and he broke his leg in the sudden lurching of the British brig. Despite his injury, Allen managed to avoid entrapment in the ship's rigging and was saved. When Allen reached safety, the Delaware pilot could honestly say, "I've had good luck."

According to tradition, there were several people on shore who watched in astonishment as the capsized warship slipped beneath the waves. Gilbert McCracken was among those who rushed to the beach, where he spotted three men clinging to a chest. As the surf carried the three sailors to the beach, McCracken helped them to dry land. When the three men had recovered from their brush with death, McCracken led them across the dunes to his home in Lewes.

After *De Braak* had settled to the ocean floor, the vessel's masts protruded above the waves. The location of the sunken brig was obvious to anyone walking the sands of Cape Henlopen, and the British made several attempts to salvage the warship. When these efforts failed, the wind and waves eventually carried away *De Braak's* upper rigging, and all indications of the sunken vessel disappeared. In 1805, Gilbert McCracken and his son, Henry, went for a stroll near Cape Henlopen. As they walked, the conversation between fourteen-year-old Henry and his father turned to the sinking of HMS *De Braak*, the three survivors that the elder McCracken had helped

and the tales of the gold and silver among the brig's captured cargo. Gilbert, an experienced bay pilot who knew a thing or two about navigation, stopped and took sightings of where the British brig sank. The tales of the treasure that the British ship carried passed into Lewes lore, and the residents never tired of regaling visitors with the stories of riches that could be found just off the Cape Henlopen beach.



Grave marker of Captain James Drew of the *De Braak* in St. Peter's churchyard on Second Street.
Photo by Michael Morgan.

BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR

When Jacob Jones left Ryves Holt's old house to join the U.S. Navy, he was one of the oldest midshipmen in the service. The thirty-one-year-old Jones was nearly twice the age of his fellow midshipmen, many of whom were still teenagers, but the prospect of a change in scenery may have been

an inducement Jones couldn't deny. Jacob's mother died when he was an infant. After his mother's death, Jacob's father married Penelope Holt, the granddaughter of Ryves Holt of Lewes, but soon afterward, Jacob's father died. Penelope raised Jacob in Lewes, where he attended the academy and studied under Reverend Matthew Wilson.

At the age of eighteen, Jones left Lewes to study medicine under Dr. James Sykes of Dover. With his education completed, Jones moved back to the Ryves Holt House and began his medical practice, but few patients appeared. After his wife died, however, the Lewes resident decided to join the navy, and in 1798, the year the *De Braak* went down, Jones became a midshipman.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pirates of Tripoli were raiding American merchant ships in the Mediterranean, and Jones was assigned to the frigate *Philadelphia*, which was ordered to the coast of North Africa. While cruising off Tripoli, the *Philadelphia* ran aground on a sandbar. Jacob Jones and the rest of the American crew were captured, and they spent the next two years in a Tripolitan prison.



Captain Jacob Jones was raised in Lewes and lived in the Ryves Holt House. He became a respected commander in the U.S. Navy. Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.

After his release, Jones continued his naval career, and in the early months of the War of 1812, he was in command of the eighteen-gun sloop *Wasp* when it sailed past Lewes and into the Atlantic. As he cruised southward, Jones encountered the British brig *Frolic*. After a brisk battle, the British ship surrendered. The victory seemed to signal a change in the luck of Jacob Jones, but before he could return to port, Jones encountered a large British squadron and was captured. Despite his numerous misfortunes, Jacob Jones was an excellent naval officer, and he continued to serve in various capacities in a career that lasted over half a century.

While Jones and the rest of the U.S. Navy were fighting the British at sea, the War of 1812 again put

Lewes on the front line with Colonel Samuel B. Davis as the commander of the forces defending the town. Davis, who was born in Lewes on December 25, 1765, went to sea as a young boy. By the time that he was an adult, he was a veteran sailor. In the course of his travels, Davis landed in New Orleans, where he met the merchant Daniel Clark, one of the richest men in America. Clark and Davis became business associates and close friends. Clark had a daughter, Myra, and shortly after she was born, Clark asked Davis to care for her. The Lewes native and his wife, Marian, believed that the arrangement was only temporary, but when Clark showed little interest in raising his daughter, Davis and his wife adopted Myra as their own child. When Davis moved into Henry Fisher's former house on Pilottown Road to oversee the defenses of Lewes, Myra played in the yard and swung on the fence gate near the creek.

