

3. BACKGROUND HISTORY

THE PROJECT AREA is a stretch of highway that passes along the mid-peninsular drainage divide, the spine of Delmarva.

PREHISTORY

Mammoths, musk ox, horses, caribou, and walrus provided food for dire wolf, short-faced bear, and other predators. Man was among the smaller competitors in the tundra food chain, but his skills compensated for his physical shortcomings. Nomadic people of this Paleo-Indian period were among the most skilled makers of stone tools in the world. They would travel great distances to quarry the best flinty cobbles from which they made exquisite spearpoints, knives, and small tools.

Paleo – Indian hunting – gathering society lasted until about 6,500 BC, when the Atlantic climate episode and the Archaic period of prehistory began (Custer 1984:31). Northern hardwood forests had replaced the tundra, the ocean had risen, and the climate was warmer. Pleistocene megafauna were replaced by smaller game, which required different hunting techniques and tools.

The mid-peninsular divide area has been particularly rich in finds of Paleo materials. If sites of this period are found in lower Delmarva, there is a high probability that they will be procurement sites near poorly-drained land along the divide (Custer 1986:49).

Archaic people fashioned tools made of quartz, a material that is less tractable than the flinty materials that Paleo people had favored. Ground stone axes and other heavy tools appear during this period.

By 3,000 BC, prehistoric society was decidedly different. Because people had stopped moving around so much, regional cultural differences began to appear in the artifact assemblages. Sedentary lifestyles ultimately led to horticulture, complex religious practices, and the accumulation of more, less portable, material goods.

The last prehistoric period, the Woodland, is characterized by larger groups of people living together in villages, using pottery and other heavy or fragile goods that would have been difficult to move from place to place. Woodland people tended to form more or less permanent settlements at places with abundant multiple resources. They sent out hunting parties, but they seldom dispersed whole populations to live off the land in the manner of their hunter-gatherer ancestors.

The Woodland I period, beginning about 3,000 B. C., is marked by the introduction of pottery. Elaborate mortuary practices and broad trading networks marked the later part of the period, which ended around 1,000 A. D.

The Woodland II period saw the disappearance of the broad trading networks. People became even more sedentary during this period.

People of the Woodland II period were the ones who met the first European settlers on the Delaware coast. Unaware of the natives' long history, descendants of these European settlers long assumed that the Woodland period culture reflected native lifestyles throughout prehistory.

Only during the present century has archæology revealed the rich variety and long time-span of Delaware's prehistoric cultures during the twelve millenia from glacial times to contact. After European contact, native culture faded away, until little remained in the consciousness of the people.

CONTACT PERIOD

The contact period is the time of initial interaction between European colonists and Native American residents. It begins with the first, indirect experience of Delaware Native Americans with European trade goods and diseases and ends with near-disappearance from Delaware of Native Americans as recognizable cultural groups.

It is likely that contact sites will not be easily distinguished from sites of the Woodland II period and European-American sites of a slightly later period. Less than ten confirmed or suspected contact-period sites have been catalogued in Delaware.

COLONIZATION

The area now known as Sussex County was part of the Dutch Zwaanendael patroonship grant of 1630, which extended from the mouth of Delaware Bay to Bombay Hook. On this huge tract, the Dutch erected only tentative settlements, most concentrated near the mouth of the Bay. By the time the Dutch lost their colony to the English in 1664, the back country remained unsettled.

The project area was not colonized during the Dutch period, but there was a sizable settlement on the coast during the seventeenth century. The Georgetown area remained sparsely-settled wilderness until the Revolutionary period.

William Penn's accession in 1682 sparked a new land rush, as his Quaker associates moved into the Delaware Valley in large numbers.

Under the Dutch and the Duke of York, local courts had taken charge of parcelling out the unclaimed land, but the new proprietor soon concentrated authority in his own land office at Philadelphia. The ensuing period was marked by large grants to Philadelphia merchants and speculators, including members of the Penn family, who effectively controlled the interior of Sussex County for another century.

The Maryland proprietors claimed western Sussex County under their English charter, and land titles remained in doubt as long as the issue was unsettled. Final settlement of the boundary between Maryland and Delaware did not come until the eve of the Revolution, when a British court ordered the drawing of the present western boundary of Delaware.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the central part of Sussex County was the site of iron furnaces, bloomeries, and charcoal burners. Because of the difficulty involved with getting products out, the forest

resources could not be exploited until after the railroad arrived, just before the Civil War.

Farms tended to be small, concentrated on the scanty high ground, surrounded by deep woods. During the nineteenth century, the tax ditch movement added to the arable land in the area.

The town of Georgetown prospered as a county seat and as a minor commercial area, but it remained largely a single-focus community centred on the courthouse.

When canneries were built along the rail lines in Sussex County after the Civil War, local farmers were able to serve broad markets. But the land remained sandy, infertile and droughty until the advent of large-scale chicken farming during the present century provided a cheap form of soil improvement.

PROJECT AREA HIGHWAY HISTORY

The first north-south road through the project area, the State Road, was built late in the eighteenth century to connect the new county seat of Georgetown with Milford and Kent County to the north. Post roads already had existed, from earliest settlements, along the coast.

The State Road in turn was superseded by the Coleman duPont Road. This modern highway, built by Mr. duPont with his own funds, was constructed from a point south of Wilmington to the Maryland line. Before it was finished, the road-building project was taken over by the state, with the establishment of the Delaware State Highway Department.

Coleman duPont envisioned a four-lane intermodal corridor, but only a two-lane road was built in Sussex County. The stretch from Dover to Wilmington was dualized soon after it was completed, but the idea of needing a four-lane road to Georgetown was considered comical. Farmers gladly sold the rights-of-way, but people continued to build houses immediately adjacent to the right-of-way line, and to landscape the public land as if it were their front yards.

The current project amounts to a final realization of Mr. duPont's original plan for a state-wide four-lane road, eighty years after it was originally planned. His foresight in

designing for eventual construction of the second roadway became apparent as the new road was being designed. Unfortunately, his original plan for purchasing a 200-foot right-of-way had not been followed throughout the project, and the state was required to buy, at modern prices, tracts he offered to donate.

Bypasses around towns were another of Coleman duPont's unpopular ideas. He wanted to build his roads around the towns, but local businesses insisted that this radical innovation would ruin the communities. After World War II, the state finally began building the bypasses, one of which is the Georgetown bypass at the south end of the project area.

Since Mr. duPont's youth had been spent working for his father's trolley line, he naturally expected an interurban electric railway to share the corridor, but the lines never reached so far south. Electric railways actually operated in New Castle and Kent counties, but light rail for Sussex County remains an unrealized dream.

The duPont road today is known as U. S. Route 113. The old State Road, where he bypassed it, is State Route 213.

FORESTRY

When western Sussex County was first settled, woodland was considered nearly worthless. Forest industries, such as charcoal and iron production, dominated the swampy interior. Later, gum logs were brought out to make veneer for peach baskets.

When the duPont highway was opened, Delaware's first professional forester was brought into state government. The visionaries who designed the road saw forestry development as a vital part of the economic development process.

The Redden and Ellendale state forests were established by the Delaware forestry board and developed by CCC labor during the Depression. Through forest management practices, the state was able to make the upland swamps into money-making tree farms.

At the core of the state's forestry effort was the Redden facility near the project area. Using a former Pennsylvania Railroad retreat facility as its basis, the state transformed wasteland into Redden State Forest.