

BOONE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

One of the Most Beautiful of West Virginia's 55 Courthouses

The present-day Boone County Courthouse was constructed in 1921 on a hillside in a small square above State Street in Madison. One of the most beautiful of West Virginia's 55 courthouses, the Boone County Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

A prime example of the Neoclassical Revival style popular during the early 20th century, the courthouse is a stately three-story building faced with Indiana limestone with an open-domed belvedere above the central mass.

Architect H. Rus Warne was a student in the Beaux Arts tradition, having studied in Paris and Rome and would have been very familiar with traditional classical architectural forms. "Much like the famous architect Cass Gilbert, who would design the State Capitol in Charleston in the same style a year after the Boone County Courthouse was completed, Warne recognized the power of refined classicism for public architecture," said Robert Plants, president of the Boone County Genealogical Society.

Boone County was formed from an act of the Virginia General Assembly March 11, 1847, from Cabell, Kanawha and Logan counties. The county was named in honor of Daniel Boone, the famous hunter and explorer, founder of Kentucky, Lieutenant Colonel of the Virginia militia and member of the Virginia General Assembly representing Kanawha County.

Although Daniel Boone was known as a son of Kentucky, he was born Nov. 2, 1734, in the Schuylkill Valley in Pennsylvania. He moved with his parents to North Carolina in 1750. He later married and started a family and was active as an Indian trader in that area. He visited the present site of West Virginia in 1755 as a member of General Braddock's army, which was defeated by the Indians on the Monongahela River. A few years later, he explored the future site of Kentucky and moved his family there.

BY JESSICA FARNER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID FATTALEH





Left: The Boone County Courthouse sits on a hillside in a small square above State Street in Madison.

In 1788, he lost his Kentucky property because he failed to properly enter his land grants. Homeless, he moved to Point Pleasant, W.Va., for nearly a year, before moving to present-day Charleston. He lived in Charleston for seven years. In 1789, he was named a Lieutenant Colonel of the state militia, and in 1790, he was elected to the Virginia General Assembly. He left West Virginia in 1799, moving to Missouri, where he had been granted 1,000 acres of land by the Spanish government and given a government position overseeing the area. He died Sept. 26, 1820 in Missouri.

According to Plants, the idea of naming the county after Daniel Boone came from St. Clair Ballard, a member of the Virginia General Assembly. In an eloquent speech before the Virginia General Assembly, Mr. Ballard recounted the story of how Daniel Boone saved his mother from the Shawnee Indians. When Ballard finished relaying the story, he moved to name the new county Boone County. The Virginia General Assembly agreed to the motion, creating Boone County March 11, 1847.

Plants said four engagements took place within the county during the Civil War. The first was called the Battle of Boone County Courthouse. When Brigadier General Jacob Cox, in command of the Union Army in the Kanawha Valley, heard that a Confederate regiment was forming in

Boone County, he sent Colonel J.V. Guthrie from Charleston to destroy it.

On Aug. 29, 1861, Col. Guthrie sent two companies, Company G, 26th Ohio Infantry, and Company A, First Kentucky Infantry, to Boone County. On the following day, he dispatched Company K, 26th Ohio Infantry, to reinforce the first two companies. On Sept. 1, 1861, Companies G and A, and some local militia, were in the process of crossing the river on their way to the Boone County Courthouse in Madison when the Confederate militia, commanded by Colonel Ezekiel S. Miller, opened fire on them. However, after 20 minutes of fighting, the Confederate troops were forced to retreat.

Twenty-five Confederate soldiers were killed, wounded or captured during the engagement. One Union soldier was killed and five more were wounded. In retaliation for supporting the South, the Union soldiers burned the courthouse and several other buildings in the town before returning to Charleston.

Madison, the county seat, was incorporated in 1906. According to Plants, many historians claim the town was named in honor of William Madison Peyton, a leader of the movement to form Boone County and a pioneer coal operator. Others have suggested it was named in honor of James

Madison, the fourth president of the United States, a leading member of the Philadelphia Convention responsible for writing the U.S. Constitution and lifelong friend and neighbor of Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States. Still others claim the town was named in honor of Madison Laidley, a Charleston lawyer who helped to reorganize the civil affairs of the county.

The first meeting of the county court took place at the home of John Hill, then a justice of the peace in Logan County. He lived less than a mile below the present county courthouse. By tradition, Hill, the longest-serving justice of the peace residing in the county, was commissioned to be the county's first sheriff. J. H. French was selected to serve as the county's first prosecuting attorney.

According to Plants, until the county's first courthouse was built at the junction of the Pond and Spruce Forks of the Little Coal River, court was held in the log church at the mouth of Turtle Creek. Grand juries, when charged, and petit juries, when cases were submitted to them, retired to the bushes surrounding the church to deliberate.

Altogether, the county has had three courthouses. The aforementioned initial courthouse burned to the ground during the Civil War, and the second was condemned in 1913. The foundation for the current county court house was laid in 1919, but construction was stopped when Danville vied to replace Madison as the county's seat of government.

"Madison eventually won out, most likely because work on a new courthouse had already begun there," Plants said. "On June 7, 1921, the county court deemed the courthouse completed enough to be used, though it was not completely finished until 1923."

Standing tall on the front lawn of the Boone County Courthouse is a 7-foot-2-inch bronze and metal statue that is intended to serve as an everlasting tribute to coal miners – past, present and future. According to Plants, the Coal River Council of the Holmes Safety Association raised funds to erect the statue as a memorial to an industry that originated in Boone County. As a result of the support of local merchants, UMW District 17, The County Commission and mining operations, the statue was unveiled on Labor Day, Sept. 2, 1991.

For decades, Boone County has ranked first or near the top in coal production statistics in West Virginia. Nearly 2,000 miners labor in the county, and for every person directly employed in the coal industry, three more work in coal-related support occupations. Boone County's 506 square miles feature more coal reserves than any other place in the world equal to its size. **WV**

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About the author: Jessica Farner is a graduate of Marshall University's W. Page Pitt School of Journalism and Mass Communications. She lives in Logan, W.Va.