On March 16, 1813, Davis led a contingent of Delaware troops across Lewes Beach to meet with a delegation of British officers from a powerful British flotilla anchored near Cape Henlopen. The enemy ships were under the command of Commodore James Beresford of the seventy-four-gun warship *Poitiers*, but the British warships were short of provisions. With the British warships anchored in full view of the town, Beresford dispatched a small boat with several officers aboard under a flag of truce.

When the officers reached Colonel Davis, they presented him with an ultimatum from Commodore James Beresford: "As soon as you receive this, I must request you will send twenty live bullocks, with a proportionate quantity of vegetables and hay, to the *Poitiers*, for the use of his Britannic Majesty's Squadron, now at this anchorage, which shall be immediately paid for at the Philadelphia prices. If you refuse to comply with this request, I shall be under the necessity of destroying your town." Having delivered the ultimatum, the British officers returned to their ships.

As soon as the people of southern Delaware learned of the British threat to destroy Lewes, volunteers flooded into town to defend it. Within days, over one thousand troops had assembled in Lewes. The old fortifications at the west end of Pilottown Road were reinforced with logs, earth, sand and gravel to create a rudimentary fort. A small watchtower added an impressive note to the earthworks. Close to the center of town, the defenders of Lewes built a second defensive work. In addition, defensive works were thrown up west of town near Block House Pond, which had acquired its name in the seventeenth century when the people of Lewes built a blockhouse nearby to defend the town's western approaches.

Beresford did little to improve the British fleet for an attack on the Delaware town. He already had weapons more powerful than any that the

troops under Davis possessed. Nevertheless, the British commander waited three weeks for his demand to be met while he attempted to secure the needed supplies by raiding coastal farmhouses. During this time, several British officers went ashore at Cape May, where they were entertained at a New Jersey tavern with “every species of debauchery.”

The residents of the Delaware town knew that they had survived the British navy during the American Revolution, and they were confident that they could do it again. One observer compared the reaction of the defenders of Lewes to the scorched-earth policy that greeted Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Russia: “[If] the enemy in our bay want bullocks, they should have them on terms which the Russians gave Bony Moscow.”

As Beresford waited for a reply to his demand, the people of Lewes prepared to defend the town. To make it difficult for the British ships to maneuver, the lamps in the Cape Henlopen Lighthouse were ordered extinguished, and the buoy markers in the bay were shifted. In addition, men from Sussex County began to arrive in Lewes. One confident Delaware defender suggested:

We have about 1,000 citizen residing on the banks of our River and creeks who live by fishing, fowling and muskrat catching—put those useful men up, furnish them with suitable shot, embody them in classes of seven to every class, appoint a leader and rallying point, give them a handsome sum for every boot they destroy or capture belonging to the enemy, and good reward for every prisoner they take dead or alive.

On April 6, 1813, the British flotilla assembled off Lewes, and the British fired two shots over the town to get the attention of the town’s defenders. Several officers were sent ashore under a flag of truce, and they repeated Beresford’s ultimatum: provide supplies or face destruction. Colonel Davis refused to comply. The British answered with a directive to evacuate the women and children, and a short time later, the bombardment of Lewes began. In his diary, Daniel Rodney of Lewes noted the first day of the attack: “The cannonade then commenced and continued till 10—their shot pitched beyond the town and did but little Damage—firing ceased until day light.”

All the British warships were capable of firing solid shot that weighed up to thirty-two pounds apiece. These solid iron cannon balls could smash through the walls of the strongest building in Lewes. In addition, some of the British ships were armed with mortars that could lob exploding shells



Colonel Samuel Boyer Davis commanded the defenses of Lewes during the British bombardment in the War of 1812. Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.

into the Delaware town. The explosion from a mortar “bomb” could demolish most structures in Lewes. Finally, the British fired a number of Congreve rockets during the bombardment. These newly developed weapons were shaped like oversized skyrockets, with a cylinder several feet long and about six inches in diameter attached to a long pole. The cylinder was filled with black powder that served as a propellant. Attached to the end of the cylinder was an explosive or an incendiary device designed to start fires or used for illumination during night battles. The rocket could also be equipped with an iron shell that, when exploded, would send deadly scraps of metal flying.

