

4.0 HISTORIC PERIOD CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Western Parkway study area and surrounding region have been the subject of numerous previously completed cultural resource investigations. The historic period context below relies heavily on these cultural resource reports and management documents (Arnold *et al.* 2004; Clark *et al.* 2005; Harris *et al.* 2005; Herman *et al.* 1989; Tabachnick *et al.* 1992; Tidlow *et al.* 1990).

4.1 Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730±)

During the Exploration and Frontier Settlement period of Delaware history, the Western Parkway study area was caught in the struggles of the Dutch, the Swedes, and various English factions to control this part of the New World. To help advance its claims in the region, the Dutch, in 1631, established a whaling community near present-day Lewes, which it named Zwaanendael, or "Valley of the Swans." It was abandoned by 1632. In 1659, the Dutch returned, erecting a small fort called Whorekill (also Hoerenkil, Horekil, Horekill, and Hoorekill) near the mouth of Delaware Bay at what is now Lewes. The purpose of the fort was to discourage English settlement in the region. The Lord Baltimore, who considered the lands of the Delmarva Peninsula part of his proprietorship, encouraged settlers from the Chesapeake Bay and Virginia to move to the area (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:30). By 1666, enough English settlements had been made on the Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore to establish Somerset County, Maryland, which included all land from the Virginia line to Delaware's Nanticoke River (Moore 1959). The Dutch, too, settled families near Whorekill, including Dutch Mennonites, who established a colony called Sekonnessinck on Horekill in 1663 (Weslager 1961). After the Dutch abandoned the fort and the English (through the authority of the Duke of York) gained political control of the region, Dutch settlers who swore allegiance to England were allowed to retain their lands and personal property. The English governor established the first local court at Whorekill in 1670. By 1671, Whorekill's population consisted of 47 English and Dutch individuals (Gehring 1977:100).

When the Dutch briefly gained control of Whorekill again in 1673, Maryland's governor sent out an expeditionary force, which burned and pillaged the fort (deValinger 1950). Even after the English reestablished sovereignty, the Whorekill area remained in dispute with the Duke of York, Lord Baltimore, and William Penn, all making claims to the area. Penn's claim to the area would ultimately prevail. In 1682, the southernmost of Penn's lower three counties was

renamed Sussex and the town of Whorekill became Lewes, named for the county seat of England's Sussex County. Lewes was the only town of any size and it became the region's political, maritime, and commercial center. Sussex County was heavily forested and swampy, and settlement for much of the period was confined to an area within 10 to 12 miles of the coastline. In light of poor road conditions, most settlers who lived outside of Lewes lived along navigable streams (Hancock 1976:17-21). The majority of Sussex's population were farmers raising tobacco (the primary means of exchange), corn, wheat, rye, hogs, and cattle. The county's population by 1700 was still less than 1,000 persons (Munroe 1978:198).

Sussex County's enslaved African American population increased during the eighteenth century due to an influx of slaves brought into the region by Maryland planters (Munroe 2001:57).

4.2 Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770±)

From 1730 to 1770, settlement in Sussex County increased due to an influx of emigrants. In 1728, the population of Sussex County was estimated at 1,750 residents, including 241 slaves and free blacks. By the 1740s, a maximum of 2,000 people called Sussex County home. By 1775, however, the population had ballooned to 14,000 inhabitants (Hancock 1976:20). The dramatic influx is attributed to strong migration of settlers from Maryland's Eastern Shore, as well as overseas immigrations from Great Britain (Munroe 1978:150).

One of the first priorities of the new settlers was to clear the land for farming and to build houses for shelter. The county's abundant timber resources provided the necessary raw materials for houses and agricultural buildings, with brick buildings being rare. Lewes continued to be the major community in the county, but crossroads villages began to appear as timber clearing and the development of arable lands farther from the coast spurred inland settlement (Catts *et al.* 1994:35, 49). To exploit the timber resource, settlers established water-powered sawmills, which generally were post-and-beam buildings supporting an up-and-down saw. Getting sufficient head to power the mills was problematic, however. Although streams abounded, the flat topography generally did not provide the necessary fall to power a waterwheel. Consequently, settlers had to dam existing ravines to create millponds for sawmills and gristmills (Moore 1959). Mill dams became convenient locations for roads to cross streams. For example, where the King's Highway between Lewes and Dover crossed a branch of the

Broadkiln Creek is the approximate location of where the Red Mill pond and mill are currently situated.

