

## 2.0 HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Delaware's recent past, comprising approximately three centuries, has been organized into five temporal study units, as defined by the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1987). These units form the basis for an appropriate chronological framework for investigation of the state's resources. In an effort to coordinate the study of historic archeological and architectural resources, these temporal study units were adopted unaltered in the *Management Plan for Delaware's Historical Archaeological Resources* (DeCunzo and Catts 1990:19).

The following regional historical summary is presented to provide a brief background on important local and regional historical events that shaped and affected the inhabitants of the study area. Descriptions of regional historical events are based in large part on the works of Munroe (1978, 1984), Hoffecker (1977), Hancock (1976), and Scharf (1888).

### 2.1 EXPLORATION AND FRONTIER SETTLEMENT (1630 TO 1730)

The first permanent settlement in present Sussex County, Lewes, was made in 1630 and was known as Swanendael ("valley of swans"). About a decade earlier the Dutch West Indian Company had established a trading post on the west side of Delaware Bay (then called Godins Bay after Samuel Godyn, a company supporter) (Weslager 1967).

In 1682 the granting of proprietary rights to William Penn and his representatives by the Duke of York essentially gave political and economic control of the Delaware region to Philadelphia, the new seat of government in Penn's colony of Pennsylvania (Munroe 1978). Two years earlier, in 1680, Governor Edmund Andros had established the County of Deale, which included the settlements at the Whorekil northwards to Cedar Creek. The settlement of the Whorekil region, particularly around the town of Whorekil, and the area ten miles south at Indian River and Assawoman Inlet, was encouraged by Governor Andros. Between 1676 and 1678 forty-seven land patents were issued by the Duke of York's government for lands in the area, all fronting on the coast or on navigable streams and rivers (Hancock 1976:17).

With Penn's arrival in 1682, the name of Deale County was changed to Sussex County, and the name of the town of Whorekil was changed to Lewes, the county seat of the English county of Sussex. In 1682 the first surveyors of highways and bridges were appointed for the county. Sussex County at this time was heavily forested and swampy, and settlement in the county for much of this period was confined to an area within about 10 to 12 miles of the coastline, extending inland along a line running roughly from modern Milford-Milton-Harbeson-Millsboro-Dagsboro. Grist mills were established on Broadkilm Creek (Milton) by 1695 and on Bundick's Branch soon thereafter; an earlier grist mill had existed in Lewes by 1676. Lewes was the only town of any size in the county, and it became a political, maritime, and commercial center for the region. The population of Sussex County has been estimated to have been less than 1,000 persons by 1700, and the majority of these inhabitants were farmers, raising crops of tobacco (the primary medium of exchange), corn, wheat, and rye. Hogs and cattle were also raised. The exporting of cattle, by driving them overland from Lewes to New Castle, appears from the records to have been a significant source of income for the settlers of Sussex (Munroe 1978:198).

## 2.2 INTENSIFIED AND DURABLE OCCUPATION (1730-1770)

Settlement in Sussex County by the start of this period had penetrated the interior portions of the region, reaching the area of the mid-peninsular divide (just to the west of present-day Georgetown). Patents for land west of the headwaters of the Broadkilm and Indian rivers, and along Gravelly Branch and its tributaries were being issued from the Pennsylvania government by the second decade of the eighteenth century (Scharf 1888:1237, 1293). According to one contemporary observer,

The Inhabitants here live scattering generally at 1/2 a mile or miles distance from each other, except in Lewes where 58 families are settled together. The business or Employment of the Country Planters, is almost the same with that of an English Farmer, they commonly raise Wheat, Rye, Indian Corn, and Tobacco, and have Store of Horses, Cows, and Hoggs. The produce they raise is commonly sent to Philadelphia.... The people here have generally the Reputation of being more Industrious then they of some of the Neighboring counties...." [Hancock 1962:139].