On Wednesday, April 7, the British resumed the bombardment of Lewes with these fearsome weapons. In his diary, Rodney noted that “again began and continued [to] 5 or 6 last night. The firing of Bombs 12, 18, & 32 shot and Rockets till 1 o’clock in which time 537 shot were sent against the Town.”

Although the sound and fury of the bombardment had been awesome, the results had been negligible. Many shots passed over the buildings and landed harmlessly in the fields beyond the town. The British solid shot hit a number of chimneys, knocked corner posts off several houses and lodged in the walls of buildings. Peter Hall’s tavern was hit several times, and the building sustained significant damage. At one point, a woman heard a whistling sound over her head. She turned to her husband and asked, “What’s that noise?” Her husband curtly answered, “Bullets, my dear.”

During the bombardment of Lewes, most of the town’s defenders huddled behind the breastworks of pine logs that had been erected along the creek. At Block House Pond, a number of the town’s residents had taken shelter in



Some of the cannons that defended Lewes from the British attack as they appeared a century ago. *Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.*

the small fortification, including a pregnant woman who gave birth during the attack. The infant girl was cradled in a bed of corn stalks and lullabied by the boom of cannon.

Whenever possible, the Delaware troops fired back at the British, but the Americans were unable to damage the enemy ships. Colonel Davis decided on a bit of trickery to convince the British that a large army was defending the Delaware town. Davis ordered the militia and volunteers to march along the waterfront so that they could be seen by those aboard the British ships. Once the troops reached a point where the buildings shielded the troops from British view, the soldiers marched out of town. From there, they circled around to their original starting point. The result was a continuous parade of troops that appeared to be a vast army marching into Lewes.

When the bombardment was over, a few buildings had sustained minor damage, and a frustrated Beresford ordered the British squadron to set sail. The relieved residents of Lewes began to retrieve the debris of the shot and shell that littered the town. Rodney noted that "above 300 cannon balls besides bombs & rockets were picked up in town since the cannonade." A small shot that lodged in the foundation of a building on Front Street earned the building the nickname "Cannonball House." A Baltimore newspaper carried a dispatch from one of the defenders: "Our brave citizens being short of cannon-balls, the enemy was so



The Cannonball House before it was restored and turned into a museum. The cannonball is lodged in the large dark square in the foundation of the building. *Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.*

accommodating as to fire eight hundred on shore, which on picking up and finding they suited the caliber of our cannon remarkably well, the loan was immediately returned with *interest*."

Another newspaper reported:

Commodore Beresford would seem to have suddenly altered his mind with respect to burning down Lewiston, to make a fire to roast the Delaware oxen by. It would be too offensive to suppose a British officer would threaten without meaning to make good his word... Delaware beef is highly seasoned, and if served up with forced meat balls, might not prove as palatable to this nautical hero as the beef of old England.

On April 24, the *Niles Register* reported that, after the attack on Lewes, the British sought provisions from an easier prey: "We have nothing new from this quarter except that Sir John Beresford has captured five oyster-boats, and after a severe engagement, caused these whole cargoes to be devoured." The paper also described the results of the attack on the Delaware town:

Blockhouse Pond historic marker unveiled in Lewes

Site was a refuge for residents during bombardment in 1813

By Nick Roth

nicroth@capegazette.com

During the bombardment of Lewes in 1813, Blockhouse Pond was considered an inland refuge for residents who lived along the shoreline.

In the years since, the small pond in George H.P. Smith Park near Beebe Healthcare has provided refuge for residents, visitors, hospital staff, patients and others who seek a peaceful respite.

The pond's place in history is now officially recognized on a historic marker that was unveiled during a short ceremony Oct. 20.