Agriculture remained the region's primary occupation, with farms and "plantations" (as the local inhabitants referred to their farms) generally oriented to watercourses (Zebooker *et al.* 1996:1-13). Major landowners who held choice tracts of land occupied the highest rung on the social and economic ladder, while lesser landowners, foresters, and shippers were in the middle, and tenants, day laborers, and slaves had the least status (Herman 1992:66-67). Tobacco growing had depleted the soil and was largely phased out by 1775. Farmers now grew grains of all kinds, but the predominant crop was corn, produced both for consumption and as livestock feed. Most farms were subsistence farms operated by poorer farmers and farm laborers (Hancock 1976:28; Main 1973:26-32). Agricultural buildings included frame barns, granaries, corn cribs, and buildings to house livestock (Catts *et al.* 1994:51). Other important industries included shellfish fishing in the bays of the Delaware and the Atlantic, and shipbuilding (Harris *et al.* 2005:9).

In 1765, a century-long boundary dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania was resolved in the latter's favor, and an area west of the Nanticoke River officially became part of Sussex County. As a result, Sussex County became the largest of the Lower Three Counties, and five new hundreds were created (Hancock 1976:25).

4.3 Early Industrialization (1770-1830±)

During the American Revolution, Lewes and the surrounding coastal areas bore the brunt of wartime activities, with British blockades and shore raids disrupting trade and commerce. Inland, strong loyalist sentiment prevailed, particularly among the poorer inhabitants of the county, who complained about the lack of paper currency and the destitution of their families.

Following the war, settlers in the western part of Sussex County agitated for a more accessible county seat. Consequently, in 1791, the legislature voted to move the center of government from Lewes to more centrally located Georgetown. The move prompted improvements to the county's interior road network (Catts *et al.* 2003:13).

Despite the increase in area of the county, Sussex County's population continued to grow slowly. By 1790, the county's population stood at more than 24,000; by the close of the period it had reached 27,000. By 1830, 15.8 percent of Sussex County's African-American population was enslaved. The proportion of slaves to free blacks was much higher in Sussex

County than in the rest of the state, but free black and African-American tenant communities did exist (Collins and Eby 1998:205; Herman *et al.* 1989:79). Slavery had become an important institution during this period, although the presence of anti-slavery Quaker leadership did result in social and political support for emancipation in the second half of the eighteenth century (Tidlow *et al.* 1990:13). When Delaware declared independence in 1776, its new constitution included a clause banning the importation of slaves from overseas. Ten years later, it banned exporting slaves from Delaware or outfitting slave ships in Delaware ports. The laws effectively barred slave auctions; however, that institution persisted (Hoffecker 1977:93; Munroe 2001:57).

Agriculture remained the dominant occupation in Sussex County during this period. To increase the amount of arable land by reclaiming low or swampy land for agriculture, Ditch Acts were passed beginning in 1779. Compared to the rest of Delaware, Sussex County farms were smaller (averaging less than 200 ac) and operated at a subsistence level (Garrison 1988; Macintyre 1986; Michel 1985). Tenancy also increased during this time period (Herman *et al.* 1989:79). Sussex County homesteads were generally characterized by frame or log, one-and-one-half-story houses of less than 450 square feet, a small apple or peach orchard, livestock such as hogs, cows, sheep, and oxen, and a few outbuildings. The most common were log corncribs (commonly called stacks) or small barns one-story in height, 15 or 16 feet by 20 feet, with a gable roof over a floored loft. Other buildings might be a smoke or meat house, and a kitchen (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:22; Herman 1992:107, 192). On most plantations, only 50 percent of the total acreage was under cultivation (Hancock 1987:24-25).

