



HANCOCK COUNTY COURTHOUSE

West Virginia's smallest and northernmost county
brings together small-town living and big-city thrills.

Hancock County is a lot like your favorite pair of jeans, the ones you reach for when you want to settle down with a good book and a glass of wine. They may be a little worn in places, but when you slip them on you know you're home.

"It really has a Mayberry feel to it," said Weirton attorney Mike Nogay, who earned his undergraduate degree in 1980 from West Virginia University and his law degree from Washington & Lee in 1983. A history buff, Nogay also authored *Every Home A Fort, Every Man A Warrior*, stories of the forts and men in the Upper Ohio Valley during the American Revolution, and is a partner in the firm of Sellitti, Nogay & McCune, specializing in personal injury, medical malpractice, product liability, corporate litigation and nursing home neglect. "It sounds corny to say it, but the area still has a small-town feel. My sons played football in the same stadium I played in and both their grandfathers played in. There's a continuity you don't find in many places."

And it's a community where you can leave your doors unlocked and be reasonably sure your possessions will be where you left them when you come home.

"No matter where you go in the county, people say hello," said Weirton's John Sorrenti, a retired school employee, former county commissioner and longtime sportscaster for a local radio station. "It's a very friendly county. I think everybody cares about everybody else – that's the best way to put it."

At 88 square miles, Hancock County is the smallest of West Virginia's 55 counties and also its northernmost – just a stone's throw from Pennsylvania to the east and Ohio to the west.

But for what it lacks in size, Hancock County makes up with its location on the Ohio River, as prized now as it was back in 1771 when innkeeper John Holliday settled along Harmon Creek in what came to be known as Holliday's Cove in present-day Weirton.

With just the river separating the settlers from Native American country, a fort bearing Holliday's name was commissioned at the mouth of the creek to protect the settlers from marauding Native Americans and roving frontier renegades like the infamous Simon Girty. In 1777, Fort Holliday's garrison made its way by river to Wheeling

By Linda Harris



The famous Logan Massacre left 11 Mingo Native Americans dead, including the family of previously peace-loving Chief Logan. The massacre led to a short-lived but bloody battle between settlers and Native Americans called Lord Dunmore's War.

to aid defenders at Fort Henry who were under siege by several hundred members of the Shawnee, Wyandot and Mingo tribes.

It would be the settlers, however, who would perpetrate what is, to this day, considered by many to be one of the greatest atrocities of the frontier – the 1774 mass murder in of 11 Mingo Native Americans at Baker's Tavern, just a few miles upriver from Fort Holliday near the present-day site of Mountaineer Casino, Racetrack & Resort. Witnesses would later recount how the colonists lured the Mingos across the river, plied them with alcohol and, once most were incapacitated, challenged the sober ones to a shooting contest. After the Mingos' guns were emptied, the settlers murdered them all. Among the dead were the brother, nephew and pregnant sister of the previously peace-loving Chief Logan, who thereafter exacted vengeance on those he held responsible for the deaths of his family members. The killings sparked what became known as Lord Dunmore's War, a short-lived but bloody battle for supremacy.

It wasn't until 1848 that the Virginia General Assembly, at the behest of the people living in the area, created Hancock County (named after John Hancock, first signer of the Declaration of Independence),

though they left it to the electorate to choose a county seat. The decision was more difficult than it seemed, as county government toggled back and forth between New Manchester – then known as Fairview or Pughtown – and New Cumberland for nearly 40 years. It took the residents of the newly formed county four elections to finally settle on the City of New Cumberland, incorporated in 1872, as their county seat.

Once the decision was made, a new courthouse was built – only to have it burn down in 1920. That structure was replaced with a two-story brick building, to which a concrete addition was added in 1968. Guarding the front of the old building is a statue of a Civil War soldier, dedicated in 1886 and listing the names of Hancock County residents killed in the War Between the States.

Long known as an industrial powerhouse, in recent years local leaders have capitalized on Hancock County's prime location to market the area as a tourist destination. Minutes from both the Pennsylvania and Ohio state lines, Mountaineer Casino, Racetrack & Resort boasts more than 2,400 slot machines, 48 table games, 24 poker tables and a thoroughbred racetrack, along with an upscale hotel, a spa, a fitness center, three pools, the nearby Woodview Golf Course, a theater and events center, conference facilities and a range of dining options. Across the road from the original hotel is a historical marker commemorating the site of the Baker's Tavern massacre.

Just four miles to the north is the famed Homer

A statue of a Civil War soldier stands in front of the Hancock County Courthouse and lists the names of Hancock County residents killed during the War Between the States.

