



New Castle Court House
NPS / MARK MUSE

For more than 300 years,

on a fraught and uneven course, people in Delaware have worked to pursue human rights and self-determination for themselves and others. As with the nation as a whole, the journey has never been straightforward. Questions and contradictions in the First State story expose threads of conflict, personal motivations of altruism and self-

interest, and social forces that shaped a centuries-long pursuit for civil and human rights. Today, First State National Historical Park encompasses places and events related to the founding of the nation, the ratification of the US Constitution—and well beyond. The story evolves as each new generation finds its voice.

Colony to Constitution

The 1500s saw big European powers competing for empire in the New World. By the 1600s and early 1700s, they were sending a steady stream of colonists to what are now New Jersey and Pennsylvania.



The Lenape Indians, who had long inhabited the Mid-Atlantic, were removed in the 1860s to Oklahoma. Jennie Bobb and Nellie Longhat are pictured there in 1915.

NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES / SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, BACKGROUND
NPS / MARK MUSE

Swedes, Dutch, and Finns left their home countries to pursue economic prosperity in the region, building forts and settlements along the Delaware River and bay. The newcomers encountered the Lenape Indians and soon adopted their travel networks over local waterways.

In 1681 Charles II of England granted William Penn land in Pennsylvania, including the "Lower Three Counties" on the west bank of Delaware Bay. Penn's colony became a refuge for the persecuted



John Dickinson was a delegate to the Continental Congress, primary author of the Articles of Confederation, and drafter and signer of the US Constitution. His Poplar Hall estate (below) had free and enslaved laborers.

COURTESY INDEPENDENCE NHP

Society of Friends (Quakers). Unlike in other colonies, Penn extended freedom of religion to outsiders. The three Delaware counties grew to resent Pennsylvania's Quaker-led assembly and in 1704 established their own legislature in New Castle.

During the American Revolution, the state capital moved to Dover. In December 1787, as state legislators met at the Golden Fleece Tavern on Dover Green, Delaware became the first state to ratify the US Constitution. Before long, the Constitution would face a series of challenges.

The Constitution Tested

In the first decades of the 19th century, the unresolved issue of slavery divided the nation. Delaware's northern border marked the frontier between slave state and free, securing its role in the human migration and self-emancipation that became known as the Underground Railroad.



Samuel Burris, a free man from Philadelphia, was captured in Dover in 1847 and convicted for helping a woman escape from slavery in Delaware. Sentenced to seven years of slavery, Burris was rescued on the auction block by abolitionists posing as buyers.

NPS

Abolitionists Thomas Garrett and John Hunn were tried on federal charges at the New Castle Court House in 1848 for violating the Fugitive Slave Act. They were found guilty and received hefty fines. Garrett, formerly a prosperous businessman, was unrepentant and continued his work.

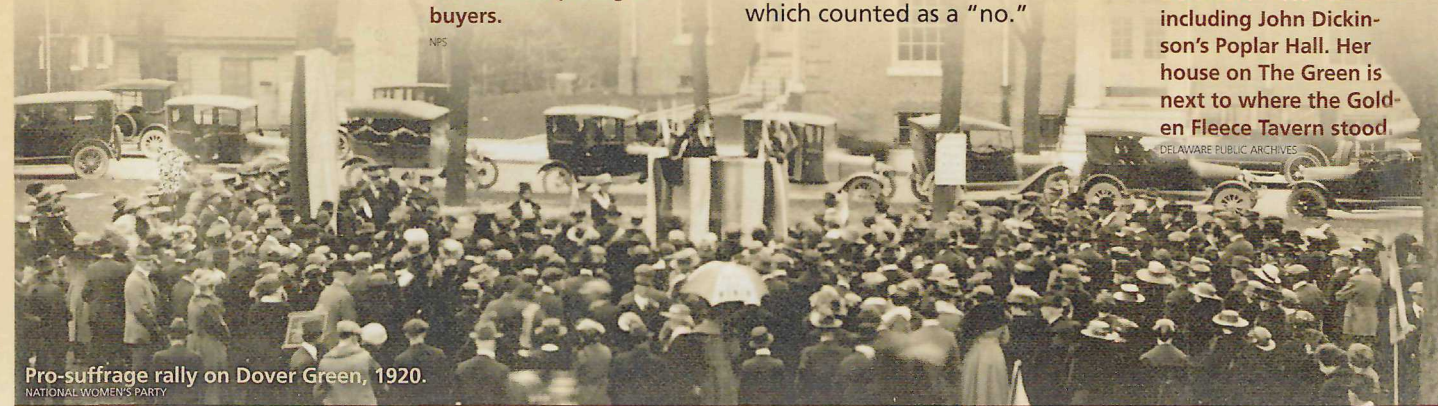
In 1920, the First State played a new role in constitutional history. Only one state was needed for the three-fourths majority to carry the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the vote. Mabel Lloyd Ridgely, Florence Bayard Hilles, and others advocated tirelessly in Delaware, but the legislature declined to vote—which counted as a "no."

