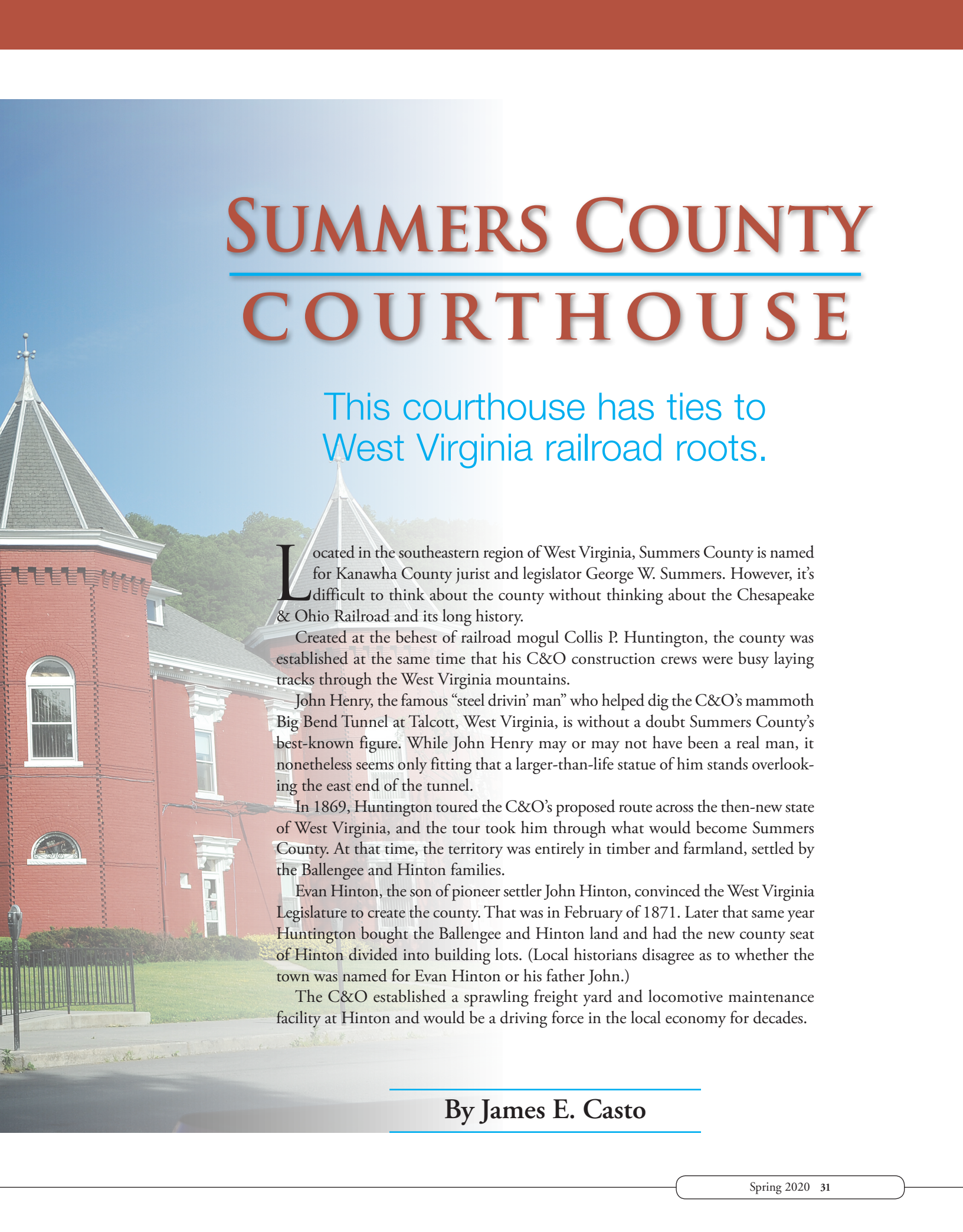


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PHOTO BY JEFF GENTNER.





SUMMERS COUNTY COURTHOUSE

This courthouse has ties to
West Virginia railroad roots.

Located in the southeastern region of West Virginia, Summers County is named for Kanawha County jurist and legislator George W. Summers. However, it's difficult to think about the county without thinking about the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad and its long history.

Created at the behest of railroad mogul Collis P. Huntington, the county was established at the same time that his C&O construction crews were busy laying tracks through the West Virginia mountains.

John Henry, the famous “steel drivin’ man” who helped dig the C&O’s mammoth Big Bend Tunnel at Talcott, West Virginia, is without a doubt Summers County’s best-known figure. While John Henry may or may not have been a real man, it nonetheless seems only fitting that a larger-than-life statue of him stands overlooking the east end of the tunnel.

