

16 Miles From Anywhere

A History Of Georgetown, Del.

William J. Wade

DELAWARE STATE ARCHIVES

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

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

2

Pettyjohn's Field

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

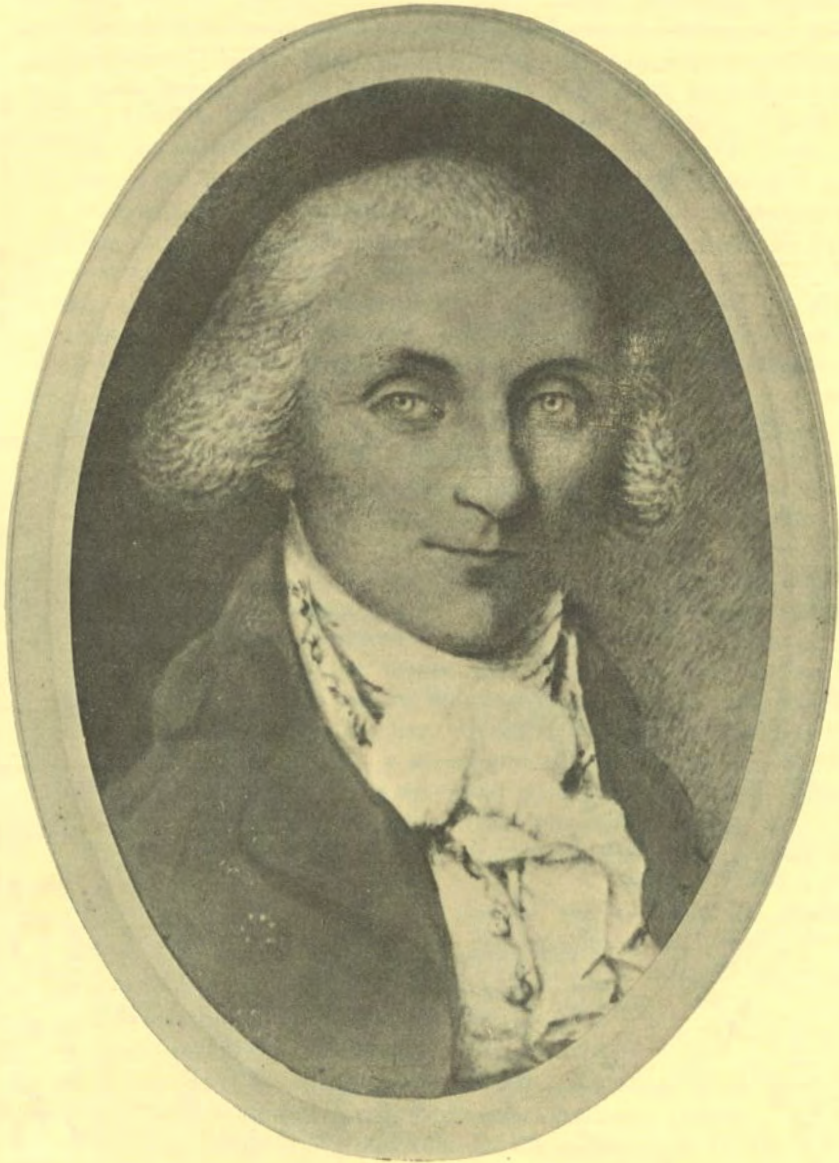
A second theory may well have been conjured up to counter the Tory version. According to this latter version, there was strong sentiment to name the new county seat after the Revolutionary War hero and recently elected first President of the United States, George Washington. There was, however, one stumbling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

