



FAYETTE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Located at the heart of one of America's "Coolest Small Towns," the Fayette County Courthouse has a history as rich and eclectic as the restaurants, shops and recreational activities located nearby.

Wild and wonderful whitewater, sky-high rock walls, mountainous trails, zip line rails, spectacular views, local brews, delicious food – and a little “Hi, how y’all doin’?” Not only is Fayette County an adult’s all-natural playground, an adrenaline junkie’s paradise and a small business owner’s dream, it’s also home to people sweeter than your momma’s iced tea, views that will take your breath away and a county seat’s downtown groove that keeps even the locals coming back for more.

However, Fayette County was not always a bustling tourist attraction. In fact, it wasn’t until 1830, when a group of dissatisfied citizens of Logan, Nicholas, Greenbrier and Kanawha counties came together, that the idea of Fayette County was even born. The petitioners’ reasons for establishing a new county were mainly brought on by the distance many had to travel to get to the nearest courthouse – some more than 100 miles – providing interference with their right to vote. The request was brought before the house of delegates of the Virginia General Assembly, and on Feb. 28, 1831, a new county was born. It would be named Fayette in honor of the French Nobleman Marquis de Lafayette, a military hero and American ally during the Revolutionary War.

While citizens of Fayette County were pleased with their new region, placement of the county seat took longer than the formation of the county itself. After several campaigns, a new set of county commissioners and back-and-forth discussions between landowners, Vandalia (now Fayetteville) was named the county seat in 1837, and so began construction of the first Fayette County Courthouse.

Fayette County was only three decades old when the nation was split apart by the Civil War. During this time, Fayetteville was the scene of several fierce battles and even earned a place in history as the origin of indirect firing, a method of artillery fire still in use today.

Artillery fire wasn’t the only method of attack during the battles in Fayetteville. An actual fire destroyed the courthouse that had been so desired and lovingly maintained by the county’s residents.

Construction of a new courthouse began after West Virginia seceded from Virginia in June 1861. With the construction of the new courthouse came the question of whether to establish a new county seat. An election was held to determine whether the location would remain in Fayetteville or move to Deepwater. Although Fayetteville won the race by a landslide, the battle was not yet won; in 1893, after only six years of service, the new Fayette County Courthouse was once again lost to flames.

By Erin Thompson

Photos courtesy of West Virginia Department of Commerce



Whitewater season begins April 1 and lasts through the fall, and with some of the world's best whitewater, Fayette County is a top destination. The county boasts more than 10 different outfitters available to guide groups down the New River, and whitewater rafting trips range from easy and family-friendly to extreme and full of adventure.

Another county seat location election followed and money was tight, but Fayetteville won the county seat spot one final time. The county court put its faith in a couple of young architects, a decision that was proved well-founded; the county's residents came together to view their new center of justice in 1902.

The Fayette County Courthouse is an impressive building located on Court Street in downtown Fayetteville. Several embellishments inside add touches of elegance and sophistication. The walls are of original solid oak, and corner fireplaces with marble mantels remain. Rich ornamentation on its exterior gives the courthouse its major distinction. The building is mostly made of brick but includes touches of rock-faced masonry, as well as decorative arches and columns. Curious decorations include carvings of animals and human faces on many of the corner chimneys; they are said to represent such qualities as truth and wisdom.¹

While Fayette County is known for its rich history, it's safe to say that the county seat is most known for its booming tourist industry and outdoor recreation activities. In 2006 Fayetteville was dubbed one of *Budget Travel Magazine's* "Coolest Small Towns in the U.S.A."

Fayetteville is home to some of the world's best whitewater, with more than 10 outfitters available to guide groups down the New River. If water sports aren't your style, maybe hiking the scenic trails of the

New River Gorge, rock climbing, mountain biking, ATV riding, bird watching, fishing, hunting or gliding through the trees on the new zip line course is more your speed. Even if you find sports in general unappealing, the creative nature of downtown Fayetteville offers something for everyone. You can visit one of the many local shops that sell items ranging from hand-crafted jewelry to fine wines to used books to antiques.

