

RANDOLPH COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The courthouse's history spans over two centuries and several renovations.

Randolph County has a storied history, spanning from the movement of its courthouse and county seat to serving as home to historic Civil War battles. The Randolph County Courthouse, which has sat along Randolph Avenue in downtown Elkins for more than 100 years, is not the original courthouse.

The original courthouse — a two-story, log courthouse — was first completed in 1789 in the town of Beverly but later deemed unsatisfactory, according to information provided by the Beverly Heritage Center.

The log structure was built on an acre of land donated by James Westfall. Oral tradition indicates several citizens from Leading Creek attended the first meeting and suggested the courthouse be constructed there, according to Beverly Heritage Area records.

While the attendees only offered to donate the land, Westfall agreed to provide timber for the courthouse construction.

In 1808, a committee was appointed to build a new courthouse and jail in Beverly, which was completed in 1815.

In the late 1800s, citizens of Elkins began a campaign to have the Randolph County seat moved to Elkins. However, in 1890, a referendum regarding the move was held but defeated.

In 1894, a new courthouse was built in Beverly, in hopes of the town remaining the county seat; however, the building burned down in 1897 under “suspicious circumstances,” according to the Beverly Heritage Center.

After the blaze, court records were returned to the former courthouse to be safely kept. At that time, efforts were revived to have the county seat moved to Elkins, which was favorably ruled upon in 1899, at which time court records were moved to Elkins.

By Tim MacVean

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS OF WEST VIRGINIA.
PHOTO BY JEFF GENTNER.



The current Randolph County Courthouse was constructed in 1904, featuring a rounded arch entrance.

In recent years, several upgrades have been made to improve the century-old facility.

In 2015, county officials celebrated a complete renovation of the courthouse basement — which took nearly four years — in an effort to preserve documents, some of which are nearly a century old.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Randolph County Magistrate Court and Randolph County Prosecuting Attorney's Office were located in

the basement of the Randolph County Courthouse.

"They outgrew the facility but the basement became the storage facility. That's where all the documents from the county clerk, circuit clerk and magistrate court were kept," Mike Taylor, Cheat District Randolph County Commissioner from 2007 to 2018, many years serving as commission president, explained about the basement renovation. "The thing that became problematic down there was the basement was truly a basement. The conditions were deteriorating

so much and there are records that have to be kept indefinitely until they are authorized by the courts to be destroyed but the moisture from the heating and cooling — along with leaks around the cracked foundation — required us to start a three-phase project."

Taylor said the three-phase project of upgrading the basement included improving the gutter system to install a French-drain setup to prevent rain and outdoor water from penetrating the building; upgrading temperature control in the basement which was home to over 100 years

This Randolph County courtroom is ornate with Classical architectural features, including Corinthian columns. A painting of Lady Justice, enrobed in a Greco-Roman toga, is displayed inside a curved inset in the wall with a marble ledge anchoring it at the bottom.



PHOTO COURTESY ELKINS RANDOLPH COUNTY TOURISM, CIVIL

of documentation that citizens and organizations needed to review; and wiring to the basement area.

"It affects everyone in the county," Taylor said. "It was a several hundred thousand dollar project. It was very labor intensive due to the physical location of it. Much of the work had to be done by hand — you couldn't get equipment in there so when they cut the grooves and the floor to get new sewer pipes in there, it had to be done by hand."

In early 2018, the first of phase of a two-phase project roof replacement was completed. The second half of the original roof is in the process of being replaced thanks in part to a \$100,000 West Virginia Statewide Improvement Grant, which was awarded to the county, for the second time. Commissioners hope to keep the original feel of the structure by replacing the original 100-year-old terracotta plates that housed the building with a synthetic material that has a lifetime warranty.

"What we realized was the courthouse roof was the original ceramic tile roof when it was built in the late 1800s," Taylor said. "Due to the harsh weather conditions we have here in Randolph County it had taken a toll on the roof."

Leaks in the original roof led to a May 2016 collapse of the ceiling above the waiting area of the Randolph County Circuit Courtroom. Fortunately the event took place over a weekend when the courthouse was closed.

Upgrades to the roof also inspired enhancements to gutters on the facility.

"Before we did the roof project, we replaced the gutters which were all copper. That was another main source of the leaks that we had," Taylor said. "We replaced the



This iconic iron statue of former U.S. Senator Henry Gassaway Davis astride his horse stands on the Davis & Elkins College campus. Davis helped establish the college in 1904.

gutters and the downspouts because we were getting water, not only in where the offices were, but it was leading into the water infiltration into the basement."

The Randolph County Commission also replaced 109 windows in an effort to upgrade the historic facility.

"We re-did the windows. Some of them we totally replaced, others we re-glazed, and refurbished and replaced," Taylor said.

Taylor said he believed the renovations were important as the Randolph County Courthouse not only catches the eye of visitors, but also serves a purpose in preserving history and documents stored there; both are more than 100 years old.