To supplement their income, Sussex County's subsistence farmers were extensively engaged in home manufacturing. Tench Coxe, in his report on manufactures for the year 1810 (Coxe 1814:76), indicated that 70 percent of Delaware looms were located in Sussex County. Over 62 percent of the total value of flaxen goods and more than 75 percent of wool produced in Delaware came from Sussex County homes. Other manufactories noted in Sussex County included iron works and distilleries.

4.4 Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880±)

At the beginning of this period, settlement patterns replicated those of the earlier periods. Lewes remained the dominant town, but many residents lived in non-nucleated houses on its outskirts (Herman *et al.* 1989:78). The arrival of the railroad in Sussex County in the 1850s and 1860s altered settlement patterns and the economy. The north-south Delaware Railroad, completed to Delmar in 1859, connected Sussex County to urban communities such

as Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York, Norfolk, and Washington, D.C, particularly after it became part of the Pennsylvania Railroad system. In 1869, the Junction & Breakwater Railroad completed a line from the Delaware Railroad to Lewes; in 1878 it was extended to Rehoboth. The Queen Anne Railroad, completed in 1898, ran between the Chesapeake and Delaware bays; it was later known as the Maryland, Delaware & Virginia and the Delaware Coast Railroad (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:24, 99; Eckman 1955:407; Hancock 1976:87-90; Herman *et al.* 1989:54; Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers, Inc. 2000:42).

The impacts of the railroad to the economy, settlement patterns, and architecture of northeastern Sussex County were profound. Towns and villages developed around railroad depots. Nassau, for example, became a boomtown as a shipping point for milk, fruit, and produce in the years following the Civil War. Large apple orchards were also established in the area (Eckman 1955:494). Lewes and Rehoboth Beach became much more accessible to urban dwellers, and tourism began to become a force in the area's economy (Hancock 1976:90). Agriculturally, corn remained the dominant cash crop. However, perishable fruits and vegetables, which could now be quickly transported to urban markets *via* rail, began making up a larger percentage of crops. By the end of this period, Sussex County was the state's largest peach producing region. Blackberries, strawberries, melons, and tomatoes were also grown. Fruit and vegetable production, in turn, spurred the establishment of canneries, particularly at rail head locations (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:87-88; Hancock 1976:88; Scharf 1888:1241).

Despite a shift in the types of crops being produced, the continued emphasis of agriculture in the region led to previously marginal lands being cleared to take advantage of the new agricultural opportunities (Bauman 1941). The physical condition of the agricultural complex also changed, becoming more permanent and comprised of a farmstead with one or more dwellings, along with yards, gardens, fences, ditches, and other domestic and agricultural outbuildings (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:234-235). Farmhouses from this period were generally vernacular I-house dwellings of two-and-one-half-stories in height, one or two rooms in depth, and three to five bays in width, with a side gable roof and a center hall plan. They often featured front and side porches and rearward ell extensions. These farmhouses often incorporated functions such as kitchens or servants' quarters that formerly had been housed in separate buildings (Herman 1987:148). In rural areas like Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred, many retained Greek Revival, Italianate, and Gothic Revival influences long past their popularity in urban centers (Arnold *et al.* 2004:19; McAlester and McAlester 1990:89, 96, 178, 210). Outbuildings might include corn cribs, small barns, sheds, granaries, summer kitchens, hay poles, and root houses. Tenant houses and labor camps were not uncommon, particularly as

market crops played a greater role in Sussex County agriculture (Herman *et al.* 1989:54). Farms also include agricultural fields, wood lots, marshes, ditches, and orchards (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:235).

Despite the changes brought by the railroad, certain economic patterns continued. Home manufacturing continued to be a major source of income for Sussex County farmers. Crafts engaged in included smithing, carpentry, fishing, lumber and grist milling, tanning, hunting, and trapping (Garrison 1988; Michel 1985:10-12). Craft-based industries, such as blacksmith shops, boot and shoe manufacturing, leather working, agricultural implement construction and repair, and wagon and carriage shops, also remained in evidence. Other industry was limited. In 1860, the county recorded 37 gristmills, 56 lumber mills, and six ship yards (Hancock 1976:67).

