

# Whipping Post to be Removed from Public Display

GEORGETOWN, Del. – Tomorrow, July 1, the Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs will remove a whipping post from public display on the grounds of the Old Sussex County Courthouse near the Circle in Georgetown.



Whipping post  
formerly displayed  
in Georgetown,  
Sussex County

The decision to remove the whipping post was made in response to calls from the community and in recognition of the violence and racial discrimination that its display signified to many Delawareans.

“Finally, Delaware is removing its last ‘Red Hannah,’ the whipping post, from the public’s view,” said Dr. Reba Hollingsworth, vice-chair of the Delaware Heritage Commission. “Such relics of the past should be placed in museums to be preserved and protected for those who want to remember the cruel, inhuman, barbarous acts perpetrated on our citizens.”

The post will be moved to a Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs (HCA) storage facility with other historical objects and artifacts, including a whipping post that once stood near The Green in Dover.

“It is appropriate for an item like this to be preserved in the state’s collections, so that future generations may view it and attempt to understand the full context of its historical significance,” said HCA Director Tim Slavin. “It’s quite another thing to allow a whipping post to remain in

place along a busy public street – a cold, deadpan display that does not adequately account for the traumatic legacy it represents, and that still reverberates among communities of color in our state.”

HCA intends to work with historians, educators and leaders of the African American community in Delaware to explore plans for future display of this artifact in a museum setting, where it can be properly contextualized and interpreted.

This whipping post was located on the grounds of the Sussex Correctional Institution south of Georgetown. The facility was established in 1931, but the exact date this particular post was installed is not known. In 1992, the warden donated the post to HCA. The post was installed for public display at the state-owned Old Sussex County Courthouse site in September of 1993.

The history of corporal punishment in Delaware goes back to the earliest days of colonial settlement and included the use of the whipping post and the pillory in all three counties into the 20th century. These punishments were imposed for a variety of crimes throughout history and were disproportionately applied to persons of color. Those sentenced to the whipping post could be lashed up to 40 times for a single offense.

Dr. Hollingsworth, a lifelong Delaware educator, historian and civil rights advocate, witnessed a whipping in her childhood that still lives in her memory:

*When I was a child in the late 1930s, I saw a man being whipped at the Kent County jail at the corner of New and Water Streets in Dover. On a Saturday morning, my dad, Solomon Ross, had driven to Dover from Milford to conduct some business. When he saw the crowd gathered at the front of the jail, he parked his car and he, my sister Vivienne and I joined the crowd around the wire mesh fence, which*

*surrounded the jail yard.*

*There, we saw a man, naked to his waist, with his wrists shackled to an eight-foot post, being whipped by a man with a cat-o-nine-tails that had a short handle with nine rawhide thongs, which appeared to be about 18 inches long.*

*Even though the whipping occurred more than 80 years ago, I still remember the eerie silence that was pierced by the lashes of the whip. After each lash, the warden would loudly count each lash.*

*I don't remember how many lashes the man received that day, but the incident is a vivid memory every time I pass the jail on New Street, even though Red Hannah has been removed. When I drive around the Circle in Georgetown, my childhood emotions fill my heart.*

The last use of the whipping post in Delaware took place in 1952. Delaware was the last state to abolish the whipping post, removing the penalty from state law in 1972 through an act of the General Assembly signed by Gov. Russell Peterson.