Sponsored by Rep. Steve Smyk, R-Milton, the marker highlights the pond's significance during the War of 1812 and the years since while also acknowledging the role former Mayor George H.P. Smith played in preserving the city's heritage and history.

"This is a very important part of the community and one that I think has gone unappreciated for so many years, and one that I am very happy we are now recognizing with this marker," said Mayor Ted Becker.

Becker noted the pond was drained



State Archivist Stephen Marz talks about the historic marker program.



Rep. Steve Smyk says the park has been a place for people to run and walk for many years.

by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1934 as part of an effort to control mosquitoes. The city restored the pond and created Blockhouse Pond Park in 1976.

For some time, the property was eyed for housing, but city council in the 1960s decided to keep it as open space.

"Can you imagine this park if it had been townhouses or if it had been freestanding homes just sitting here?" Becker asked rhetorically. "And what a loss it would've been to this community."

"WE ENJOY MANY THINGS TODAY THAT WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ENJOY IF GEORGE WASN'T PART OF IT, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THE CANALFRONT PARK."

- LEWES MAYOR TED BECKER

Becker said city council made another smart decision in 2004, when it renamed the park in honor of George H.P. Smith.

"George was quite a visionary," Becker said.

"We enjoy many things today that we would not have been able to enjoy



NICK ROTH PHOTOS

ON HAND FOR A PHOTO with the new Blockhouse Pond historic marker are (l-r) State Archivist Stephen Marz, Lewes Mayor Ted Becker, Barbara Smith Rivers, Lorraine Smith, Rep. Steve Smyk, Valarie Woodyard, Friends of George H.P. Smith Park President George Cole, Albert Johnson and Tyrone Woodyard.



Unveiling the marker are (l-r) State Archivist Stephen Marz, Lewes Mayor Ted Becker, Friends of George H.P. Smith Park President George Cole and Rep. Steve Smyk.

if George wasn't part of it, not the least of which is the Canalfront Park. It was George's willingness to step up and believe that Canalfront Park could be a reality."

In preparation for the Oct. 20 event, Smyk said he called friends who grew up in Lewes to get a sense of what the park meant to the community.

"They had a lot of positive things to say," he said. "A lot of memories of just running around this pond. It was a beautiful spot of unencumbered

exercise."

The historical marker program was initiated in 1931. Over the last 90 years, the state has positioned more than 670 markers throughout Delaware to commemorate houses of worship, historic buildings, notable Delawareans and historic locations. Smyk noted that markers are not just randomly selected by state officials; instead, they require efforts from private citizens to preserve and tell the history of the First State.



Friends of George H.P. Smith Park President George Cole welcomes guests to the ceremony.



Mayor Ted Becker says the park continues to be a peaceful place for residents and visitors alike.



DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES

Block House Pond	
<p>Block House Pond, a natural spring-fed pond, has provided fresh water, ice, and recreation to the City of Lewes for several centuries. The pond was likely named for a nearby blockhouse built to protect Lewes in the 1670s, where town residents sought shelter during the Bombardment of Lewes in 1813. In the late-1800s and early-1900s, the pond was a popular ice-skating destination in winter. The Civilian Conservation Corps drained the pond in 1934 as part of mosquito control efforts. The City of Lewes restored the pond and created Block House Pond Park in 1976. In 2003, the park was renamed in honor of former five-term City of Lewes mayor, George H.P. Smith.</p>	
Delaware Public Archives- 2021	SC-288

Location: George H. P. Smith Park, Dupont Ave., Lewes, Delaware 19958

Time: 10:00 A.M.

Sponsoring Legislator: Representative Steve Smyk, 20th Representative District

Constituent: George Cole, President, Friends of George H. P. Smith Park

City of Lewes Officials: Mayor Ted Becker and Janet Reeve, Parks and Marina Administrator



DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES

Block House Pond Historical Marker Dedication ***October 20, 2021 10:00 A.M.***

AGENDA

WELCOME

Mr. George Cole
President, Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park

INTRODUCTION of DIGNITARIES

Mr. George Cole
President, Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park

REMARKS – DIGNITARIES

Ms. Janet Reeves
Parks and Marina Administrator, City of Lewes

Mr. Theodore Becker
Mayor, City of Lewes

The Honorable Steve Smyk
20th District State Representative

Mr. Stephen Marz, CA
Director & State Archivist, Delaware Public Archives

UNVEILING OF HISTORICAL MARKER

Mr. George Cole
Mr. Theodore Becker
Ms. Janet Reeves
Mr. Stephen Marz
The Honorable Steve Smyk

CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. George Cole
President, Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park



Delaware Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony

Block House Pond

October 20, 2021 - 10:00 A.M.

