FOUR CENTURIES OF CHANGE
ON LAND
IN NORTHWEST FORK HUNDRED
SEAFORD, DELAWARE

By

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INTRODUCTION

For my MALS Synthesis Project I propose to examine the history of the Governor William Ross Plantation, located on the north side of Seaford, Delaware, from the late seventeenth century to the present. The story of this plantation notably parallels the history of land ownership in numerous other parts of the Delmarva Peninsula. The land is the constant in this equation where owners, fortunes and techniques changed over time. The buildings and fields present a physical reminder of the remarkable changes that have occurred in rural downstate Delaware over four centuries.

Even though the Hooper, Tennent, Ross, and Davis families are important to the development of Seaford, they are fairly typical of gentleman farmers of their respective time periods. They engaged in agricultural endeavors for their main livelihood, yet pursued other careers. Such important themes including shifts in agricultural practices, the movement away from slave labor to tenancy, the transportation revolution, architectural changes, political turmoil, and historic preservation will be examined within the context of family ambition and regional history.

The paper trail of original documents can readily tell us what these families did during their lives, but why they made these choices remains tantalizingly beyond our grasp. Due to the relative availability of primary sources and the importance of the years just prior to and during the Civil War, the main focus of this paper will be on the mid-nineteenth century years when William Ross owned the plantation. As an ante-bellum Governor of Delaware, Ross became a very controversial figure during the war due to his Confederate sympathies. Equally as important were the decisions made and the actions taken by Ross as a Delaware planter within the contexts of the lingering impact of slavery, declining soil fertility, changing commodity markets, the advent of the railroad, and the rise of Italianate architecture.

I have been intrigued by the Ross Plantation since becoming a member of the Seaford Historical Society in 1987. I have held the office of President since 1991, and have spent considerable time researching many aspects of the property's history. This included great attention to authenticating architectural details so that the continuing restoration of the mansion house, outbuildings, and the grounds could be as accurate as possible.

In an attempt to most effectively organize and present the following information, I have divided the material into two sections. The first section relates the stories of the landowners, and the second relates the stories of the land and its structures. The first section includes more specific chapters on William Ross since the house today is interpreted to the period of his occupation. It is my hope that this research will help illuminate a fascinating aspect of Delaware's history that has previously been neglected. Throughout its evolution western Sussex County has been the venue for many interesting and unique stories of American life.

SECTION I

The People And Their Stories

CHAPTER 1 – MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA OR DELAWARE?

"History is written through the actions of individuals - a history where meaning is found not in great events but in the continuum of architectural thought realized upon the land."
Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900, Bernard Herman.

History, whether it surrounds a person, object, building, or landscape is a means of recording events and circumstances. Frequently it is the evolution of an idea which emerged from a decision for change. It is the movement of these thoughts and ideas which gradually gather momentum affecting the people they reach through numerous generations. Beginning in the seventeenth century, decisions were made which forever changed the face of the area we know as the Delmarva Peninsula. Some of these changes remain visible to today's generations through documentary and physical evidence. On a major tract of land now located in Northwest Fork Hundred (from now on designated "NWFH"), Seaford, Delaware, one farmstead can be studied as it evolved from its seventeenth century inception to the present.

The Charter of Maryland established the foundation of this early colony in 1632. As proprietors of the colony the Lords Baltimore (Calvert family) were granted enormous power and possessed all the lands in the province. In an effort to attract colonists, Lord Baltimore granted patents to individual settlers in an attempt to make the lands productive through occupation. Since its discovery the Chesapeake Bay region has provided expanded opportunities for early colonial settlement. Although the reasons for immigration varied, land ownership meant wealth and this area was readily available. For those willing to take the risk, the agricultural system of the Chesapeake could produce sufficient capital for growth and advancement. The tobacco economy, in spite of its recurring fluctuations, provided the basis for this wealth. The Chesapeake colonies soon grew to be the most widely populated area in North America.

On February 4, 1669, Dorchester County, Maryland came into existence through a writ issued by the Governor and his Council. The following May, eight commissioners were appointed by the General Assembly to attend to all the administrative, civil, and criminal matters of the County. They were specifically "authorized and enjoined to inquire into 'all manner of felonies, witchcraft, enchantments, sorceries, magic arts,' etc., in the county; arrest the guilty and send them to St. Mary's for trial."[1] Named after Sir Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset, Dorchester County is located along the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay between the Choptank and the Nanticoke Rivers. The seventeenth century boundaries encompassed an area of land almost twice the county's present size. It included part of present-day Caroline County and much of southern Delaware. [See Appendix #1] This region was a paradise for early hunters, trappers and watermen. Water access was an important factor in the county's development. Most plantations used this orientation as a source of food, travel and communication.

Maryland's Eastern Shore frontier proved to be a good escape especially for those who sought isolation from St. Mary's crowded conditions and some distance from the Calvert family's rigid control. Settlement here was actually encouraged by the Proprietor through the offer of cheap land. As development of the Eastern Shore intensified it attracted the attention of settlers from other parts of Maryland and Virginia. The Calverts issued Conditions of Plantation which stated that "every freeman who came to Maryland to 'inhabit and plant' was entitled, without cost or charge (except an annual quitrent), to 100 acres of land for himself, a like quantity for his wife, for every child over sixteen, and for each servant, and 50 acres for every child under sixteen years of age, to be held by 'him and his heirs and assigns forever, in free and common socage."[2] These quitrents were payable annually and depended upon the date of the Condition of Plantation under which the land patent was issued. Although immigration continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a hierarchical society developed well before 1700. Wealthy landholders soon dominated the political and social life of the counties.

Documents housed in Maryland's Hall of Records attest to the fact that in January of 1672, Jeremiah Jadwin of Virginia received a land patent for 1,750 acres of land from Lord Calvert. This land was located on the north side of the Nanticoke River and known as "Martin's Hundred." Jadwin's patent stated that the land rent of 3 pounds 10 shillings in silver or gold was due to Lord Calvert at the City of St. Marys during two festivals. Half of the rent was payable during the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other half during the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel. It remains unclear whether Jadwin ever resided at "Martin's Hundred" or even visited his property.

In 1678, Lord Baltimore granted another land patent of 500 acres of land on the north side of the Nanticoke River to Francis Jenkins of Somerset County. This patent was for a tract of land several miles downstream from "Martin's Hundred" known as "Grapevine Thicket." Colonel Jenkins was perhaps the most successful merchant-planter of his day living on the lower Eastern Shore. This land rapidly passed through the hands of three more owners until 1732. On November 4, the Proprietary of Maryland granted a fifty-acre parcel of "Grapevine Thicket" to Abraham Covington for the cost of 1,300 pounds of tobacco, although he never occupied this grant.

Land ownership disputes began as early as the 1670's when the Penn family was granted some of the same territory encompassed by the Maryland Charter that the Calverts administered. The Penns claimed direct family administration of the land they called the "Lower Counties of Pennsylvania," on the basis of several inaccurate early Dutch maps. Conflicts took the form of legal battles as well as armed encounters. By the middle of the eighteenth century the dispute over ownership of this land became a point of serious contention between the Penns and the Calverts. In a final effort to resolve this problem, the King of England sent Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two English astronomers, to resurveyed and plot the boundaries in question. This momentous task began in 1763 and was finally accomplished in 1768.

After ownership of the land was finally decided, the Penn's ordered a resurvey of all properties originally granted under Maryland patents. On May 25, 1776, John Tennent applied for a resurvey of "Grapevine Thicket" after Abraham Covington failed to pay the "four shillings sterling per hundred"[3] quitrent. The resurvey included vacant surrounding land comprising a total acreage of two hundred and twenty seven and a half acres "called Addition to Grapevine Thicket."[4] John Tennent was the first owner to arrive with the durable intent to work the land. The property of our focus was now permanently placed in Sussex County, Delaware. Known as NWFH, this area derived its name from the upper fork of the Nanticoke River. The main body of the Nanticoke originates in Delaware and eventually empties into Tangier Sound in the Chesapeake Bay.

Prior to 1689, ownership of the "Martin's Hundred" tract had passed to John and Grace Barnes of Dorchester County, who in turn deeded this 1,750 acre property to Henry Hooper. The earliest map of Seaford shows the Hooper homestead and wharf at this location on the river. This extensive tract of land became the site of present day Seaford, Delaware due to the foresight of the Hooper and Tennent families.

Dynastic family alliances were maintained through intermarriage. Land, lineage and labor were the driving forces behind these marriage decisions. The Hooper families were early settlers to the Eastern Shore. Henry Hooper's sister, Mary, married William Chapline whose mother was the sister of the first Lord Baltimore. Little else is known of the first Henry Hooper except that he and his wife Mary had thirteen children, five boys and eight girls. In Henry's will, dated 1720, he divided extensive parcels of land between his surviving children. These included major portions of Hooper's Island and acreage on many other Maryland waterways. Henry left his sons Thomas and John a tract of land known as "Hooper's Forest" (formerly "Martin's Hundred" and "Addition to Martin's Hundred") located on the Nanticoke River. It is through this extensive tract of land that our saga continues with the involvement of the John Tennent family. [See Appendix #2]

CHAPTER 2 - THE TENNENT FAMILY

"This is a Tennent saga which goes from place to place."
"The Heritage That Is Ours: A Family History," John Hooper Tennent IV.

According to family records, John Tennent was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on December 17, 1749, the youngest of twelve children of Adam and Mary Tennent. John's mother died when he was only eight years old, and his father died the following year. Adam Tennent's death record listed him as a tobacconist. John was still living in Scotland at age thirteen during the filing of his father's estate inventory. No further record of John has been found until he appeared in NWFH, Sussex County, Delaware in 1776. In present day Tennent family records, there is an indication that John Tennent may have been in the Seaford area as early as 1770. According to a deposition he made in 1800, Tennent said that he had known the individual for "thirty years at Martin's Hundred."[1]

At the age of twenty-seven, John Tennent purchased the property west of Seaford on Horsepond Branch known as "Grapevine Thicket." The following year, on February 10, 1777, he married Mary (Molly) Hooper and began to raise a family. Molly's father, Henry Hooper, was a very successful area entrepreneur who controlled extensive landholdings on the Nanticoke River as early as 1689, and figured prominently in the early history of Seaford. Molly died in 1793, leaving her husband with their son John, and daughter Ann. Within three years Molly's brother, Henry, also died, leaving his widow, Esther with two young children. On April 16, 1797, John married his sister-in-law, thus merging the two families. Ironically, Esther also died by the end of that year. In October 1799, John Tennent and two of his brothers-in-law, John and Thomas Hooper, helped to lay out the boundaries and streets of the town of Seaford, previously known as "Hooper's Landing" originally "Martin's Hundred." [See Appendix #3]

According to Sussex County land records, Tennent was involved in as many as eighteen land acquisitions, divisions and sales between 1776 and 1802. He also served as a witness or administrator in many local transactions. Sussex County Probate Records reveal him to be a witness to the wills of eleven different planters, farmers, merchants and yeomen from 1777 to 1795. In 1784, John continued to add property to "Grapevine Thicket." He purchased twenty-five adjoining acres of land from Joshua and Sarah Wright of Somerset County for twenty-five pounds. Tennent was appointed Justice of the Peace on October 22, 1784. One year later, he was elected to the Delaware House of Representatives where he served for a total of ten years. During his final term, he served as chairman of the House during the Speaker's absence. During this tumultuous period in American history, General George Washington was elected the first President of the United States, and Nicholas Van Dyke was elected President of Delaware.

