

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 the investigation of the state's historic 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 Archeological Resources* (DeCunzo and Catts 1990:119).

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)

In 1682 the first surveyors of highways and bridges were appointed for Sussex County. At this time the county 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 to Harbeson-Millsboro-Dagsboro. Grist mills were established in Lewes in 1676, on Broadkiln Creek (Milton) by 1695, and on Bundick's Branch soon thereafter.

The population of Sussex County has been estimated to have been less than 1,000 persons by 1700. The majority of the 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 1978:98).

2.2 INTENSIFIED AND DURABLE OCCUPATION (1730-1770)

Waterways were important to transportation and commerce as early roads were limited in number and of poor condition. The few existing roads led to landings on rivers and the Delaware Bay where produce and goods were shipped by cheaper and more efficient water transport. The Delaware River and Bay served as a major focus of water transportation because the majority of Delaware's streams flow eastward to these bodies. For this reason, the large port city of Philadelphia, and to a lesser extent Wilmington and New Castle, exerted major commercial influence on the Delaware counties throughout the eighteenth century and later. Wilmington, New Castle, and Lewes were also ports for ocean-going vessels involved in export trade. Overland transport was limited to a few major roads, such as the eighteenth-century post road connecting Philadelphia, Wilmington, New Castle, Odessa, Middletown, Dover, and Lewes with a western branch at Milford linking it to the Chesapeake Bay.

Throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the agrarian Delmarva Peninsula was considered an area of production and transshipment between the Chesapeake Bay markets (Annapolis and Baltimore) and the Delaware River and Bay markets (Philadelphia and New

York). As local markets prospered, so too did the hamlets and other unplanned towns that had sprung up at crossroads and around taverns, mills, and landings. Landings, as well as towns and hamlets in the study area, formed, grew, and sometimes declined according to local and regional economic conditions.

A tract of 200 acres lying west of present-day Ellendale and adjoining land of Jonah Webb, was taken up about 1750 by Edward Calloway. John Webb, in 1747, took up a tract of 400 acres on the northeast side of the Jonah Webb plot. The tract on which the village was established, known as Bennett's Pleasure, was obtained in 1740 (Nutter Associates 2004:37, 39).

Throughout Delaware's agricultural history, farm labor has been a valued commodity. In the colonial period, enslaved African Americans and indentured servants were the primary farm laborers. By the mid-eighteenth century, indentured servants were as numerous as enslaved African Americans. According to the Federal censuses, by 1790 slightly less than one-half of the African Americans in the state were free; however, by 1810, less than one-quarter of African Americans were enslaved. Free African American labor played an increasing role in farm production in Delaware as ethical and economic factors reduced the profitability of slavery prior to the Civil War. After Emancipation, African American labor continued to be a significant factor in farm production.

2.3 EARLY INDUSTRIALIZATION (1770-1830) AND INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION (1830-1880)

In the study area the start of these periods witnessed the increase of settlement of new farms on marginal lands since good quality, well-drained lands with access to markets were becoming scarcer. The move inland from navigable waterways apparent by the late eighteenth century began with the influx of new populations, particularly from England. This period of growth from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, however, was short-lived with the study area population declining during the second quarter of the century. Considering the natural increase of the population that remained during this period, the number of people leaving and "passing through" the county would have been even greater. The rapid population growth of the first decades of the nineteenth century in Delaware also forced many farmers off the land. Competition for prime land forced many new farmers to clear and till land of poor or marginal quality. Many of these farmers were then hard pressed to turn a profit from their farmsteads and thus became part of the outward migration from Delaware.

A decline in wheat prices and increased competition for good land was accompanied by a significant decrease in the fertility of agricultural lands throughout the state. Poor farming methods, erosion, and simply exhausted land contributed to the economic woes of Delaware farmers. Increased opportunities in urban areas and the West also served to draw people from Delaware. As more and more people left Delaware, the resulting labor shortage made the cultivation of marginal and exhausted lands even less profitable. Thus, even more people moved away from the study area.

In the 1790s two villages existed in the vicinity of present-day Ellendale. To the north was Federalburg, more commonly known as "Fleatown." To the east was, and is, the village of New Market. A branch of the old King's Highway connected the two villages, as well as Milton and Milford. The villages functioned as small distribution centers and commercial points on the

King's Highway system. Prior to 1796, some of the windings of the earlier King's Road had been eliminated, and a continuous road, known as the State Road, was provided from Wilmington into Washington (Nutter Associates 2004:38-39).

The economic crises of the first decades of the nineteenth century helped to spur the beginning of an agricultural revolution throughout Delaware. The discovery of marl, a natural fertilizer, during the construction of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal in the 1820s enhanced the productivity of Delaware agriculture. The opening of the canal in 1829 further encouraged the production of market-oriented crops by providing for more efficient transportation of perishable goods. Existing water-based transportation systems were complemented in 1839 with the opening of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad, a railroad that provided transportation of northern Delaware produce to growing eastern markets. For southern Delaware, rail service came gradually during the next two decades. When the Delaware Line extended rail service to Dover, and later Seaford, in the 1850s, a vast agricultural hinterland was opened and agricultural production for markets increased significantly.

