

3.0 HISTORIC CONTEXT

A historic context is a body of information organized by theme, place, and time that assists in the evaluation of National Register eligibility of resources that meet the National Register age consideration (1962 cut-off used). Chapter 3 provides a general background on the historical development of central Sussex County as it may relate to its project area and the Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Geographical Zone of Delaware. The historic context is organized by the chronological periods presented in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* and by identified historic themes:

Chronological periods addressed in this report include:

1630-1730+/- Exploration and Frontier Settlement

1730-1770+/- Intensified and Durable Occupation

1770-1830+/- Early Industrialization

1830-1880+/- Industrialization and Early Urbanization

1880-1940+/- Urbanization and Early Suburbanization
1940-present Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization

No above ground resources dating to the 1630-1730+/-, 1770-1770+/-, 1770-1830+/-, or 1830-1880+/- chronological periods have been identified in each project area to date. However, one property (S-8493) may have been constructed during the 1830-1880+/- range, but this dwelling's date is an estimated range and has likely been relocated from another location within the region. Each period is broadly addressed in this document (Chapter 3) to provide a more complete understanding of the historical development of the project area(s). The remaining chronological periods are reflective in sporadic and gradual settlement patterns in the outskirts of Georgetown and Lewes. The later chronological periods are more applicable towards understating the property types identified and evaluated for the National Register in this report.

As noted above, the information presented in the historic context is organized by historic themes. Background research identified three general historic themes based on the Delaware Historic Preservation Plan:

- Architecture (related specifically to Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts);
- Retailing and Wholesaling (related specifically to commercial use)
- Agriculture (related agricultural complexes or unique farming facilities and operations)

The following historic context provides a brief background for the US 9 Intersection Improvements project area and Sussex County in general. Published works that were used include *The History of Delaware* by John A. Munroe (2006), *The History of Sussex County, Delaware* by Harold B. Hancock (1976), *The History of Sussex County* by Dick Carter (1978), and *Delaware Farming (Images of America series)* by Ed Kee (2007). Additionally the following reports that were prepared for the Delaware Department of Transportation provided important information on local history and building types within the US 9 project area: *Historic Resources Survey, Sussex East West Corridor Study, Sussex County, Delaware* by Cultural Heritage Research Services, Inc. (1992) and *Evaluation of National Register Eligibility for Architectural Properties in the Ellendale Study Area, US 113 North/South Study* by John Milner Associates, Inc. (2009).

3.1 Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730)

The first European settlement in Sussex County was formed in 1631 by the Dutch, who established a trading post and whaling station near Cape Henlopen at the mouth of the Delaware River. This post was called Zwaanendael or "Valley of the Swans" and was the first New Netherland settlement in the Delaware valley. The colony failed within a year as native people destroyed the fort and killed the colonists. Any further attempts by the Dutch to colonize the lower Delaware Valley were abandoned until 1659 when they established a new settlement at Lewes, called Horekill, near the former site of Zwaanendael (Munroe 2006:28 & 34). In 1638, the Swedish settlement of Fort Christina was established on the Christina River near its confluence with the Delaware River, in present-day Wilmington. The New Sweden colony claimed the land west of the Delaware River including the Eastern Shore and later also parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Subsequent rival settlements by the Dutch at Fort Casimir (New

Castle), just seven miles south of Fort Christina resulted in territorial skirmishes that ultimately resulted in the surrender of not only the fort but all of New Sweden to the Dutch in 1655 (Munroe 2006:26). At that point, New Netherland encompassed lands in New York, New England, Delaware, and New Jersey.

After taking over the Delaware Valley, the Dutch began buying tobacco from the English in Maryland to sell on the world market. Despite some strategically located forts on the peninsula, the Dutch had not ventured far inland to settle. In 1664, King Charles II granted lands encompassing New Netherland to his brother the Duke of York. Over the next ten years, the Dutch and the English vied for commercial supremacy in the Horekill area, with the Dutch finally surrendering to the English in 1674. Little land had been settled up to that point except in and around the Horekill village, but following the English take-over, numerous tracts were granted. As these tracts were settled and farmed, a large African slave population was imported for labor, particularly for the production of tobacco, which gained importance in the southern counties (Kent and Sussex) during this period.