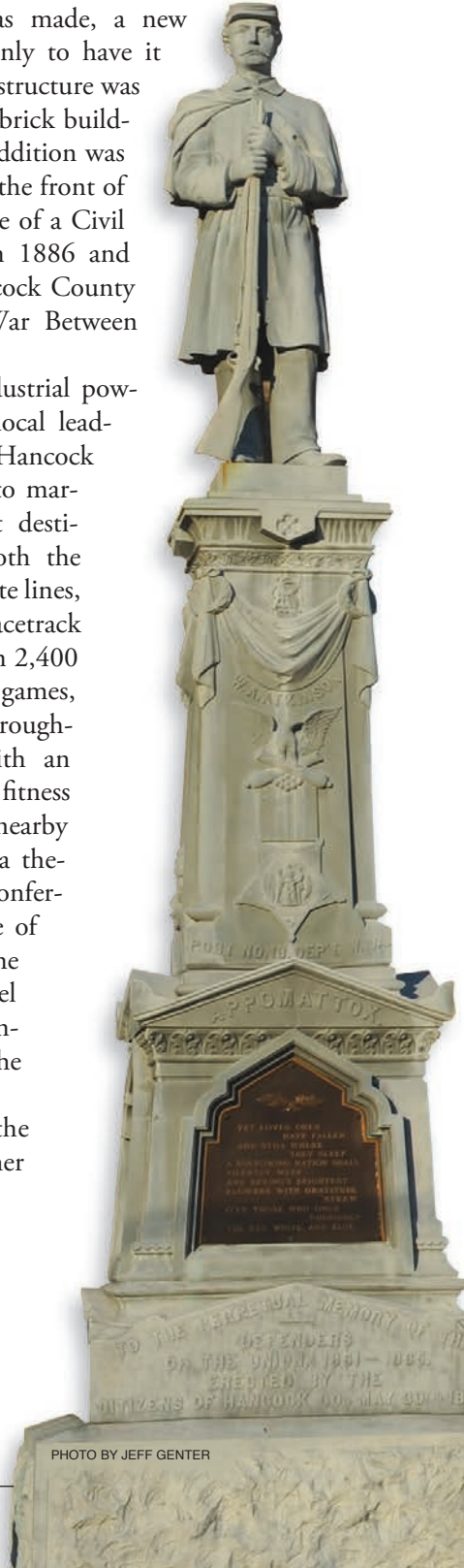


PHOTO BY JEFF GENTER

Laughlin China Co., maker of the highly collectible Fiesta line. Guests can tour the factory to see how it's made and shop for finished pieces in the retail outlet, open daily except on holidays, and many browse for bargains in the "Fiesta Seconds" warehouse.

Feeling outdoorsy? With nearly 1,400 acres, Tomlinson Run State Park boasts a wilderness area featuring forests, wildflowers and fauna, as well as picnicking, boating, miniature golf, basketball and volleyball, a swimming pool, a campground and a group camp. The park is in the process of adding an 18-hole disc golf course.

If quirky roadside monuments are more your style, the "World's Largest Teapot" at the intersection of State Route 2 and U.S. Route 30 in Chester definitely



PHOTO BY GARY KELLNER OF DIMPLED ROCK GOLF PHOTOGRAPHY

Williams Country Club is home to one of the state's most celebrated golf courses, beautiful views of the Ohio River Valley and facilities that are ideal for a wide range of special events.

qualifies. The 14-by-14 structure once served as a hamburger and souvenir stand.

Farther south, check out the old-world charm of Williams Country Club in Weirton. Though it's members only, onlookers are allowed on the grounds to view the clubhouse, built in the 1930s by Weirton Steel Corp., as well as its elite golf course, where legions of sports greats from the late Jumpin' Joe DiMaggio to Michael Jordan have played a round.

On the way back, you'll pass historic Margaret Manson Weir Memorial Pool, with its distinctive – though nonworking – circular bricked pool surrounded by the trees, benches and picnic shelters of Marland Heights Park.

Across town, Weirton's Starvaggi Park, named after one of the city's most generous benefactors, boasts picnic facilities, tennis and basketball courts, a swimming pool and a water park. And the newly opened Weirton Events Center in downtown Weirton features Friday night concerts showcasing all genres of music.

In the mood for professional sports, some serious shopping or cultural pursuits? Just a 40-minute drive to the east is Pittsburgh and its three pro sports teams (the Steelers, Pirates and Penguins), an international airport, off-Broadway shows, concert halls, a symphony, a zoo and, for the shopaholic in all of us, a bevy of retailers. And an hour's drive to the south is Wheeling, where you'll find attractions like Oglebay Park and the Good Zoo, the Wheeling Symphony and Jamboree, while a little more than a two-hour drive into Ohio will take you to Cleveland and its three pro sports teams (the Browns, Indians and Cavaliers), not to mention the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Cleveland Zoo and Lake Erie.

Nogay said one of the best things about Hancock County is how easy it is to get to Ohio and Pennsylvania for work and play.

"Where I live, I'm literally 20 minutes from Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, and the Jefferson County Courthouse (in Ohio) is only six miles from my home," he said, pointing out that he and his partners practice in all three states. "Where we're located, you have to have a multi-state practice to survive. You can't just practice in one state." **WVL**

Linda Harris is a resident of Weirton, W.Va., and the business editor of the *Steubenville (OH) Herald-Star* and *Weirton Daily Times*. Details of the founding of Fort Holliday as well as the Baker's Tavern massacre were drawn from *Every Home A Fort, Every Man A Warrior*, by Michael E. Nogay, 2009.

Homer Laughlin China Co., located in Newell, is the maker of the popular Fiesta dinnerware line. Its retail outlet is home to the best Fiesta bargains one can find.