Prior to 1832, Delaware's agricultural products were primarily grains. Fruit and vegetable crops were of lesser importance. However from the 1830s to the 1870s, Delaware was the center for peach production in the eastern United States. Rich soil, favorable climate and rainfall, excellent transportation facilities, and strategic locations near large markets made peach production a lucrative enterprise. The peach industry was hindered in Kent and Sussex counties until the 1850s due to transportation limitations. Early attempts there failed because producers could not move fruit to market economically. Rail service into the area and the absence of the peach blight in the southern counties led to the initial profitability of peach production.

Throughout the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, agriculture in Delaware continued to focus on perishable products with a decrease in staples. The planting and harvesting of more diverse crops, including tomatoes, apples, potatoes, and other garden produce increased in response to the demands of markets in Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, and other cities. Poultry and dairy production also increased significantly in this period in Delaware, particularly in Kent and Sussex counties. Concurrent with the rise in importance of truck crops and dairy products in the late nineteenth century was the improvement of transportation throughout the state. The completion of the Delaware Railroad trunk line through to Seaford in 1856 encouraged the production of such goods by providing quick and cheap access to regional markets. Prior to the Delaware Railroad, steamboats and other water craft provided areas of Kent County with cheap and efficient transportation.

Tenant farming was common in the eighteenth century and became even more prevalent in the nineteenth century. Large landowners, having acquired much of their holdings during the hard times of the 1820s and 1830s, leased their land to tenants. Most of the landowners and tenants were white, although a number of tenants and farm laborers, particularly in Kent and Sussex counties, were African Americans.

Industrialization in Sussex 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 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1865:54). The majority of these industries were oriented towards intra-county services, though shipbuilding touched all areas of the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and the lumber industry was nationally

known. By the end of this period shipbuilding in villages like Frederica, Milford and Milton had reached its peak (Eckman et al. 1938:375, 416), and the number of flour and grist mills, though still important in the County, had declined to twenty-six (Passmore et al. 1978:24).

Much of Sussex County was transformed in the mid-nineteenth by the establishment of railroad service. The survey party for the Junction & Breakwater Railroad that began in Milford reached Georgetown in March 1860. Construction was delayed by the Civil War, and the line was completed by 1869 (Nutter Associates 2004:39-40).

In Sussex County two formally planned towns were established after the Civil War in response to the construction of the railroad line. "Lincoln City," today known as Lincoln, was initially envisioned by Abel S. Small in 1865. When officially laid out in 1867 on a portion of 696 acres he purchased, the town contained streets and parks "on a grand scale" (Eckman et al. 1938:378; Scharf 1888:1254). A total of 774 building lots were laid out under the supervision of A.T. Johnson. Small apparently had great hopes for Lincoln, considering it to be "the future metropolis of southern Delaware" (Eckman et al. 1938:378). A second planned community, Ellendale, was also laid out in 1867 by Dr. John Prettyman. Prettyman named the town after his wife. Following its establishment, most of the residents of the nearby crossroads village of Federalsburg moved to Ellendale (Eckman et al. 1938:417). Both towns owed their survival to the railroad, and shipped lumber and market products to northern communities.

The village of Ellendale was described in the 1874-1875 *Delaware State Directory and Gazetteer*:

Ellendale is a newly laid-out and prosperous village in Cedar Creek Hundred on the Junction & Breakwater Railroad. It contains several stores, a steam lumber mill, and a population of about 150. Distance directly north from Georgetown, 8 miles, and south from Milford, 8 miles (Boyd 1874:416).

The steam sawmill, which had a capacity of three thousand feet per day, was erected by B.E. Jester & Brother in 1870. In 1872, Henry D. Macklin began to manufacture bricks at Ellendale producing about 50,000 per year (Nutter Associates 2004:40).

2.4 URBANIZATION AND SUBURBANIZATION (1880-1940+)

In 1881 Henry Start erected a second sawmill in Ellendale, as well as a gristmill. The gristmill operated one year and the sawmill three years. In 1886 a basket factory was added with a capacity of 2,000 baskets per day. These two small industrial facilities employed 22 people. In the same year, Jester & Reed established a canning factory in the village. During the growing season, this factory packed 3,500 cases, which were shipped to Philadelphia. This cannery employed as many as 40 people. By 1891 the town included two churches, two stores, a school, a post office, a canning establishment, an evaporator, a brickyard, two sawmills, basket factories, and one hundred inhabitants (Nutter Associates 2004:40).

The agricultural trends identified in the late nineteenth century continued relatively unchanged well into the twentieth century. Corn and wheat declined in importance due to competition from the western states. By 1880, alfalfa, legumes, and truck crops were increasing in importance, and by the mid-twentieth century had become more profitable than wheat.

