



POCAHONTAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The history of Pocahontas County is a tale of two states and two county seats.

Pocahontas County was formed in 1821, 42 years before West Virginia became a state. The Justices of Pocahontas County — John Jordan, William Poage Jr., James Tallman, Robert Gay, George Poage, Benjamin Tallman, John Baxter and George Burner — met on March 5, 1822, at the house of John Baxter, to appoint officials for the county.

According to *History of Pocahontas County, West Virginia — 1981*, the Virginia General Assembly met the following day, March 6, 1822, and approved to locate the county courthouse on the land of John Bradshaw, “where an old barn stands in his peach orchard.” That peach orchard was located in the town of Huntersville, which served as the county seat until 1891 when county residents voted to move the county seat to Marlinton.

The move was an arduous battle, which pitted citizens against one another. Years of debate and elections took place before the new courthouse was constructed. The debate began in 1866 and continued into 1891 when John T. McGraw, a prominent landowner, presented the county court with nine petitions signed by 697 voters, expressing their desire that the county seat be moved to Marlinton.

McGraw also presented a deed to the court from the Pocahontas Development Company for 3.2 acres in Marlinton for a courthouse site. In addition, the Development Company pledged \$5,000 toward construction of the courthouse and jail, if the county voters approved the move. The matter seemed to be resolved when voters approved the move with a 940 to 475 outcome in the Dec. 8, 1891, election.

By Suzanne Stewart



Snowshoe Mountain Resort, located within Pocahontas County, is best known for great winter activities like snow skiing, snowboarding and snowmobile tours, but it also boasts warm weather fun as well.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SNOWSHOE MOUNTAIN RESORT.

Despite the election results and the forward motion of plans, citizens, opposed to the move, continued to file injunction after injunction to no avail. Only one injunction was granted — one which prohibited the sheriff from paying for work done on the new building and prevented the county court from laying a levy to satisfy the contract with the builder. It was stated, according to the county's recorded history, that "it would

take more money and whiskey to get it back to Huntersville than it did to move it to Marlinton," in regard to the courthouse.

Choosing to stay the course, the county seat was moved.

The courthouse and two jail buildings in Huntersville were sold to R.S. Turk for \$825. There is no record of exactly what happened to the courthouse building, but it is said the building burned and was demolished. One of the jail buildings remains standing today and is owned by the nonprofit organization Huntersville Historic Traditions. It is well maintained and, every October, it is incorporated into the events of the annual Huntersville Traditions Day.

Construction on a temporary courthouse began in



PHOTO COURTESY DURBIN & GREENBRIER VALLEY RAILROAD.

The Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad operates in the Pocahontas County communities of Cass and Durbin as “Cass Scenic Railroad.” Train rides on vintage locomotives showcase high mountain country while tracing remnants of old timber communities.

September 1892 on the south side of Ninth Street in Marlinton. The 50-by-60-foot, two-story building served as the courthouse while construction on the permanent facility was underway. Plans were put in motion and bids were received from the Manly Manufacturing Company, of Dalton, Georgia, and Murray Brothers, of Wheeling. After consulting with project architect M.F. Giesy, the county accepted the \$28,483 bid from the Manly Manufacturing Company.

Construction began October 1893 and was completed in 1895. The jail building, located behind the courthouse was completed first and prisoners were transferred from Huntersville on April 2, 1895. Along with Manly Manufacturing Company, the courthouse construction included work by Bennett and Peck, A.C. Gunther and G.C. Spitzer. The new, two-story, brick, Victorian Romanesque structure officially became the courthouse on Sept. 26, 1895.

As described by the Pocahontas County Historic Landmarks Commission, the courthouse has “irregular massing with a central block that has a steep hip roof. On the front elevation, there are two dissimilar towers, one on each corner. The east and west side have projecting gabled pavilions, as well as gabled dormers in the roof on each of the elevations in the southern portion.” The interior of the second floor courtroom maintains its regal charm with hardwood wainscoting and is accessed by way of a wide, natural oak staircase. The hall, leading off the main entrance, is brightened by 10 colorful oil paintings depicting Pocahontas County landmarks. The artwork was painted and donated by Marlinton native Betty Jo Kramer Vydra.