In 1681, William Penn received the charter for the province of Pennsylvania from King Charles II. Penn wanted access to the ocean, so he appealed to the Duke of York for his lands to the south through which the Delaware River flowed, and which would provide a direct route from Philadelphia to the Chesapeake Bay. He was granted this land in 1682 despite claims by the Calvert family of Maryland that Cecilius Calvert, the 2nd Lord Baltimore, received title to this land in 1632. These Lower Counties, as they were referred to, comprised New Castle, St. Jones and Deal, the latter two being renamed by Penn as Kent and Sussex. Penn also changed the name of Horekill to Lewes and made it the county seat. In 1682, immediately after being granted this land, Penn divided each of the Lower Counties into hundreds, which were the political subdivisions used in England. Penn's hundreds comprised geographic sections of 100 families. As originally laid out Sussex County had two hundreds, including Lewes and Rehoboth and Broadkiln, from which Georgetown Hundred was later divided.

Penn also appointed the first surveyor of roads and bridges in an attempt to improve the area to attract settlement (Scharf 1888:1203). Sussex County was marshy and forested with few cleared areas at a distance of more than ten miles inland from the coast. Such unfavorable conditions coupled with the large number of tracts owned by non-residents resulted in slow settlement. The settlement that did occur was primarily in close vicinity to water. Early farms were established where there was a convenient water source. Tobacco, corn, wheat, rye, and basic livestock were products of colonial farms. Gristmills were established at Lewes by 1676, on the Broadkiln Creek in Milton by 1695, and on Bundick's Branch soon thereafter. Lewes was the political, religious, and commercial center of the region. Shipyards existed in Lewes as early as 1680 and Anglican, Presbyterian, and Quaker houses of worship were established by the end of the period.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, two additional hundreds (Cedar Hook and Indian Creek) were formed out of the original two. As one of Sussex County's original two hundreds, Broadkiln encompassed an area north and west of Lewes to the Maryland line (near present day Georgetown). One of the first warrants granted in that hundred was to John Pettijohn, Sr. in 1715 for 540 acres near Bundick's Branch of Love Creek (Scharf 1888:1237). In

1717, Owen Hill, a Sussex County planter, received a proprietary warrant for 210 acres of forestland “at some distance from the running waters of Maryland” from the Surveyor General of Philadelphia (SCWB C:334). This warrant was for land encompassing the current village of Gravel Hill and was on the east side of the Gravelly Hill Swampe (Shankland 88). This landform was named for the hill of coarse gravel that characterized the otherwise heavily forested, low swampy landscape. Although Hill, like many early interior land-owners of Sussex County, didn’t settle his tract, there was enough of a population in the forestland to the west of Lewes to require the establishment of inland houses of worship in the Cool Spring area. By 1720, a Quaker congregation formed, but their meeting house was not built until 1742 (Carter 1976:37). By 1728, a Presbyterian Church was established, but a congregation may have existed as early as 1720.

3.2 Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770)

The late colonial era was one of expanded settlement and increased sustainable agriculture in Delaware. New settlements developed along waterways facilitating travel and transportation of goods. Early roads were few and of poor condition in the swampy interior, so overland travel often followed existing footpaths of the native people in the region. Lewes remained the largest established town in Sussex County with an estimated population of 1750 in 1728 (Carter 1978:10). In 1752, a system of King’s Highways was established by statute to connect Lewes with other population centers, such as Dover and Wilmington to the north and Dagsbury and Angola Neck to the south (Figure 5). The roads of this period were described as being “very commodious for traveling, the land being level and generally sandy, so that



Figure 5: 1757 map showing Lewes and the King’s Highway (T. Kitchen)

the people usually come to Church Winter and Summer some 7 or 8 miles, and other 12 or 14 miles...” (Hancock 1962:140). These roads saw a significant amount of traffic, being some of the earliest in the area to connect the main settlements between counties and the early houses of worship, such as St. Matthew’s Anglican Church (1717) in Cedar Creek and St. Georges Chapel (1719) on Middle Creek.