In 1869, Huntington toured the C&O’s proposed route across the then-new state of West Virginia, and the tour took him through what would become Summers County. At that time, the territory was entirely in timber and farmland, settled by the Ballengee and Hinton families.

Evan Hinton, the son of pioneer settler John Hinton, convinced the West Virginia Legislature to create the county. That was in February of 1871. Later that same year Huntington bought the Ballengee and Hinton land and had the new county seat of Hinton divided into building lots. (Local historians disagree as to whether the town was named for Evan Hinton or his father John.)

The C&O established a sprawling freight yard and locomotive maintenance facility at Hinton and would be a driving force in the local economy for decades.

By James E. Casto



Though the economy of Hinton, West Virginia, is no longer driven primarily by the railroad, you can still take an Amtrak train right into downtown. Today tourism brings many visitors to the charming town of Hinton. With world-class fishing, whitewater rafting, biking, hiking and challenging golf courses nearby, there is something for nearly everyone.

When an angry dispute arose about the best location for a proposed courthouse, Huntington settled the matter by having the C&O offer to donate three acres as a site. The railroad's offer was accepted, and in 1874 the County Commission let a \$10,000 contract to construct the courthouse.

Completed in 1877, the courthouse originally was a simple two-story brick building. In 1898, the building was given a renovation that included the addition of octagonal towers at its corners. In 1926, a rear addition doubled the size of the building and added two more towers. Another addition in 1941 added still more space (but no more towers).

The towered parts of the courthouse were built of bricks fired on the site and lumber from the nearby Hinton Island Mill.

"I have a wonderful view of the courthouse from my office

window," said Hinton attorney Anna Ziegler. "Its towers give the courthouse a medieval castle-like appearance. All that's lacking is a moat to surround the structure and a drawbridge at the entrance."

Inside, the second-floor courtroom is modern in appearance and layout. It's entered by a spiral, cast-iron stairway in the building's northwest tower. The risers of the pie-shaped steps have a frieze with ornamental fleur-de-lis. A wooden rail tops the balustrade, and the narrow banisters are joined together with iron scroll work.

The railroad and the region's coal and timber operations combined to make Hinton a boom town. Many of the buildings built in the late 1890s and early 1900s still stand in the National Hinton Historic District.

By 1929, the city could boast of having 18 miles of paved streets, 21 miles of sidewalks, three national

banks, two bus lines, two hospitals, 10 wholesale firms and 75 retail stores.

It's said that in their heyday in the 1930s, the Hinton rail yards serviced 40 trains a day (24 freight trains and 16 passenger trains), each requiring a change of crews and engines. But that changed dramatically in the 1950s when the C&O traded its steam-powered locomotives for new diesels. No longer were hundreds of workers required for the railroad's Hinton maintenance operations.

The city's population, which had stood at 6,654 in 1930 and 5,780 in 1950, was down to 2,676 in 2010. The Summers County population peaked at 20,468 in 1930 and fell to an estimated 13,417 in 2014.

Where the railroad boom of the early 20th century provided the foundation of Summers County, the county's current economy is based primarily on tourism, said Ziegler. "That's thanks to the Bluestone Dam and Lake, along with the Bluestone, Greenbrier and New rivers that converge here."

Summers County is also home to Bluestone State Park, Pipestem Resort and a number of other facilities that provide lodging, camping and a variety of recreational facilities.

For the history-minded, the Hinton Railroad Museum offers an intriguing look back at the county's railroading past. Each October the museum is the centerpiece of Railroad Days, a celebration of the community's rich rail history. **WV**

James E. Casto is the retired associate editor of the Huntington *Herald-Dispatch* and the author of a number of books on local and regional history.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY NEW RIVER GATEWAY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU.

(Above) Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall on the New River spanning 1500 feet across. Divided by islands, the falls drop from 10 to 25 feet. A quarter-mile, handicapped accessible boardwalk crosses two bridges leading to islands and observation decks offering amazing views of the falls and access to fishing areas. The boardwalk passes through the Appalachian riverside flatrock community which contains many plants that grow nowhere else in New River Gorge.

(Left) Bluestone State Park is a lakeside retreat in southern West Virginia and home to Bluestone Lake, the state's third-largest body of water. Visitors can camp by the lake's edge, or take in stunning views from the porch of a cozy cabin. This wilderness park, located five miles south of Hinton, is full of outdoor recreation, boating and fishing opportunities.