

BRAXTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Braxton Courthouse stands tall on the banks of the Elk River

The Courthouse continues to serve as a centerpiece of Braxton County as it has for over 120 years. The stately facility came into existence following the creation of Braxton County by the Virginia Legislature in 1836. It was named for Carter Braxton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. In that early beginning there was no courthouse so court was held in the home of John D. Sutton, the founder and namesake of the town which is Braxton's county seat.

In 1810 John D. Sutton and his father relocated to the 7,000-acre parcel that the elder Sutton had purchased for 400 pounds from the John Allison survey in 1798. Sutton, whom the town would later be named for, laid out the community he called Newville and set aside one acre in the middle for the public square. It would take nine years before the county would have its own Courthouse. In the mean time, Sutton leased his home to the county where court proceedings were held.

A single-story log structure was completed near the middle of the century which would become the county's first Courthouse.

The county played an important part in the Civil War with the Confederate Army occupying Sutton and the Union Army entrenched at near by Bulltown. Stories recorded during the period say the Confederate Army burned the town in 1861, including the Courthouse, in retaliation of the Union Army's not getting medical attention for a female Confederate sympathizer who died while in their custody. Fortunately, county clerk records had been removed during the time to the home of Felix Sutton and escaped the flames.

A new facility would not be completed until 1887. During the interim, Court proceedings were again held in the home of John D. Sutton. During the later part of the 18th century and the early 1900s, Braxton County's Courthouse was considered a "modern facility." According to

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Photography by Steve J. Shaluta and Braxton Citizens' News





Braxton County's Mountain Lakes Amphitheater attracts artists and music-lovers of all genres. The scenic beauty surrounding the venue creates an unforgettable concert experience.

the History of Braxton County, “same being well arranged building with office rooms for the county officials. The county jail was built in 1905 from native stone.”

The facility would remain much the same for the next 50 years before it received its first addition. In 1940 the county entered into a contract to build on to the Courthouse. A population of 22,000 and 22 practicing attorneys indicated how prosperous Braxton County had become and created the need for more space.

The facility would not see additional expansion until 1999 when a wing was added to the west side of the existing structure.

Funding from the State Courthouse and Courtroom Facilities Commission and the Governor's Contingency Fund provided the money for the Courtroom's first real face lift in nearly 70 years. The remodeling provided much-needed security and ADA accessibility to the facility. In addition, a new sound system and redesign returned the Courtroom to nearly its original configuration. Much of the credit for the redesign goes to Richard A. Facemire, current Chief Judge of the 14th Judicial Circuit, and former County

Commissioner Evelyn Post. While others were actively involved in the project, Judge Facemire, an avid historian, is credited with preserving the original aspect of the facility while adding new state-of-the-art technology, improved access and increased seating. Even though the population hovers at just over 13,000 and the number of active attorneys is only a fraction of what it was in 1940, the community and its Courthouse continues to prosper.

While the County has evolved from its agricultural and timbering roots, the local economy remains diverse. Weyerhaeuser, who maintains a state-of-the-art structure wood manufacturing plant in Heaters, is currently the largest private employer. The central location has led to the emergence of tourism and travel as the county's leading industry. Two lakes, controlled by the US Army Corps of Engineers, draw millions of visitors each year. The Days Hotel and Convention Center, Mountain Lakes Amphitheater and Flatwoods Factory Stores have made central West Virginia a destination for West Virginia shoppers and travelers from surrounding states.

Even in a time most consider economically trying, the area has experienced growth. The Sutton Lake

Marina has undergone a tremendous expansion and redesign under new owners Bill and Mary Hunt. The March of Dimes chose the area as the sight of its first “Bikers of Babies” statewide motorcycle rally, which drew a large crowd to its inaugural event. The expanded Mountain Lakes Festival brought positive attention to several areas of the county and received great reviews.

The Braxton County Courthouse continues to be the centerpiece of the rural community that is the geographical center of the Mountain State. The facility and the county’s residents are poised to weather what-

ever comes their way. Be it a Civil War and a fire that destroyed much of the community or tough economical times, the steeple of the Braxton County Courthouse seems poised to stand tall on banks of the Elk River for generations to come.

Much of the historical basis of this article was derived from a two-part series on the history of the Braxton County Courthouse written by the Honorable Richard A. Facemire and published in the Citizens’ News in 2006.

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The Flatwoods Factory Stores have made central West Virginia a shopping destination for visitors from surrounding areas. The Fiesta outlet attracts collectors of Fiestaware from across the nation.

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