The diversifying economy provided greater employment opportunities and options for area residents, who could work as farm laborers and tenant farmers, or as day laborers in the canneries or the industries of Lewes. The opportunities extended, to a lesser extent, to the African American population. At the start of the Civil War, Sussex County was the largest slaveholding area in Delaware, with more than half the state's total slave population. The vast majority were owned by small farmers and worked as domestic servants and field laborers. One factor behind the freeing of African Americans was the economic realization that hiring seasonal farmhands was cheaper than maintaining a workforce of slaves year round (Hoffecker 1977:93-94). Free blacks worked as day laborers and hired farm hands; a few owned farms or worked as skilled artisans. The Civil War ended slavery, but did little to improve the social or economic status of African Americans. Black males could find work as day laborers or tenants, or found employment in fishing and oystering, as railroad laborers and porters, or as ship deck hands or stevedores. Black women worked as cooks, laundresses, dressmakers, and agricultural laborers (Holland and Gaines 1956:3, 60). However, African Americans were denied voting rights and the opportunity for education, and were not permitted to own firearms; their freedoms were severely circumscribed by Jim Crow laws (Hancock 1976:65). To prevent blacks from voting, court officials "discouraged" blacks from paying taxes or legally recording property ownership (Tidlow *et al.* 1990:16, 102).

Despite these restrictions, African American communities were established in the Western Parkway study area. The communities generally coalesced around schools and churches (Skelcher 1995). Such was the case with the village of Belltown, founded in the 1840s by Jacob "Jigger" Bell. The village, located at Five Points, grew in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. Located to the southeast of Belltown, Jimtown, a second African American community, has been present as a community since at least the early twentieth century.

4.5 Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940±)

Conservative attitudes and agricultural practices persisted well into the twentieth century in southeastern Delaware (Williams 1999:95). At the beginning of the period, corn remained the dominant cash crop, although truck farming continued to grow. By the 1890s and until peach blight decimated the crop, Sussex County was the peach growing center of the state (Doerrfield *et al.* 1993:11). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sussex County had also become the leading producer of strawberries in the nation, growing more than seven million quarts. The fruit-growing boom ended in the post-World War II era, as war-related labor shortages and high post-war labor prices took their toll on the labor intensive fruit industry (Hancock 1976:89; Passmore *et al.* 1978:73). Other important crops in eastern Sussex County in the early twentieth century included cannery crops such as tomatoes, lima beans, and string beans, as well as potatoes and a small amount of wheat. A primary use of the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal, completed in 1913, was to ship tomatoes *via* barges from landings on Rehoboth Bay and Indian River to Rehoboth canneries (Eckman 1938:1940; Passmore *et al.* 1978:80).

Produce was not the only cash crop produced in Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred. Many Sussex County farmers supplemented their incomes during the months of November and December by making holiday holly wreaths. The industry flourished from the 1880s until the 1960s, and was especially significant during the Great Depression (Eckman 1955:385; Hancock 1976:102). In the 1920s, Delmarva's famous commercial broiler industry flourished, adding chickens to the list of Sussex County's agricultural products. With chicken-raising assuming greater magnitude, corn, along with soybeans, took on added importance as chicken feed (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:123; Hancock 1976:100-103). The broiler industry helped replace the waning maritime industry in Lewes and Rehoboth Beach (Lanier and Herman 1992:238-239).

A number of factors account for the growth of truck farming and broiler production during this period. Delaware was within a day's transport of a string of east coast cities and towns which provided ready markets; its soils were porous and well-drained, ideally suited for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables and the raising of chickens; and its climate was mild and semi-marine, due to the regulating effects of the Atlantic Ocean (Doerrfield *et al.* 1993:11; Tomhave 1951:131). Transportation improvements in the region also helped. The completion of the innovative Dupont Highway from one end of the state to the other between 1903 and

1924, provided farmers with a first-class automobile trunk route to compliment the Delaware Railroad. The formation of the Delaware State Highway Department (SHD) in 1917, combined with dramatically increased state funding assistance for county roads in 1919, and the SHD's emphasis on consolidating and improving the primary and secondary road systems between 1926 and 1935, ensured that farmers would have good roads to move products to market (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers, Inc. 2000:12-14). The improved road system also stimulated the continued growth of tourism (Hancock 1976:103).