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During this period, Delaware's economy was primarily agricultural with settled farms reaching further inland from the coast. One contemporary observer stated of Sussex County that:

The Inhabitants here live scattering generally at ½ 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 . . . (Hancock 1962:139).

Slaves were an important labor source, particularly in the southern counties of Kent and Sussex where tobacco was an important crop in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. However, tobacco did not remain a primary crop for Delaware because of the toll it took on the land and because of its inferior quality to the tobacco being grown in neighboring Maryland and Virginia (DPA 2007). An agricultural shift to grain by mid-century virtually ended tobacco production in Delaware by the American Revolution. This shift to grain agriculture resulted in more extensive land clearing and planting, so formerly uncultivated areas farther inland were settled.

Ongoing boundary disputes between Penn and the Calvert family were problematic. Both Pennsylvania and Maryland claimed the rights to the counties of Delaware and each granted land to early settlers. In Sussex County, the land south of Indian River and west of current Georgetown was principally settled by Marylanders and the remaining eastern portion of the county by Pennsylvanians (Carter 1978:8). After a century of dispute, the two colonies finally agreed to have an official boundary surveyed. In 1760, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were appointed to continue a survey began in 1750-51 by John Watson to set the boundary between Maryland and the counties of Delaware. Even after its survey, the Mason-Dixon Line was not formally implemented until 1775 (Scharf 188:123).

Settlement continued to move inland as more people took up land in Sussex County and new farms were cleared. Vast acres of forestland were timbered of pine and cedar that was used in shipbuilding and house construction. The county's waterways remained important econoin the economy as the harvesting of fish and shellfish gained popularity and shipbuilding continued at Lewes and along Broadkill Creek and the Indian River. During this period, the iron industry flourished as iron furnaces and plantations were initially established in the western part of the county around the Nanticoke River and its tributaries, Gravelly and Deep Creeks. Although the swampy landscape provided a good source of bog iron ore, most furnaces operated for a short period, rising to importance around 1760 and closing down by the American Revolution (Carter 1976:30).

3.3 Early Industrialization (1770-1830)

In 1775, the Mason-Dixon Line was officially accepted as the boundary between Maryland and Delaware, increasing the land area of Delaware. Sussex County in particular expanded as it received the land west of the Nanticoke River, which had formerly been claimed by Maryland. The addition of land spurred the formation of new hundreds, including Dagsborough (1773), Little Creek (1774), Baltimore (1775), Deep Creek (now Nanticoke; 1775),

Broad Creek (1775), and Northwest Fork (1775). By 1800, the population of Sussex County was 19,358 with the majority of the population distributed in Broadkilm, Nanticoke, and Northwest Fork Hundreds (Tabachnick et al 1992:16).

As the American Revolution began, there were a great many Loyalists (Tories) in Delaware. This was particularly true in the southern counties where isolation, conservatism, the influence of the Anglican Church, and the presence of British ships offshore kept many loyal to the Crown (DPA 2009). Several Loyalist uprisings, with the goal of seizing control of county government, occurred in Sussex County, but were suppressed by the militia or Continental troops. The war's effects to Delaware were mostly limited to the British occupation of Wilmington in 1777 and their continued presence off the coast, which disrupted trade and commerce. By the end of the eighteenth century, the economy and social structure of Delaware's three counties came to be increasingly divided. Although much of Delaware maintained an agricultural economy, industry increased by the beginning of the nineteenth century, particularly in Wilmington where flour milling, leather production, fiber and paper manufacturing, machine building, iron manufacturing, gunpowder production, and shipbuilding produced a diverse economy. Kent and Sussex counties remained overwhelmingly agricultural, and those industries that did develop were generally local in nature due to their geographic isolation. The four main industries in Sussex County at the end of the eighteenth century included grist milling, saw milling and the exportation of lumber, mining of bog ore and manufacturing of crude iron, and shipbuilding. Other local industries included tanneries, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, coopers, small distilleries, and coastal sea-salt businesses (Carter 1978:29).

