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HARDY COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Full of historic charm, Hardy County
offers fresh air and country tranquility

For travelers who want to dig deep into the discovery of West Virginia history, Hardy County is a treasure trove of historic homes, sites and graveyards, nestled among the peace and beauty of lush green hills and winding country roads.

Chartered a decade before the county itself, Moorefield, the Hardy County seat and poultry capital of West Virginia, was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1777. The first entry in the Hardy County Court record book states that the court met on Feb. 7, 1786, at the house of William Bullitt. At a court session held at the same house on March 7, 1786, it was ordered that the construction of the courthouse go to the lowest bidder. It was to be built of logs with diamond corners and to be hewn down inside and outside and measure 26 feet by 22 feet. It was to have a story and a half with a stone or brick chimney. The second courthouse was built on the corner of Winchester and Franklin streets (now South Elm Street) in 1792-93 by Abel Seymour, added to in 1833 and used as the courthouse until 1860. It has since housed offices, apartments and a day and boarding school for girls.

According to research by Historic Landmarks Commission member Eleanor Heishman, the Hardy County Court met irregularly during the Civil War and at least once outside of its official location. On May 2, 1864, the county court met at the home of John Mathias. The reason for the move from the courthouse was given as the “proximity of the enemy.” Mathias’ log house, built in the 1700s, is located along State Route 259 south and is currently featured on the front of the West Virginia Civil War Trails brochure. Mathias Homestead is open for tours during the summer months and on Heritage Weekend, which is held annually during the last full weekend of September.

Following the Civil War (during which most of Hardy County’s residents were loyal to the South), the present courthouse was built during 1911-1914 on the corner of Washington and Elm streets. Currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the façade of the original building remains nearly unchanged from its original

By Alecia Sirk



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design. In today's society where the display of the Ten Commandments in courthouses is hotly debated it is interesting to note that between Feb. 6, 1920, and March 12, 1922, the Methodists held Sunday services in the courthouse while their new church was under construction.

Karen and Lary Garrett, of the law firm of Garrett & Garrett, have practiced law in Hardy County since their graduations from West Virginia University.

"When we graduated from law school, most of the people were going to big cities and big firms in Houston, Dallas or Washington, D.C.," Karen said. "Lary and his brother had inherited a farm in West Virginia. We had come up in summers during law school and just loved it here. We loved the weather and the mountains and all the people that we met, and we thought it would be a great place to raise our kids.

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— Kelly Williams
General Manager
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"As it turned out, I was the first female lawyer in the 22nd Circuit," she added, referring to Pendleton, Hardy and Hampshire counties. "Having our 'mom and pop' practice has allowed us to have more flexibility. Being in a small community, you are able to contribute to the services that are provided in the community."

In addition to being a wonderful place to call home, Hardy County has a growing tourism industry – especially for people from Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., who are looking for a few days of fresh air and country tranquility. West Virginians come as well, some to get married at the gorgeous Guesthouse Lost River, others to look deep into their family's genealogy.

A visit to the courthouse leads travelers through the Moorefield Historic District, where a number of historic homes and sites are located. Throughout the county,

including Lost River and Wardensville, there are more than 40 structures that are more than 150 years old.

“Hardy County has so much to offer for history buffs,” said Kelly Williams, general manager of the South Branch Inn. “There are 10 Civil War Trails markers, sites where George Washington stayed and graveyards that contain Confederate and Union soldiers. But we also have so much to do outdoors: you can ride horses in Lost River State Park, fish or canoe in our lakes and rivers or spend a romantic weekend bird-watching in the George Washington National Forest.”

Each year, a handful of the county’s historic homes and buildings are open during Heritage Weekend, an annual festival held the last full weekend in September. Hardy County is a hub of genealogy for the eastern part of the state, and the Hardy County Library has many records, including a book on the dozens of historic cemeteries throughout the county. The weekend countywide celebration also features a banjo and fiddle contest at McCoy’s Grand Theater in downtown Moorefield.

One of the newest passions to come to Hardy County is cycling. The Raw Talent Ranch, located on the mountain above Lost River State Park, attracts cyclists worldwide who come to train on Hardy’s miles of scenic – but challenging – hills. The Raw Talent Ranch started the Lost River Classic three years ago, and the cycling event is now held each July.

Lost River Park is, in fact, one of Hardy County’s best-kept secrets. The park has cabins that are open year round, and in the summer the pool is filled with crisp spring water. Several miles of hiking trails lead to hours of exercise and an unparalleled opportunity

for nature study, given the abundance of flora and fauna found in the park. One rewarding trail leads to Cranny Crow overlook with its commanding views of the park from 3,200 feet.

Located along U.S. Route 259, the Lost River area also features a Yoga Barn, General Store, Lost River Grill (where musicians meet), the Guesthouse Lost River and the Lost River Artisans Cooperative and Museum. Over Memorial Day weekend, weavers, spinners and other artisans come to the Co-Op for the Fiber Fest.

Two years ago, the Town of Wardensville, located along State Route 55, welcomed a microbrew, the Lost River Brewing Co., that fills with travelers every weekend dining on smoked meats and crab cakes made with fresh catch from the Virginia shore.

“I grew up here in Wardensville. I’ve lived and worked in other places and bigger towns and cities, but my heart has always been here,” said Betsy Orndoff-Sayers, owner of Star Mercantile in Wardensville. “You know every one of your neighbors, and they know you, for better and for worse. In a place like Hardy County, you really have a chance to know people, to be involved and to help grow your community. I love it here.” **WVL**



Hardy County offers a lot to history buffs. This graveyard contains both Union and Confederate soldiers.

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Alecia Sirk started her work in journalism as a writer for the junior high school paper in Bridgeport, W.Va. After spending 15 years as a writer, she found her true passion is community revitalization. Moving with her husband, Pat Ford, whose focus is economic development, Sirk has worked in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Florida and most recently as the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce in Hardy County.