In 1926, a two-story addition was constructed on the eastern side of the courthouse. It was styled with corbelled brick bracketed cornice to blend well with the original structure. The main building was remodeled



PHOTO COURTESY GREEN BANK OBSERVATORY SCIENCE CENTER.

Green Bank Observatory, a facility of the National Science Foundation, is home to the Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Telescope (GBT). The GBT is the world's largest steerable telescope and has a surface that could hold two entire football fields. It can be pointed with an accuracy of one arc second, which is equivalent to the width of a human hair seen from 66 feet away. At 485 feet tall, it is taller than the Statue of Liberty. The GBT works to observe fundamental physics, star formation and evolution, cosmic chemistry and the origins of life and galaxies. Visitors are welcome and tours are available.

and renovated in the early 1970s. Rotting boards and timbers around the eaves of the roof were replaced and a new roof was added to the main building and bell tower.

Another addition was made in 1976, consisting of a one-story section covering the first floor south bays. The first floor of the courthouse has offices for the county clerk, circuit clerk, magistrate clerk, prosecuting attorney, sheriff, tax office, assessor and county commission, as well as a records room in which all county deeds, marriages and births are archived. The second floor houses the main courtroom, witness room and jury room. The courtroom is used for court hearings and trials, of course, but is also used each election

night to receive vote totals from precincts around the county. Its spaciousness allows candidates and interested citizens to be a part of this important democratic process. The county commission, at times, utilizes the courtroom when issues of great public interest require a larger meeting room. The basement houses offices for the county's magistrates and their assistants, the WVU Extension office, the Pocahontas County Health Department, Pocahontas County Solid Waste office and a multipurpose conference room.

During the renovations, the building was modernized with electrical circuits, panel boxes, light fixtures and copper pipes for plumbing. The coal-fired furnace



2017 ROADKILL COOK-OFF PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAKINSEY COCHRAN.



In autumn each year, the West Virginia Roadkill Cook-off is one of Pocahontas County's most fun and exciting annual events. The Food Network, the Travel Channel and the Discovery Channel have all covered this wild and offbeat festival. If you've ever wanted to taste exotic dishes like squirrel gravy over biscuits, teriyaki-marinated bear or deer sausage, this is the place to be.

was removed and replaced by an oil-burning furnace. At one time, the basement contained five wood and coke burning open-hearth furnaces. One of those original furnaces was restored and remains in the courthouse, where visitors can get a peek into the past.

The jail building still stands today, but is now used as offices for the sheriff's department. The jail stopped housing prisoners in 2005 when the Tygart Valley Regional Jail in Norton opened.

The Marlinton courthouse has served Pocahontas County for more than 120 years and is an example of how the county's strong-willed people will fight for what they want.

Known as Nature's Mountain Playground and the Birthplace of Rivers, Pocahontas County is noted for its skiing, hiking, biking and all things pertaining to outdoor recreation.

Marlinton is home to one of the most unique

festivals in West Virginia — possibly the world. Each year, on the last Saturday of September, thousands of tourists flock to the county seat to participate in and/or witness the annual Roadkill Cook-off. The one-of-a-kind cooking competition has gained national attention through features on the Food Network with Adam Gertler and Travel Channel with Andrew Zimmern. The tongue-in-cheek festival is one of the best ways to experience Pocahontas County, its beauty, its people and its hospitality. **WV**

Suzanne Stewart is a native of Pocahontas County, growing up in Green Bank. After attaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts in photography from West Virginia University, she was employed as a photographer at *The Inter-Mountain* newspaper in Elkins, from 2003-2008. She returned to Green Bank in late 2008 and became a reporter and page designer for *The Pocahontas Times* — the oldest continual business in Pocahontas County. She has received awards from the West Virginia Press Association for photography, page design and writing.