During this period, Sussex County's agricultural production and revenues increased despite a reduction in average farm size and a decrease in the total number of farms (Bauman 1941:4, 7). Some crops, like broilers, needed less land, and many farmers took advantage of agricultural and technological improvements to increase revenues (Lanier and Herman 1992:7). Tenant farming also increased during this period, with more than 50 percent of Delaware's farmers being tenants or sharecroppers by 1900 (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:31). Farmers used the increased revenue to construct new family farmhouses and agricultural outbuildings, alter existing homes, or move older housing stock to their properties as tenant residences. Existing I-houses were often remodeled to accept new porches, to bring kitchens inside the main house, or to expand living areas. Newly constructed farmhouses from this era include Colonial Revival, American Foursquare, and Bunaglows, or vernacular dwellings with elements of those styles. Outbuildings include new barns, chicken houses, frame corn cribs, and concrete block milk houses (Arnold *et al.* 2004:25-27).

As throughout history, the Western Parkway study area region remained primarily rural and agricultural during this period. In addition to farming, the lumber industry remained important in Sussex County. The main product was virgin Sussex pine that had grown following the initial cuttings made with the arrival of the railroads (Passmore *et al.* 1978:13-14). Lewes remained the largest town in the study area, but other villages, such as Prettymanville, Belltown, and Nassau were also present (USGS 1918a, 1918b).

Sussex County's black residents continued to work as farm laborers, in seafood- and produce-processing plants, as domestics, and in the resorts of Rehoboth. Belltown and Jimtown remained African American enclaves. Reportedly, Belltown residents found a measure of prosperity in the moonshine trade during Prohibition (Tidlow *et al.* 1990:103).

4.6 Suburbanization and Exurbanization (1940-1964)

The Western Parkway study area remained predominantly rural into the early 1960s. An exception to this pattern was along what is now U.S. Route 1, the major north-south road through the area and the major feeder route to the Delaware beaches. The opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1954, dramatically cut travel time to Rehoboth and Delaware's other beaches, making the area much more accessible to vacationers from Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The ensuing heavy traffic volume made U.S. Route 1 an ideal location for commercial establishments relating to the tourism and automobile industries such as motels, service stations and auto parts stores, automobile showrooms, and restaurants (Clark *et al.* 2005:14-15). Development along U.S. Route 1 has continued and intensified and much of the post-World War II commercial roadside architecture has been replaced by big-box retailers, strip malls, and fast-food and other restaurant franchises.

In addition to commercial establishments, there are also residences from the Suburbanization and Exurbanization Era found along U.S. Route 1 and elsewhere in the study area. Most of these residences are small, modest, one- or one-and-one-half-story frame residences constructed after 1945. The houses are generally classified in three broad categories, including Cape Cod, Minimal Traditional, and Ranch. Surprisingly, the Western Parkway study area is virtually devoid of the planned subdivisions that were such a housing archetype of the post-World War II period (Clark 1986:201).

4.7 Previously Identified Archaeological Resources

In 1990, DeCunzo and Catts (1990:109) indicated that 79 historic period archaeological sites had been identified in Sussex County. Of these previously recorded historic period archaeological sites, the majority are associated with historic agricultural activities. The remaining previously recorded sites are associated with industrial, maritime, public/religious, and other undesignated historic activities. In 1990, Sussex County contained the largest number of previously recorded archaeological sites dating to the early period (1630-1770) (DeCunzo and Catts 1990:117). This must be a reflection of the early settlement at Lewes and the relatively under-developed nature of the county until recently. Recent review of the Delaware archaeological site files yielded six previously recorded historic period archaeological sites located within the Western Parkway study area (Appendix B).