The 1780 tax assessment records provided descriptive information about Tennent's land, livestock, and slaves. At this time he reported ownership of 1,530 acres of "poor land" and a house on the "River Nanticoke." Livestock included horses, oxen, cows, sheep, and pigs. He was also assessed for three ounces of silver plate, plus eleven male and eight female slaves. [See Appendix #4] During the eighteenth century, NWFH farmers were increasingly dependent upon black labor for assistance in raising crops. Delaware's Assessment of 1797 attested to the control of 485 slaves by 106 owners in this Hundred. The Second United States Census of 1800 reported Tennent's ownership of twenty-two slaves. This was the largest number of slaves owned by any individual in Sussex County, and the second largest in the State, only surpassed by Kent County's Matthew Tilghman who owned twenty-five.

Lamentably, much of John Tennent's life is undocumented. Public records are brief and full of information gaps. We will probably never know what circumstances brought him from

Glasgow, Scotland to Seaford, Delaware. As the youngest son, how did he acquire the finances to purchase "Grapevine Thicket" and "Martin's Hundred" at the age of twenty-six? Education at this time was generally only attainable by the wealthy. What background did he posses that enabled him to serve in Delaware's Legislature? History has a way of reducing many individuals to just their signature on a faded document, or the highlights of their careers. The Tennent family is no exception to this rule. We can only attempt to piece the story of their lives together, while unfortunately missing the essence of their existence.

John Tennent died on February 21, 1806, at the age of fifty-seven, and was buried at Seaford's Mt. Olivet Methodist Church in the same plot with both of his wives. In his will, John was very careful to divide his "worldly Estate as it hath pleased god to bless me with in this Life" equally between his two children. Daughter Ann received several large tracts of land located in "Martin's Hundred," plus two mahogany tables and a mahogany looking glass. Son John also received land, a clock, a watch, two large family pictures, and one mahogany desk. (These special items are still cherished by the John Tennent family today.) A final dispensation freed an elderly negro man, Jack, "to be clear from the claim of my heirs or the claim of any other person."[2] Jack, now in his sixty's, had first appeared in Tennent's Assessment record of 1780.

John Tennent II (usually referred to as "Colonel John") was born February 6, 1786 in Seaford, Delaware. He was mentioned in his father's will as receiving the "Dwelling plantation where I now live with all the lands which I hold or posess adjoining thereto lying on both sides of Horse Pen [Pond] Branch."[3] In 1807, at the age of twenty-one, the Governor appointed Tennent as a Lieutenant to the Militia of the State of Delaware. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel of the 9th Regiment by 1827. On November 8, 1810, Colonel John married his first cousin, Sarah Hooper, who had grown up in the same household as the result of his father's second marriage. This marriage would prove advantageous in keeping land and prestige within the family. In 1814, John purchased twelve more acres of land in "Martin's Hundred" from his sister Ann Hazzard's inheritance. It can be assumed that John had previously acquired land here since this deed stated that this division "crosses a small gully or draw which runs through the said Tennents now dwelling plantation and empties into the herring run branch."[4]

The 1816 tax assessment described details of the Tennent holdings. It included the following land and buildings: 550 acres of land - Mansion House, large Brick dwelling, barn; 350 acres in tenent of Jacob Allen with old dwelling; 197 acres in tenent of James Polk with an old log'd dwelling; 300 acres in tenent of Wingate Connaway with old hip roof dwelling, barn, and crib; 400 acres in tenent of John Lynch with small framed dwelling. With a property total of 1,797 acres, Tennent also owned six horses, two pair oxen, seven cows and four calves, eight young cattle, twenty-three sheep, eight swine, and eight male and seven female slaves. At this time he was the third largest landowner in NWFH.

Following in his father's footsteps, Colonel John served in the Delaware House of Representatives as a member of the American Republican Party from 1826 through 1829. The following year he was elected to the State Senate. On January 15, 1829, he was selected as a director for the Georgetown Branch of the State Farmers Bank. Colonel John was also very involved in the community, serving as a Trustee of the Seaford Academy in 1819, helping to view and examine road requests, and establish boundaries for the neighboring town of Laurel in 1827. Additionally, he served as a Master Mason of Hope Lodge No. 4 in Laurel.

John Tennent II died intestate on August 21, 1831 at the age of forty-five, leaving a widow and ten children. "The distinguished rank which this estimable gentleman held in society, and his many virtues, render his death a public loss."[5] Upon this death he owned 2,587 acres of land, four houses and lots in Seaford, a granary, plus a wharf which he had purchased one year earlier from the Steamboat Company. He was buried in the Mt. Olivet Methodist Church cemetery next to his mother. His obituary included the reminder that "he was kind, generous and benevolent, an affectionate husband, a tender and indulgent parent, a good neighbor, and a humane and feeling master. Of him it may be truly said that he lived esteemed and beloved, and died deeply lamented by a wide circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances."[6]

Following her husband's death, Sarah continued to live on their homestead while the property distribution was handled through the State's Orphan's Court. It took four years for the land to be resurveyed and the estate settled. In 1836, Sarah sold her 400 acres to Caleb Ross of Laurel, Delaware for $1,380 with eldest son James also selling Ross his 1,260 acres of "Martin's Hundred" for $12,800. Sarah Hooper Tennent then moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to reside with James, who was a merchant in the city. Thus the property moved into its next phase of ownership.

CHAPTER 3 - CALEB ROSS

The earliest documented members of the Ross family in Delaware were brothers, James and William. In 1730, they were granted patents to land in NWFH by the Penn family. Residing west of present day Bridgeville, William Ross married Esther Eaton and began a family. Son Caleb, born in 1784, was one of seven sons and one daughter born to this union.

Caleb Ross first appeared in the Laurel, Delaware Assessment Records in 1809 at the age of twenty-five. He had married Letitia Lofland of Milford, Delaware five years earlier. This marriage was blessed with five children. Tragedy struck the family on October 8, 1833 when their oldest son, James was murdered under mysterious circumstances in Monticello, Georgia by Augustus Glover. There is some question that James' presence there may have been due to involvement in the slave trade. Second son, William Henry Harrison Ross, was probably thus named after the contemporary military victories of William Henry Harrison future United States president. The remaining children were daughters Mary, Maria, and Sally Ann.

As early as 1815, Caleb appeared to have accumulated some financial backing since he purchased two town lots in Seaford. In 1825, Caleb must have caught "Western Fever" since his mercantile endeavors expanded from Delaware to Illinois where he purchased several saw mills. As a local gentleman, Caleb fared well as a merchant. He was well traveled and financially able to accumulate extensive land holdings. In 1832 the federal government surveyed Delaware industries. Caleb's wool carding mill was one of only four enterprises listed for Little Creek Hundred. He was a partner in a grist mill operation located just west of Laurel, and later purchased "Big Mills" grist and saw mill.

Caleb's community involvement continued. In 1809 and again in 1822 his name headed a legislative petition attempting to enforce the laws against swine running loose in the village of Laurel. He later signed an 1827 request to lay out streets in the town. Caleb's name can also be counted among the seventy members of a local militia company raised in 1831.

In 1836, Caleb purchased 1,660 acres of land North of Seaford from Widow Sarah Tennent and her son James for a sum of $14,180. Caleb never lived on the property, but rented it out to several tenant farmers. During this same year, he was assessed for ownership of the Tennent property, plus an additional 1,095 acres, including two lots in Seaford. He owned six slaves and a male servant who was indentured for seven years. Upon his death in 1841, Caleb left a sizable estate of 5,483 acres of land. It was divided between his four surviving children in such a way that his daughters were provided for. Their husbands were given the property in trust for their wives. The Seaford acreage was left to his son William. This property included "all the land and premises which I purchased of James Tennent and wife, and Sarah Tennent and is now divided into two Farms the one called the 'Home Farm' on which William Rogers now resides as my tenant, the other called the 'Willin Farm' upon which last Hansley Martin now resides as my tenant . . . with all and singular the buildings and improvements with the appurtenances thereunto belonging."[1] In addition, his will provided for distribution of property owned in Somerset and Worcester Counties, Maryland; Quincy and Adams County, Illinois; the cities of Laurel and Seaford, Delaware; plus land in Little Creek and Northwest Fork Hundreds. Apparently Caleb's will did not include all of his most recent land acquisitions. Three years later, William petitioned the Sussex County Orphan's Court on behalf of his siblings for final distribution of several additional pieces of property in Little Creek Hundred which were not previously covered.

CHAPTER 4 - WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON ROSS AND FAMILY

"Early in life he had learned the secret of success in many things, and what his hand attempted was, as a rule, accomplished"
Addresses Delivered at the Formal Presentation of the Portraits of the Governors of Delaware to the State.

William Henry Harrison Ross was born in Laurel, Delaware on June 2, 1814, the youngest of five children. As a young boy, he was educated in the Laurel public schools. After the death of his mother in 1832, William left Laurel to attend Claremont Academy, a Quaker school in Pennsylvania. He returned in 1834 to work as a clerk in his father's grain and mercantile business. At the age of twenty-two, William had the opportunity to travel to Europe with his father where they visited the England, Scotland, and Ireland. "A good education supplemented by trained habits of reading and thought, and his European visits made him a man of culture and an agreeable and entertaining companion."[1] The following year (1837) he traveled to Adams County, Illinois where his father had milling interests, engaging in business there for a year. He purchased land in Missouri and Kansas, but sold it by 1857, relating in a letter that he "could never be satisfied (living) west of the mountains."[2]

On June 6, 1840, William married Elizabeth Emeline Hall of Concord, Delaware. [See Appendix #5] They spent their early years of marriage in Laurel, Delaware where William opened his own store. He acquired the "Big Mills" grist and sawmill from his father, and added a tannery in 1843. After the death of William's father, Caleb, the couple finally took up residence in the Tennent farmhouse in Seaford by 1845. This parcel of land totaled 1,398 acres. He brought with him the four slaves he inherited from his father. William now embarked on another career, that of farming. His milling involvement continued locally as one of many in a long line of owners of a mill on Herring Creek north of Seaford.

After relocating to the country, William and Elizabeth continued to raise their growing family. Ten children were born to this union. Tragically two sons were lost to childhood illnesses; John Wood Ross at age three and George Hall Ross at age sixteen. Letters to a close family friend dating from 1857 and 1861 recount these family tragedies, where "our hearts are all wrung with anguish at our sad loss."[3] George's tombstone recounts the fact that he was "kind hearted, generous and unselfish, the pride and hope of his parents: the beloved of his brothers and sisters, and the favorite of all his associates. He died lamented by all."[4] The tragic loss of a third son was endured when Caleb, their eldest, died of typhoid only three months after enlisting in a Virginia cavalry unit during the Civil War.

In 1846, William was commissioned as Captain of Co. A 3rd Brigade Delaware Cavalry which was organized in the Seaford and Laurel area. Within five months, he was transferred to Delaware Militia Co. D 15th Regiment. The following year, Governor William Temple appointed Ross as one his aides-de-camp. One of his first assignments was to accept the consignment of Delaware's quota of public arms from the United States government as cavalry equipment "consisting of sabres, pistols and the appropriate accouterments."[5]

A Democrat like his father, William maintained an active political presence that would later lead to his election as Delaware's twenty-seventh governor from 1850 to 1854. After his term as governor, William was frequently solicited for other political positions. He declined those offers and decided to retire from active State politics due to a hearing impairment resulting from an early childhood illness.