To the **City of Lewes**, to **George Cole and the Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park**; to our elected officials; and to all here with us today, I bring you greetings from the Delaware Public Archives. My name is Stephen Marz, and I have the privilege of being the Director of the Delaware Public Archives and Delaware's State Archivist.

Today we are here to dedicate a Delaware Historical Marker that will now formally present to and educate the public of the historical significance of this ground upon which we now stand.

The Delaware Historical Marker program was initiated over ⁹¹80 years ago in 1931. At that time it was established by an Act of the Delaware State Legislature so as to:

"Select and determine points of historic interest throughout the State and to ...erect markersto be appropriate at such points."

Since the beginning of the Delaware Historical Marker program; over 670 Historical Markers have been positioned throughout the State of Delaware to commemorate:

Houses of Worship,

Historic Buildings,

Notable Delawareans and Historic Locations.

The Delaware Public Archives has had responsibility for the Historical Marker program since 1990.

It is important to note that these markers are not chosen by the Archives, but instead - these markers are the direct result of private citizens and groups such as yours working with local legislators to have historical markers of this type placed to give recognition to a selected point of history in the First State.

Each historical marker is erected to tell the history of Delaware and the people who populated the First State. As more of these are dedicated throughout Delaware, present and future generations will have more opportunities to learn about the rich history and culture of this wonderful state we call home.

And so today, the intent of the Delaware Historical Marker program has again been realized as we recognize this historical area and its significance to Delaware's rich cultural history.

A natural spring-fed pond named for a nearby blockhouse built to protect Lewes in the 1670's, Block House Pond is the location in which town residents sought shelter during the Bombardment of Lewes in 1813. Drained by the CCC in 1934, the City of Lewes restored the pond and created Block House Pond Park in 1976. In 2003, the park was renamed in honor of former five-term City of Lewes Mayor, George H. P. Smith.

I would like to thank marker constituents, *and friends of the Public Archives* **George Cole** who, along with **the Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park** and **Taylor Reynolds** of the Delaware Public Archives, were responsible for the research and writing of the text of this Delaware Historical Marker; and our elected state official, **and Representative Smyk** for his enthusiastic support and financial sponsorship of the marker.

certainty

To all of the constituents and sponsors your leadership, perseverance and commitment has ensured that this significant place of history is forever documented and acknowledged.

Stephen Marz, CA

Director of the Delaware Public Archives

and

State Archivist

Janet - City of Lewes (parks/Rec) 6/10/21
- Look for date of park opening

Rep. Smith
District 20
Senator Lopez
District 6



121 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. N | Dover, DE 19901 | (302) 744-5000

Historical Marker Application

Proposed Marker Information (required info is in red)

Suggested Marker Topic: Date of Application: 28 October 2019

Blockhouse Pond Delaware Militia Encampment 1813-1815

Preferred Location (Please provide the exact address or GPS Coordinates):

The George H. P. Smith Park

Town: Lewes County: Sussex County

The reason this location was chosen:

The Blockhouse Pond is located in the George H. P. Smith Park, a Lewes City Park and has become a frequent destination for citizens and visitors. The Pond is a prominent feature of the Park, including an island in the Pond. The marker would bring history alive role of Lewes and the Pond in the War of 1812.

Property Information

Public or Private Property:

Public Property

Owner's Permission (if private):

Your Contact Information

Full Name: Joan Sundstrom / George Hale Phone Number: 301.356.4022 / 302-645-1845

Email Address: joanesun@gmail.com Organization (if applicable): Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park

Street Address:

City: Lewes State: DE Zipcode: 19958

gs.hole.SU1@gmail.com

Please complete both sections found on Page 2 of this application before submitting.
Incomplete applications will not be reviewed or considered.

