

CHAPTER 1: DELAWARE—AN OVERVIEW

The First State

Delaware, the first state to adopt the United States Constitution (on December 7, 1787), has made many contributions to the history and development of the United States including Caesar Rodney's famous ride to Philadelphia to sign the Declaration of Independence in July, 1776. The name Delaware comes from Lord De La Warr, the first governor of the colony of Virginia.

Delaware colonial history begins in Lewes with the first settlement by Dutch colonists in 1631 and in Wilmington with the first permanent settlement by Swedish colonists in 1638. The Swedish colony was taken over first by Dutch, and then by English colonists. Each group left lasting effects on the laws and culture of the area.

The early colonies were ruled by military officials appointed by the mother country or trading company. Later some self-government was permitted for local problems. In 1682 William Penn added the "three lower counties" to his ownership of Pennsylvania. By 1704, a separate Assembly had been established, and this body sent representatives to the Trade Act Congress and to the Continental Congress of 1776.

Delaware then declared itself free from England and from Pennsylvania and established the "Delaware State." This fledgling government was soon outgrown as a result of rapid growth in population, agriculture, milling, shipping, banking and manufacture. The fluid nature of government is reflected in the many changes which have been and are continuing to be made in Delaware's government by state law, by amendment to the state constitution, by United States constitutional amendment (Women's Suffrage and the 18-Year-Old-Vote), and by United States Supreme Court decisions (reapportionment and desegregation).



“Delaware” – sketch for a mural by Edward Loper

Delaware – the Diamond State

Long called the Diamond State, a name arising from a quotation attributed to Thomas Jefferson comparing the state to a small and valuable jewel, Delaware’s resources are varied and rich.

Agriculture

Good soil and climate, and ease of access to the large eastern markets contribute to making agriculture one of Delaware's leading industries. Poultry, grains, soy beans, vegetables, fruits, dairy, hay and swine are among the most important products.

Industry

Abundance of water power and water transportation made Delaware a thriving industrial center in the early 1700s. Economic growth continued even when water was no longer a source of power or transportation. The population of Delaware was 783,600 in 2000 and in 2006 is estimated to be 853,476. Major industries included services, retail trade, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, banking and finance, insurance, real estate, poultry production and automotive assembly. The Port of Wilmington, the first inland port on the Delaware River, handles several million tons of cargo annually. Two statewide daily newspapers, numerous weekly newspapers and two magazines are published and three television stations and 31 radio stations operate in the state. With 12.2 million visitors spending \$947.9 million in Delaware in 2003 and supporting 15,930 jobs, tourism is very important to the state’s economy.

Transportation

In addition to commuter rail service to Philadelphia, Amtrak provides service to Washington, D.C. and New York with scheduled stops in other major cities. Greyhound provides interstate bus service. DART buses provide fixed route transportation in and between each county as well as to Elkton, MD. DART also provides summer bus service to beach resorts. DART Paratransit provides transportation for the handicapped and elderly. <http://dartfirststate.com>

One of the earliest dual highways in the nation (U.S. 13) runs the length of the state leading to Delaware beaches, Maryland and Virginia. An Interstate highway system including twin bridges across the Delaware River provides a fast route north through New Jersey or Philadelphia and south through Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Route 1, Delaware's newest express highway to the beaches, was completed in May, 2003 and is now being expanded. <http://www.visitdelaware.com>

Cultural and Recreational Activities

Opportunities are available in visual arts, drama, music, history, archeology, museums and indoor and outdoor recreational events. The Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs in the Department of State has a listing of programs available.

<http://history.delaware.gov>