Hilles traveled to Tennessee to work for passage there. Two months later, Tennessee ratified the amendment, and it became law on August 26.



Mabel Lloyd Ridgely, 1872–1962, suffragist and preservationist, raised money to restore Delaware historical sites including John Dickinson's Poplar Hall. Her house on The Green is next to where the Golden Fleece Tavern stood.

DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES



Pro-suffrage rally on Dover Green, 1920.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S PARTY

Caring for Lands and Legacies



William Poole Bancroft (1835–1928) came from a family of Wilmington industrialists. Quaker values and a love of nature led him to champion improved conditions for factory workers and access to parklands (like Beaver Valley, background) for everyone.

The story of William Bancroft unfolds around the turn of the 20th century, an era when industry was both the source of vast fortunes and the cause of wealth disparity. Bancroft's own textile mills spawned congested urban conditions, where working families lacked access to open space.

In 1901 Bancroft set up the charitable Woodlawn Trustees to ensure affordable housing

and "wise development." But the benefits did not extend to all. Like many such institutions throughout the state, the group's policies created de facto segregation in housing, schools, and other institutions for African Americans.

It was, in part, through acts of conscience by Wilmington's Quakers that the Trustees were led to comply with federal civil rights legislation. In

1972 the Trustees adopted a housing nondiscrimination policy and implemented changes that a local newspaper described as "a model of integration."

Delaware's natural resources were historically valued for serving human needs. Today, thanks to Bancroft and many others, they are valued just for being themselves.

First State, Lasting Legacy

A NEW NATIONAL PARK Established as a national monument in 2013 and a national historical park in 2014, First State has seven sites throughout Delaware operated by state, local, and nonprofit partners who provide visitor programs and services.

STAY SAFE, PROTECT THE PARK Be aware that the park is a mix of federal, state, local, and private property. Respect owners' privacy.

- Take precautions when crossing streets or cycling.
- Accessibility varies site to site. For information, contact individual sites.

First State National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. For more information, visit www.nps.gov.

First State National Historical Park
c/o New Castle Court House Museum
211 Delaware St.
New Castle, DE 19720
www.nps.gov/frst

 **National Park Foundation.**
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org
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BEAVER VALLEY



Beaver Valley preserves 1,100 acres of farmsteads, winding roads, forested hillsides, and stream valleys characteristic of northern Delaware and southern Pennsylvania. This landscape reveals evidence of 18th-century English Quaker settlements, as well as the conservationist vision of Quaker industrialist William Poole Bancroft in the early 20th century.

GPS: Smith Bridge Picnic Area
Wilmington, DE 19803
www.nps.gov/frst

OLD SWEDES CHURCH



Old Swedes is one of the oldest active congregations in the nation. Descendants of original Swedish colonists founded this church in 1698. The black walnut pulpit (*far left*) dates from the church's early years. The burial ground's 2,000 gravestones reveal hundreds of years of history. Operated by the Old Swedes Foundation.

606 N. Church St.
Wilmington, DE 19801
www.oldswedes.org

FORT CHRISTINA

Swedish and Finnish settlers arrived at this spot on the Christina River in 1638 and named it for the Swedish queen. The riverside community thrived briefly until the rival Dutch, who settled other parts of Delaware, took control of the colony a few years later. Operated by the Kalmar Nyckel Foundation.