Hungry? Grab a gourmet sandwich at the Secret Sandwich Society; taste the local beer and specialty pizzas at Pies and Pints; enjoy a fresh, light meal at The Vandalian; smother your face in barbecue sauce at Dirty Ernie's Rib Pit; bring your four-legged friend to Diogi's for some authentic Mexican cuisine; or sip a latte at Cathedral Café, one of Fayetteville's most famous hang-outs located in a turn-of-the-century church with stained glass windows and cathedral ceilings.

Visitors to Fayette County frequently stay in one of the many hotels, cabins and bed-and-breakfasts – or they simply pitch a tent and relax under the stars. The most popular time to visit is during the weekend of Bridge Day, held every year on the third Saturday in October. Bridge Day, West Virginia's largest festival, hosts thousands upon thousands of people (80,000 expected this year) who walk along the northbound lane of the New River Gorge Bridge, watching hundreds of people dive (then release a parachute) into the gorge below.



Visitors to the New River Gorge Bridge, one of the longest arch bridges in the world, have the opportunity to raft beneath it, walk across it and – on Bridge Day – even jump off of it.

For local attorneys, the decision to practice in Fayette County is an easy one. Attorney Tom Rist of Rist Law Offices is no stranger to what the New River Gorge has to offer. A West Virginia University College of Law grad, Rist spends his free time mountain biking and hiking with his wife and daughter in the gorge. When the water's fine, Rist takes to the rapids every chance he gets.

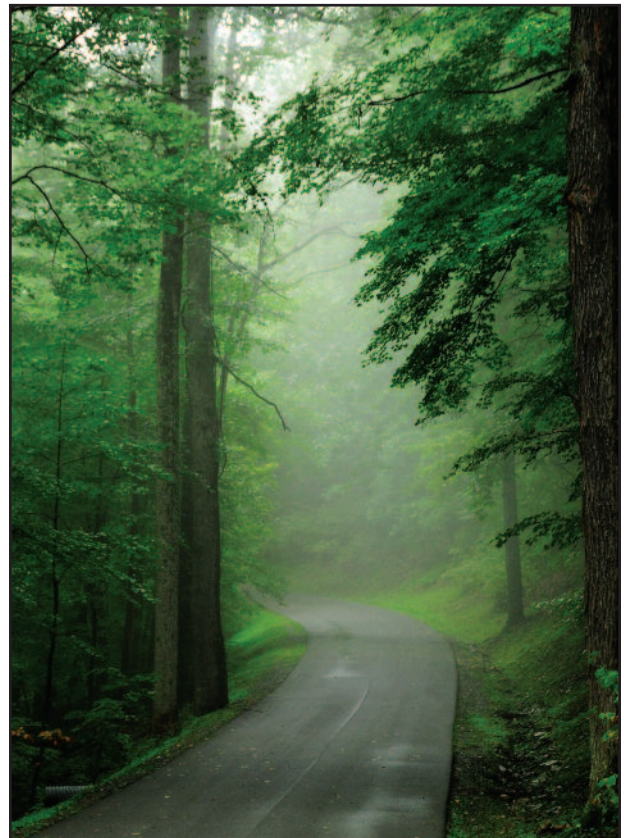
"I work in Fayetteville because I fell in love with the town years ago," Rist said. "Plus, practicing in a small town provides me with a greater opportunity to work in different areas of the law."

Although Rist typically focuses on injury, employment and business litigation cases, since moving back to West Virginia from San Diego he has also done environmental work, title searches, property disputes, family law, criminal law and even wills.

"The variety of work is much more interesting here," Rist said. "I also knew that I could make a greater difference in a small state like West Virginia and a small community like Fayetteville. My wife and I could not have found a better place to live, work, and play." **WVLT**

¹Fayette County Courthouse facts are found in "Fayette County Courthouse 'A Century of Service'" by Melody Bragg. ©1995 Fayette County Courthouse Centennial.

Erin Thompson is a Marshall University graduate and native of Fayetteville, W.Va. She now lives in Morgantown, W.Va., and works for the American Cancer Society.



Babcock State Park, located along the New River Gorge, is one of the most photographed places in the state due to its many scenic pathways and the picturesque Glade Creek Grist Mill.