

WYOMING COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Historic Wyoming County offers recreational opportunities galore.

Wyoming County, with its rugged terrain bisected by the Guyandotte River, is located in the heart of West Virginia's southern coal- and natural gas-producing region. The Virginia General Assembly created the county in 1850 by carving off a piece of Logan County. The county's name came from a Delaware Indian word meaning "large plains," although the county is more known for its mountains than its plains.

The act creating Wyoming County specified that the county seat was to be laid out on the lands of William Cook. The town was laid out and originally named Cassville, in honor of noted American statesman Lewis Cass. In 1851, the town was renamed Stumperville because another settlement was calling itself Cassville, causing confusion for the mails. In 1853, the town was renamed again, this time to Oceana, in honor of Chief Cornstalk's youngest daughter.

Major timbering began in the county in the late 1880s. Logs were floated down the Guyandotte to its junction with the Ohio River at Huntington. Completion of the Virginian Railway in 1909 provided transportation of coal to Virginia ports on the Atlantic Ocean. Financier I.T. Mann and others developed a major coal mine and company town near Mullens around 1916. Developer C.H. Meade completed the county's first commercial natural gas well in 1919.

By James E. Casto

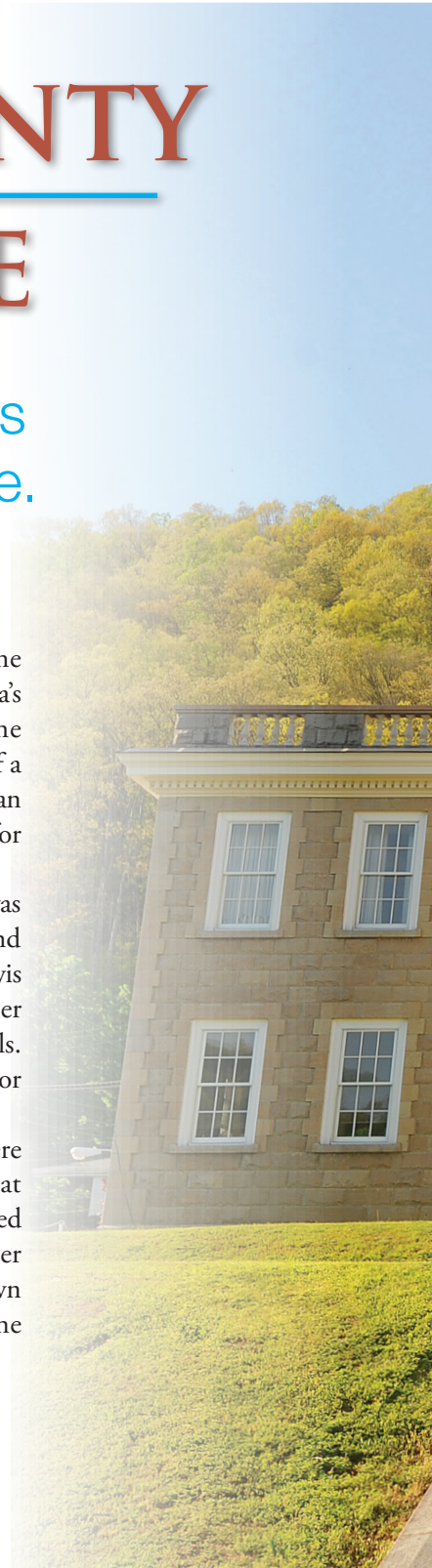


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R.D. Bailey Lake, part of the Guyandotte River Basin, has the second highest dam in West Virginia, towering 310 ft. high and is open for boating year-round.



Wyoming County is home to part of the Pinnacle Creek Trail, known as the most scenic trail system in Hatfield-McCoy Country. The Hatfield McCoy Trails are open to off-road vehicles.

Over the years the county saw a tug-of-war between Oceana and Pineville, each determined to be the county seat. There were also attempts to relocate the courthouse to Mullens and to New Richmond, known as Lusk at the time. Following a series of hotly contested referendums and elections, the issue was finally resolved in 1907 when the

county seat, and its courthouse, was permanently moved to Pineville.

