



From First Settlement to First State

Each of the original thirteen colonies has a distinct story to tell. While not as well known as the stories of Jamestown or Plymouth Rock, that of Delaware is remarkable in its complexity, diversity, and drama.

The colony was born amidst a struggle for empire among three great powers: Sweden, The Netherlands, and Great Britain and, from that struggle, developed an independent spirit that ensured that it maintained its individual character and identity.

The Dutch were the first to arrive in 1631 at what is now Lewes (loo' is), Delaware. Their colony met a tragic fate within a year as Indians wiped out the entire settlement. However, that Dutch occupation was later legally decisive in keeping Delaware from being absorbed by Maryland.

The next arrivals had better luck with the native inhabitants. In 1638 the Swedish ship, *Kalmar Nyckel*, made landfall at what has become known as The Rocks, a natural outcropping that served as a wharf. The Lenni Lenape people welcomed the new arrivals and the relations between the two peoples proved to be relatively peaceful.

These settlers were not cavaliers seeking treasure or religious zealots seeking a land where they could live according to their beliefs. They were the common folk of Sweden and Finland. They had no illusions of riches and no reason to flee their homeland.

Little supported from home and left to their own devices, the colonists lived side by side with the natives who they depended upon for survival. They also developed a spirit of independence. To the autocratic Director of New Sweden, Johan Printz, they claimed the right to be secure in "life and property." This bold action resulted in the execution of their soldier-leader.

As the Swedes, then the Dutch, then the English, then the Dutch, then the English again gained control of the Delaware Valley, the inhabitants pledged allegiance to the current victor and went about the daily business of survival.

With English rule came William Penn who had been granted the "three lower counties" on the Delaware soon after being granted Pennsylvania by King Charles II. The Delaware Valley settlers welcomed Penn at New Castle in 1682.

While loyal to Penn, the colonists came to resent being dominated by the Quaker-led Assembly that refused to vote money to fight pirate raids. As a result, they separated from the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1704 and set up their own legislature in New Castle, but remained part of Pennsylvania under William Penn.

By the 1770s, Scots-Irish, Welsh, Africans, and Germans had further diversified a population that continued to guard their right of self-rule. On June 15, 1776, with the Revolutionary War already begun, Delaware separated from Great Britain. Two weeks later, Caesar Rodney rode overnight through thunder and lightning to cast the vote that decided the Delaware delegation to the Continental Congress in favor of independence.

Eleven years after the Declaration of Independence on December 7, 1787, Delaware earned the title of the First State by being the first to ratify the United States Constitution and endorse its principles for a "more perfect union."



11 year-old Queen Christina occupied the Swedish throne when Swedish settlers first landed at what later became Wilmington. The settlers named their fort in her honor.

"We the Delegates of the People of the Delaware State, in Convention met, having taken into our serious consideration the Federal Constitution . . . Have approved, assented to, ratified, and confirmed, and by these Presents, Do, in virtue of the Power and Authority to us given for that purpose, for and in behalf of ourselves and our Constituents, fully, freely, and entirely approve of, assent to, ratify, and confirm the said Constitution."

With these words, Delaware became the first state to ratify the U.S. Constitution on December 7, 1787.





Experience Delaware's Colonial Past

First State National Monument's boundary encompasses a little over 1,000 acres of federal, state, and city lands in Kent and New Castle Counties in Delaware. Programming and visitor services are provided by National Park Service partners.

The Woodlawn Tract

The Woodlawn Tract is located at the northernmost tip of Delaware in the beautiful Brandywine Valley. The property provides a taste of what Delaware was like when first contact took place between Indians and Europeans. It is a small part of a large manor established by William Penn and reflects early Quaker settlement patterns.

The Woodlawn Tract has been preserved by the Woodlawn Trust founded by philanthropist William Bancroft in 1901. (No NPS facilities.)