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

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

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

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



George Mitchell

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

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

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

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

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

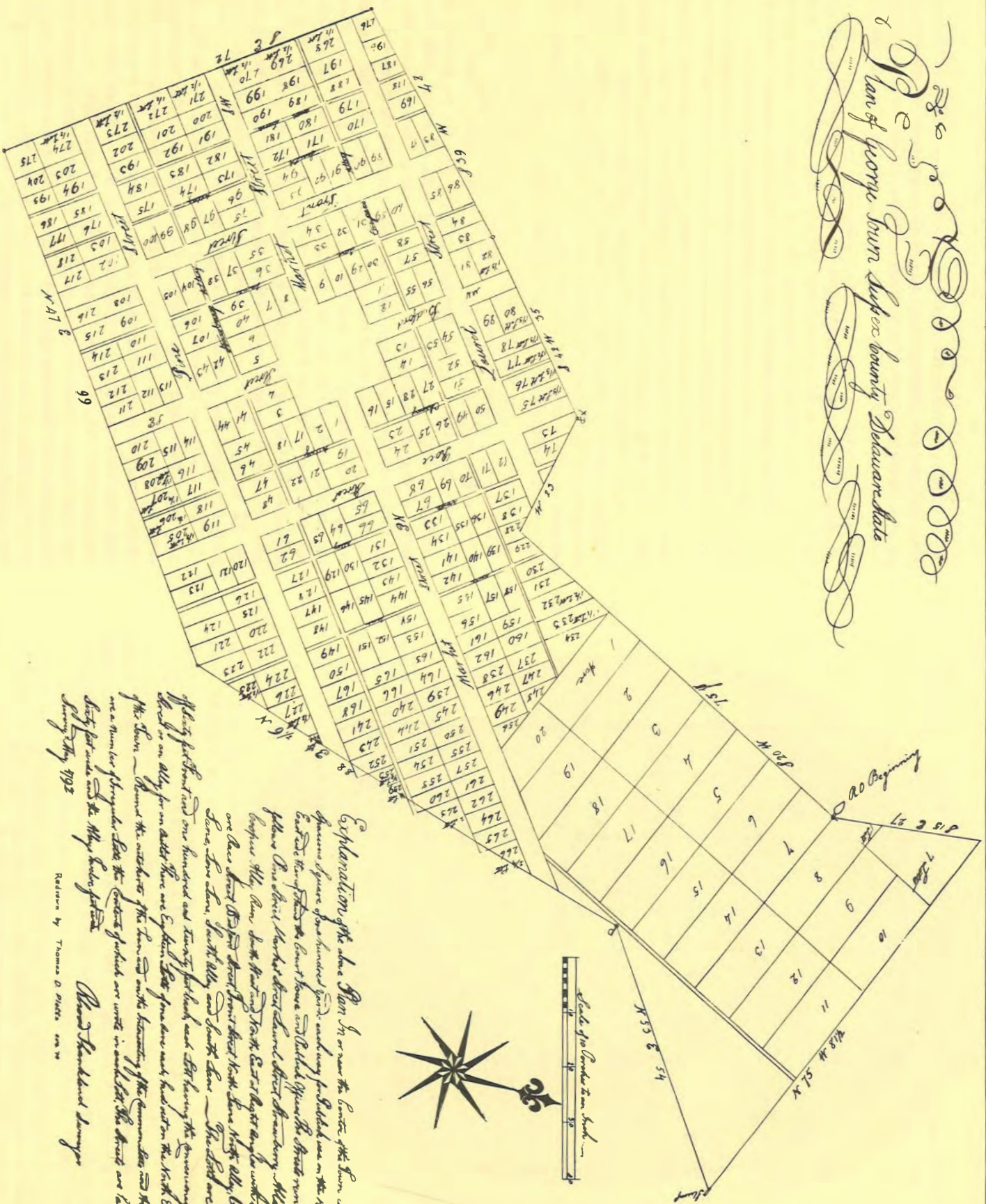
In 1796, the General Assembly passed an act to make access to the county seat much less difficult by ordering that three roads be "laid out and straightened" in Sussex County. The first of these was to run from Milford Bridge, through Georgetown and Dagsboro, "until it intersects the west line that divides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

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



 Plan of George Town Superintendence Delaware State





Explanation of the above Plan. It is to be seen that the center of the town is a square square of one hundred yards each way from the Public Square on the corner East side of the street the Court House and Public Square. The street runs as follows: One street Market Street and North Street. Another street runs as follows: One street Broad Street and South Street. A third street runs as follows: One street East Street and West Street. The streets are laid off as a number of squares. The center of the town is a square of one hundred yards each way from the Public Square. The streets are laid off as a number of squares. The center of the town is a square of one hundred yards each way from the Public Square. The streets are laid off as a number of squares.

Return by Thomas D. Pitts, Esq.

