



GILMER COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The Gilmer County Courthouse stands tall in Glenville, W.Va.,
a town rich in history and small-town culture.

Oh, the hills, beautiful hills, how I love those West Virginia hills! If o'er sea, o'er land, I roam, still I'll think of happy home and my friends among the West Virginia hills." In 1885, Ellen King looked out across the hills of Gilmer County, W.Va., while visiting her father, and wrote these lines which have since become iconic to natives of our state. However, for anyone who has ever traveled Route 5, it is clear from where she gained her inspiration. At the end of that road, which has been appropriately named "Fifteen Mile Road" for the fifteen miles of curvy, natural beauty that separate the destination from the rest of society, is Glenville, the Gilmer County seat.

Appropriately nicknamed "The Light House on the Hill" or "The Thrill in the 'Ville," Glenville is the epitome of a small-town treasure waiting to be found. Settled around 1800, Gilmer County spent much of the first half of that century evolving into a community as families moved into the area. In February 1845, Gilmer County was officially created as an act of the Virginia General Assembly; it was named in honor of former governor and late secretary of the Navy Thomas Walker Gilmer.

Following legislative recognition, the citizens of the area wasted no time further establishing their region. On March 24, 1845, the first meeting of the Gilmer County Court was held in a town named DeKalb at the home of Salathiel Stalnaker, the son of Captain William Stalnaker who was an original settler of the area. Some historians argue that this home served as the first courthouse of Gilmer County. In this first meeting, the 15 justices had much to determine: who would serve as county clerk, surveyor and sheriff and when to hold a countywide election to determine the county seat.

With the subsequent election held in May, a majority of the county's 66 voters selected the area then called "The Ford" (Glenville) as the county seat. At that time, it was the only area in the county that lay along a state road; thus, while the Stalnaker family, who was the region's most prominent, wanted DeKalb to be the seat, access to the "The Ford" made it a more favorable option. This was the start of a dramatic period in the young Gilmer County government.

By Jamie Mullins



PHOTO COURTESY OF WV DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, STEVE SHALUTA

Minutes from the small town of Glenville is Cedar Creek State Park, consisting of 2,588 acres of pleasant views and lush scenery. Visitors enjoy hiking on the park's 14 miles of trails or fishing in its three seasonally stocked trout ponds. Tennis courts, a miniature golf course and a variety of water sports are offered, as well as a multipurpose recreation building that is reservable for business or family gatherings.

Although the citizens had spoken, the Stalnaker family was not pleased, and along with other justices of the county government, they refused to attend meetings in "The Ford." However, after contesting the selected seat for almost a year, all justices finally agreed to meet in "The Ford."

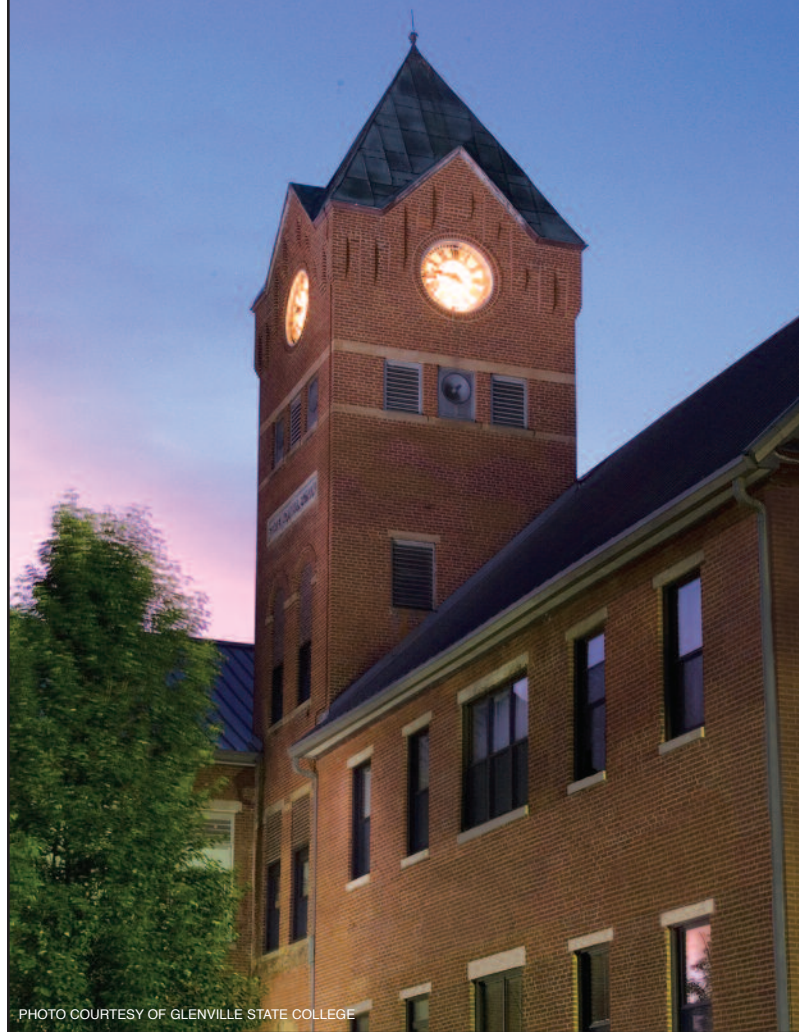
Their first order of business was to select a location at which to build the county courthouse. A site was proposed, but another obstacle delayed the Gilmer Court's progress; the deed to the land was in question. For the next four years, the court was forced to meet in the home of William Ball, located in "The Ford." Finally, in 1850, the original Gilmer County Courthouse was erected in the county seat. This was the first of three courthouses that would serve as the center for justice in Gilmer County.