Funding Statement

Historical markers are funded on an individual basis by local legislators. Financial support must be obtained from a local Senator or Representative *after* the marker application has been approved by the Delaware Public Archives. Once support is gained, the legislator will notify the Archives and we will move forward with the production of a marker.

DPA Office Use Only

Date Received: 10/28/19 Approved by: KH + SM

Date Approved: 2/7/20

Historical Marker Application Supplemental Information

Application for Block House Pond in George H. P. Smith Park, Lewes, Delaware

1. Statement of Significance

The Blockhouse Pond has long assumed an important role in the history of Lewes, dating back to the late 1600s. The natural spring-fed pond was an important source of fresh water, especially as an emergency reserve, as well as a source of ice in the Winter.

The town of Lewes had a prominent role in the War of 1812 in protecting shipping in the Delaware Bay and River and north to Philadelphia. Lewes remained vigilant into 1815, guarding the Delaware coast and inland waterways to prevent a British invasion at Dover or Philadelphia. During the British bombardment of Lewes in April 1813, Blockhouse Pond was a place of refuge for many Lewes residents, including a newborn child. The Blockhouse Pond also served a critical military need during the war, with the U.S. "troops encamped at Block House pond (numbering) five hundred." Troops remained in Lewes guarding the Bay and River until March, 1815.

In more recent times, Blockhouse Pond has become a focal point of the George H. P. Smith Park, providing an important habitat for native flora and fauna of Delaware. While no longer used for ice skating or a source of ice, it is still enjoyed by the community for fishing, education and recreation. A variety of animals have lived in the pond, including: turtles; river otters; and a number of bird species; a remarkable variety of native fauna for an urban setting.

Adding a historical marker at Blockhouse Pond will highlight the earlier importance of the Pond and teach visitors about it's role in the War of 1812.

2. Background Information

--Brittingham, Hazel D. "Blockhouse Pond", in the Journal of the Lewes Historical Society, vol. 4, November 2001, pp. 13-14.

--Per an illustration in the above article, Pomeroy and Beer's Atlas of 1868 contains a representation of a portion of the Blockhouse Pond of that time. Full Blockhouse pond is shown on actual map.

--Marine, William M. The Bombardment of Lewes by The British, April 6 and 7, 1813. [A presentation to the Historical Society of Delaware, 1901] (1964)

--During the 1813 bombardment, an infant was born at the Block House Pond refuge:

<http://www.delawaretoday.com/Delaware-Today/July-2014/Discovering-the-Hidden-History-of-Lewes/>

--Block House Pond was the site for the manufacture of blocks used in the construction of Beebe Hospital in Lewes. <https://www.capegazette.com/article/trail-unique-family-name-lewes-history/86989>

--DelMar History blog about the history of Block House Pond, from various contemporary accounts, February 26, 2018. <http://delmarhistory.blogspot.com/2018/02/lewes-block-house-pond.html>

--http://www.lat-long.com/Latitude-Longitude-215527-Delaware-Blockhouse_Pond.html

--Camp Lewestown militia documents dated September 1814 through December 1814.

https://warof1812.delaware.gov/reports/lewistown/camp_lewistown_1814.pdf

On the trail of a unique family name in Lewes history

By Dennis Forney July 10, 2015

Sometimes I look at the African American cemetery on Pilottown Road in Lewes. Old gravestones spread beneath the branches of one of Delaware's largest hackberry trees. I have been told that veterans of the Civil War, African American men who fought on the side of the Union, are buried there. So too are relatives, probably descendants, of Cato Lewis, who, I've come to know through the years, was an African American shipbuilder who plied his trade in the vicinity of today's Canalfront Park. Lewis was one of a handful of African American shipbuilders along the East Coast.

There's so much history. We barely even scratch the surface. Seven lifetimes could be spent tracing the history of the African Americans in Sussex County and then another seven trying to bring into focus the thousands of years of history of Native Americans who lived here and died here. Even then we would know relatively little.