1110 East 7th St.
Wilmington, DE 19801
www.kalmarnyckel.org



HISTORIC NEW CASTLE



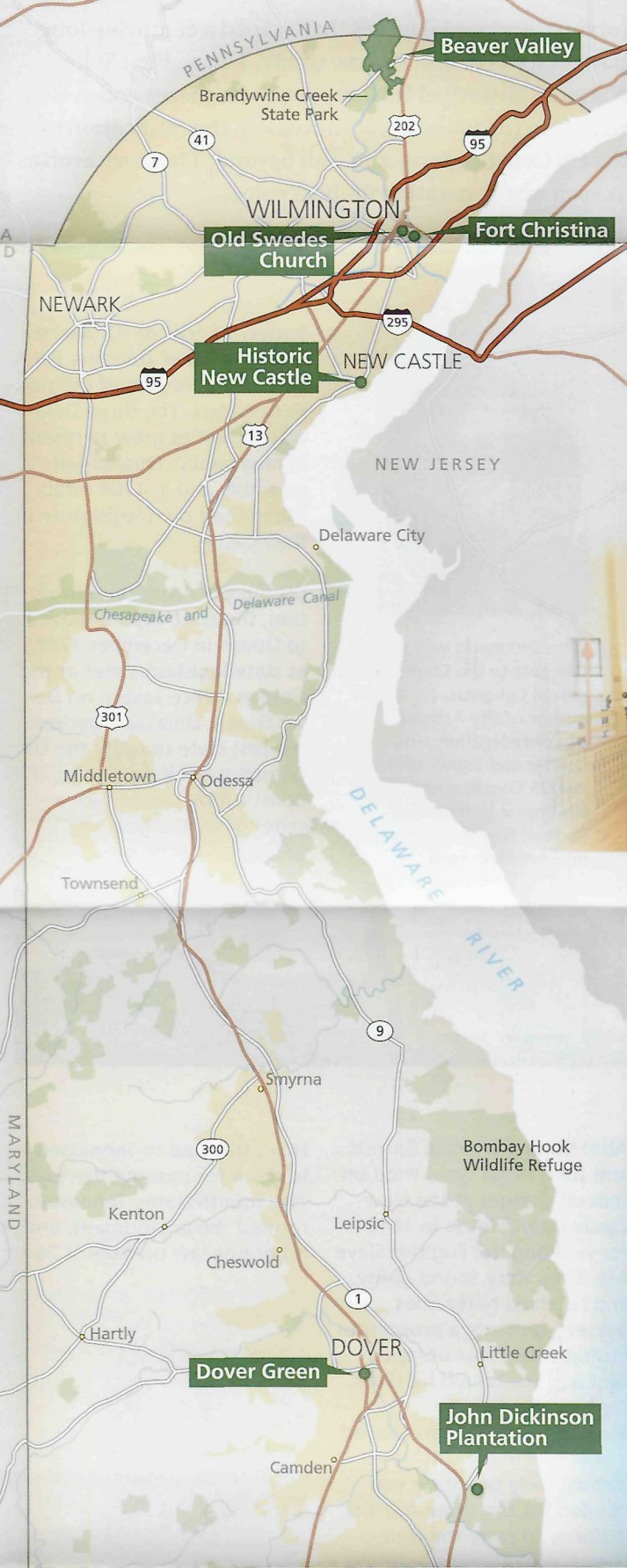
New Castle served as Delaware's capital 1707–77. The court house (*interior at left*) was home to the Delaware legislature that voted for independence from Great Britain in 1776. The adjacent Green has been a space for civic gathering for over two centuries. Operated by the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs.

New Castle Court House Museum
211 Delaware St.
New Castle, DE 19720
www.history.delaware.gov

DOVER GREEN

On December 7, 1787, state delegates met on The Green at the Golden Fleece Tavern (now gone). At this meeting Delaware became the first state to ratify the US Constitution. Historic buildings include the Old State House (*right*). Operated by First State Heritage Park.

