



# Foundation Document Overview

## First State National Historical Park

Delaware and Pennsylvania



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*FIRST STATE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK works in partnership to preserve and interpret the nationally significant cultural and historic resources associated with early settlement of the Delaware Valley by the Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, and English; Delaware's role in the establishment of the nation; and as the first State to ratify the Constitution. First State National Historical Park works in partnership to conserve and interpret the natural and cultural landscape of the Brandywine Valley consistent with William Poole Bancroft's vision of an open space accessible to the public for their health and well-being.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why First State National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Fort Christina, a national historic landmark, preserves the original landing site, known as “The Rocks,” of the first Swedish expedition to North America and, together with Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church and its burial ground, the sites and resources closely associated with the principal settlement of New Sweden. Built in 1698, almost a half century after the Dutch conquered New Sweden, Holy Trinity illustrates early religious tolerance in Delaware and the continued influence of Swedish settlers in the Delaware Valley
- Built in 1740, Poplar Hall stands at the center of the boyhood home and country estate of John Dickinson. Known as “the Penman of the Revolution,” Dickinson was a delegate to the Continental Congress, the primary author of the Articles of Confederation, and one of the drafters and signers of the U.S. Constitution. Dickinson, whose words and actions included the manumission of his enslaved individuals, shaped the ideals, institutions, and aspirations of the new nation. Today, the site, known as the John Dickinson Plantation, is open to the public and owned by the State of Delaware.



## Significance

- Bordering the Green established by Dutch colonists in the mid-17th century, the New Castle Court House witnessed seminal events in the establishment of the United States and the forging of our nation’s most fundamental ideals. A site near the current Court House stood as the epicenter of the Twelve Mile Arc, the boundary between Delaware and Pennsylvania surveyed in 1701 and, ultimately for many, the frontier between slavery and freedom. Here, prior to casting Delaware’s vote in favor of independence in 1776, Delaware’s colonial assembly separated from Great Britain and Pennsylvania in June 1776, making the Court House Delaware’s first capitol building. Almost three-quarters of a century later, U.S. Chief Justice Roger Taney presided over the well-publicized prosecution of prominent Quaker abolitionists and Underground Railroad conductors Thomas Garrett and John Hunn under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 in the Court House.
- First plotted as a public space in 1717 in accordance with William Penn’s orders, The Dover Green occupied a central place in the political and economic affairs of colonial Dover and in the nation’s political foundations when, in December 1787, the state convention ratified the U.S. Constitution in the Golden Fleece Tavern at the edge of the Green, earning Delaware the sobriquet of “First State.”
- Brandywine—a 1,359-acre tract in the Beaver Valley area north of Wilmington—is an integral component and legacy of Quaker industrialist William Poole Bancroft’s vision for open park lands and the conservation of green space as part of his larger philanthropic community planning experiment in the City of Wilmington that drew upon national and international currents of early 20th century social and industrial reform.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Brandywine Valley Unit**
- **New Castle Court House and Green**
- **Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church**
- **Fort Christina**
- **The Dover Green**
- **John Dickinson Plantation**
- **Partnerships**

First State National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural Resources in the Brandywine Valley Unit**



## Description

Delaware may be small, but it played a big role in the early years of our nation. Famous as the First State to ratify the U.S. Constitution, Delaware was born out of a conflict among three world powers (Sweden, The Netherlands, and Great Britain) for dominance of the Delaware Valley. From this beginning, the region developed a distinct character that tolerated diversity in religion and national origin and valued freedom and independence.

The significant and varied historic resources that form First State National Historical Park are located in the two northern counties of Delaware, with a portion in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The three counties of Delaware lie in a north-to-south alignment, with each county encompassing a remarkably different environment. New Castle, located on the eastern edge of the Piedmont, was historically rich in woodland resources and water-power useful for manufacturing. Kent County, the middle-tier county in Delaware, has rich farmlands that served as the early nation's grainery. The southernmost Sussex County has the longest coastline, touching both the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

Delaware was occupied for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Lenape greeted the first visitors to the Lenapewihittuck (Delaware River) region. European powers contested the region for its access to the lucrative peltries trade, its fertile soils, and its water access to the interior. The Dutch controlled the region from 1616 to 1638. Control of the region passed to the Swedes in 1638. Resuming control in 1654, the Dutch solidified their presence by building Fort Casimir and the adjoining New Amstel village (later New Castle). Just as the Dutch and Swedes began to settle their territorial dispute, in 1664, the English took control of the Delaware River region. In 1682, the region became a part of William Penn's vast proprietary commonwealth called Pennsylvania.

The Delaware counties, to which Penn gave a semi-autonomous legislature in 1704, were strong advocates for colonial independence. In 1774 and 1775, the Delaware legislature sent representatives to the First and Second Continental Congress. Then, in a 1776 meeting in the New Castle Court House, the Delaware Assembly voted to form the "Delaware State" and joined the twelve other colonies-turned-states in declaring their independence from Great Britain. Delaware earned its "First State" title in 1787 when the Delaware delegation, meeting in The Golden Fleece Tavern along The Green in Dover, was the first to ratify the new United States Constitution.

Delaware's rich history is peopled by a diverse cast of men and women whose daily lives intersected with significant episodes in American history. Their stories are preserved in the historic sites they occupied and amplified within the larger contexts of settlement and nation-building along the Delaware River and its tributaries.