The Ross family members were also deeply involved with religion in the community. An 1853 journal of Seaford reported that "Today our camp meeting commenced near Seaford in His Exelency's (sic) Gov. W.H. Rosses woods. At this camp we had 15 tents."[6] Additionally, the Ross's were members of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and all family members are buried in the churchyard cemetery.

Although the nineteenth century was a period of prolific letter writing, there are unfortunately few remainders of Ross correspondence to enlighten our search. Secondary sources are also meager, relegated to fairly generic prose by local historians. Curiously, Thomas Scharf, nineteenth century author of the *History of Delaware*, barely mentioned William Ross. There possibly were some negative relations between them, since Scharf included photographs, and personal and physical descriptions of all of Ross's contemporaries. In 1851, an Editorial in *The Delaware Gazette* stated "Of one thing I am certain, that all who know Gov. Ross *intimately*, will concede to him honesty of purpose in his official acts, and if, like all other human mortals, he sometimes erred, it was from mistaken judgment, and not from a design to do wrong, for Mr. Ross is unquestionably a gentleman and a scholar."[7] The existence of a dozen letters from William to close friend, Henry Adams of Laurel, provided additional insight. In 1856, William admitted that, "I am so deaf that I do not like to go anywhere much."[8] He is very sensitive towards a misunderstanding with Adams, "When ever you and your family falter in your friendship towards me and mine, I will no longer believe there is any true and disinterested friendship in this world. Your having supported Capt. Phillips at the late election is a further proof of your friendship towards me, and I shall appreciate the act as long as I live."[9]

A large family, plus new trends and construction techniques may have encouraged Ross to remodel John Tennent's earlier vernacular house design into a more modern structure. This massive construction effort spanned several years with Ross's intimate involvement. Work began after the completion of his term as governor, and continued until October 1860 when he invited friends to visit his new "cottage" on the eve of a life changing event, the Civil War.

Southern sympathies and increasing personal stress prompted Ross to spend considerable time in Europe to avoid arrest during the War. Research has yet to determine exactly where William Ross lived during his sojourn there. We only know that he resided on an estate located just outside the city of Birmingham, England. After the War, Ross returned to Seaford with John Boswell who was the gardener on the English estate where Ross lived. The two had become good friends over the years. Ross offered him employment as his farm manager, and the opportunity to move his family to America.

William, his son James, and grandson Brooks continued to spend his time with the property's improvement and farming until 1886. At this time, seeking medical advice, Ross moved to his daughter Sallie's Philadelphia home where he could have the attention of her husband, Dr. S.R. Skillern. William Henry Harrison Ross died on June 30, 1887 at the age of seventy-three, and was buried in Seaford, Delaware.

CHAPTER 5 – POLITICS

"While young in years, he brought with him to the office qualifications and attainments that eminently fitted him for the place. He possessed strong ability and was a man of extensive reading."
Biographic and Geographic History of the State of Delawar,e J. M. Runk.

Military involvement and the political principles of the Democratic Party provided great interest for William Ross beginning at an early age. William never served in the State's General Assembly, but he was a candidate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1844, 1848, 1856, and 1860. In 1846, at age thirty-two he was elected captain of a local cavalry unit, which disbanded at the close of the Mexican War in 1849. During that same year his name headed a petition to the State Legislature that "protests and remonstrates against any Law being passed abolishing slavery in the State of Delaware."[1]

It was during this time that William was convinced by numerous friends to run for political office. The Democratic Party selected him as their candidate for governor. With Wilmington architect and businessman, George Read Riddle as his congressional running mate, the Democrats heralded their campaign with the slogan, "Ross-Riddle-Reform."

During the antebellum period, Delaware's political parties were in a state of change. The election of 1850 was unusual due to a three-way split; Democrat, Whig, and Temperance Parties. A September issue of the *Delaware State Journal*, reported that "the Locofocos nominated, at the Convention in Milford on Thursday last, [are] George Read Riddle, for Congress, and William H. Ross for Governor. Ross, Riddle and Reform. These are sign, countersign and watchword of the Democracy for the coming campaign, and by them they expect to sweep everything before them."[2] The twentieth century holds no monopoly on slanderous newspaper articles during an election campaign. Two weeks prior to the 1850 election, the *Delaware Journal* ran an article on Colonel Ross. They bluntly stated that this locofoco candidate for Governor was "aristocratic, proud and overbearing in his demeanor towards his equals and inferiors, while to his superiors, he is servile, humble and houndish. He is one of the most unpopular men in his own neighborhood."[3] The article closes by accusing Ross of keeping a county store where he sold "rot-gut whiskey at ten cents a quart."[4] In the following weeks issue, an apologetic retraction is published. Apparently, the paper had received a letter denouncing all of the above accusations. The Editor felt "sorry that we were led into error by putting faith in anonymous communications and…do not wish to wound the feelings of anyone."[5]

When the ballots were counted, William Ross won by the narrowest margin of votes in the State's history, only twenty-two. When combining votes for Whig candidate, Peter Causey, and Temperance candidate, Thomas Lockwood, the total votes against Ross were actually more than those in his favor. At age thirty-six, Ross was now the youngest man to serve as governor in the State of Delaware. This was also the first time in many years that the Democrats had total control of the State government.

After Ross' political victory, the January issue of the *Delaware State Journal*, anticipated the delivery of his Governor's message with a certain sarcasm, "We will at any rate hope for the best, until we are unfortunately convinced to the contrary by the acts of the party in power."[6] Several weeks later, the Whig Editor, still apparently bitter over the election results, wrote, "He asks permission to thank the people of Delaware for the confidence exhibited towards him in electing him to the honorable post of the Chief

Executive Magistrate...We think therefore that his excellency need not plume himself so 'sustentatiously' on honors that he only acquired by accident."[7]

Prior to Ross's election, the necessity of a new State Constitution was vocally advocated by the general public. Major revisions were proposed including the election of the judiciary, suffrage, increased representation for New Castle County, and the abolition of slavery. During Ross's administration, serious conflict arose during the State Constitutional Convention of 1853. These proposals were defeated by a vote of almost two to one. Probably the greatest contributor to its defeat was the inequality of county representation. According to upstate Legislator James Bayard, "I will oppose your Constitution because you deny that equal justice to the people of New Castle County, which is all they ask."[8]

Beginning his third year in office, Ross's Governor's Message painted a rosy picture of life in the United States. He began by stating, "It is a source of unmingled satisfaction that I am again permitted to congratulate you, not only upon the continued welfare of the State of Delaware, but also upon the increased prosperity of the Federal Union. Peace and plenty smile throughout our enlarged territories; order tranquillity and contentment, characterize the separate communities of the Republic. The voice of internal discord, recently so ominous of disruption, no longer jars the general harmony of our happy system; and the seeming clashes of opinion and conflict of views engendered by a presidential election have subsided into an universal acquiescence and satisfaction in the result. Good government, adherence to the great principles of international law, the extraordinary progress of our industry, the useful inventions and productive improvements of that mechanical skill which has ever distinguished the American people, together with a general and steady advance in scientific attainments and literary culture, have combined to elevate us in the scale of nations and in the estimation of the world, and we may yet trust, notwithstanding the apparently retrogressive tendency of free principles from the advance of absolutism, that our tried and trusted spirit of civil liberty, teaching by the silent by cogent persuasion of example, may ere long reform the oppressors, or regenerate the oppressed in all portions of the habitable world."[9]

Ross's positive view of the Nation quickly expanded into similar optimism for the State. "Not unhappily confined in territory, we possess, within our own narrow boundaries, all the essential elements necessary to provide for the interests, and secure the welfare of our community. Enjoying a remarkable fruitful soil and genial climate, - happy in a most fortunate geographical position, with an energetic, industrious and highly intelligent population; endowed with an ample fund for the promotion and universal diffusion of the benefits of education; possessing sufficient means, if economically administered, for the support of government without resort to taxation, except for local objects; having throughout, an entire identity of popular interests; free from all sectional disturbances; with a simple and well settled State policy, undisturbed by conflicting views and safe from the interference of rash experiment, Delaware ought to present to the associated members of the Union, both in her institutions of government, and the corresponding prosperity and character of her citizens, the perfect example of a model Republic."[10] Unfortunately, this serenity would not last much longer.

CHAPTER 6 - SLAVERY

Sussex County Delaware, *"the northernmost county in Mississippi."*
Slavery and Freedom in Delaware, 1639-1865, William Williams.

There are some aspects of the past that make us uncomfortable. They demonstrate a bias in understanding our local and regional history. Slavery was rationalized legally and morally and became a system of inherited servitude for African-Americans. The possession of slaves was a cultural heritage that had been passed down to William Ross through many generations. In addition to being a labor force, the ownership of slaves provided social standing in the community. Slaves became status symbols for their owners since their purchase cost more than hiring either white or black indentured servants or laborers. This fact can be observed in the County Assessment Records where human chattel is grouped with property, livestock, and luxury items (i.e. silver plate). Property rights extended to all the assessment categories, thus allowing an owner to sell, trade, or use his property however he pleased.

The Assessment Records for Little Creek Hundred during 1840 show William Ross owning a negro woman, Hanner age twenty-eight, and a seven year old boy named Perry. William was also assessed for a cow, a sow, and 12 ounces of silver plate. Four years later, these records show him in possession of five Negroes: Zachariah, age thirty-five; Jerimiah, age twenty-three; Benjamin, two; and Harriet, thirty-one with an infant. Zachariah was valued at $100, the same amount as William's pair of black horses. Today it is seemingly incomprehensible that a human life had a value equal or less than ones livestock. Within another four years, William was master of twelve slaves, and by 1852, he was assessed for his maximum number, fourteen slaves along with "1 doz. table spoons & 1 1/2 doz. teaspoons."[1] William's father had owned a slave man named "Zach" (Zachariah) since 1828. After Caleb's death, the Assessment showed that

William now owned a slave by that name. This family connection was probably the reason that William continued to keep Zach until 1860, even though the records show him to be afflicted or infirm, and having no monetary assessment value.

Another interesting fact has surfaced to enlighten our knowledge of Ross's involvement with his slaves. In the baptismal records of St. Luke's Episcopal Church for 1850 and 1854, there are two instances where Ross children are baptised into the Church. On the same respective dates the following entry lists "Joseph Tindal, coloured (sic)" and"Samuel Spry" as also being baptised, and the note that they belonged to William Ross. This is a previously unnoticed situation in owner/slave relationships.

In Delaware it took an act of Legislature to move slaves into or out of the State. Many owners not only had to deal with controlling the work of field and house slaves while keeping the farm in operation, but they also had to deal with runaways. A single document exists to indicate William's reaction to dealing with the problem of runaway slaves. On September 8, 1857, he wrote a letter to Judge Edward Wootten on behalf of twenty-nine of his neighbors. A slave belonging to William Cannon had runaway twice and kept the neighborhood "in a state of excitement by parties of men riding in search of him."[2] Ross sought a punishment that would "afford a wholesome and salutary example to our slaves," and thus requested special permission to sell this "very bad boy" out of the State.