Old State House
25 The Green
Dover, DE 19901
www.cityofdover.com/the-green



JOHN DICKINSON PLANTATION



A strong advocate for American independence, John Dickinson wrote eloquently of liberty. Influenced by the Society of Friends (Quakers), Dickinson freed his slaves by 1786. Operated by the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs.

340 Kitts Hummock Rd.
Dover, DE 19901
www.history.delaware.gov

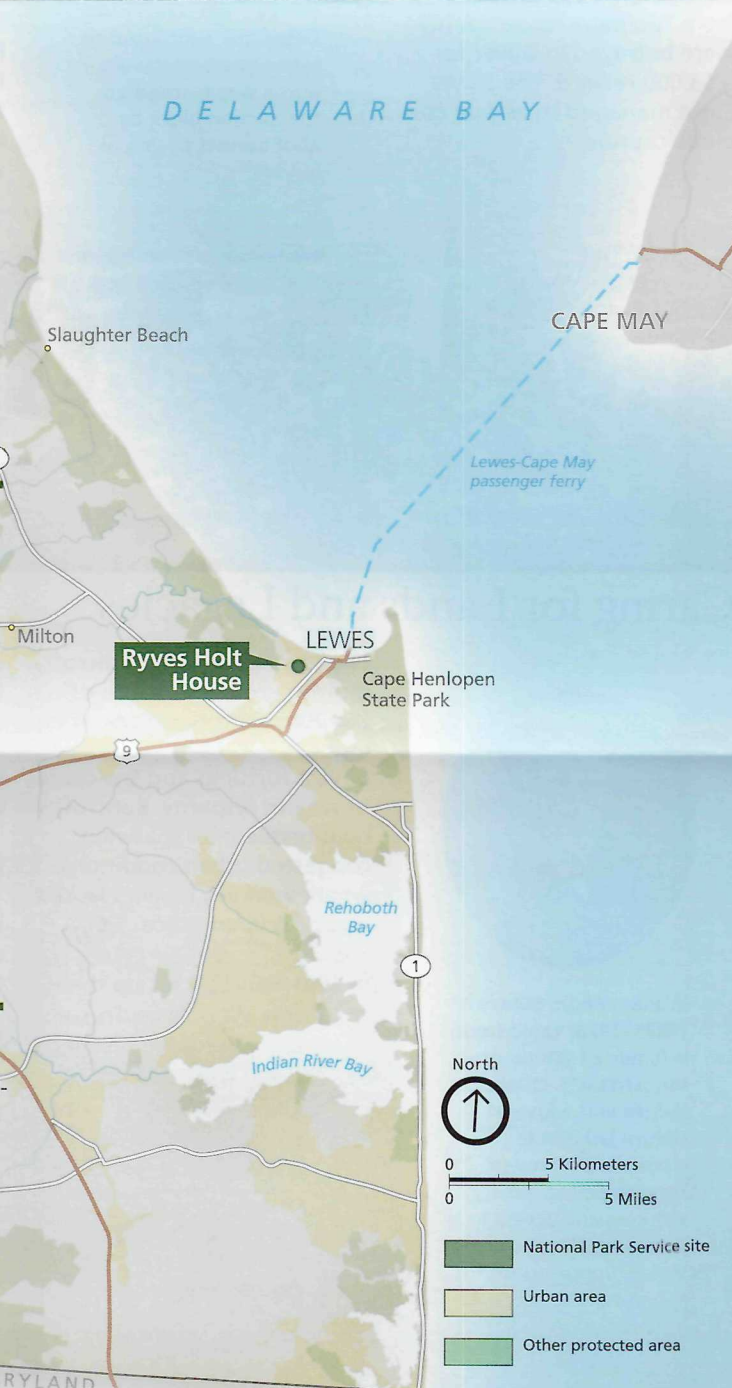
RYVES HOLT HOUSE



Built in 1665, this is thought to be one of Delaware's oldest buildings. It served the early Dutch maritime industry. Operated by Lewes Historical Society.

218 Second St.
Lewes, DE 19958
www.historiclewes.org

PHOTOS: NPS / MARK MOUSE
EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE CREDITED



0 5 Kilometers
0 5 Miles

 National Park Service site
 Urban area
 Other protected area