During this period, agricultural trends shifted as tobacco became less important and corn became predominant. Although there were limited industries that contributed to its economy, the isolation of Sussex County resulted in an economy primarily based on subsistence farming and home manufacture. Population grew within the county from 14,000 in 1775 to over 24,000 in 1790 and reached 27,000 by 1830 (Tabachnick et al 1992:17). Some of this increase may have been due to the acquisition of the Maryland lands to the west. During this period, farm tenancy increased as agricultural properties were cultivated and occupied not by the owners, but by tenants.

Farming in the southern counties, particularly of tobacco and corn, relied on slave labor throughout the eighteenth century. In the decade prior to the American Revolution, 20 to 25 percent of Delaware's population was enslaved. This percentage decreased to 15 percent by 1790, as wheat replaced tobacco as the colony's cash crop, slave importation was banned by Delaware, and slave ships were banned from Delaware ports (Harper 2003). Slave labor was also used to initially dig the intricate system of drainage channels or ditches across the county to prevent flooding, drain fields, and better manage soil and water resources.

As Sussex County became more developed with settlements scattered farther inland, the journey to coastal Lewes became problematic for much of the population. In 1791, the county seat was moved from Lewes to Georgetown, a more central location within the county (Scharf 1888:1240). New roads were required to provide access to the new county seat (Figure 6). In 1796, an act was passed to lay out and straighten the following three Sussex County roads to Georgetown: "a road to begin at Milford bridge, and to run thence through Georgetown and

Dagsborough, until it intersects the west line, that divides the said county of Sussex from the State of Maryland;” “a road to begin at Lewestown, and to run thence through Georgetown until it intersects the north line, that divides the county aforesaid from Maryland;” and “a road to begin at Georgetown, and to run thence to the west line that divides the hundreds of Little-Creek in the said county from Maryland” (Hall 1829:662). The roads, which were deemed to be State Roads, were specified to be 40 feet wide with a grubbed and cleared width of 30 feet.



Figure 6: 1804 map of Delaware showing the developing road network in Sussex County (Lewis)

Georgetown quickly developed into Sussex County’s industrial center with tanneries, saw mills, foundries, blacksmiths, and carriage makers. The laying of several new roads into Georgetown, and subsequent crossroads, provided not only new routes for travel, but access to formerly unsettled portions of the county’s interior. The section of road between Lewes and Georgetown, which US 9 now follows, was an early east-west route in the county and opened up a new area for settlement. Farms were established on land that had been cleared of forest and drained of its swamps. The Gravely Hill Farm was

established in the first half of the nineteenth century on 100 acres at the intersection of US 9 and Gravel Hill Road where the village of Gravel Hill is currently located.

3.4 Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880)

The nineteenth century saw improvement to Delaware’s transportation system, a diversity of industrial pursuits, and an increase in settlement, particularly in the southern counties. Steam boats accessed the peninsula in the 1830s and 1840s and the first railroad in Delaware opened in 1832 (Lankton 1976:2). The first railroad in Sussex County was the Delaware Railroad which opened in 1856 connecting Seaford to Wilmington. By mid-century, additional railroads provided access to all sections of the state allowing the agricultural produce of the southern counties to get to distant markets in a reasonable amount of time. The railroads spurred the further development of the interior of Sussex County as marginal lands were cleared, drained through ditches, and cultivated. As a result, the population of Sussex County increased to such an extent that in 1833 Broadkiln Hundred was divided and Georgetown Hundred created. Two years

later the act was repealed, but in 1861 Georgetown Hundred was formed a second time (Scharf 1888:1237).

In Sussex County, farming continued to be the primary occupation with slaves supplying a portion of the labor force. By the beginning of the Civil War, less than 1,800 slaves lived in Delaware with 75 percent of those in the lower hundreds of Sussex County (Harper 2003). Although slave labor was not utilized as much in Delaware as in other southern states by the Civil War, the state still supported the institution of slavery despite siding with the North to preserve the Union. New Castle County, which became increasingly industrial throughout the nineteenth century, had little need for slavery, but the southern counties of Kent and Sussex still relied on slave labor and slavery remained intact until the Emancipation Proclamation ended the institution in 1865. Freed slaves joined an already large free African-American population within the state. In Sussex County, nineteenth-century black communities included Jimtown and Belltown, which developed along the Lewes-Georgetown road as early as the 1840s. Sussex County agriculture flourished during the nineteenth century. Market crops included wheat, corn, buckwheat, barley, oats, and other cereal grains. By mid-century, farmers branched out into fruits and vegetables as well, including peaches, strawberries, apples, blackberries, blueberries, melons, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, lima beans, and peas (Carter 1978:33; Kee 2007). These products were shipped by rail and boat to markets in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Baltimore. In conjunction with increased market produce production came new industries, such as canneries and factories for the manufacture of baskets and crates.