The Hagley Museum houses the only remaining Ross farm account book. This book provided a glimpse into Ross's financial dealings from 1846 through 1887. Most money lent to friends and neighbors was repaid by cash or check, but there were several instances where payment came through barter or trade. Horses, cows, oxen, barrels of whiskey, roof shingles, and a slave girl, are some of the items that Ross accepted as payment for outstanding debts. On

January 21, 1856, the trio of Levin Allen, Joseph Allen, and Perry Darby borrowed $1,261.84, from William Ross. By the following January, only $76.84 had been repaid in cash. The entry for March 28, 1857 stated that a payment was made "By negro girl (Amey)" valued at $300.00.[3] Amey's name is reflected in Ross's 1860 Assessment. The impending war appears to have reduced the value of slaves since Amey's worth had been reduced to $90.00.

On the eve of the Civil War, slavery in Delaware was largely confined to the western part of Sussex County. This placed Ross at the epicenter of this institution since he owned the greatest number of slaves in the area. At this time the total population of Sussex County was 29,509, with the slave population totaling 1,195. Slaves comprised less than 2% of the State's total population. Considering that the black population had dramatically decreased from a three free to one slave ratio, it is a "wonder that Delaware had not completely abolished slavery before the Civil War."[4] [See Appendix #6]

By the close of the War, the 1864 Assessments showed a tremendous decline in slave owners and slaves. It is necessary to remember that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation only freed the slaves in States that were in rebellion. This did not include Delaware. Thirty-seven slave owners now held only eighty-eight slaves, consisting of thirty-two males, and fifty-seven females. William Still noted, "At the time of the emancipation amendment to the Constitution there were few slaves in the hundred, and they were mostly engaged in domestic occupations."[5] The figures in Appendix # 7 seem to support this statement, since the greater number of females indicates that these slaves were probably house servants rather than field help. Finally, in this Assessment, the date "1866" and "deduct slaves" was penciled in after the entry of each slave owner.

By the 1864 Assessment, William Ross was no longer a slave owner. His property assessment included three horses, two cows, one sow pig, two shoats, three ounces of silverplate, and 850 acres of land. The free blacks residing in Northwest Fork Hundred now included Zacariah and Denis Ross, the two oldest slaves that Ross previously owned. The whereabouts of the remaining twelve slaves is unknown. It is possible that they relocated to another town or left the State entirely. We will never know who or what influenced William Ross's decision to move, sell, or free his slaves especially since he was out of the country during that final year of the Civil War. [See Appendix #8 & 9]

CHAPTER 7 - THE CIVIL WAR

"In Delaware, the good sense and patriotism of the people have triumphed over the schemes of traitors." *History of Delaware*, J. Thomas Scharf.

Life in Delaware moved at a rather slow, quiet pace prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the War Between the States. Delaware was in a unique position geographically, socially, and politically. Her northern towns were tied to the surrounding industrial expansion occurring in Pennsylvania and New York. The southern farming communities were linked to the agricultural traditions of the South. Unfortunately, Sussex County's agricultural, slave holding, southern way-of-life would soon clash with the northern entrepreneurial spirit. Political differences would quickly alter this "model" society.

"Lively times ahead" cried the *Smyrna Times* on May 3, 1860. The transformation of the upper South had been well under way before the beginning of the Civil War. Slavery in Maryland and Delaware had been virtually abolished since the first federal census of 1790. "Although there were 587 slaveholders in Delaware in 1860, no one in the State held 20 slaves and only 25 persons held 10 or more slaves."[1] William Ross owned the second largest number of slaves. Assessment records provide the names and value of those ten men and four women. Slave labor was certainly at a minimum in Delaware, but it was part of a life style that slave owners saw no reason to change. Many Sussex County families traced their heritage to Maryland and Virginia locales, and they brought their traditions and slaves with them to Delaware. William Ross belonged to this category, and his personal and political views soon placed him in a precarious position.

In the widening breech between Northern and Southern beliefs, "We need not say the rock of offense is the slavery question."[2] Although the war did not begin over this question, its presence in many States provided the answer as to where they stood. As conflicting views intensified and States began their secession from the Union, many on the

Eastern Shore thought that Maryland would secede, followed by Delaware. "The secession feeling is produced by Southern pride - not from any interest or advantage that can be derived from it. We have always been classed with the South from the fact that slavery is one of our institutions. Hence the Southern sympathy...almost the entire interest of Delaware is with the North. From all parts of the State we hear expressions of devotion to the Union. Therefore, unless secession comes nearer our doors than it is at present we are for the Union. Much depends upon Maryland," declared the *Smyrna Times.*[3]

As a whole, the people of Delaware were opposed to dissolution of the Union, but a large minority would stand with the South if the Union were dissolved. Although the Mason-Dixon Line marked the physical boundary between Yankee North and Dixie South, the mental separation was far less defined. As Border States, Maryland and Delaware showed traits of both. This pro-southern sentiment was fairly strong in the rural areas of Sussex County.

On April 17, 1861, Delaware's Ex-Governor William Ross wrote a personal letter to Maryland Governor William Hicks expressing his fear of secession and civil war. "The Republican Party mean a cruel war with the South, for the express purpose of creating Negro insurrection and the liberation of all our slaves, 'What should be the course of Maryland and little Delaware?' As to the pretended offer of protection to our slaves made by some of the people in the North, it is the kind of protection which the Wolf gives to the Lamb. I am one among the largest slaveholders in this state, and I feel a lively interest in this matter. This civil war is about to work my ruin, I fear, for some years past I have been investing nearly all my means in Virginia turnpike and Missouri state bonds; they will become worthless, if Negroes have to go next."[4] One day later, the *Smyrna Times* expounded, "Civil War, that most horrible of all Wars, is now fully inaugurated. When it will end, God only knows."[5]

After the surrender at Fort Sumter in April 1861, many pro-secessionists and equally enthusiastic Unionists showed their loyalties in different ways. The Seaford community was torn in their sympathies. During a local meeting resolutions were adopted stating that Seaford's citizens were "declaring strongly for the Union, and offering to devote their time, money, and lives in the cause of their country."[6] Caleb Layton, a prominent Sussex County Republican expounded that "Sussex County is sound to the core...We give secession and secessionists no quarter in this county and feel entirely competent to take care of them."[7] Unionists were quick to believe that all southern sympathizers were traitors. Newspapers shouted "Treason in Delaware. There is a nest of traitors at Seaford in this State, and another at Willow Grove. Let them, be watched closely, if necessary to the safety and quiet of the State, let them be wiped out. This is no time for trifling."[8] At the same time, other Seaford citizens jubilantly fired several guns "in honor of their country's disgrace."[9]

Military Home Guard units had previously been formed throughout the State. Governor Burton was placed in a difficult position. It was generally believed that prominent Democrats including former Governor Ross heavily influenced him in political matters. Governor Burton stood for the Union, but his Democratic friends continued to push their points of view. Through much confusion, Burton sent conflicting orders to the militia regarding whom might hold arms. Ross praised his decisions remarking, "I hope you will remain firm and not commit our State further in support of the Black republican war policy. I will die a thousand deaths rather than make war upon our brethren in Virginia."[10]

But life was still changing. By October, Union troops began removing arms from several Sussex County Home Guard units. On the twentieth of that month, three hundred Union soldiers disembarked from the steamer *Balloon* at Seaford and arrested Captain Martin. The *Georgetown Messenger* left no doubt regarding the treatment of those with southern tendencies. "We notice that numerous arrests are being made in the loyal States of persons who are detected in furnishing aid or information to the rebels. That is right. If persons are traitors, let them go and stay with those who are engaged in the rebellion."[11]

Throughout the War illicit trade flourished on the Chesapeake Bay and the main tributaries that extended into Sussex County. This practice was closely watched on Seaford's Nanticoke River at local and federal levels. New York's customhouse collector complained to Treasury Secretary, Salmon Chase, that "it is a matter of notoriety that articles of all kinds are constantly transmitted by way of Delaware and Maryland into eastern Virginia."[12] Local newspapers provided several of these accounts. "In August, Dr. Jonas, Inspector of Customs at Seaford, seized several hundred rubber overcoats and twenty compasses, which had been sent from Baltimore to be shipped South by way of Salisbury, Maryland. They were confiscated and sold in Wilmington in November 1861."[13] "The Sussex *Messenger*, in noticing the fact that two wagon loads of arms had been removed from Georgetown to Seaford, to equip a military company, suggests that arms should not be placed where they might in, certain emergencies, be made to further the cause of traitors - it being currently reported that the persons comprising said company are in favor of secession."[14] It was rumored that these arms were moved at the request of William Ross.

"We learn that Delaware has furnished a few of her citizens as recruits for Jeff Davis' army. Two or three have gone from the vicinity of Seaford and Laurel."[15] Included in this group were the sons of several prominent Delaware Democrats. Even though he was a staunch Southern sympathizer, William Ross wasn't fully in favor of his son Caleb's enlistment in the 9th Virginia Cavalry in June 1861. Ross's opinions began to make life in Delaware very uncomfortable. Within a month he left for Europe. Although there is no physical evidence of this, local gossip reported that the purpose of this trip was to confer with Confederate agents in London and Paris. The Confederate government was known to send representatives abroad to help foster commercial relations, arrange for financial assistance, and negotiate for recognition by European governments. The local newspapers were eager to report Ross's departure, with their usual editorial comment. "Left the State - Ex-Governor Ross has gone to Europe. It is said that his transactions were of such a nature as to render his arrest, on the charge of treason, very probable and thence his visit. This suspicion is based on the fact that the schooner Henry Wolf, belonging to John Ponder, conveyed several boxes of arms from Philadelphia to Milford, whence they were carried to the residence of Mr. Ross and from thence to the traitors in Maryland, or Virginia. One of the officers of the cutter *Dobbin* boarded the schooner, but he was so short sighted as to overlook the boxes. For this he should be reprimanded, as it furnishes ground to suspect loyalty, or efficiency. Ex-Gov. Ross, also, took several boxes of guns from Georgetown, and we suggest that the authorities shall look after them. Other men may be implicated, and they should be brought to justice."[16] Unfortunately, during Ross's European sojourn, his son Caleb contracted typhoid and died in Virginia only three months after he enlisted. The Ross home was also reportedly raided by Federal troops during William's absence that October.

One year later, in June 1862, Ross returned from Europe. During a Democratic meeting in Georgetown in August he again emphasized his opposition to Lincoln's plan to abolish slavery in the Border States. At the meeting's conclusion, it was resolved that "the relation of master and slave continue in the future as it has in the past."[17] At this time, "more than 90% of Black Delawareans were free."[18] Delaware's percentage of free blacks was higher than in any other southern State. "It is ironic that Delaware, with its few slaves, many free blacks, and its core of active abolitionists, was among the very last States to end slavery; and the end came, not as the product of the State's own action, but rather through the adoption of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, an amendment that Delaware refused to ratify.[19]

As the war continued, Sussex County remained under suspicion. In January 1863, Thomas Rodney, collector of the Port of Wilmington wrote, "This Department also has information that most of the contraband goods, reaching the Maryland peninsula, passes on the Delaware Railroad, via Bridgeville, Seaford, Laurel and Salisbury. You will use all diligence to prevent such contraband trade."[20] The southern terminal of Delaware's railroad was Salisbury, Maryland, which was a "hub of illegal trafficking by secessionists."[21] There were claims that arms were shipped from Philadelphia in bags of wheat to Seaford and Salisbury, then to Accomac, Virginia and then to confederate troops. Ross's name continued to be whispered in connection with this smuggling of goods and men.