On the opposite side of the Delmarva Peninsula the Maryland government was issuing patents and warrants as early as the 1680s for lands on the Marshy Hope Creek, Clear Brook Branch, and other tributaries of the northwest fork of the Nanticoke River. Prominent family names from the western part of Sussex County, such as Nutter, Cannon, Polk, Richards, and Adams, appeared in the area during this period under Maryland land patents (Hancock 1985:13). Until the settling of the dispute over the boundary line between Maryland and Pennsylvania (including the Three Lower Counties) in 1765 by the establishment of the Mason-Dixon Line, the traditional western boundary between Sussex County (in present-day Delaware) and Worcester County (in Maryland) was the Nanticoke River and its tributaries, particularly Tussocky Branch and Gravelly Branch. Those settlers on the west side of the Nanticoke resided in the Province of Maryland, and those on the east side lived in Sussex County. This rather arbitrary boundary caused considerable confusion and dissension among the "Border People" on the Peninsula, and numerous annoying disturbances occurred along the borders of the Three Lower Counties throughout the period. John Dagworthy, for whom the town of Dagsboro is named, received his patent in 1759 for 20,000 acres of land in what was then Maryland. Today, much of "Dagworthy's Conquest", as the patent was called, is situated in Delaware (Eckman et al. 1938:388).

For most of the eighteenth century, the land remained heavily wooded and overland passage was difficult. Major roads included the King's Highway, officially established by an Act of the General Assembly in 1752, which ran northwards from Lewes to Cedar Creek and St. Mathews Anglican Church (built in 1707), and from there to Dover and up country to Wilmington. From Lewes the main road ran south through St. Georges Chapel to Warwick and the ferry crossing on the Indian River, and from Lewes southeast down the Atlantic Coast towards the Inlet. A side road extended down Angola Neck at St. Georges Chapel (built in 1719), site of early settlement in the county (Munroe and Dann 1985). In the western part of the county, claimed at this time by Maryland, a major overland route ran from Choptank Bridge across Gravelly Branch in the vicinity of Coverdale Crossroads. The roads were described at the beginning of this period as "very commodious for traveling, the land being level and generally sandy, so that the people usually come to Church Winter and Summer some 7 or 8 miles, and others 12 or 14 miles...." (Hancock 1962:140).

The population of Sussex County grew slowly throughout this period. In 1728 it was reported that there were a total of 1,750 inhabitants in the county, consisting of 1,075 Anglicans, 600

Presbyterians, and 75 Quakers, in addition to 241 enslaved and free African Americans in the county (Hancock 1962:138). By the 1740s, it was estimated that the population of Sussex County was between 1,800 and 2,000. Thirty years later on the eve of the American Revolution the population was estimated that at nearly 14,000 (Hancock 1976:26). The tremendous growth of the population between 1740 and 1775 may be attributable to the strong migration of settlers from the eastern shore of Maryland to Delaware lands, as well as to overseas immigration from Great Britain (Munroe 1978:150).

Throughout the period, farming continued to be the major occupation of the settlers in Sussex. The farms and plantations in Sussex have been generally characterized as subsistence farms, operated by poorer farmers and farm laborers, particularly when compared to the farms located in New Castle County (Main 1973:26-32). Tobacco declined from its position as the prominent cash crop in Sussex County and was replaced somewhat by corn and wheat. The lumber industry, particularly the harvesting of vast stands of cypress, cedar and pine from the Indian River area, began in this period to grow in importance, and the shellfish industry was established in the bays of Sussex. Shipbuilding remained a significant industry, especially at Lewes, on the Broadkilm, and along Indian River.

An important industry that flourished in the county during this time period was the iron industry. Several iron furnaces and plantations were established along the Nanticoke, Gravelly Branch, and Deep Creek beginning in the 1760s (Tunnell 1954; Heite 1974). These furnaces used bog iron ore, dug from the surrounding swamps and wetlands, for their sources of ore. Most of these furnaces were out of production by the beginning of the American Revolution.

Lewes continued to be the major town in the region, though there was some dissension in the 1760s among the inhabitants of the southern and western portions of the county to have the county seat moved to the Crossroads on the Broadkilm (present-day Milton). Several small hamlets began to spring up during this time period, mostly located at stream and river crossing points. Besides the Crossroads, also known as Clowes, these hamlets included Warwick in Indian River Hundred, a ferry-point erected before 1750 on the upper reaches of Indian River; and St. Johnstown in Nanticoke Hundred, the location of crossroads village and Presbyterian Church in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