Beers' 1868 atlas illustrated the continuing rural nature of Sussex County through the latter part of the nineteenth century (Figure 7). During this period, the road between Lewes and Georgetown (current US 9) was bordered by farms with few concentrated areas of settlement.

Crossroads were important locations for stores, schools, and churches, providing access from several directions. By this period, all three intersections associated with the US 9 Intersection Improvement Project were settled. William Hopkins occupied the 100-acre Gravely Hill Farm at the northwest corner of the intersection of US 9 and Gravel Hill Road in Georgetown Hundred; the S. J. Dickenson Estate was at the northeast corner of the intersection of US 9 and Hudson Road in Broadkilm Hundred; and the G. Waples Estate was at the southwest corner of the intersection of US 9 with Dairy Farm Road in Lewes & Rehoboth Hundred.

In 1869, the Junction & Breakwater Railroad was built between Milford and Lewes by way of Georgetown, and in 1878 extended to Rehoboth (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers, Inc. 2000:39). This section of railroad traversed the agricultural core of Sussex County paralleling US 9 for much of the way between Georgetown and Lewes. In this section there were five stations, including Messick, Gravely Hill, Harbeson, Cool Spring, and Nassau (AAPTO 1874:203). These small stations shipped local agricultural products, lumber, and charcoal. The stations often provided the impetus for a small community or commercial center that developed adjacent to the tracks, such as at Harbeson and Nassau.

The Gravely Hill Station was located approximately a half-mile south of the Gravel Hill intersection and four miles east of Georgetown. According to Scharf, this station was known as

Bennum Station and locally as Hancock's Crossing (Scharf 1888:1239). William Hancock owned the 100-acre Gravelly Hill Farm from 1844 to his death in 1887, occupying the house on the northwest corner of the intersection (SCDB 51:456; Beers 1868). In 1868, Hancock sold a 41-acre parcel south of the southeast corner of the intersection to Nehemiah W. Bennum (SCDB 78:288). The Junction & Breakwater Railroad built the Bennum Station on this parcel and soon after a store was established adjacent to the tracks. Today, there is no specific evidence that extant dwellings formed the impetus of community as a result of Bennum Station and the Junction and Breakwater Railroad at either the Gravel Hill Road intersection or at the rail crossing.