All of this arises as a result of condemnation notices placed recently on the front doors of two dwellings on Chestnut Street in Lewes. I never knew much about the two humble houses, but, as it is with knowledge acquired largely through osmosis, I was aware that they were occupied for decades by members of the Gooch family.

I knew Nancy, the friendly and outgoing mother of several Gooch children, including Nancy, who is married to Bill Collick; Ronald, who many of us know as Beau, former police chief in Lewes; Wayne and Linda Jo; Mark, who I've always known as Froggie; and Eric. I'm still working on getting family history, so there may be more children. In the meantime, I apologize if I've missed any.

Nancy worked for many years at Beebe Healthcare when it was known simply as Beebe Hospital. The connections to Beebe don't end there. Nancy's father, Ernest, worked for Drs. James and Richard Beebe back in the 1920s and probably earlier. Lewes historian Hazel Brittingham recalls that Ernest worked for the father of the brothers Beebe, also named Richard. Ernest helped haul sand for the blocks that Richard manufactured near Blockhouse Pond for his sons' first hospital. Then, when construction was complete, he went to work for the Beebe doctors and drove the hospital's first ambulance.

Before that though, I know nothing of the Gooch history and how the family came to reside in Lewes.

In Virginia, west of Richmond, lies Goochland County.

According to an article on the Wikipedia site, Sir William Gooch named the county in his own honor. Gooch served as Royal Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, for the English king, from 1727 to 1749. Is Goochland County the ancestral American home for the Gooches of Lewes?

My search continues. I'll let you know what I learn.



Ernest Gooch worked for members of the Beebe family in the early part of the 20th century. He performed a number of different jobs including driver for Beebe Hospital's first ambulance shown here. SOURCE DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2018

LEWES BLOCK HOUSE POND

LEWES BLOCK HOUSE POND

Journal of the Lewes Historical Society, Volume IV, November 2001 by Hazel Brittingham

A natural feature found on early plots and maps of Lewes is Blockhouse Pond and was the south end of of Market Street, Mulberry Street, and Shipcarpenter Street. It was about an eighteen acre spread.

In the mid 1930's it was drained by the CCC to curb the mosquito infestation around Lewes. It was restored in 1976 when Blockhouse Pond Park was established for recreational activities and also serve as an emergency water supply. Lewes Community Platground was set in 1994 at the NW corner.

Today the eleven acre area is surrounded by residences, the Bethel Methodist Cemetery, Beebe Medical Center and public school property. A near property of Beebe, the old convalescent center, sits on what was known as Frog Hill which it is said got the name from the bull frogs serenading in the pond.

Way back, 1670, Lewes folk request of the English Governor, Sir Francis Lovelace, to make use of discarded materials of a deteriorated fort on the bank of the creek to build a forty foot square 'blockhouse' in the middle of town, thus giving the name to the pond and the area.

In the late 1600's county deeds and records used the names 'block house field' and 'block house pond' to identify adjoining property.

During the War of 1812 it is recorded that 500 troop were encamped at Blockhouse Pond and when bombardment took place, women and children of Lewes sought refuge in the Blockhouse.

Blockhouse Pond also held the towns reserve of ice harvested in winter in addition to a fine skating rendezvous.

Wilmington Morning News, Thursday, February 8, 1912

Lewes, Delaware Pond Filled With Skaters:
Block House Pond, almost a hallowed spot in the memory of every boy and girl who ever lived in Lewes, is the scene of gayety these days when throngs of skaters and ice boats make merry all day.

Wilmington Evening Journal, Friday, September 3,, 1915

Lewes, Delaware Lewes Talks of Playground

Lewes residents are in to forming a movement to purchase the old block house pond in back of the Union School of Lewes, fill it in, and make a playground of it. The majority of the pond is owned by Lewes and the rest by private individuals. Since the pond is dry at this time of year it is considered a good time to fill it in.

In a 1903 Wilmington News Journal it is reported that blockhouse Pond host free ice skating'

Also a 1913 New Journal reports that very early on St. Peters Episcopal Church of Lewes owned land up to Blockhouse Pond.