### **2.3 TRANSFORMATION FROM COLONY TO STATE (1770 TO 1830)**

By the start of this period, the century-long boundary dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania had been decided, and the area west of the Nanticoke officially became part of Sussex County. The addition of such a substantial tract of land spurred the creation of five new hundreds in Sussex; Baltimore, Little Creek, Dagsborough, Nanticoke, and Broad Creek. These hundreds in “New Sussex” were joined with the five hundreds of “Old Sussex”; Lewes and Rehoboth, Indian River, Northwest Fork, Broadkill, and Cedar Creek (Hancock 1976:25). Sussex County thus became the largest of the Three Lower Counties, with a surface area of 94 square miles, nearly the size of both New Castle and Kent counties combined. By 1800 the population of the county had reached 19,358 inhabitants. The region at the head of Indian River was relatively sparsely settled with approximately 5,800 people residing in the hundreds of Dagsborough, Baltimore, Indian River, and Lewes and Rehoboth. Hundreds in the study area with large percentages of enslaved laborers included Dagsborough at 19 percent (largest in the county), Baltimore (18 percent), Lewes and Rehoboth (15.8 percent), and Indian River (15.5 percent).

At the start of this period, the American Revolution heavily influenced social, economic, and political developments in the county. Much of the effects of the war were limited to the coastal areas around Lewes, the Mispillion, Cedar Creek, Broadkill, and Indian River, where British blockades and shore raids by “loyalist refugees” disrupted trade and commerce (Hancock 1976; Hoffman 1976:287-290).

On January 29, 1791, the Delaware General Assembly passed an act removing the seat of government of Sussex County from Lewes to a more central location at “James Pettyjohn’s old field” near the center of the county. Commissioners were appointed and charged with the purchase of up to 100 acres of land for the new county seat. Meeting on May 9, 1791 at the home of Abraham Harris, the commissioners negotiated the purchase of 50 acres from him. They also acquired 25 acres from Rowland Bevins and one acre from Joshua Pepper. Commissioner Rhoads Shankland began to survey the land and divide it into 60 by 120 foot lots, which were sold to defray the purchase price of the land. Shankland explained the original plot, as follows:

In or near the centre of the town is a spacious square of one hundred yards each way, for publick...the northeast side thereof stand the court-house and public offices. The streets run as follows: Pine, Maple, Laurel Streets, Strawberry and Cooper Alleys run southwest and northeast; at right angles with them are Bedford and Front Streets, North, Love, Cherry and South Lanes, and North and South Alleys [Scharf 1888].

The new county seat was given the name “Georgetown” in honor of Commissioner George Mitchell, one of the leaders in the effort to relocate the seat of government. As a result of this move, improvements in the transportation network, particularly in the interior parts of the county, were undertaken. By 1796 a road running south from Georgetown to Laurel was established, as was a road from Georgetown north to Milton and the Broadkill. Within the Georgetown South study area, both the transportation network and the settlement pattern focused on grist mills, saw mills, and mill dams. The mills provided nodal points for the surrounding population, and other services, such as taverns, shops, and stores were erected in their vicinities. The mill dams often provided the easiest means of crossing low, swampy ground and of crossing the mill ponds, thus becoming ready-made causeways across streams and creeks in the area. Mill seats sometimes expanded into larger settlements, such as Millsboro (1792), and Dagsboro (c. 1785), Frankford (1808), and Sandy Branch (c. 1775).

Georgetown grew outward from the central circle with houses erected for judges, lawyers, and county officials in proximity to the Circle. As commerce grew, businesses were established to capitalize on traffic generated by the seat of government. Taverns, restaurants, hotels and several types of shops were constructed along the major roads leading into the Circle. Bedford Street, Market Street, and the Circle became the business hub of Georgetown (Institute for Public Administration [IPA] 2001:9).

Millsboro, situated on the north side of Indian River, was originally called Rock Hole, but the name was changed in 1809 to Millsborough. The settlement on the south side of the river was known as Washington until the late 1830s when both settlements became known as Millsboro. An iron furnace, known as the Millsborough Furnace was established in 1817 on the south side of the river and initially used local bog iron in its blast furnace. A foundry was added to the operation in 1822 (Eckman et al. 1938:387).

Dagsborough (or Dagsboro), like Millsboro, grew up around a gristmill situated at the head of Pepper Creek. The settlement here was initially called Blackfoot Town, but the name was

changed circa 1875 to Dagsborough in honor of General John Dagsworthy (Eckman et al. 1938:388). The village of Frankford, known as Long's Store, later as Gum's Store, was established on Vines Creek around 1808, and the settlement of Selbyville was known as Sandy Branch until 1842 (Eckman et al. 1938:390-91).

