

A brief history of the Old Sussex County Court House



As the site of the first European colony in Delaware, the town now known as Lewes had been the natural choice for the location of Sussex County's first seat of government. However, with population expansion into the western sections of the county, pressure mounted to relocate the county seat to a more centralized location. In January 1791, the Delaware General Assembly authorized the move and later that year, a 10-member commission, headed by state Sen. George Mitchell, purchased 76 acres of land and mapped out a new town centered on a square, now known as The Circle, where the court house would be situated.

Designed to meet the exact dimensions of the former court house in Lewes, the new court house was completed in 1793, serving as the focal point of a community which was later named Georgetown in honor of Mitchell. The building continued in service until 1837 when it was sold and moved from The Circle to make way for a larger brick court-house designed by William Strickland. The latter structure continues in service to this day. The Old Sussex County Court House, now located at 10 S. Bedford St., was restored in 1976 and is still used occasionally for special court functions.



The regional tensions which forced the creation of the Old Sussex County Court House grew directly from the century-long conflict of the Lords Baltimore with James, Duke of York, and his successors, the Penn family, over their respective provincial boundaries. The same frictions were involved in the election of the assemblymen and ratifying convention delegates who considered the United States Constitution. They helped shape travel routes, trading habits, political preferences and sectional loyalties of Sussex Countians and other residents of Delmarva from the early colonial settlement. The Old Sussex County Court House, now administered by the Georgetown Historical Society, is a unique vehicle for interpreting this complicated and significant regional history.

Exterior and interior photos of the Old Sussex County Court House.