Pineville was originally known as Rock View. The name was changed to Pineville by John W. Cline who reopened a post office there in 1880. He couldn't use the name Rock View because it was already being used by another town at the time. The name Pineville is derived from



Twin Falls Resort State Park is an ideal destination for nature lovers.

a large pine forest that existed on the site at that time.

The Wyoming County Court built a simple, one-story, wooden-framed building. In 1916, it was torn down and replaced by a large building fashioned from locally quarried stone. A.F. Wysong, an architect who practiced in Princeton and Charleston, designed the



Set on a high, wooded ridge in the rugged mountains of Wyoming County in southern West Virginia, Twin Falls offers more than 25 miles of hiking and biking trails, an 18-hole golf course, swimming pool, meeting facilities, restaurants, lodging and more.

neoclassical structure, which was built by D.J. Phipps, a Roanoke, Virginia, contractor. The building cost \$79,000 to erect. It's been renovated in recent years by the county commission.

A striking feature of the courthouse is its massive portico with four soaring Roman Doric columns and a triangular pediment.

The former Wyoming County Jail stands beside the courthouse. The three-story structure was built of the same rock-faced stone that was used to construct the courthouse. It's currently used for county office space.

The courthouse, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, stands high on a level terrace, backed

by a wooded hillside. In 1958, a courthouse annex was added. The terraced lawn that slopes from the courthouse down to Main Street is dotted with several memorials, none more eye-catching than the one at the center of the middle terrace of the grand stairway.

As architectural historian S. Allen Chambers noted in his book



Twin Falls Resort Park features a fully-functional Pioneer Farm, which offers park visitors a glimpse of what life was like on the frontier. This is a living history farm of the 1830s. Buildings are not open to tours.



PHOTOS COURTESY WV DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Buildings of West Virginia (Oxford Press, 2004), this is a prime spot “usually reserved for a Civil War or World War I monument.” Instead, the county in 1924 erected a statue of the Rev. W.H.H. Cook, who served in both the Union and Confederate armies, organized the first free school in the county and served in the West Virginia Legislature. The statue shows Cook preaching from a marble pulpit.

“Although the good reverend might not like the comparison,” Chambers wryly added, “his statue is similar to the almost contemporary statue of ‘Devil Anse’ Hatfield in Logan County.”

Attorney Tim Lupardus noted that beyond the county courthouse

there's a great deal to see and do in Wyoming County.

"The county's rugged beauty makes it a popular destination for outdoor enthusiasts of all types," Lupardus said. "We have beautiful Twin Falls Resort State Park, the R.D. Bailey Lake and two 18-hole golf courses — Clearfork Valley Golf Club at Oceana and the other at Twin Falls Park. The many riders that flock to the Hatfield-McCoy Trails are helping revive many of the county's small communities that have been dying."

History-minded visitors might enjoy visiting Pineville's Castle Rock, an unusual natural outcrop of rock at the convergence of Rock Castle Creek and the Guyandotte

River, as well as the petroglyphs at Lyco, he said.

Castle Rock, a natural rock formation so named because it resembles a medieval castle, stands next to the Pineville Public Library, just a stone's throw from the courthouse. It rises about 200 feet above Rock Castle Creek, a branch of the Guyandotte River. It's said to be 200 million years old. Over time, water steadily eroded the rock, creating its distinctive shape.

The rock carvings at Lyco are the best known one of four such sets of carvings found in the county. There's much speculation about their origin. Some people say Native Americans made them. Others insist they were carved by Irish

missionaries who came to America before Christopher Columbus, although most archeologists scoff at that theory.

"Something new in Pineville, started by the Chamber of Commerce just this summer, is the First Friday event," said Lupardus. "Our little Main Street is closed to cars and trucks. Local businesses set up shop outside. There are lots of vendors and artisans and, of course, plenty to eat and drink. It seems sure to become an annual happening." **WVLT**

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.

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