Beginning in 1779 the Sussex Legislature passed several "Ditch Acts" in an effort to reclaim swampy or low ground so that it would be suitable for agricultural use. Between 1779 and 1812 over thirty ditch acts were passed, and these affected such drainages as the Marshy Hope, Indian Run, Pot Hook Creek, and Almshouse Ditch. The reclamation of land in this fashion would be a continuing operation in Sussex, and today is represented by County Tax Ditches. By 1976 there were 106 independent tax ditch companies in Sussex (Passmore et al.1978:19).

Corn agriculture predominated throughout this period in Sussex County, and in the southern part of the county livestock raising contributed substantially to the economy (Macintyre 1986; Michel 1985; Garrison 1988). Homesteads in Sussex were generally characterized by a frame or log one-and-one-half-story house averaging under 450 square feet of living space, a small orchard of apple and peach trees, and usually about four outbuildings, including a corn barn, smoke or meat house, and kitchen. Livestock on the farm might include a herd of hogs, cows, sheep, oxen, and an occasional horse. On most plantations, only 50 percent of the total acreage of the farm was under cultivation (Hancock 1987:24-25). "Out plantations" or "out fields" might be located close by the farm, and were locations of tenant houses or well-used fields. A form of extensive subsistence farming coupled with home manufacturing dominated the economy of Sussex County during this period. By 1810 over 70 percent of the looms in the state of Delaware were located in Sussex County. Over 62 percent of the total value of flaxen goods, and over 75 percent of the wool produced in Delaware, came from homes in Sussex County. Five iron forges were located in Sussex and produced 215 tons of iron annually. Twenty distilleries in the county produced nearly half of the annual value of all of those establishments in the state (Coxe 1814:76).

#### **2.4 INDUSTRIALIZATION AND CAPITALIZATION (1830-1880)**

The most significant event to occur within the county during this period was the arrival of the railroad. Prior to this time, the preferred method of long-distance travel out of the county had been by steamboat, since overland travel was generally hampered by poor roads. In the study area, travel was difficult due to the tidal inlet at Indian River Bay. The Delaware Railroad was constructed in the western portion of the county and reached the town of Seaford in 1856, and exited the state at Delmar by 1859 (Hancock 1976:63). The Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Railroad ran from Harrington to Milford and from Milford south to Georgetown in 1869 (LeeDecker et al. 1989:32). A third line, the Junction and Breakwater Railroad was constructed between 1859 and 1868, when it reached Lewes; a spur line eventually connected to Rehoboth in 1878 (Hancock 1976:89). The Queen Anne's Railroad, which ran between the Chesapeake and Delaware bays, was famous in the late 1890s for its excursions to Lewes, but was abandoned in 1924 (Eckman et al. 1938:407).

The arrival of the railroad in the county stimulated changes in agriculture and industry, and the growth of new towns. The growing of perishable market crops, particularly fruits like peaches, blackberries and strawberries, became possible after the railroad. By the end of this period, Sussex County was the leading peach producing area of Delaware, and most of this crop was shipped by rail or water to urban locations. The transportation of the fruit crops was made possible in turn by the establishment of canneries, like the Fruit Preserving Company and the

Georgetown Packing Company, both constructed near the railroad depot in Georgetown by the mid-1870s (Scharf 1888:1241). Other towns, such as Milton, Frankford, Selbyville, and Bridgeville, also constructed packing companies at this time (Eckman et al. 1938:390; Hancock 1976:88). Smaller communities, such as Gumboro (established 1840) were loose agglomerations of dwellings and services associated with extractive industries such as timbering in the Cypress Swamp (Eckman et al. 1938:509).

The demise of the iron furnaces of Sussex County occurred at the start of this period, and included the furnace at Millsboro (abandoned in 1836) (Heite 1974). However, a foundry continued in operation at Millsboro until 1879, making it the longest operating furnace in Delaware history (Eckman et al. 1938:94, 387). The Millsboro foundry produced pipes used in New York's Croton Waterworks and in the iron railings used to surround Independence Square.

The arrival of the railroad allowed the tourism industry to grow in the county during this time period. Beaches and coastal areas had always held a special allure to the region's inhabitants, and with the improved transportation methods these areas became more accessible to the urban populations of Philadelphia and Baltimore, who no longer had to rely solely on the steamboat to travel to Lewes (Hancock 1976:90).

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Sussex County was the largest slaveholding area in Delaware, containing over half of the state's slave population. The majority of the enslaved laborers were the property of small farmers, and worked as domestic slaves or field laborers. Free blacks in the county generally owned little land, and like their enslaved counterparts, worked as day laborers and hired farm hands, though some were skilled artisans (Hancock 1976:65). The end of the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves in Sussex, though providing freedom, did little to improve their social or economic status (Eckman et al. 1938:494).