While "The Ford" was finally incorporated into Glenville in 1856, the town had little time to rest or grow. By the 1860s, the Civil War was beginning and, as with many governments, the growth of Gilmer County was at a standstill. Numerous military groups patrolled the area. For eight months, Fort Moore, a

home base for Gilmer County's home guards during the war, was established just above the modern-day Glenville State College campus (the site of the original courthouse). In December 1864, when a small Civil War contest known as the Battle of Tank Hill broke out in the area, that fort was burned to the ground by Confederate troops; however, the courthouse survived the attack.

In 1873, Glenville State Normal School had its first session on January 14 inside the original Gilmer Courthouse. The school had obtained the building when the county opted to move just down the hill to a new courthouse. The new building served as the second Gilmer County Courthouse and remained in use until the turn of the century, when a fire consumed the building and construction began on a new home for the courts on the same property. Finally, in 1923, the current Gilmer County Courthouse was erected and has, despite expansions, remained the home of Gilmer County courts for the better part of the last century.

The age of this historic structure is quickly made clear to visitors walking up Court Street Hill, for as



Above: Gilmer County is home to Glenville State College, founded in 1872 to provide instruction and practice for school teachers. Today, Glenville State prepares students for careers in teaching, business, land resources, music, the liberal arts, sciences, criminal justice and human services. Glenville State's football team, the Pioneers, provides weekend entertainment for the entire community.

they look upon the building they will not read “Gilmer Courthouse” as most counties’ titles read; rather, the building is inscribed with “Gilmer Covnty Covrt Hovse.” This is not a mistake; it is an intentional design element meant to show prestige. When constructed, Latin was considered a language of knowledge, and since the Latin alphabet does not include the letter ‘u,’ the words were instead spelled with a ‘v.’

Gilmer County’s rich history expands past the age-old courthouse. Gilmer is home to 10 nationally registered historic landmarks including Job’s Temple, a Civil War-era poplar log church built by southern sympathizers during the war. In 1979, Job’s Temple was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. For any fan of history, Gilmer Country offers a great daytrip full of natural beauty and historic locations. Anyone wanting more information on these historic sites only has to stop into the Holt House History Museum on the corner of Morris Street and Main Street.

Gilmer County is also specifically noted for being home to the West Virginia Folk Festival, Glenville



The Holt House, used by the Gilmer County Historical Society as a museum, is located in Glenville and has a record of the county’s many historical sites.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE MULLINS

The West Virginia State Folk Festival, held in Gilmer County every year since 1950, welcomes musicians, artisans, storytellers and vendors from all over the state to a celebration of our region's culture. The festival offers something for everyone: banjo and fiddle contests, square dancing, horse shoes and other games, a quilt show, an antique car show, Appalachian arts and crafts, a spelling bee, a parade and more.

State College and one of West Virginia's three medium security prisons FCI-Gilmer.

For a lively visit with historic small town culture, there is no better place to look than Gilmer County on the third Thursday in June. Since 1950, Gilmer County has welcomed musicians, artisans, storytellers, singers and vendors from across the state to Glenville for a festive celebration of the culture that pioneered the area. From sunrise to sunset, fiddles and banjos can be heard strumming throughout the town as eager dancers take to the square-dancing platform at the bottom of Court Street Hill in the center of town.

For those who cannot find time for a midsummer vacation, fall is always an exciting time of year in the area as the I.L. and Sue Morris Stadium begins to fill up for the Glenville State College Pioneers' football season. The Pioneers always provide an interesting afternoon of football, whether because of the enthusiasm of their fans or the talent of their athletes (which, according to Head Coach Dave Hutchison, will not disappoint this season). While in the area, do not miss your chance to grab a bite at the "Common Place Restaurant." It has been a staple of downtown

Glenville for many years and provides great breakfast options any time of day.

While Gilmer County is a great place to visit, Gilmer County Prosecutor Gerry Hough has proven it can also provide great economic and legal opportunities as well. Hough lived in areas across the country and around the world prior to settling in Gilmer County in 1976. Initially, Hough came to the area to build a real estate business, but sometime more than 15 years ago, Hough decided to pursue a degree in law.

"I purposely chose to settle in Gilmer County," said Hough. "Each person hopes to find their place in the sun and their labor that fits. Gilmer is where I was sent, and practicing law is what I have been called to do; the calling for me has always been to serve others. I'm just obeying the calling after obeying the placement." **WV**

Jamie Mullins is a 2010 Glenville State College graduate and the sports editor for the *Glenville Democrat/Pathfinder*; she hopes to pursue a law degree in the fall. Jamie currently resides between Glenville and Elkview, where her family calls home.