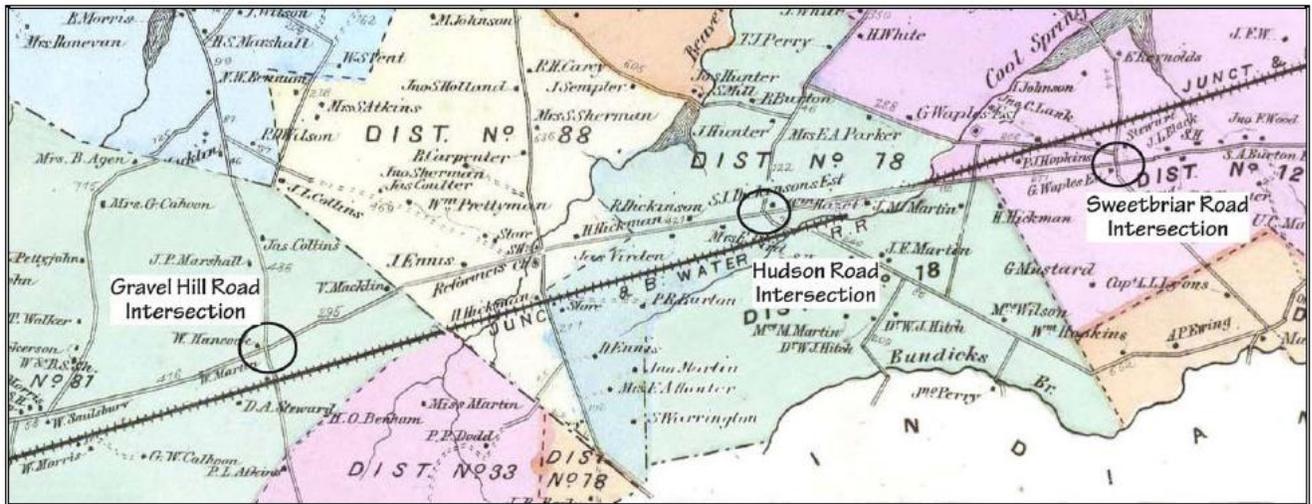


Figure 7: Beers' 1868 map of Sussex County, showing the development along the county road between Lewes and Georgetown (now US 9)

The completion of the railroad through the county to the coast initiated the beginnings of tourism. After the long, hard years associated with the Civil War, people began traveling to coastal areas for rest and relaxation. Sussex County's coast developed slowly, beginning with the Rehoboth Beach area, which already had a stop on the railroad due to a steamship pier on the Delaware Bay. The first summer hotel was built at Dewey Beach in 1870. In 1873, the Rehoboth Beach Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church bought land just to the north for religious camp meetings and soon after a town was laid out and summer cottages and hotels were built (Hancock 1976:90). The era of resort tourism began. Rail travel made the trip to the beach convenient for urban dwellers from many surrounding states. Locals traveled both by rail and by the slower and less convenient roads. The county road from Lewes to Georgetown (now US 9) through rural farmland was the most direct route to the coast from the west.

3.5 Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940) Suburbanization and Ex-urbanization (1940-1960)

Like many parts of the country, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's in Sussex County were characterized by additional development as its towns grew and settlement expanded into nearby areas. Populations increased as new agricultural industries evolved providing more jobs, additional transportation routes made travel and freight transportation quicker and easier, and advancements in technology and health care made life more comfortable. The development of the automobile and the standard use of electricity and the telephone

facilitated the suburbanization of the county. Although farming continued to be the main occupation in Sussex County, many of the new homes were built on lots parceled out of former farmland.

The trend to market farming that began in the 1870s reached a zenith by the 1890s. The main agricultural crops of Sussex County remained consistent into the twentieth century. Staple crops such as corn, wheat, grains, and potatoes provided important income as did produce, including tomatoes, string beans, lima beans, peas, broccoli, cucumbers, asparagus, sweet potatoes, apples, cantaloupes and other melons (Kee 2007). In the 1890s, Sussex County was the main producer of peaches in the country (Carter 1978:33). By 1900, the county was also the top producer of strawberries (Carter 1978:33).

During this period, the canning industry flourished. Canneries were located near the farms that supplied them. Some were small, short-term operations while others were more permanent industries that operated for decades in such towns such as Bridgeville, Millsboro, Laurel, Seaford, and Georgetown. Various produce was canned, including tomatoes, peas, string beans, peaches, strawberries, and even oysters.

The county experienced a significant agricultural transition from produce and truck farming to the production of broiler chickens, following the 1923 success of Cecile Steele, a Sussex County farmer who made a substantial profit selling broilers in the urban market (Kee 2007). Large demand in New York City and improved year-round production quickly made broiler production the most financially lucrative agricultural endeavor in Sussex County. By 1927, the county had an estimated 500 chicken farms with flocks averaging 2,000 broilers apiece (Carter 1978:35). In 1939, 24 million broilers were raised in the county, and by 1944 the number rose to 60 million (Carter 1978:36). Offshoot industries included hatcheries, feed mills, crate manufactures, dressing plants, and poultry pharmaceuticals. The increased demand for feed saw a rise in corn, soybean, and fish meal production. Sussex County's dominance of the broiler industry continued until the market was saturated in the 1950s. At this time, many small-scale enterprises either shut down or merged with larger agri-businesses such as Townsend, Cargill, and Perdue. During its heyday, broiler production made Sussex County one of the richest agricultural counties in the eastern United States (Munroe 2006:216).

