

DELAWARE

HISTORY

Delaware is small, but its story is long. Lenape and Nanticoke people, Swedes, Dutch, English and Americans all had a hand in building it.

The First Peoples

People have lived in Delaware for more than 10,000 years. By the 1600s, the Lenape lived in the north along the Delaware River. The Nanticoke lived in the south along rivers that run to Chesapeake Bay. Both nations grew corn, beans and squash. They hunted deer, fished and gathered oysters and clams. They traded with each other and later with Europeans.

Dutch, Swedes and English

In 1631 the Dutch built a whaling post called Zwaanendael near today's Lewes. After a quarrel, Lenape warriors killed the settlers and burned the post. Swedes came in 1638 and built Fort Christina. The Dutch took over the Swedish **colony** in 1655, and England took it from the Dutch in 1664. In 1682 it passed to William Penn of Pennsylvania. Delaware got its own assembly in 1704. The Lenape sold land to the Dutch, the Swedes and Penn. In the 1700s most Lenape and many Nanticoke moved north and west. Some families stayed, and both tribes live in Delaware today.



Revolution and the First State

In July 1776, Caesar Rodney rode all night from Dover to Philadelphia. His vote put Delaware on the side of **independence**. In 1777, American soldiers fought British and German troops at Cooch's Bridge near Newark. The Americans fell back, and the British then held Wilmington for about a month. Ten years later, Delaware became the first state.

Mills, Canals and Rails

Brandywine Creek drops fast on its way to Wilmington. Its falling water turned the wheels of flour, paper and cloth **mills**. Oliver Evans of Newport invented machines that let a flour mill run almost by itself. In 1802, E.I. du Pont began building gunpowder mills on the creek. Workers dug the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, which opened in 1829. Railroads followed and carried Delaware peaches to city markets.



Slavery and the Civil War

Enslaved people worked on Delaware farms from the 1600s on. By 1860, most Black people in Delaware were free. Thomas Garrett of Wilmington helped more than 2,000 people escape from slavery. Delaware stayed in the **Union** during the Civil War. Fort Delaware held Confederate prisoners. Slavery ended in Delaware in December 1865, when the 13th Amendment became law.

Building Modern Delaware

Wilmington's shipyards built iron ships and railroad cars. The DuPont company turned from gunpowder to chemistry. Its scientists invented nylon, and the first nylon plant opened in Seaford in 1939. T. Coleman du Pont paid for a highway that ran the length of the state. In 1951 the Delaware Memorial Bridge linked Delaware to New Jersey.

DELAWARE THROUGH TIME



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Caesar Rodney	Rode all night to cast a key vote.
Oliver Evans	Invented a self-running flour mill.
E.I. du Pont	Started gunpowder mills in 1802.
Thomas Garrett	Helped people escape slavery.
Annie Jump Cannon	Born in Dover. Sorted the stars.

WORDS TO KNOW

colony	land ruled from far away
independence	freedom from outside rule
mill	a workshop run by machines
Union	the states that stayed loyal