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

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

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

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

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

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

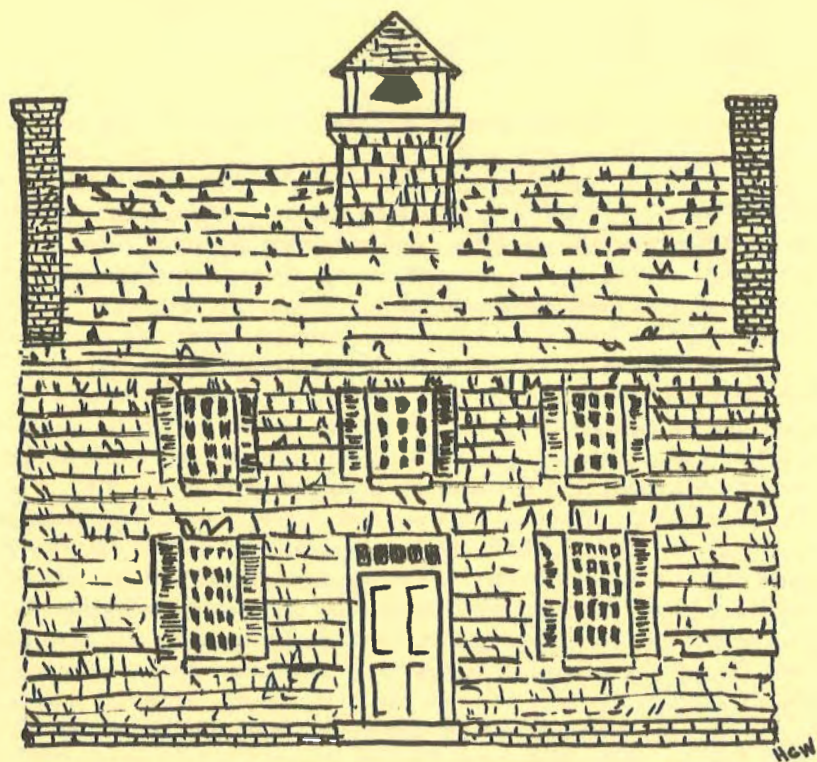
Thomas Bevans (1799)
J. Anderson (1797)

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

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

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

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



First County Courthouse in Georgetown

completely disappeared during the first half of the nineteenth century.

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

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

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

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

A GENERAL HISTORY OF
SUSSEX COUNTY COURT HOUSES

Madeline-Elizabeth Dunn
Historic Site Surveyor
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Constitution at a convention in Dover on November 29, 1791.¹⁸ They requested that each county elect ten deputies to attend the convention. The gentlemen freeholders of Sussex County met in accordance with the resolution at the new court house on October 1, 1791 and chose the following conventional representatives: Rhoads Shankland, Charles Polk, Isaac Beauchamp, John Collins, William Moore, Daniel Polk, Peter Robinson, George Mitchell, Isaac Cooper, and John Wise Batson.¹⁹

Pettijohn's "Old Field" was later renamed Georgetown in honor of George Mitchell, one of the commissioners. Georgetown was surveyed by Rhoads Shankland in May 1792. The survey indicates that the central public square was surrounded by 275 common lots, each measuring 60 by 120 feet. A number of larger irregular lots surrounded the town. Eighteen one-acre lots had also been laid out at the north end of the town. According to the Georgetown commissioners' specifications, streets were 60 feet wide while alleys were 12 feet wide.²⁰

The funds for purchasing the land for erecting the court house and prison and for furnishing each came from the sale of the town lots, not from county taxes. According to the 1791 Act, the Levy Court was prohibited from taxing the county inhabitants to pay for the new court house and prison.²¹

For the next forty-six years, the 1791 structure served as the county court house. On Thursday, February 9, 1837 the Sussex County Levy Court Commissioners adopted a petition for a new court house. This petition was signed by Spencer

Phillips, chairman of the Levy Court, and submitted to the General Assembly by J. L. Layton. It stated:

That the Court House in George Town is in A ruinous and irreparable Condition and is A wooden Building-That the Several Offices are also in frame buildings private property, and scattered in various directions in said Town that great fears are entertained that at some time great loss may arise by A destruction of one or more of the public Offices, and desire that A law may be passed authorizing and requiring the Levy Court of said County to build A good and sufficient Court House and fire prooff Offices to be paid for out of the funds of said County at such times as the Levy Court may deem right and proper....²²

"An Act to authorize the building of a Court House and Fire-Proof offices at Georgetown, in Sussex County." was passed by the General Assembly on February 16, 1837. According to this act, the new court house was to be

...built erected and finished of the best materials and in a workman like manner, upon the public square....