On January 28, 1863, Ross was summoned as a principle witness before a special General Assembly committee. This investigation surrounded two issues. First, "the invasion of the State during the years 1861 and 1862 . . . by the Maryland Home Guard, and the disarming of all the volunteers companies of the State which were commanded by Democrats, while all the volunteer companies which were commanded by Republicans were permitted to retain possession of their arms,"[22] and secondly the involvement of Federal troops during the previous years election.

Federal troops under the command of Major General Wool had arrived at Seaford in November 1862. They arrived from Fort McHenry by two steamboats and one gunboat with 200 cavalrymen and horses, and 200 infantrymen. The Maryland Home Guard, under Colonel Wallace, arrived by railroad. Their headquarters were established at Coulborn's Hotel. A group of men, including William Ross, attempted to meet with the General, but they were refused admission. At the Seaford polls about sixty soldiers were stationed thirty yards from Seaford's election polls, including a dozen mounted cavalry with drawn sabers located on each side of the voting window. The public was forced to walk down this alley to vote.

The investigation established that Governor Burton had the right to request protection for the State against domestic violence, but he testified that he never applied for troops to be sent. Later testimony by then Governor William Cannon established that Cannon and George Fisher were the guilty agents of the Republican Party. Cannon had heard rumors of Maryland men who would deter Union men from voting. He said that "all the Union men in the County with whom I conversed deemed it advisable to request troops to ensure a fair election."[23]

Two months after his testimony, Ross again felt forced to leave his Delaware home. It appeared that his decision to leave the country was a wise one. At this time northern agents and military leaders began to make an example of leading southern supporters through arrest and imprisonment at Fort Delaware. In May 1863, six prominent Seafordians were arrested for alleged smuggling. Although they were quickly released, it is probable that Ross would have been included in this group if he had remained in the States.

From this time until the conclusion of the war, Ross remained on an estate outside of Birmingham, England. During his self-imposed exile, he wrote the following sentiments to his Seaford neighbor, Isaac Giles, "I deplore the loss of that form of government which made us great and happy. Indeed the northern people...will find as the Romans did that the Revolution has given them a master. It is that fact which caused me to lose all hope for the future." In further narrative, Ross addresses the reason behind his decision to leave Delaware, and his frustration with the course of events. "I have been fearful of compromising my friends, not that I am guilty of any act against the government of the U.S. but I am considered to entertain opinions which are pronounced by some people as disloyal. For that reason I remain out of the country, hoping the American people may some day return to their reason and I may return in safety to spend the remainder of my days in a country ruined by the madness and fanaticism of its own people."[24]

Although Delaware was left unscarred by battle, the Civil War left its legacy on the people. When William Ross finally returned to his home and family in Seaford, he found a way of life greatly changed from that previously enjoyed. Having invested heavily in Border State bonds before the war, Ross lamented the fact that he now held "$62,000 of such securities which before the war were worth very nearly par which I now consider worthless."[25] With quiet determination, Ross began to adjust.

The world of agriculture still turned with the seasons. Although slave labor was gone, Ross possibly hired some of the same African-American individuals that had earlier worked his land. His slave quarter located next to the Mansion was moved to the back of the property to provided tenant housing. "Foreseeing the great future importance of fruit culture in this county he was one of the first to plant extensive orchards and set out large fields of small fruits, which he successfully cultivated as long as he remained upon the farm."[26] The Civil War had provided both an end and a beginning to a way of life that continued to survive and adapt in "little Delaware."

CHAPTER 8 - CALEB ROSS AND THE CIVIL WAR

"Caleb Ross, Brother of George, died in the Confederate Service at Big Spring, VA Sept. 17th 1861 aged 20 years & 18 days."
Tombstone in St. Luke's Episcopal Church cemetery, Seaford, Delaware.

Caleb (named after his grandfather) was William and Elizabeth's eldest son, born August 31, 1841. [See Appendix # 10] Nothing is known of his childhood. As the son of a governor, and a staunch southern sympathizer, Caleb was probably very aware of the growing conflicting view surrounding the slavery issue. Life in Seaford had been relatively routine as the Ross children grew up. The numerous years of house construction were finally coming to an end. But just as the Ross's were inviting friends to visit their new home, the Civil War cast its dark shadow over the household. Now a sense of duty and excitement stirred Caleb's decision to join the Southern cause.

In a letter dated May 23, 1861, former Governor Ross informed his friend, Judge Edward Wootten that his son and three other young men had gone to Baltimore to enlist. "Of course I shall be charged with having sent him and every other young man who may leave the county," he declared. "For that reason I had better leave the country for a while."[1] Eight months after Virginia seceded from the Union, the 9th Virginia Cavalry Co. H began enlisting volunteers on June 10, 1861. On June 28, 1861 Caleb enlisted at Ashland, Virginia in Johnson's Regiment. Captain William H.F. Lee, the nephew of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, commanded Caleb's unit, known as the Virginia Rangers. Company enlistment records show that most of these men were either farmers or young enough to not yet have chosen an occupation. Their average age was 25.85 years with an average height of five feet, nine and one eighth inches tall.

In less than a month, Caleb was listed in the Company's Muster Rolls as "sick in hospital." He died of typhoid fever on September 17, 1861 in the Big Springs, Virginia hospital. After his death, Captain Beverly B. Douglas of the Virginia Rangers provided a list of Caleb's personal effects. The list included the following items: "1 Double cased gold watch; 1 gold breast chain; 1 old six shooter; 1 Bowie knife; 1 Powder flask; 1/2 lb. powder; 2 pd. Balls; 1 box caps; 2 pr. Boots; 1 felt Hat; 1 Forage Cap; 2 shirts; 1 under shirt; 6 linen collars; 4 pr. socks; 1 Buckskin sabre belt; 1 Have lock, 1 Bridle; 1 seal ring; 1 plain gold ring; 1 leather purse; 1 pocket comb; $36 in Gold; $5 Wheeling & a $2 note."[2]

How devastating it must have been for Elizabeth to have to send word to her husband in England telling him of their eldest son's death. After the close of the war, William's personal servant retrieved Caleb's body from Virginia. Caleb was reburied in the graveyard of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seaford, Delaware. A sprig of yew was placed on the casket and later planted on the grave. This yew flourished and still watches over the grave today.

CHAPTER 9 - E.C. DAVIS

Life continued in Seaford, Delaware. William and his son James took advantage of changing commodity markets and the availability of railroad transportation for their produce. After William's death in 1887, James and his son Brooks continued with the business now known as "The Evergreens." As the twentieth century began, the business of agriculture moved from single horsepower to machinery. Brooks Ross liked to do things in a big way, and was quick to mechanize his farm operations with massive threshing machines. Unfortunately, he soon became financially over extended. On December 3, 1924, after a series of setbacks, the Ross family was forced to sell their plantation at auction. It was purchased by The Sussex Investment Company. Within two years, George ("Hotsie") Davis purchased it from the Investment Company. George and his brother Edward Charles ("E.C.") remember traveling from Laurel to pick strawberries and peaches on the Ross farm when they were younger.

Initially, the farm (then renamed "Herring Run Farm") was managed by foreman George Straub. Herds of beef cattle, along with corn and bean crops, were raised on the property. The Davis brothers would occasionally visit, but it wasn't until the late 1930's that Judge Hotsie Davis resided on the property on a more regular basis. He is locally remembered as a nice man with a good personality.

E.C. attended Delaware College (now the University of Delaware) and was a graduate of their first Civil Engineering Class in 1905. During his college years, E.C. became close friends with his roommate John Frazier. E.C. spent much time with this wealthy New England family, so much so that when the elder, Mr. Frazier died, he left half his construction company to his son and half to E.C. Davis. Then Frazier and Davis continued this successful engineering operation based in St. Louis, Missouri. Their work included many major dams, bridges, and roads across the country.

In 1936, Hotsie conveyed the property to his brother, and moved to Hood River, Oregon. E.C. then took up residence at the Seaford farm. He had previously married Eva Brown, and they had a son Edward C. Davis, Jr. and daughter Sarah Elizabeth. Sarah had a reputation as a "wild child" in the Seaford neighborhood. Tragically, her first husband died in a plane crash while they were on their honeymoon. This tragedy effected Sarah's mother so much that she committed suicide. Sarah's second marriage was to a DuPont Company engineer, Herman Schneider. Sarah and her husband resided in the Victorian home on property previously built by James Ross. As time passed, the sons of Frazier and Davis became involved with their father's business. They gradually assumed more and more of the operations leaving the elder Frazier and Davis feeling pushed out of the operation. This caused intensive family friction and negatively effected their future working and personal relationship.

E.C. was known for emphatically stating, "Business is business." He was very opinionated and wanted to make sure that he received maximum value in all business transactions. E.C. died in 1959. As a widower, his will set up funds for his daughter, Sarah, and his sister, Ida. He had previously set up a trust fund for his son. E.C. bequeathed the 448-acre farm to the Delaware Trust Company specifying that the income from the trust be used for student scholarships in the College of Civil Engineering. [See Appendix #11 & #12]

For the next seventeen years a long line of tenant renters called the Herring Run/Ross Farm home. Finally, in 1976, the Seaford Historical Society purchased the house and eleven acres of land.

CHAPTER 10 - THE SEAFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Seaford Historical Society was formed by a group of concerned and foresighted citizens on May 8, 1972 after the Seaford *Leader* reported, "During the past months and years, people have spasmodically expressed interest in starting an historical society in Seaford." The following week twenty-five individuals met in the city building and elected Fred Miles president of the new Society. Their purpose was (and is) "to collect and maintain facts and artifacts of a historical nature pertaining to Seaford and the immediate area."

Within the next four years, the members recognized the historical importance of the rapidly deteriorating Ross Mansion. At this time, another issue of the *Leader* noted that "The Ross Mansion today would be a perfect spot to film a horror movie, with vacant rooms shuttered off against the sunlight and the wind howling through its huge spaces." (March 7, 1977) The Seaford Historical Society's mission became the seemingly impossible task of raising $65,000 to purchase the Ross Mansion as a bicentennial project. With State and County support and local fund raising, this goal was achieved. In 1977, the Mansion was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and restoration work began in earnest.

The support of local community groups, such as the Kiwanis and Acorn Club, saw specific restoration projects inside the house reach completion. Further restoration efforts were able to take a gigantic leap forward in 1989 when the Society was the beneficiary of the estate of founding members William and Gertrude Jester. Through their generous donation the kitchen and second floor hallways were restored, as well as stabilization of the stable.

In 1993, the society was able to square off the property boundaries by purchasing an additional eight acres of land. The following year saw an exciting discovery brought to light. A ramshackle house on the edge of the nearby woods was observed to contain log walls under its deteriorating lathe and plaster. Continued research by Historical Society members and the University of Delaware's Center for Historic Architecture determined that this was the only documented log slave quarter remaining in Delaware. The structure was relocated to its original 1860's location just fifty-nine feet east of the Mansion house. Restoration efforts were funded through the State's 21st Century Community Revitalization Fund.

This fund also helped to support restoration of the nineteenth century Granary and Stable, and the re-location and restoration of the Gate House, Smoke House, and two corncribs. With the start of the twenty-first century, the Society has received the Ham House once owned by Governor Cannon of Bridgeville. It has joined the plantation complex which now totals seven buildings on twenty acres, as compared to the original sixteen outbuildings on 1,398 acres which were once a functioning, essential part of everyday life on the Governor Ross Plantation. [See Appendix #13]

SECTION II

The Land And The Buildings

CHAPTER 11 - AGRICULTURE

"Men pursue different objects as their inclinations and fancies lead them; but of all the arts, agriculture, when properly conducted is one of the most useful, profitable, pleasing, rational and healthful amusements in life" *The Practical Farmer*, John Spurrier.

