

COMMUNITY

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PHOTO BY JEFF GENTNER.



TUCKER COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Once busy with timbering and mining, the county's chief employer today is tourism.

Between 1890 and 1893, two tiny West Virginia towns, Parsons and St. George, clashed in a dispute that became known as the “Tucker County Courthouse War.”

Each of the two towns coveted the title of county seat. St. George initially gained that honor, but Parsons won a subsequent election. Claiming there had been voting irregularities in the election, St. George refused to turn over the courthouse records.

On the night of Aug. 1, 1893, an armed mob of 200 Parsons men took matters into their own hands. They broke into the St. George courthouse and made off with the county records and the bell that hung in the courthouse tower, carrying them to Parsons. In a subsequent action, the court reaffirmed that Parsons was the rightful county seat. The “war” was over, with no casualties other than St. George’s wounded pride.

The Virginia General Assembly formed Tucker County from Randolph County in 1856. In 1871, after the new county had broken away from Virginia, the West Virginia Legislature added a small portion of Barbour County to it. The county is named for Virginia jurist Henry St. George Tucker.

When the Parsons men who broke into the St. George courthouse returned home, they established a temporary courthouse in a nearly completed store on Main Street. The county government continued to operate out of the store until 1900 when the current courthouse was built.

By James E. Casto



Blackwater Falls is a 57-foot cascade of water tinted by the tannic acid of fallen hemlock and red spruce needles. Visitors can enjoy the scenic views year-round by taking the steps to the falls or by using viewing platforms.

With the construction of the courthouse, the town of St. George never regained its former prominence. The flickering hope that the county seat might once again come to St. George was lost forever.

The courthouse, located at First and Walnut streets, was designed by architect Frank P. Milburn, a prolific designer of courthouses and other public buildings in West Virginia and across the southern United States.

More or less Victorian in design, the courthouse is flanked by a red brick jail and jailor's residence, built in similar style. The main entrance of the courthouse is flanked by two towers. The largest of the towers is four stories tall and capped with a steeply pitched roof. Each side of the tower has a clock face. The courthouse and jail were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

The historic jail is no longer used to confine inmates. Since 2005, the Tygart Valley Regional Jail in Belington in Randolph County has also served Tucker County.

In 2013, a four-story courthouse annex, designed by ZMM Architects of Charleston, was built adjacent to the courthouse. It sits on the same lot as the courthouse, with the original jailor's residence between the two. The annex is starkly modern in design, but its red bricks blend well with the courthouse brickwork.

Tucker County's rugged terrain and impenetrable thickets

of mountain laurel impeded the county's settlement. In 1746, when a survey party hacked its way into the wilderness, one member of the group, Thomas Lewis, claimed the "dismal appearance of the place" was "sufficen [*sic*] to strike terror in any human." Even as late as 1853, Philip Pendleton Kennedy called the region "as perfect a wilderness as our continent contained." Little wonder that the 1860 census counted only 1,428 residents in the county.

All that changed in the 1880s when industrialist Henry Gassaway Davis built his West Virginia Central and Pittsburgh Railroad, which joined the Baltimore & Ohio's main line in Mineral County. The coming of the railroad provided the missing ingredient — transportation — that was needed to open up Tucker County's timber and coal resources.

The timber and coal boom naturally increased the county's population. In 1910, it stood at 18,675. But there it peaked, when the boom proved short-lived. The clear-cutting that claimed nearly all the county's old-growth forest came to a halt



Dolly Sods is located on top of the Allegheny Plateau of West Virginia, and has over 26 miles of hiking trails. The name is derived from an 18th century German family named Dahles, who settled nearby and allowed their sheep to graze in the open mountaintop meadows (sods).



Bear Rocks Preserve is a 477-acre area owned and maintained by The Nature Conservancy. It is adjacent to the Dolly Sods Wilderness, part of the Monongahela National Forest. Bear Rocks overlooks the South Branch Potomac River and visibility can extend eastward to the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.

in the mid-1920s. Coal mining continued but steadily declined, ultimately playing out in the 1950s. By 2012, the county's population fell to an estimated 6,995.

With three state parks and a good share of the West Virginia ski industry, Tucker County's leading employer today is tourism.

Though mostly known as a skiing destination, Canaan Valley Resort State Park is a four-season resort park. Hiking and biking are exceptionally popular, and its trails double as cross-country skiing routes in winter. Its 18-hole golf course is among the top warm weather attractions in the Canaan Valley. More than 150 guest rooms at Canaan Valley Lodge and 23 cabins and cottages accommodate overnight guests year-round.

Photographs of the spectacular falls have won worldwide fame for Blackwater Falls State Park, though more than 2,000 acres of forest await visitors who trek beyond its well-traveled boardwalk to the falls. Hiking, biking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing trails wander the park and intertwine with those of the adjacent Monongahela National Forest. Guests are accommodated in 26 cabins and the 54-room Blackwater Lodge.

Although it's only four acres in size, Fairfax State Park attracts its share of visitors. It celebrates the Fairfax Stone, a boundary stone marking the source of the North Branch of the Potomac River. The original stone was placed in 1746. Over the years, there have been six Fairfax Stones, each one replacing

the last owing to weathering or vandalism. The present six-ton stone was dedicated in 1957.

The county is also home to the Dolly Sods Wilderness. Part of the Monongahela National Forest, its distinctive landscape is characterized by stunted trees, wind-carved boulders, heath barrens, grassy meadows created in the last century by logging and fires and sphagnum bogs that are much older.

Tucker County attracts thousands of visitors each year, and an increasing number of visitors decide to buy or build vacation homes in the county. **WVL**

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