A major crop of the Ellendale area was peaches that were processed by evaporation. Among the peach farmers of Ellendale and vicinity were Mark H. Davis, Joseph M. Davis, George H. Draper, Hammond & Wheelbank, Prettyman & Short, William R. Phillips, William Prettyman, Fox and Webb, Frederick Wiswell, and E.B. Read & Company (Scharf 1888).

In 1898 the Queen Anne's Railroad was constructed from Queenstown on the Chesapeake Bay, through Greenwood and Ellendale to Milton and Lewes. At Queenstown, the line connected to a Chesapeake Bay steamer, while at Lewes, it connected to a ferry across the Delaware Bay to Cape May. With its two railroad lines, the village boasted associated railroad fixtures including a watch box, pump-house, water tower, two stations, and a hotel with a jitney service to Milton (Nutter Associates 2004:41). At the time of the railroad's completion, Ellendale was described as follows:

An important postal station on the D.M. & V. R.R., in the southern part of Cedar Creek Hundred...No better section can be found in the State for farmers desiring homes at lower prices, as land sells at the low price of from \$10 to \$20 per acre on which grain, fruit and vegetables, can be raised in abundance. Its railroad facilities for marketing are the best. Among the industries located here are a steam saw and planing mill and basket factory, and a cannery and fruit evaporator. It has a daily stage line to Milton...fare 50 cents. Telegraph and express offices (as cited in Nutter Associates 2004:43).

By 1900 more than 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 County.

In 1905 the 128-acre area of Ellendale was surveyed and divided into 13 streets, five alleys, 38 blocks, and approximately 500 individual 9,600 square foot lots, each measuring 60 by 160 feet. As laid out, the town was centered on the north-south railroad tracks and the east-west Main Street. If all the lots had been developed with houses accommodating the average household size of the time, the population would have numbered 10 times its present population. Only about one-quarter of the lots were developed, leaving many undeveloped open spaces within the town, particularly in the northern area that had been platted as Oak and Pine Streets (Nutter Associates 2004:41-42).

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).

Beginning c. 1910, reliance on cash-crops and grains declined and production of truck crops steadily increased on Sussex and Kent County farms, especially on farmland formerly used to produce small grains and fruits. Regionally, broad-scale production of Irish potatoes began c. 1940 on lands that had previously produced grains, orchards, vegetables, and dairying. By the early 1970s corn and soybeans had replaced most of the grain farming and were also grown in many areas previously used for subsistence farming (Matthews and Ireland 1971:2; Ireland and Matthews 1974:2).

A large portion of the Ellendale study area is devoted to state forest lands, the acquisition of which began in the early twentieth century. In 1909, legislation passed creating a State Board of Forestry, but no funds were appropriated for the Board, and therefore, no appointments were made. After several other false starts, the State Forestry Commission, established in the 1920s, finally began the acquisition of property along the DuPont Highway south of Milford in 1928. The first tracts, a purchased three-acre site and an additional leased five acres located north of Hudson Pond on the west side of the DuPont Highway, were used as a nursery. The Appenzellar Tract, located between Staytonville Road and the Ellendale Crossroads, originally consisted of 45 acres lying on both sides of the DuPont Highway. The state received the land at no cost from T. Coleman DuPont, and it was transferred from the State Highway Department to the State Forestry Department in 1928. The Appenzellar Tract was initially used as a forest demonstration and experimental area. Another early state forest tract, originally known as the Ellendale State Forest, had at its core a 40-acre tract in the heart of the Ellendale Swamp, purchased by the state from Harry W. Jester in 1931. The Forestry Department's initial plans for the land included erection of campsite facilities on the portion adjoining the DuPont Highway, which were improved during 1935-1936 by workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A CCC work camp was established in the Jester Tract of the Redden State Forest between Ellendale and Georgetown, which had been acquired by the state in 1934. Its residents were put to work throughout Delaware's forests establishing boundaries, building or improving roads and trails, digging a ditch system to drain the marshes and control mosquitos, and constructing visitor facilities. Since the early years of the twentieth century, the state forest system has determined the course of much of the land-use development in the Ellendale study area, and a more detailed history is presented in the Research Design (Section 3.0).

The Coleman DuPont Highway—now known as U.S. Routes 13 and 113—is the focal point of the present study area, and has served in that capacity since its creation in the second decade of the twentieth century (McVarish et al. 2005). 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 Engineers, Inc. 2000:9). Within its right-of-way DuPont proposed a center roadway for high-speed motorized traffic, electric trolley tracks, and 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) far easier than the more restrictive railroad system. Sussex and Kent County farmers adjusted their agricultural produce to meet the needs of the urban market, for example, shifting to broiler chicken production and liquid milk production (Munroe 1984:203). For much of the twentieth century, Sussex County produced more broiler chickens than any other county in the United States.

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 DuPont 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 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).

Throughout its historical development, the pattern and density of settlement in Delaware, and 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.