In the seventeenth century, Captain John Smith said of Delmarva, "Heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation."[1] Early settlers recognized that Delmarva's qualities included a moderate climate, level land, and ease of farming. Located between the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays, Delaware's weather combined a good mixture of North and South providing a lengthy growing season. Equally important was the availability of good soil. According to historian Richie Garrison, "Dirt matters." The soil type surrounding the Seaford area and the Tennent-Ross Plantation is known as Evesboro-Rumford Association. It is the most extensive soil association in the county, characterized by being excessively drained with rapidly permeable subsoil of sand to sandy loam. The landscape is nearly level or gently sloping. This soil combination encourages the cultivation of deep-rooted crops due to its ability to hold moisture. All of these factors helped to encourage economic growth in the area.

There are no surviving documents to enlighten us about John Tennent's agricultural practices. Documents show that a large quantity of tobacco was grown in the area during the late eighteenth century. Did Tennent's large number of slaves indicate that he grew tobacco due to the labor-intensive nature of the crop? His only reference to the land was that it was "poor." By the 1830's, Delaware's soils were quite depleted after years of constant over use. In 1836, Governor Comegys urged the General Assembly to requisition funds for a State geological survey, which took five years to complete. This information proved to be invaluable to farmers, in that it recognized the need for adding organic matter (i.e. fertilizer) to the soil, and urged soil testing.

Apparently William Ross concurred with these findings. As early as 1854, he was dealing in a relatively new type of fertilizer known as guano (solidified bird droppings gathered from South American sea cliffs). Ross informed, Henry Adams, "I can not afford to sell my quano at

Laurel for much less than the price at which it is offered . . . It is a business that I wish to follow, as it requires considerable capital and as the profit is small there is little or no opposition. I hope you will let me furnish you with four or five tons."[2] It was further reported of Ross that when he "took charge of the property it consisted of 1,000 acres of worn out land. Intelligent care and liberal management improved and enriched the soil, increasing the yield of wheat from 5 to 30 bushels, and of corn from 10 to 50 bushels per acre."[3]

In his application to the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company in 1851, William Ross provided an extensive list of agricultural implements and crop yields. These items included a reaper, wheat thrasher and horse power, two fans, 20 plows (specifically including three No. 5 1/2 Prouty and two No. 22 Minor Hortons), six cultivators, five spike harrows, 7 fluke harrows, "and every other farming implement and tool in the same proportion."[4] [See Appendix # 18] Crops included an average of 1,500 bushels of wheat, 2,500 bushels of corn, 1,000 bushels of oats and 1,000 bushels of barley. It is puzzling to see Ross's mention of barley, because his neighbor, Charles Wright, informed the U.S. Commissioner of Patents during the same year that there was "none raised in the county to my knowledge."[5] Charles Wright additionally wrote that, "My neighbor, Governor Ross, has informed me that he has raised more than 1,300 bushels of sugar beet on 1 1/2 acres of his land."[6] As a root crop, sugar beets were often fed to livestock during the winter months along with squash, carrots and pumpkin. William Ross's obituary included the praise that after "having purchased the 'Tennent' farm of several hundred acres near Seaford, he moved there and devoted himself to agricultural pursuits. In the course of a few years by assiduous attention and an intelligent system of farming, the place was improved to such an extent as to become one of the most productive farms in the State."[7]

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a new class of landowner emerged who were referred to as gentlemen agriculturists. They were acquainted with contemporary authors who expounded, "Man was not born merely to eat, drink, sleep, or to spend his time in hunting, shooting, gaming, idleness, dissipation, and sensual gratification's; but to be industrious and useful to society; and ought to leave some record of his actions as a testimonial of his endeavors at least to be useful to the present and future generations."[8] These men were dedicated to stewardship of their land. They were also instrumental in organizing agricultural societies. The State Agricultural Society was started in Dover in 1849 with William Ross as a charter member. Here members could discuss their experiments with the new methodology involved in animal husbandry, land usage, and crop diversification.

Once again, Charles Wright's report included enlightening information about Seaford's agricultural community. "In order to increase the interest in the public mind on the subject of farming in this section of the county, we have established a club, consisting of 12 farmers, who meet together once a month, at the residence of each member by rotation; eat a good dinner; walk over the fields, and talk freely and socially together in regard to the *modus operandi* which each has adopted."[9] In another letter to Henry Adams, Ross explained, "I expect to have several gentlemen at my house (all farmers) and I wish to discuss farming generally. Our farmers club has broken down, but I expect to invite the old members at my house on that day."[10]

The U.S. Census of Delaware Agriculture provided a good source of information on livestock, and individual crops. [See Appendix # 14] It comprised nearly four decades of information about Ross's farm production. Livestock and its improvement were always a topic of great discussion. Horses were probably riding or carriage horses, not draft animals. Ross used his teams of oxen for fieldwork. As a former cavalry officer and foxhunting enthusiast, Ross was always willing to expound on his horses and hounds, and invite friends to join him in the hunt. Foxhunting was another means for mounted gentry to socialize. Another area where Sussex County followed a Southern tradition was the consumption of pork. During the nineteenth century, pork was a more popular meat than beef. Ross emphasized this in his first Insurance Policy when he stated, "I also kill each year over 4000 lb. of pork."[11] In addition, Irish or white potatoes were grown in large amounts for family, servants, and livestock.

The 1850 Agricultural Census showed that only three individuals (out of a total of 259 farm owners included in this Census) attained the highest farm value level of $10,000; William Ross (880 acres total), Charles Wright (357 acres), and Hugh Martin (275 acres). During the next ten years, Wright's farm doubled in value, but Ross's increase was amazingly five-fold to $50,000. Ross's positive influence on the community was greatly respected. "After William Ross, afterward governor of the state, moved near Seaford and began to develop the resources of his farm, and other farmers around in the county who were stimulated by his system of farming, became more and more interested in the matter, the people began to act as well as talk. We venture the opinion here that no man who ever made farming a practical thing, contributed more to the progress and prosperity of the farmers' interests than Governor Ross. I regarded him as a benediction on this line to the county, and perhaps he contributed more in various ways to the building of the [rail]road than any other person."[12] The arrival of the railroad in 1856 rapidly improved agricultural economics in Sussex County. Extending through the middle of his property, Ross conveniently had a "whistle-stop" station that enabled him to get produce on the morning train bound for northern markets. It also enabled him to develop as one of the largest peach growers in Seaford.

After the Civil War and slavery emancipation, Ross's farming practices evolved to include many acres of peach, apple and pear trees since they were a less labor-intensive endeavor. As William grew older, his son James assisted with their agricultural endeavors. "Foreseeing the great future importance of fruit culture in this county he was one of the first to plant extensive orchards and set out large fields of small fruits, which he successfully cultivated as long as he remained upon the farm"[13] now known as “The Evergreens.” Unfortunately, the lucrative peach market was short lived due to a disastrous blight. [See Appendix #15]

When James retired from active business, his son Brooks “carried on one of the most extensive selected seed businesses in this territory.”[14] In 1893, Brooks was a member of the first class to graduate in the Department of Agriculture at Delaware University. He then continued his agricultural education at Cornell University. Returning to Seaford, Brooks recognized the possibilities of fruit growing and began to raise peaches, red raspberries, blackberries and strawberries on the farm. He is credited with shipping the first refrigerated railroad car of fruit to northern markets, and operating a large fruit drying business. [See Appendix #16]

The agricultural scene again changed crops during the twentieth century. Now known as "Herring Run Farm," new owner E.C. Davis planted beans and corn on alternate years during the 1950's. The gradual evolution of this property paralleled Sussex County's economic growth. All of the property owners acquired their land with a goal of eventual prosperity. Their thoughts envisioned a future that was physically and financially comfortable. The decisions and actions of the Tennent, Ross, and Davis families contributed to a lingering, yet recognizable presence on Seaford's landscape.

CHAPTER 12 – THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROAD

"A railroad in Kent and Sussex! What would be the use of it? These counties produced nothing but mosquitoes and bilious fevers."
Slavery, Steamboats & Railroads: The History of 19th Century Seaford, Harold Hancock and Madeline Hite.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, land transportation in downstate Delaware was limited to horseback, carriage, or foot. Due to the notoriously poor conditions of the roads, waterways were used as much as possible. Boats and sail power moved people and produce at a quicker pace. As early as 1825, a stagecoach route of forty-five miles existed between Dover and Seaford. Even though this route carried eight to ten coaches a day, it soon failed to meet the demands of increasing travel. In 1837 a local sea captain was promoting the use of steamboats on the Nanticoke River for more efficient transportation. It was almost 130 miles from Seaford to Norfolk, Virginia. This trip took about sixteen hours by sail, and could be shortened to ten hours by steam. William Ross and a committee of gentlemen from Seaford and Laurel were appointed to investigate the establishment of a steamboat line from Seaford to Baltimore. The ability to effectively move people and produce from place to place soon became a topic of increased discussion.

A new day in transportation was rapidly being sought. During the next decade, proponents of the railroad laid out a route that followed the old stagecoach line. On March 5, 1849, seven businessmen met in Dover to begin planning a railroad to Sussex County. At first, many thought this was an absurd dream. Fortunately, there were men in downstate Delaware with foresight. William Ross and some associates became interested in extending the railroad from Dona Landing near Dover to Seaford, Delaware. One of Ross's greatest achievements was his leadership in helping to establish the Delaware railroad. He pushed to make the vision of a downstate railroad a reality. A local historian regarded Ross "as a benediction on this line to the county, and perhaps he contributed more in various ways to the building of the road than any other one person."[1]

In June of 1853, the *Sussex News* reported "Colonel Johnson passed through our place yesterday on his way down to commence the survey of the line of the Delaware railroad from Governor Ross's cottage, near Seaford, running a straight line to some point near Dover."[2] On August 9, 1854, Ross corresponded with his good friend, Judge Samuel M. Harrington, who was also the President of the Delaware Railroad Company. Ross complains about damages to his farm from construction of the railroad. He had previously given the right-of-way to run the tracks for "more than a half a mile through the most valuable part of my farm." Now piles of dirt created an "eye sore" on his farm and he felt ignored by some of the commissioners in solving this problem.