As in the previous historical periods described above, corn agriculture continued to be dominant in Sussex County. The corn that was raised was used to feed livestock, and the small livestock herds of Sussex County were the chief source of agricultural income for the area's farmers. Home manufactures also continued to be a major source of income in Sussex. Long after few New Castle County or Kent County farmers produced any home manufactures, a majority of Sussex County farmers reported it as a source of income in the 1849 Census Schedule. Sussex inhabitants have been characterized as self-reliant, and often in addition to farming used smithing, carpentry, fishing, milling, tanning, hunting and trapping as supplements to their incomes (Michel 1985:10-12; Garrison 1988).

Industrialization in the county still lagged behind that seen in New Castle and Kent counties. By 1860 there were a total of 141 manufacturers of all kinds located in the county, including thirty-seven grist mills, fifty-six lumber mills, fifteen blacksmith shops, and six shipyards in Sussex, with smaller numbers of boot and shoe manufacturers, leather works, agricultural implement shops, fisheries, wagon and carriage shops. The majority of these industries were oriented towards intra-county services, though shipbuilding touched all areas of the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, with ships constructed at Seaford and Laurel, as well as Milton and Lewes, and the timber industry centered on the Cypress Swamp was nationally known (Eckman et al. 1938:509). By the end of this period shipbuilding in villages like Milton had reached its peak (Eckman et al. 1938:416), and the number of flour and grist mills, though still important in the county, had declined to 26 (Passmore et al. 1978:24).

## 2.5 URBANIZATION AND SUBURBANIZATION (1880-1960)

Trends in agriculture begun in the preceding periods continued in Sussex County, and the county remains today the most important agricultural section of the state. At the start of this period corn was still dominant as a cash crop, the county producing over 1,676,000 bushels in 1900. In some sections of the study area, especially around Indian River, a defining characteristic of the region was the large number of highly productive, small farms operated in many cases by people with economic and cultural connections to both the land and the sea (Conrad 1908:728).

Today corn and soybeans, both used for feed in the broiler industry, are primary products of the county, and Sussex is characterized by a “broiler-corn-soybean complex.” Several large-scale agribusinesses, such as the Newtons and Cannons of Bridgeville, and the Townsends of eastern Sussex, dominate the agricultural economy of the county (Munroe 1984:233; Hancock 1976: 100-101).

The trends in truck farming and market gardening, begun in the early period, saw their zenith by 1890, when Sussex became the peach producing center of the State. Towns such as Millsboro and Selbyville were centers of fruit and market garden production. Basket, barrel, and crate manufactories were essential businesses for the successful production of perishable foods, and the larger towns each had manufactories. By 1900 over 7 million quarts of strawberries were grown in the county, making Sussex one of the leading producers in the nation (Hancock 1976:89). In 1918, 250,000 crates of strawberries were shipped from Selbyville, a number that had declined to 100,000 crates twenty years later (Eckman et al. 1938:393). Other fruits were also widely produced, including blackberries, peaches, and apples (Derrickson 1926:51-64). By the early 1960s orchard crops had been supplanted by other, more lucrative, agricultural products.

The county also experimented with new agricultural methods, most notably in the chicken industry (broilers, or chickens weighing less than three pounds). In 1923 Cecile A. [Long] Steele, the wife of farmer David Wilmer Steele, raised chickens for profit in Ocean View. These were sold to urban markets for broiling, frying, and roasting. She was extremely successful and the poultry industry grew rapidly; the number of broilers raised in Delaware grew from 7 million in 1934 to 54 million in 1942, or over one-quarter of the entire commercial broiler production in the country (Munroe 1984:214-215). By 1944 sixty million broilers were being raised annually, mostly in the southeastern portion of the county in the vicinity of Millsboro, Ocean View, and Selbyville. By 1969 Sussex farmers were deriving over 80 million dollars per year come from this source, and its associated agricultural jobs of soybean and feed production (Hancock 1976:99-101). As one historian has remarked, “thanks to broilers, Sussex became one of the richest agricultural counties the eastern United States” (Munroe 1984:216).