"The courthouse — you just simply couldn't build a courthouse for the structure you have today — it's the centerpiece of the county, it's a very historic building and it's

PHOTOS COURTESY ELKINS-RANDOLPH COUNTY TOURISM, CVB.



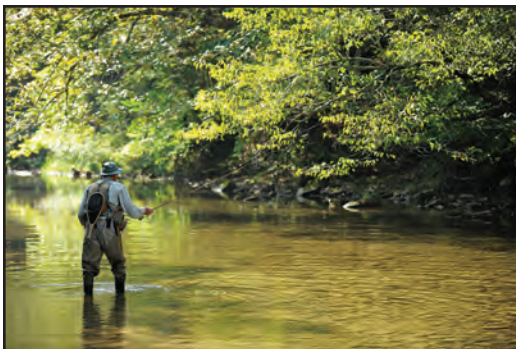
The Mountain State Forest Festival is one of the largest in West Virginia with more than 75,000 visitors each year.



The Stirrup Gallery, free and open to the public, houses nine complete collections of artifacts and art.



The Augusta Festival is a celebration of dance, crafts and music on the Davis & Elkins campus.



Second Creek is one of the many waterways where anglers can fly fish for trout.

significant in that the residents of the county can identify Elkins with being the county seat — that's the center of government," Taylor said. "To build the same building we have today would be millions and millions of dollars, but I think, number one, it's important to preserve the history of the court. I think the commission has the responsibility, as the keepers of the records, to preserve the integrity and quality of the records so they can be maintained for hundreds of years."

The Randolph County Courthouse is also home to monuments for the 1983 Beirut Bombing and other veteran memorials.

Randolph County History

Beverly, chartered in 1790 and originally known as Edmunton, honoring Edmund Randolph, served as the Randolph County seat until 1899, when Elkins became the county seat.

Elkins was incorporated in 1890 and named for United States Senator Stephen Benton Elkins, son-in-law of United States Senator Henry Gassaway Davis.

A nearly three year dispute over which town should be the county seat eventually led to the town of Elkins taking the title.

During the dispute a "special train" was formed

in Elkins to mount an attack on Beverly. However, the attack halted at the last minute after Elkins residents were assured they would be home to the county seat, according to information provided to the Randolph County Commission website by Dr. Robert Jay Dilger, director for the Institute of Public Affairs and Professor of Political Science at West Virginia University.

Randolph County also holds historical significance as home to one of the earliest engagements of the Civil War — prior to West Virginia being founded as a state — on a mountaintop just west of Beverly.

Union soldiers, under the control of General George B. McClellan, took the victory and provided control to federal forces over Appalachian northwestern Virginia, which later became West Virginia.

Randolph County Tourism

Randolph County is home to more than 20 annual events, fairs and festivals attracting tourists from around the world like the Augusta Festival and the Mountain State Forest Festival, Elkins-Randolph County Tourism CVB marketing director Taira Landavere said.

She added the importance of the history of Randolph County can be seen through a pair of attractions — the aforementioned Rich Mountain Battlefield and the Stirrup Gallery on the campus of Davis & Elkins College.

"History is in our bones, it is who we are as a place. We have a deep Civil War history in Beverly. The Beverly Heritage Museum is a fun attraction to learn more about our history," Landavere said. "The Stirrup Gallery located on Davis and Elkins College Campus is also a hidden gem."



Bickle's Knob is home to one of the few remaining observation towers in Monongahela National Forest. Formerly a fire tower, the original cab has been removed and replaced with a wooden viewing platform.

Live music is a focal point for tourists visiting Randolph County — including weekly live music at area establishments such as El Gran Sabor, Beander's, Smoke on The Water, DiBella's, Stumble In, Whiskey River and The Hutte to name just a few.

"I would say El Gran is a local hotspot since they have consistent live music every Wednesday and Friday," Landavere said.

Landavere urged visitors to the area to check out the Elkins-Randolph County Tourism website at www.elkinsrandolphwv.com for

more information on places to visit throughout the county.

"Randolph County is a lot of different things to a lot of different people. Many have fallen in love with Elkins-Randolph County because of its natural beauty. When you look around, you are surrounded by the mountains, so it is perfect to come and visit in almost any season," she said. "We are in close proximity to four different ski resorts, we have several campgrounds located next to trout fishing rivers and streams, we have several unique restaurants you won't find anywhere else, and

when you come to Randolph County you will be treated as if you are already home." **WVL**

Tim MacVean is a proud, lifelong resident of Elkins and Randolph County. He is a graduate of Davis & Elkins College, focusing with a major in history and a minor in political science. For seven years he served *The Inter-Mountain* newspaper as a staff writer, most recently as senior staff writer, covering courts, crime and city and county government. He recently left the newspaper but continues to do freelance writing for the publication.