Twentieth-century trends in agricultural labor included tenancy and migrant labor. Farm tenancy was high in Delaware at the beginning of the century. By 1900, more than 50 percent of farmers in the state were tenants or sharecroppers. This trend continued through the first half of the century. In 1935, approximately 32 percent of Sussex County farms were occupied by tenants (McVarish et al 2009:15). The labor-intensive harvesting of market produce required a large workforce that flocked to the area, returning to their homes for the remainder of the year. The migrant workforce included African-Americans from the Eastern Shore of Virginia and southern European immigrants, primarily Italians from larger urban areas (Delaware Federal Writers' Project 1938:391).

The introduction of the automobile at the beginning of the twentieth century quickly led to a new transportation culture. The railroad, which had by that time reached all areas of the state, experienced competition as increased auto ownership ushered in an era of truck farming.

The landscape of the county was characterized by farms and scattered communities: Between the Delaware Bay and the western Maryland/Delaware state line, State Route 18 [now US 9] runs across the flat, sandy plain of Sussex County marked by small farms and squared off blocks of loblolly pine timber. Cornfields alternate with fields planted with tomatoes, peas, and other cannery crops. Along the road the occasional sheds covering heavy machinery are ‘bean-viners’ to which lima beans vines are brought in by the wagonload to be thrashed. Other crops of these sections are asparagus, broccoli, apples, and peaches (Delaware Federal Writers’ Project 1938:492-93).

Autos also enabled suburbanization as large numbers of families moved out of populated areas into the rural hinterlands. Along US 9 between Georgetown and Lewes, small communities sprang up particularly at important crossroads (Figure 8). Gravel Hill, Harbeson, Cool Spring, and Belltown were all in existence by the 1930s, some nothing more than clusters of residences as their occupants traveled by car to work and to purchase goods.

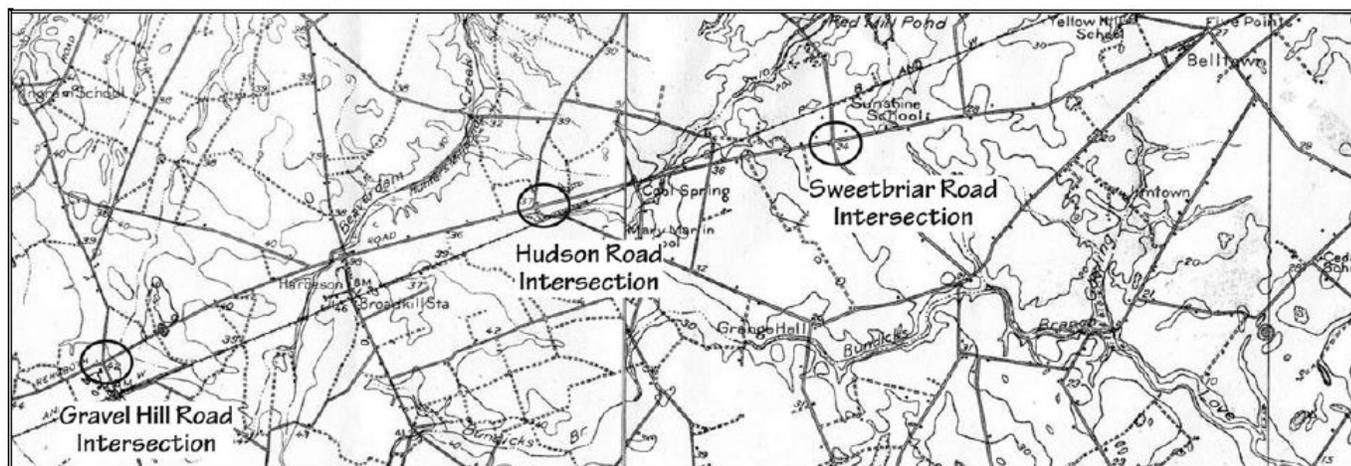


Figure 8: US 9 between Lewes and Georgetown in 1917-1918. A scattering of villages included Gravel Hill, Harbeson, Cool Spring, and Belltown (USGS 1917 & 1918).