The holly wreath industry flourished in Sussex from the 1880s until the 1960s, and many farmers supplemented their incomes during the months of November and December in the holly business. It was an especially significant industry during the Depression, and in 1936 over 2 million wreaths were shipped from the towns of Bridgeville, Milton, Millsboro, and Selbyville. The industry declined quickly after the Second World War (Eckman et al. 1938: 385; Hancock 1976:102).

At the start of the twentieth century, the lumber industry was a significant source of income for Sussex County. In 1909 a record amount of timber, over 55 million cubic feet, was shipped from the county. Most of this was virgin Sussex pine which had grown following the initial cuttings

caused by the arrival of the railroad several generations earlier. In the Cypress Swamp area west of Gumboro extractive lumber industry has been a thriving business since the eighteenth century. Until 1930 the Cypress Swamp, later a cedar swamp and still later a pine swamp, supplied the region with “Pocomoke Swamp” shingles, used for siding and roofs. In the 1930s the area was burned and is now locally known as the Burnt Swamp (Eckman et al 1938:510; Ireland and Matthews 1974:9). Along with lumbering, the charcoal industry was an important related industry of the county; some charcoal was still being produced in the Redden area as late as the 1950s (Passmore et al. 1978:13, 14).

In 1939 less than 40 percent of the land in Sussex County was farmed. The acreage of land in farms had declined by nearly one-quarter since 1880, and the number of farms in the county had decreased by 15.3 percent between 1910 and 1940. Both of these trends were largely the result of changing economic conditions and the difficulties in farming marginal lands (Bausman 1941:4, 7). At that time, one of the major problems confronting Sussex farmers was drainage, which today has been largely solved through the construction of a vast network of drainage ditches and channelized streams. The growth of corn and soybeans as cash crops in the county has allowed the reclamation of over 35,000 acres of land from swamp and brush to tillable acreage in the last forty years (Hancock 1976:100).

Grain farming in the late 1930s was spread fairly evenly across the county, with slightly heavy concentrations of farms in Northwest Fork Hundred and in the southeastern portion of the county. Cannery crops, such as lima beans, tomatoes, and string beans were grown mostly in Broadkill, Cedar Creek, and Lewes and Rehoboth hundreds, while truck crops and fruit crops were mostly produced in the fertile southern and western hundreds (Derrickson 1926). Timber lands, brushlands and open untillable lands were the dominant landform in 1941, and covered large portions of the central part of Sussex (Bausman 1941:16-21). Significantly, the farmers of Sussex were characterized in 1941 as being more closely tied to the land than the farmers of New Castle or Kent Counties. There were few foreign born inhabitants in Sussex, and the vast majority were native Delawareans; “in fact, most of the farmers of Sussex County were born and reared in Sussex County” (Bausman 1941:61).

By 1900 over 50 percent of all farmers in Delaware were tenants or sharecroppers. Tenancy remained a dominant but locally variable farming practice into the first half of the twentieth century in Kent and Sussex counties. For example, in 1935 approximately 43 percent of Kent farms were tenanted compared to about 32 percent of Sussex farms (Bausman 1940:42, 1941:31). Conversely, owner-occupied farms were more common in Sussex County than in Kent. The vast majority of rural residents within the study area on the eve of the Second World War were native Delawareans, and in most cases were farming within the county where they were raised (Bausman 1941:46). This characteristic of the study area has been steadily declining as large numbers of people from other parts of the country relocate to Sussex.

During the twentieth century the size and composition of agricultural communities along the Eastern seaboard in general fluctuated during the year as different crops matured in each region. In the 1920s, the seasonal agricultural work force in Delaware was principally composed of white women. Over the next twenty years however, they were replaced by thousands of migrant farm laborers, both black and white, traveling north from Florida following the potato, vegetable, and berry harvests into Delaware (Miller et al. 1997; Taylor 1937). In addition to these migratory crews, local teenagers and African Americans who had “fallen out” of the migratory “stream,” worked seasonally in Kent and Sussex counties (Miller et al. 1997).