It took two more years of construction, but finally the long awaited day arrived. The formal opening of the Delaware Railroad occurred on December 11, 1856. Although the weather did not cooperate, two trains of cars carrying stockholders and special guests traveled from Philadelphia and Wilmington to Seaford. At the entrance of the Nanticoke Station cars passed under an arch bearing the mottoes: "These iron bands unite us!" "Delaware shall blossom as the rose!" "The luxuries of earth and ocean," and "Uncle Sam's peach pocket." They were also greeted by a thirteen-gun salute. During an address by Governor Peter Causey he related that now "we can milk a little Sussex cow in our pine woods and serve them (New Castle County residents) with cream for their breakfast."[3]

Daily runs of passenger and freight trains soon launched Sussex County into the nineteenth century at a total cost of $1.1 million, or $15,284 for each of the seventy-five miles of track laid. The social, cultural, and economic impact on Seaford residents was tremendous. The arrival of the railroad was a signal for renewed energy among the people. "Our incredulous citizens, who expected to see a railroad run to 'the moon' almost as soon as to Seaford, can now dismiss their doubts, in the realization of the noble enterprise."[4]

Since the economy of southern Delaware was predominantly agrarian, the advantages provided by the railroad were rapidly observed and taken advantage of by industrious businessmen and agriculturists. "Delaware and the Peninsula is fast becoming the orchard and early fruit and vegetable garden for Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and smaller cities in the Middle and Eastern States. Everything that is raised has the advantage of the best markets of the county, - only a few hours distant by rail. Fruit picked by noon of one day, and placed on board of cars especially built for its transport, smooth running and admirably ventilated, is delivered in New York in time for the next morning's market."[5]

By 1861, a telegraph line was laid parallel to the railroad running from Harrington to Seaford. In 1867 the railroad was extended from Seaford south to the state line with Maryland. By 1880, Seaford was no longer a sleepy little village. With the opening of the railroad it had become a busy station. Now noted as the "largest most prominent point in the southern part of the State. It is now a town of 3,000 people with several churches, hotels, and schools, a national bank and newspaper, and in addition to a large oyster packing business, it has an extensive sash factory and planing mill, and handles large quantities of lime. Ex Governor Ross has a handsome residence and fine farm on the outskirts of the city."[6] A local tongue-in-cheek newspaper article boasted "I expect you have heard of Seaford; I'm most sure you have. It's a big town for its size- -mighty. It's growing…It's fated Seaford is, its got to be a city. Seaford's health- -good; thermometer high- -unpleasant; no mosquitoes- -very pleasant."[7] Apparently this positive view of life in western Sussex appealed to many.

CHAPTER 13 – THE PLANTATION

"Since it was the harvest from the field that provided the capital required to build, modify, or transform a farmhouse, it follows that the fate of a house was critically linked to its fields."
"Eighteenth-Century Field Patterns as Vernacular Art," Stewart McHenry.

The establishment of a family estate was a common ambition of early settlers. "The desire to confer the wealth of one generation on selected beneficiaries of the next was a time-honored custom among country folk in England and much of western Europe."[1] Acquiring land was the first step in this process. The next necessity was a farmer's access to labor. During the 18th century, slaves provided the labor necessary to see a return on one's investment.

Due to the dearth of primary documents and material objects which belonged to either John Tennent I and II, or William Ross, many assumptions about their lives are concluded from the positions of importance they held in the community and the State. History records more of Ross's qualifications than those of the Tennent's, yet we can assume that the demands of their social status influenced the decisions they made surrounding the visual impact their farm had on the surrounding community.

Local culture and custom demanded certain traditions be upheld. People accepted the fact that certain families acquired money, dignity, and political authority as distinguishing factors. As individual wealth began to accumulate, attitudes also changed. Gentlemen became interested in displaying their social eminence before their world, with brick becoming a visually effective tool. As the Federal "Georgian" house plan developed, the "mansion house" emerged on many early deeds. This symmetrical form was accepted as the home of many affluent gentlemen all along the Atlantic coastline, becoming a dominant presence on the land. The 1836 Deed survey of the Tennent property portrayed a stylized two-story house with end chimneys. It is interesting to note that three other comparable "mansions" are located in the neighborhood. [See Appendix #17]

This deed placed the "Mansion" house in the center of area "No. 1." It was common practice for farms to be laid out in relation to the road. Early nineteenth century plantation owners weren't seeking rural seclusion. On the contrary, they saw the necessity of linking their fortunes as directly as possible to convenient markets. At this time, the Tennent house faced the county road leading to Seaford. The physical orientation of the original house and outbuildings remains unclear. A 1944 map of the farm identified several dirt roads accessing the property from the south and east. These were in use since the early 1800's.

The only documentary evidence related to John Tennant's eighteenth century dwelling has recently emerged through a nineteenth-century source. After William Ross inherited the farm he sought to insure his property with the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company. Two insurance applications survive in the Delaware State Archives. The first, dated October 1, 1851, described a dwelling house and farmscape that were entirely different than those of the second application a decade later. We can surmise that the first house belonged to the Tennents, since Ross didn't begin his re-modeling project until 1856. "A dwelling house, part built of brick, 35 feet long by 18 feet wide, two stories high"[2] described the formal main block. Even though the ensuing description elaborated on four additional sections of the dwelling it did not specify how these sections were aligned. The most puzzling addition is a frame, one story section, 28 by 28 feet. This odd dimension would require an internal wall to help support the span. Future archaeology may serve to answer some of these questions. [See Attachments #18 & 19] "By the late 1820's owners as well as builders began to visualize substantial additions and even whole houses in various stepped forms."[3] By comparison with several other Eastern Shore houses, it is possible that the Tennent house was constructed in a linear pattern.

By the end of the eighteenth century, domestic spaces were improved by the insertion of a colonnade or hyphen between the dwelling house and kitchen to provide a protected passageway. Of the sixty-eight individuals in NWFH with an insurance policy through the Kent County Mutual Company, only eight specifically listed kitchens and all were attached to the dwelling by a colonnade. The dimensions and location of the kitchen and colonnade are the only two pieces of the dwelling house that remain consistent in both of Ross's insurance policies.

The second structure mentioned was the "Negro Quarter 24 fts. long by 16 ft wide one story high."[4] Edward Kimber, an eighteenth century traveler described a quarter as a "Number of Huts or Hovels, built some distance from the Mansion House; where the Negroes reside with their wives and Families and cultivate at vacant times the little spots allow'd them."[5] The Ross quarter remained the same size and distance from the dwelling house in both policies. It is entirely possible that John Tennent's slaves originally used the quarter listed in the 1851 policy. In the first policy, Ross crossed out this entry and later added, "In place of No. 2 I have built a large negro Quarter 1 1/2 story high with 4 Rooms, all plastered and a porch extending the whole length. This quarter stands nearly in the same place where the old one stood."[6] This structure was a single pen, hall and parlor log dwelling. The open, cross passage plan provided entrance into the hall directly from the outside. Access to the second floor was gained from a corner winder stair placed to the left of the gable end fireplace.

From 1856 through 1862, only five other Delaware gentlemen insured a "Quarter" in their policies. According to the "Population Schedule of the 8th Census of the U.S. 1860 Slave Schedules," there are seventeen slave owners who provided a separate dwelling for their slaves, with a single individual providing two. No other Insurance maps have been found that shows quarter locations. Unfortunately, we are unable to know whether the Tennent-Ross property was unique in having their quarter only fifty-eight feet from the dwelling house. The quarter was clearly visible from the dwelling house, and its occupants were an integral part of the farmscape. We may only conjecture as to how many of Tennent's twenty-two slaves or Ross's fourteen maintained residence in this structure. Some domestic help may have lived above the kitchen, while field hands may have stayed in barn lofts or other outbuildings.

Beginning with the quarter, all of the farm buildings were described and listed by the distance that they were located from the dwelling house. These measurements allow one to hypothesize about the farmstead plan. In 1850, it included ten buildings whose maximum distance from the first, "Dwelling House," to the last, "Granary and Stables," was 290 feet. This range of buildings appeared to depict a linear pattern instead of a courtyard type of arrangement. Due to the fact that there is a time span of fifteen years from when John Tennent resided on the property to the time of the first Policy, we can not be sure how many of these farm buildings were later constructed by William Ross. Further architectural investigation may resolve numerous questions surrounding the history and appearance of the dwelling house and remaining outbuildings.

Situated close to the main house were several domestic outbuildings. Most important were the smokehouse and dairy. Barns, granaries, and corncribs comprised the key storage facilities for agricultural settings, but a host of other buildings contributed to the operation of a plantation. These all served to provide the appearance of a small village to the casual observer.

The second insurance policy was acquired a decade later. By 1861, the farm showed considerable changes in dwelling house and outbuilding locations. [See Appendix #20 & 21] The distance between the kitchen and quarter remained the only constant between the two farmscapes. The dwelling house expanded westward into a two story, brick structure seventy-eight feet long with cellar below. The framed office may also have been kept from the earlier house. Much of the original structure may have been retained to enable a family of eleven to continue living there during the six years spent re-modeling. The footprint of the first dwelling house was 2,310 square feet, with a total living space of 3,612 square feet. The second dwelling expanded to 3,388 square feet. The living space nearly doubles to 6,776 square feet.

New technology developed during the second half of the nineteenth century which effected social, economic, and architectural changes on the Eastern Shore. These new trends and construction techniques encouraged adaptation of earlier vernacular house designs. Ideas of physical comfort changed along with attitudes about upward mobility. The fact that William Ross was an ex-governor placed certain social, political, and cultural implications on his farmscape. "A man's dwelling at the present day, is not only an index of his wealth, but also of his character. The moment he begins to build, his tact for arrangement, his private feelings, the refinement of his tastes and the peculiarities of his judgment are all laid bare for public inspection and criticism."[7] The construction of his Italian Villa home, referred to in State newspapers as "the Governor's cottage,"[8] was a visual assertion of power, which was very evident on the landscape.

No paper trail of correspondence or drawings exists to help us understand Ross's ideas behind choosing this architectural form. When Ross was Governor, George Read Riddle was Delaware's US Senate representative. It is entirely possible that Ross admired Riddle's Italian Villa Wilmington home, and received assistance in planning his home near Seaford from this professional architect turned politician.

CHAPTER 14 - THE ROSS MANSION

"I expect to finish my new house by the first of October when I wish you and all your family both male and female to pay me a visit."
William Ross to Henry Adams, August 16, 1860.

The Italian or Tuscan villa style became popular in England during the 1820's. The fashion soon spread to America and flourished from about 1835 to 1860. It was derived from the palazzos and villas of Tuscany, and combines many of their features. Italianate was considered an appropriate style for use in rural domestic architecture. During renovation its features could easily fit onto a basically Federal house. These revival styles were often appealing due to their novelty, and the fact that they enabled their owner to show his neighbors how up-to-date he was regarding the latest architectural fashion.

The Italian villa style was first copied from designs in English pattern books published during the early nineteenth century, although builders usually chose ideas from several designs and combined them to suit their needs. Due to its asymmetrical nature, this form was easily adapted to the owner's wishes since rooms could be grouped and sized according to function. It combined the latest technology in terms of heating, ventilation and sanitation, and was thought to "convey at once an expression of beauty arising from a superior comfort or refinement of the mode of living."[1] "The builder's guides all indicate that the main motivation for this architectural style was to create practical houses for prosperous families seeking an ideal domestic life close to nature."[2]

One of the more accomplished practitioners of the style was Richard Upjohn. The Ross Mansion's off-center tower over the entrance to a hall running clear through, and the classical architraves with pediments framing the windows were noted Upjohn techniques. Another prominent proponent of this new style was Alexander Jackson Downing. He emphasized that "a hearty desire to contribute to the improvement of the domestic architecture and the rural taste of our country"[3] was his motive for writing an architectural pattern book. He descriptively elaborated on the beauty and harmony that were just within ones reach. Downing insisted that everyone must naturally strive for these qualities for they would "enlarge the mind, and give new sources of enjoyment."[4] [See Appendix #22]

Ideas of physical comfort were changing along with attitudes about upward mobility. The fact that William Ross was an ex-governor placed certain social, political, and cultural implications on his farmscape. According to architect Samuel Sloan, "A man's dwelling at the present day, is not only an index of his wealth, but also of his character. The moment he begins to build, his tact for arrangement, his private feelings, the refinement of his tastes and the peculiarities of his judgment are all laid bare for public inspection and criticism."[5] The construction of his Italian Villa home, referred to in State newspapers as "the Governor's cottage,"[6] was a visual assertion of power which was very evident on the local landscape.