The increased number of autos and outlying communities resulted in a need for better roads. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no paved roads in Sussex County, and by 1917 only 35 miles had been paved (Carter 1978:34). Realizing the unfulfilled need for better roads, T. Coleman DuPont, of Wilmington’s famed family, proposed to finance the construction of a paved modern highway the length of the state of Delaware. After much political maneuvering the two-lane macadamized highway was begun in 1911 in Selbyville and Georgetown, Sussex County. The highway, now US 13 and 113, was completed between Georgetown and Selbyville first before eventually connecting to Dover and Wilmington by 1924. This highway immediately impacted the economy of the state as agriculture, business, and tourism all benefited.

During the period that Coleman was pushing his state-wide highway through construction, the counties each supported a state assisted road program in which each county was responsible for its own road work labor and materials. The materials used in paving roads included sand and gravel, which were packed to form the sub-layer of the proposed roads. Gravel was found mostly inland, farther from the coast where sand composed the majority of surface

materials. A gravel source was identified in an 1885 *American Journal of Science* article which stated that “three miles from Georgetown the road to Lewes cuts through a hill of coarse gravel, which, trending for several miles in a N.W. and S.E. direction, attains a height of fifty feet” (Chester 1885:43). This hill was located in the vicinity of the Gravely Hill Farm, for which it was named. In 1911, T. Colman DuPont purchased the Gravel[y] Hill Farm for \$4,000 (SCDB 177:397), but doesn’t seem to have utilized it as a gravel pit. However, the adjacent property to the west, now DelDOT’s Gravel Hill Yard, was purchased by the State of Delaware for a gravel source in 1919, following the 1917 formation of the State Highway Department (SCDB 221:35). During this period, there was an increased program of road improvement due to the war effort.

In 1919, DuPont sold the Gravel Hill Farm to Gustav H. Koeppel (SCDB 216:95). Koeppel, who owned the parcel until his death in 1937, farmed the property, occupied the house at the northwest corner of the intersection, and established a store with service station at the southwest corner of the intersection across from his house. During his ownership, Koeppel parceled off the majority of the farm except for the house and store. Subsequent development of these parcels gave rise to Gravel Hill, a small community of vernacular dwellings and strip development built between 1920 and 1960. Commercial enterprises within the community included a privately owned gravel pit that produced gravel for roadwork and concrete production and a well-drilling garage.

Increased suburbanization ultimately led to a decrease in farmland throughout the county. By the beginning of World War II, less than 40 percent of the land in Sussex County was farmed (Tabachnick et al 1992:25). The total number of farms as well as individual farm size also decreased from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. By mid-century many farms had parceled out lots, particularly along major roadways, for the construction of residences and commercial businesses. Along US 9, commercial services such as stores, gas stations, restaurants, and local businesses were built to take advantage of the heavily traveled corridor that led to the state’s coast. Strip development, large commercial complexes, and more recent subdivisions are in evidence along the US 9 corridor, in areas like Cool Spring and Harbeson, but more recent intensive development near the coast has dramatically altered the landscape in that area.

Although farming continues to be an important economic activity in Sussex County, many changes have occurred to the agricultural landscape in addition to the loss of farmland. A large amount of building stock post-dates World War II, and much of the earlier stock has disappeared or been replaced. In the Gravel Hill area, half of the residences date after the war; the original farmhouse that sat on the northwest corner of the intersection was removed in the past five years and replaced with a large model display home. Many of the secondary structures, such as chicken houses and sheds associated with this crossroads village, have been removed. Similarly, the house and any associated outbuildings that occupied the northeast corner of the US 9 and Hudson Road intersection in Broadkiln Hundred are no longer extant. The current farm, at the US 9 and Dairy Farm Road intersection, also dates to the mid-twentieth century, having replaced an earlier agricultural property at the same site. Most of the buildings on this farm have been built within the past 50 years, including the house, which replaced the earlier residence within the past five years.

Currently, Sussex County remains a primarily agricultural county. Market crops and grains are still the main farm products. Chicken farming also continues to be an important economic endeavor. However, the improvement of roads and increase of disposable income has seen the rise of tourism as a main contributor to the county's economy. US 9 is a major artery to the coastal areas around Lewes and Rehoboth Beach and recent development along this corridor is increasingly geared toward the traveling public.