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PUTNAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE

When Virginia created a new county in 1848, it took the name of General Israel Putnam.

Putnam County was created in 1848, when the Virginia General Assembly carved away pieces of Kanawha, Cabell and Mason counties to form a new, unnamed county. When the county offices were established, the new county took the name of General Israel Putnam, a hero of the Revolutionary War.

Today, history has all but forgotten General Putnam, but in the nation's early years he was enormously popular. West Virginia is one of nine states with counties named for him.

With the county suitably named, the new county government established temporary quarters in a private residence on the banks of the Kanawha River and then set about constructing a permanent courthouse. A site was selected and \$4,000 was raised to build a brick structure. Inspired by the recent American victory in the Mexican-American War, county trustees named the new county seat after the victorious General Winfield Scott.

Construction of the county's first courthouse was begun in 1848 and completed in 1850.

Known as Red House Shoals prior to becoming the county seat, the vicinity had long been a popular landing place for boats, and the new town of Winfield quickly became a link in the burgeoning Kanawha River steamboat trade.

By the late 1890s, county officials, faced with a deteriorating building with limited space, began to lay plans to replace it. But after several years of inaction, matters came to a head when the old courthouse partially collapsed in a windstorm on the night of Sept. 6, 1899. Finding the old structure "unfit

By James E. Casto

for use and occupancy” the county court moved its proceedings to the local Baptist church, paying \$2.50 per month in rent.

The waning months of 1899 were spent demolishing the remains of the old courthouse to prepare a foundation for a new one. The county took possession of its new building on Sept. 16, 1900, after 16 months of construction. The total bill for the project ran to \$14,713.31, which included \$1,075 for the installation of a steam heating system.

In seeking an architect for their new building, county officials sought one who had an established record in terms of design ability and artistic talent. They found such an architect in Kenova’s Frank Pierce Milburn (1868-1926), one of the nation’s most prolific architects of his day.

Up to 1899, Milburn had remodeled the Summers County Courthouse and designed new courthouse buildings in McDowell and Tucker counties. After completing the Putnam County Courthouse, he remodeled the Berkeley County Courthouse and designed courthouses for Mingo, Hardy and Wayne counties, bringing his total number of courthouse projects in West Virginia to eight.

He was also well known as a courthouse architect in Virginia and Kentucky, but his range of commissions ran the gamut from schools and churches to railroad stations and commercial buildings, including Clarksburg’s Goff Building, the Fairmont Hotel and the five-story McCreery Hotel in Hinton, the town’s largest commercial structure.



Located in the heart of Teays Valley, Valley Park is home to Waves of Fun waterpark, the Valley Park Conference Center, an all-inclusive playground, miles of walking trails and much more.

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In 1900, he did the final design of the South Carolina capitol building.

Milburn’s Romanesque Revival courthouse has served Putnam County well for more than 100 years. The original building is a two-story rectangular block with a hip roof and four octagonal towers, one at each corner. A clock is located in the west tower, which is taller than the others. A gradually sloping stairway provides access to the structure’s front entrance.

Hanging above the front entrance is a small bell that originally belonged to the Kanawha River steamboat Blue Ridge. After the Blue Ridge exploded and sank in 1848, the bell was salvaged and used for the first county courthouse, which was under construction at the time. Following the collapse of the first courthouse, the bell was pulled from the wreckage and hung from the portico of the new courthouse, where it remains today.

Two-story additions were built to the courthouse in 1953, 1963 and 1974. The 32,000-square-foot Putnam County Judicial Center was constructed nearby in 2000.

Courthouse lawns are known as places to commemorate heroes, but strangely enough the courthouse grounds in Winfield remained unadorned until after World War I. In 1921, a life-sized statue of a WWI Doughboy was erected on the courthouse grounds.

Other additions to the courthouse grounds include a memorial to the county’s first responders which stands near the front entrance and a sword and plowshare monument erected in 1991 and dedicated to MIAs, POWs and KIAs. It was provided by Boilermakers Union Local #667.

The Putnam County Courthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

For much of its history, Putnam



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Open each September and October, Gritt's Fall Fun Farm offers fun for the whole family with corn mazes, wagon rides, food, hay bale slides and a pick-your-own-pumpkin patch.

County was known for its farms and coal towns like Poca, Raymond City and Black Betsy. But with the construction of Interstate 64, it became a popular bedroom community for Charleston commuters. Yesterday's farm fields have given way to today's housing subdivisions, dramatically increasing the county's population.

As recently as 1980, Winfield had a population of only 329 people. By the time the 2010 Census was taken, it had grown to 2,301, and the 2020 Census assuredly will show even greater growth.

There's much for visitors to see and do in Putnam County.

An historic landmark, the Hoge House, is located just behind the Putnam County Courthouse in Winfield. Beginning in 1857, the home of James W. Hoge was the county's first Judicial Annex and library. The site, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is accessible to the public, and the

interior is expected to open to visitors in 2019.

After a \$15 million mega makeover, the 60-acre Valley Park at Hurricane reopened in 2018 for fun-seekers of all ages.

Valley Park boasts an all-inclusive playground, an "American Ninja Warrior"-style challenge course, baseball fields, a community garden, revamped tennis courts, a regulation AstroTurf soccer field, a disc golf course, miles of walking trails and major upgrades to the Waves of Fun wave pool.

A centerpiece of the revamped park is a new conference and convention center. The facility seats 450 people in a banquet-style configuration or seats 1,200 people conference-style.

Designated "History Row," Main Street in Hurricane boasts more than a dozen specialty shops offering one-of-kind antiques, gifts and collectibles. A half-dozen colorful

murals decorate the town's buildings. A gazebo, constructed on the site of the C&O's old Hurricane depot, invites visitors to stop and linger a while.

Noting that Charleston and Huntington are only minutes away via I-64, the Putnam County Convention and Visitors Bureau suggests "you can experience the best of West Virginia's two biggest cities, then unwind by enjoying the slower pace and small-town charm of Putnam County." **WVL**

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