Known for his education, William Ross must have included architectural pattern books in his extensive library. He quite probably read works by Downing, Upjohn, Sloan or Vaux before beginning his re-modeling project. Calvert Vaux promoted many building projects by stating that they "could be easily executed in the country by a clever carpenter."[7] No paper trail of correspondence or drawings remains to help us understand Ross's ideas behind choosing this architectural form. This massive construction effort spanned several years with his constant involvement.

Ross's only direct reference to renovation of the house was found in a letter to Samuel Harrington, President of the Delaware Railroad, dated September 6, 1856. "I hope you will excuse my absence from the last meeting of the board when I inform you that I am in the midst of my fodder saving, and besides have a gang of carpenters, a brick layer, and painter to look after and provide materials for their work. My whole time is taken up, and will be for two or three weeks to come."[8] It appeared that Ross was intimately involved with the progressing work. It is possible that he fancied himself a "gentleman architect" knowledgeable enough to handle his own building project. Building renovation of this scope required the participation of dozens of people. "All the quarry-workers, lime-burners, brick-makers, lumber merchants, glass-manufacturers, sawyers, masons, stone-cutters, plasterers, carpenters, joiners, tin-men, gas-fitters, plumbers, glaziers, iron-mongers, painters, carvers, gilders, modelers, decorators, architects, live by the constant demand for the exercise of this art of building."[9] It may be assumed that some of Ross's slaves were also involved with the project.

Viewing the property today, one can recognize the inclusion of a multitude of options which the pattern books suggested. The Mansion was built of brick covered with stucco, "which is, when well executed, one of the best materials for cottages or villas,"[10] according to architect A.J. Downing. The tower rose three and a half stories above the ground and included the main entrance. This construction design became a solar chimney used to effect air circulation through the house. Ornate molded tops decorated the five chimneys. Prominent ornamental brackets supported the extended roof design and three Italian balconies. A separate gable front roof additionally covered the tower balcony. A pair of arched windows were placed on both stories of the parlor and tower sections, with triple windows at the dining room. Three single windows illuminated the center family parlor apartment. The secondary arcade front entrance was located to the right of the main doorway, being reached by a series of steps. Four paneled Corinthian columns originally led to the verandah. The characteristic porches or verandahs that surround the house provided a necessary and comfortable appendage to the dwelling. "Verandahs are delightful places on which to spend twilight and moonlight summer evenings, in either promenading or conversation, and the advantages of having them all around the house is considerable, allowing you to choose sun or shade, breeze or shelter from it, as comfort dictates."[11] [See Appendix #23]

New technology is evident both outside and inside these nineteenth century houses. Many of these contemporary designs would have been impractical without the development of improved heating systems and adequate ventilation. Stoves became commonplace, and there was a growing acceptance of indoor plumbing. An interior water-closet, became "a real necessity in a prime house."[12] Also new ideas were being expressed regarding drainage, service, cleanliness, and privacy. Further proof of new technology evident in the Ross mansion is an iron support beam in the north wall of the tower. This feature was quite unusual for residential construction during this time period. The hallmark of the Phoenix Iron Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is still prominently displayed on the beam's surface.

This Italian Villa style "cottage" was unusual in rural NWFH, although comparable structures in this style could be seen in neighboring Delaware and Maryland towns. William Ross was obviously able to create the lasting impression on the landscape that he sought.

Land and its usage were always central to a man's position in life. Upper class Americans in the nineteenth-century considered the countryside picturesque. It "offered visual variety and interest as well as vitality and promise."[13] The secret of success was to make all of these arrangements appear to be as natural as possible. It was essential to organize one's property in an effort to most effectively divide its living and working spaces. Just as it was important to consider how the house appeared when viewed from a distance, it was important to consider how "the distance" appeared when viewed from inside the house. A house like this demanded a considerable extent of ground to promote its picturesque aura. The 1861 Insurance map detailed that the west side of the dwelling was specifically "Lawn-In-Grass" thus affording a delightful scene when viewed from the parlor. Near the house considerable acreage may be devoted to mown lawn "that nearest the house being of course more neatly and more frequently clipped by the style, to accord with the air of elegance and polish always to be observed in the precincts of a handsome dwelling."[14] Most of the farm buildings were relocated several hundred feet east and separated from the dwelling by a large garden plot. [See Appendix # 21 ~~19~~]

The introduction of the Delaware railroad tracks through the middle of Ross's property necessitated a new approach to the mansion. In keeping with the Italian Villa style, the approach was usually by means of curving driveway entering from the side. Downing expressed his attitude of planning thus: "In the present more advanced state of landscape gardening, the formation of the approach has become equally a matter of artistical skill with other details of the art. The house is generally so approached, that the eye shall first meet it in an angular direction, displaying not only the beauty of the architectural facade, but also one of the end elevation, thus giving a more complete idea of the size, the character, or elegance of the building; and instead of leading in a direct line, from the gate to the house, it curves in easy lines through certain portions of the park or lawn, until it reaches that object."[15]

Today one can still observe that William Ross was visually able to create the lasting impression on the landscape that he sought. The splendor of his mansion house remains to radiate across the fields and inform the viewer that someone of importance once created this structure.

CHAPTER 5 - A PATTERNBOOK HOUSE TOUR

The interior of the Ross Mansion readily lends itself to picturesque portrayal through the use of pattern book terminology. The following tour, presented in nineteenth century fashion, is a combination of descriptions gathered from works by A.J. Downing, Calvert Vaux, Samuel Sloan, and Richard Upjohn.

Welcome to the Governor William Ross Mansion:

The conspicuous entrance is approached from a series of three stone steps to a porch landing with one additional step up to the vestibule. The vestibule is floored with a checkerboard pattern of light and dark marble squares. Here one is faced by a grand arched double doorway. The three panel doors are surrounded by eight lights. [See Appendix #24]

Opening the door, we arrive in the entrance hall. This hall runs clear through the building to a second door opening onto the back covered porch. The gracious main stairway is located on the right. Its gracefully turned balustrade terminates in an octagonal urn-shaped burl newel post. Scrolled brackets decorate the wide stair treads.

On the left side of this hall is an elegant parlor or drawing room. The drawing-room is, of course, the finest room in size, aspect, and proportion in the house, being 30 x 17 feet, with a fine semi-hexagon bay, or oriel window, which, projecting boldly, will give three distinct views to a person standing within it. The carved Italian fireplace is flanked by windows opening to the floor providing an entrance to the verandah. The south and west facing windows include the addition of interior louvered box shutters easily made to fold into the window casings. Unity of design is preserved by carrying out the boldness of character in all portions of the room including the introduction of moldings. The 12 foot ceiling exhibits tastefully executed plaster moldings in a double ring around the room. The interior row, using nature for architectural embellishment, is a line of wheat sheaves. Agricultural plenty is repeated by wheat designs in the entrance hall's original wallpaper. Ornate, centrally located plaster ceiling medallions surround the hanging chandeliers in the four principal floor apartments.

Located on the right side of the hall is the family room, 22 x 20 feet, which is a cool, airy apartment, with windows and verandahs on both sides. A fireplace is situated on the interior east wall.

The second hallway communicates with the open air by doorways front and rear opening onto the verandahs. It also contains a narrower servant's staircase to the second story, under which is a descending flight leading to the cellar. The cellar or basement may have accommodated a laundry or storage space in its three rooms. On the sides of the passage are two interior doorways, one leading to the butler's pantry, connecting to the kitchen, and the second leading to the dining room.

The dining room, 22 x 17 feet, is placed to afford easy ingress and egress to and from the kitchen via the butler's passage and colonnade, thus excluding the sight, sounds, and smells of the kitchen. The dining room contains a built in corner cupboard and marble fireplace.

The kitchen is located in a one one-half story wing, 16 x 24 feet, added to the east of the main dwelling. The far wall contained a large cooking fireplace, with root cellars under the floor. The kitchen communicates with the butler's pantry by the addition of a southern-style colonnade, 11 x 8 feet. A second workroom/kitchen, containing two closets and an exposed brick wall fireplace, was also reached through the butler's passage.

Leaving the workroom, one passes through a narrow hallway with simple staircase leading to a second floor chamber. Doors front and back provide access to the office, 15 x 14 feet, or gentleman's own room - a very necessary and useful apartment, especially in country houses upon large estates, or those belonging to professional men in the habit of receiving business calls at their residences. Devoting this room to such a purpose, we find an iron safe for valuable papers, built into the wall on one side of the fireplace, and a bookcase filling up the corresponding space on the other side.

The chamber story contains five good bedrooms of different dimensions. The utility of the wardrobe closets contained in each being universally acknowledged. Each bedroom receives abundant ventilation through the swivel transoms located above each doorway.

The master bedroom and sitting room are located over the parlor chamber, and is spacious enough for receiving morning tea and distinguished visitors. The bedroom contains a separate dressing area or walk-in closet. The only second floor fireplace is located in this room. Paneled interior shutters are located in the south and west windows. The central room is also a large bed chamber. The bedroom over the dining room is a well-lit chamber with windows on three sides, although only the front ones are shuttered. It connects to a smaller dressing room or nursery containing a large closet for linen storage with numerous compartments. This room, in turn, connects with the water-closet. No dwelling can be considered complete without a water-closet under its roof. A water holding tank was located in the attic above, and a nearby windmill pump forced the water to this location.

The back bedroom is the only one constructed without a closet. This room, strategically located off the back stairway, may have served as the housekeeper's residence. Even though "no room is really tenantable without one [a closet]."[i]

The tower was reached via a second floor stairway. It is doubtful whether this space was utilized with much frequency, but it could provide a bright, airy, quiet retreat from household traffic.

The combination of all of the above elements into a functioning household was the ultimate goal of William and Elizabeth Ross. We can evaluate and appreciate their successful project through touring the mansion today. After the house left the Ross family ownership in 1926, its contents were sold at public auction. Today, the return of many of these decorative furnishings which once graced the rooms of the Ross Mansion provide us an intimate glimpse of what nineteenth century life may have looked like for the Ross family.

SUMMARY

Viewing this portion of land in the Seaford area, I have been able to trace a piece of property through the lives of four families up to its acquisition by the Seaford Historical Society. Western Sussex County developed through a series of serendipitous circumstances unique to its inhabitants. The individuals who occupied this tract of land over four centuries never knew one another, yet they all realized the property's value. It became part of their vision of future prosperity. It provided a means to obtain wealth and the hope of passing that wealth on to the next generation. As farmer/agriculturists, the Hooper, Tennent, Ross, and Davis families all recognized the potential of "Martin's Hundred." Their daily lives focused on the land through crops, livestock, and buildings. Each generation dealt with the joys and problems of their day. Their lives were tied to the seasons and they were forced to adapt to a multitude of changes that occurred through the years.

The Seaford Historical Society is strongly aware of the educational and tourism opportunities that the Governor William Ross Plantation holds. As a result of this research, we will now be able to expand our interpretation and present a multigenerational picture of what life might have been like for the landed gentry, as well as the slave and tenant labor of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. This glimpse into many lives causes us to pause and reflect on our own endeavors. We return full circle to the confirmation of Bernard Herman's opening quote, "History is written through the actions of individuals – a history where meaning is found not in great events but in the continuum of architectural thought realized upon the land."

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