The Coleman DuPont Highway — the ancestor of Delaware’s U.S. Routes 13 and 113 — is the focal point of the present study area, and indeed has served in that capacity since its creation in the second decade of the twentieth century. The road was intended by its creator to be a superhighway and, as originally conceived by DuPont, would require a right-of-way of 200 feet (Rae 1975:171). DuPont, a leader in the national Good Roads Movement, envisioned a highway on a grand scale that would be the “straightest, widest, and best road in the country” (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineering, Inc. 2000:9). Within its right-of-way DuPont proposed a center roadway for high-speed motorized traffic, electric trolley tracks, separate lanes for heavier motorized vehicles, unpaved lanes for horses and horse-drawn traffic, and finally sidewalks for pedestrians (Rae 1975:171). The road was eventually scaled-down to a narrower right-of-way and a two-lane concrete road surface. The first section of the road from Selbyville to the Appenzellar Farm six miles south of Milford was completed in 1917 (Eckman et al. 1938:80). Thereafter the planning and construction of the road from Wilmington to Ellendale was undertaken entirely by the newly created State Highway Department, with Coleman DuPont contributing slightly less than 4 million dollars to the overall construction of the highway (Eckman et al. 1938:81; Rae 1975:178).

The emerging highway system, with the DuPont Highway as its backbone, was as significant a factor in the economic development of southern Delaware as the construction of the Delaware Railroad in the mid-nineteenth century (Munroe 1984:203). Beginning in the 1920s, the road improvements in the state marked a decided shift in agricultural production strategies (LeeDecker et al. 1992:22). The highway system allowed farmers to get produce to urban areas such as Wilmington and Philadelphia (and their expanding suburbs) more efficiently by truck than by the more restrictive railroad system. Sussex County farmers adjusted their agricultural produce to meet the needs of the urban market, for example, shifting to broiler production and liquid milk production (Munroe 1984:203).

The construction of the DuPont Highway on a new alignment away from the main streets of established villages and towns such as Frederica, Milford, Ellendale, Lincoln, Georgetown, Millsboro, Dagsboro, and Selbyville, introduced the concept of a bypass into Delaware highway construction. As described in the State Highway Department’s annual report for 1917-1920, the value in bypass construction was that it “would be more convenient for the through traffic and less dangerous for the residents of the towns. This seems to be the latest approved method of dealing with the increasing trunk line traffic. A local example of the excellent results is shown in the Du Pont Road between Selbyville and Georgetown” (Rae 1975:179). Viewed by some contemporary critics as detrimental to the economic health of the towns, the construction of bypasses did alter the locations of residential housing and commercial development within the study area, shifting the focus of these activities beyond the railroad connections of the towns and out to the highway access points of the road. “Where once towns clustered around railroad depots,” maintains one Delaware historian, “now the most valuable land was that with access to the highway... developments downstate stretched communities out into the countryside” (Munroe 1984:204). In a departure from the initial design as envisioned by DuPont that intended to create a completely new alignment, in some sections of the highway, such as the stretch between Milford and Georgetown, the road used a combination of new and old alignments. In this area the road followed the course of the old State Road between Milford and Georgetown (initially established in 1796) northwards from Sharp Hill School to near Redden Crossroads where the road moved to a new alignment parallel and slightly west of the old road (LeeDecker et al. 1992:24).

Georgetown grew rapidly in population in the last decades of twentieth century. In 1980 its population was 1,710, which grew to 3,732 in 1990, an increase of 118.2 percent. Much of this increase is attributable to annexation that doubled the size of the town (IPA 2001:12). By 2000 its

population had reached 4,643, an increase of 24 percent over ten years earlier (U.S. Bureau of the Census n.d.). A portion of this increase is attributable to an influx of Hispanic residents, most of whom are employed by the local poultry industry. According to the Delaware Population Consortium, the number of residents of Hispanic origin in Sussex County grew by 262.5% between 1991 and 1998 (IPA 2001:14). The three largest employers in the Georgetown area—Townsend, Inc., Perdue, Inc., and Allen’s Family Foods—are all poultry processing or packaging facilities (IPA 2001:23).

Throughout its historical development, the pattern and density of settlement in Delaware generally and in the study area specifically have been strongly influenced by several factors: 1) an agrarian economy; 2) the commodity demands of larger regional markets, and 3) transportation facilities. The completion of the DuPont Highway linked the northern and southern sections of the state and helped to complete the shift in agricultural production towards non-local markets and open new areas to productive agriculture. Improved transportation in the twentieth century also brought a decline in the importance of the many small crossroad and “corner” communities that had sprung up in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, the study area was still predominantly rural and agricultural, but small industries were present that utilized agricultural and woodland produce (Ireland and Matthews 1974:2). The development of resort communities in the area from Cape Henlopen south to Maryland has profoundly influenced the settlement and land use patterns of the region. During the second half of the twentieth century, recreational and part-time residential development has expanded away from the immediate vicinity of the beaches and waterfront areas, and currently affects much of the study area.