It also stipulated that the new court house was to be a substantial two-story brick building, 60 feet by 50 feet. According to the 1837 Act, the court house commissioners were authorized to

...make Contracts procure materials, employ workmen and labourers, and to do all other things which may be deemed by them necessary to effect the objects of this act.²³

In order to finance the project, the 1837 act appropriated \$10,000, provided that

...five thousand dollars out of the surplus fund belonging to this state shall upon the application of the Levy Court of Sussex

County be set apart by the state treasurer as a loan to the said County, upon the said Levy Court pledging by a resolution to be entered on their book of minutes...the interest of said Sum of five thousand dollars shall be annually deducted out of such share of the income of said surplus fund, as shall be allotted to the said County of Sussex.... And the residue of the said sum of ten thousand dollars, to wit, the sum of five thousand dollars shall be paid over to the said Commissioners by the state treasurer out of the one fourth part of the money to be applied to the use of this state, as the same shall from time to time arise and be received by virtue of an act passed the 11th of February 1835 entitled 'An Act authorizing a lottery for the benefit of Delaware College and for other purposes therein mentioned'.

It was further enacted that

...it shall be the duty of the Levy Court of Sussex County aforesaid to provide some suitable building for the purpose of holding therein the Courts of this state, in and for said County, during the progress of the work aforesaid, and until the said brick building shall be finished.

The Levy Court was authorized

...to sell or otherwise dispose of the present Court House at Georgetown for the benefit of said County, the proceeds arising from said sale or disposal to be paid over to the County treasurer.²⁴

If the appropriated sum of \$10,000 were insufficient, Sussex County would pay the deficit by a "...County rate or levies of taxes."²⁵

During the Levy Court's 1837 March meeting, George R. Fisher was appointed a special court house commissioner

...to Cause to be removed all and singular the Buildings or other impediments of any nature or description Whatsoever, on the said Court-house lots on or before the first day of October next,....

He was also authorized to

...advertise the old Court House & sell the same after Ten days Notice being given of the sale for the best price that can be had for the same and the proceeds of said sale shall be paid over to the County Treasurer....

The Levy Court specified that the

...Court House shall not be delivered to the purchaser nor any authority to remove the same be given, until the Commissioners, appointed to build the new Court House and fire proof Offices shall determine that the same Cannot be of any use on its present site either for holding the Courts therein, or for the purposes, of a work shop to aid in erecting the new building,....

The same resolution also stipulated that if the new court house were to be built on the original court house lot, George R. Fisher would be authorized to move the 1791 structure to the public square at the county's expense. If the county sold the court house, it could be moved only by an order from the commissioner ten days after the sale.²⁶

By April 18, 1837 the county treasurer had received \$5,000 from the state treasurer.²⁷ On the same day, Layton & Sipple, a local trading firm, agreed to erect the new court house for \$20,000.²⁸

The Levy Court Proceedings for Tuesday, August 1, 1837 indicate that:

Several proposals were received to furnish a suitable place for holding the Courts during the progress of the new Court House....

The Levy Court accepted Burton C. Barker's proposal

...to furnish A suitable place for holding the courts for this County (the place to

be fitted up by him in a suitable manner for the same) for the following Sum (viz) For each and every Superior Court \$50---- Chancery Court Nothing---Levy Court Nothing--- Provided that all the Courts be held at his House....29

Minutes for Tuesday, November 7, 1837, indicate that the Sussex County Levy Court was meeting at Barker's hotel on the Public Square.³⁰

On March 7, 1837 the Levy Court chairman, Spencer Phillips, signed a resolution whereby

...the state's Treasurer, shall from time to time, upon the order of the said George R. Fisher William D. Waples and David Hazzard or A Majority of them or their Successors in office pay all said sum or sums of Money set apart aforesaid by the state of Delaware for the building and finishing said Court House and fire proof Offices In Testimony of which the said Levy Court of Sussex County sitting at Georgetown as A Levy Court and Court of Appeal on Tuesday the Seventh day of March Eighteen Hundred and Thirty Seven have Caused this resolution to be signed by their Chairman and attested under the hand and seal of the Clerk of the Peace....31

William Strickland designed the new Sussex County Court House. On March 27, 1837 Strickland wrote to William D. Waples, enclosing

...a Convenient plan for the Hall Starways and other interior Arrangements for the Court Room & Jury rooms.