Visitors are encouraged to visit the nearby Brandywine Springs State Park Nature Center. (302) 577-3534, <http://www.destateparks.com/park/brandywine-Creek/amenities.asp>. Trail maps may be obtained at <http://www.woodlawntrustees.com/html/trails.html>

New Castle Court House

The Court House was the colonial capital and the first capital of the state and its State House (1776-1777). In June, 1776, it is where both the "Delaware State" state of was created when it separated from Pennsylvania and the legislature acted to become independent from Great Britain. (No NPS facilities.)

The Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs operates the New Castle Court House Museum. (302) 323-4453, http://history.delaware.gov/museums/ncch/ncch_main.shtml



The Old Court House, New Castle



The Woodlawn, Tract, Wilmington

New Castle Green

The Green is the center of New Castle's government and business district. It is surrounded by historic buildings dating to the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. In addition to the Court House, the Sheriff's House, the Arsenal and the Academy buildings (1809 and 1789, respectively), and Immanuel Episcopal Church (1689) surround the Green. (No NPS facilities.)

Dover Green

The Green is the heart of Dover's historic district. Laid out in 1717 as the city of Dover's central square, The Green is where the Delaware delegates met in 1787 to become the first state to ratify the US Constitution. The tavern where they met is gone but The Green continued to play an important role in civic life as a place to gather, rally, review troops, and hold patriotic events. The focal point of The Green is the Old State House, begun in the same year that Delaware ratified the Constitution. (No NPS facilities.)

The First State Heritage Park provides tours of the historic area. (302) 739-9194, <http://www.destateparks.com/park/first-state-heritage/>



The Green, Dover

Planning Your Visit

A New National Park

First State National Monument is a new national park which consists of four areas partners. The National Park Service will soon begin a public process to develop a management plan for the park. At present, there are no NPS facilities and limited staff.

For a Safe Visit

Be aware that land within the national monument is a mix of federal, state, and city land. Be careful crossing streets. Lock all valuables out of sight in your car.

Getting to First State National Monument

The Woodlawn Tract, near Wilmington:

Directions to Delaware's Brandywine Creek State Park, adjacent to the Woodlawn Tract. From I-95, take exit 8 (US-202 N/Concord Pike) Merge onto US-202 N/Concord Pike. Left after Concord Mall onto Beaver Valley Road. Left onto Thompson's Bridge Road. Left onto Adams Dam Road., 47 Adams Dam Rd Wilmington, DE 19807

New Castle Court House Museum and The Green, New Castle

From New York and NJ north: Take the first exit after the Delaware Memorial Bridge for SR-9 S. Follow SR-9 for about two miles. Turn left onto Delaware Street.

From I-95 N&S: Take Exit 5A toward US 13/New Castle. Turn left at SR 273. Turn slight right onto Delaware St. 211 Delaware Street New Castle, DE 19720

Dover Green, Dover

Directions to the First State Heritage Park Visitor Center:

From New York, Philadelphia and north: From I-95 S: Take the SR 7 Exit 4A. Merge onto SR-1 S. Take exit 98 for SR-8 (toward Downtown Dover/ Little Creek). Turn right onto N Little Creek Road (SR-8). Turn left onto US-13 S. Turn right onto Martin Luther King. Jr. Blvd. The Visitor Center will be on the right in the State Archives building.

From Washington, DC: Take US-50 E; Take US-301 N toward Wilmington. Turn right onto MD-302/Barclay Rd. MD-302/Barclay Rd. becomes Arthursville Rd/SR-11. Turn right onto SR-44/Main St. Turn left onto SR-8/Halltown Rd. SR-8 becomes S. Division St. In Dover. Turn right onto S State St. Turn left on E. Loockerman St. Turn right on Federal St. Turn Left on Martin Luther King Blvd. The Visitor Center will be on the right in the State Archives building.

For More Information

First State National Monument
c/o Old Court House Museum
211 Delaware Street
New Castle, DE 19720
(302) 824-3530
www.nps.gov/frst

For more National Park information, go to: www.nps.gov