A 1922 Wilmington New Journal reports that the Lewes Civic Club at their Monday night meeting discussed the filling in of Blockhouse Pond and met with approval. Dr. Hiram H. Burton, gave a very interesting talk regarding the pond which is ten acres or more and would be of considerable value if reclaimed.

Wilmington New Journal, Tuesday, July 3, 1934

Block House Pond, Old Lewes Landmark, Passes in War With Mosquitoes Lewes Delaware, July 3 'Special', Another landmark, Block House Pond, has passed on. Once a beautiful rendezvous to early colonists back to the latter part of the 17th century but of late years has become a stagnant mosquito harbor and a menace to the town, has been drained by the Lewes CCC Camp. It took four hundred foot of ditches to drain the pond which is close to the Beebe Hospital and the Lewes High School. It has served the town's history well, in 1670 a block house was built of bricks and logs salvaged from an old fort on the Lewes Creek. , was a refuge during the War of 1812 bombardment, during which Mrs Elizabeth Ann Marshall, of the Lewes Marshall family, was born, cradled in corn fodder and lullabied by the cannon roar, and lived to be 99 years of age.

1700's and 1800's, it was a favorite rendezvous for the Lewes young people, with lilies and clear water in summer and ice for skating in the winters. There were ice houses upon the banks to store ice from winter for the summers. 1920 saw the last of ice skating as dried undergrowth and 12 foot high cat tails took over and the pond became a stagnant mosquito incubator.

It is thought that Mulberry and Market streets will be continued through and a new residential section will emerge.

Wilmington Morning News, Monday, August 13, 1934

CCC workers from Lewes Camp, under the direction of the Mosquito Control Commission, are draining the bog that was once Whites Pond, on the opposite side of town from Blockhouse Pond , which was once a beautiful body of water.

Wilmington News Journal, Wednesday, February 13, 1935

The draining of Block House Pond Lewes is without an ice skating rink, however, a new

- Welcome to the dedication of the Block House Pond historical marker.
-
- This is a wonderful site for a historical marker. There is a beautiful garden, thanks to the loving and attentive work of the members of Lewes in Bloom, and there is the beautiful George H. P. Smith Park, thanks to the efforts of some dedicated park commissioners.
-
- In 1982, a *Washington Post* article described Lewes as being the Delmarva Peninsula's "quirky corner of quiet".
-
- In an otherwise favorable article, it also noted that "Lewes is for loafers."
-
- Well, about 169 years before the visit by the *Washington Post's* reporter, some British war ships paid an unfriendly visit to Lewes; their attack was part of events during the War of 1812.
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- During that long-ago visit, things weren't all that quiet, and the citizens and others from Delaware decidedly weren't 'loafers'.
-
- We called it the 'War of 1812'; the British called it the 'American War of 1812'.
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- So as to confuse students in modern history classes, the war lasted until 1815.
-
- The citizens of Lewes played an important role in repulsing the British attack, and thus protecting key segments of our nation's commerce.
-

- The Block House Pond provided an area of refuge for those citizens, particularly women and children, who thought it best to not be having a face-to-face encounter with history.
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- Recall that this was the first use of the British Congreave rockets on U.S. soil. In a later bombardment of Fort McHenry in 1814, Francis Scott Key saw the “rockets red glare” which is noted in the Star-Spangled Banner.
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- The Historical Marker that is to be unveiled today was conceived by **two** current **citizens** of Lewes.
-
- One person was Lorna Dempsey, who, having read Hazel D. Brittingham’s article about the Block House Pond, in the *Journal of the Lewes Historical Society*, asked a question of other members of the Friends of the George H. P. Smith Park. “Why isn’t there better public recognition of the historical role of the Block House Pond? Why isn’t there a historical marker?”
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- Joan Sundstrom, who was also a member of the Friends, followed up by researching the question and filing a request with the Delaware Public Archives. Essentially, she asked if a historical marker would be appropriate to recognize the role of the Block House Pond in Lewes’s history.
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- Now, to the INTRODUCTION OF DIGNITARIES who saw to it that a marker was created.

George Cole, Petitioner, Block House Pond Historical Marker