Limited funds, however, prevented Strickland from designing a more elaborate building. Strickland had originally "... Wished to have introduced a few Columns and some other decorations, On the exterior...." An iron gallery on the front of the court house "...for the use of the Cryer of

the Court. Or for any purposes of declaiming to a multitude beneath..." was included in Strickland's design. The gallery projected about three feet from the front of the landing window "...immediately Over the door of entrance in the basement Story...." Strickland also had designed a clock for the case of the cupola.³²

By April 18, 1837 Strickland had been paid sixty dollars. He submitted the following estimate with the original plans and elevations:

Digging out foundation 120 cubic yds	\$24.00
Building Stone = 150 perches including freight--laying--lime and Sand	450.00
<u>Bricks</u> -- 350.00 @ 10 p/ including laying lime, and Sand	3500.00
<u>Lumber</u> for floores, Roof, frame Scaffling &c.	1800.00
<u>Carpenters</u> Work	2300.00
Plastering Work and Materials	520.00
Painting and Glazing	450.00
Iron mongary, Nails, Straps Spikes &c	380.00
Lime 3900 Supr. feet at 14 cts including Solder and putting on	546.00
Copper 750 feet of Copper for Cupola	275.00
Stone Window Sills 28	112.00
Stone Steps front & Back doors	<u>60.00</u>
Total Cost	10,417.00
Add 5 per cent for Contingences	

William Strickland
Architect³³

Philad^a. March 26, 1837

Joseph Houston, the county treasurer, had received twenty-two dollars for the sale of the 1791 court house by March 5, 1838.³⁴ The old court house was then moved to its present location, lot 42, on South Bedford Street, owned by Elias James, a Georgetown chairmaker.

The new Georgetown court house was completed by January 15, 1839. On that date, the court house commissioners submitted a petition, asking the General Assembly for permission to sell a portion of the court house lot. According to this petition,

...a part or portion of the Lot of Public ground, in Georgetown, commonly called the Court House Lot, on which the new Court House is now erected,... adjoining the lands of Philip Short Esquire, will be of no further utility or advantage for public purposes;....

The commissioners, therefore, proposed to sell the property and to contribute the proceeds to the county treasury.³⁵

On February 1, 1839 the Assembly passed a supplement to the act entitled "An Act to authorize the building of a Court House and Fire Proof offices at Georgetown in Sussex County." It specified the following interior arrangement:

The Prothonotary of the Superior Court Shall occupy the office fronting on the Public square and Market Street. The Recorder of Deeds Shall occupy the office adjoining the Prothonotary's office, on Market Street, the Clerk of the Peace shall occupy the office adjoining the Recorder's office, on Market Street, The Register of Wills &c shall occupy the office fronting on the Public Square and

Court House lots, the Register in Chancery shall occupy the office adjoining the office allotted to the Register of Wills, and the Clerk of the Orphans' Court shall occupy the office adjoining the office allotted to the Register in Chancery = Provided however, that When the offices of Register in Chancery, and Clerk of the Orphans Court are held by the same person, then and in that case The said Register in Chancery and Clerk of the Orphans Court shall occupy only one of said fire proof offices to be selected by the then incumbent, and the Sheriff of the Said County may occupy the office not used or occupied by the said officer---:36

The 1839 Sussex County Court House, refurbished in 1914, has continued to serve the county for 135 years.

REMEMBER WHEN . . .



A Hundred Years of Pictorial History
of
Georgetown, Delaware

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Alias Ben Franklin (far left) helps Doris Short and Norma Lee Copsey out of the antique truck owned by Harold N. Short. At right, then mayor Steve Pepper and Rosalie Walls arrived on the Circle by carriage. The gentleman in center holding the horses is unidentified.



In 1996, the county added on to the old Post Office (center) on the Circle to make a new county administrative building.



The Courthouse on the Circle stands in a winter wonderland on Christmas Eve Day 1998.



The Old Courthouse has been restored and now stands on South Bedford Street.