



DODDRIDGE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Historic charm meets modern convenience in the town of West Union, W.Va., where the historic Doddridge County Courthouse stands tall amid its surroundings.

Doddridge County was pieced together on Feb. 4, 1845, with parcels of land from the four surrounding counties of Harrison, Lewis, Ritchie and Tyler. Western Virginia congressman and state legislator Phillip Doddridge (1773-1832) was memorialized in a final act of public service when his name was bestowed upon the new county. Wasting little time, local residents held the first meeting of the newly created county at the home of Nathan Davis and his wife Jane on April 17, 1845. The center of government for Doddridge County has remained on that same parcel of land since its legislative inception.

In 1820, the area's first settlers formed a small community called Lewisport on the north bank of Middle Island Creek. The community was home to a half dozen families and supported a tannery, a general goods merchant and a post office whose postmaster, Ephraim Bee, was also the community's blacksmith, tavern owner and innkeeper. A monument along the Rail Trail in the Doddridge County town of West Union marks the 1845 founding of *E Clampus Vitus* (ECV). Founded by Ephraim Bee, ECV poked fun at the pompous gentlemen's organizations of the era while matching their philanthropy.

By Monte L. Tremont

Photos Courtesy of the Doddridge County Historical Society



Settled amidst abundant natural beauty, the town of West Union was incorporated by the West Virginia legislature in 1881. Its stunning scenery includes the shores of Middle Island Creek; at 75 miles long, it is the longest creek in the world. The Doddridge County Courthouse's steeply pitched gables and prominent Gothic towers are unmistakable against a backdrop of the town's surrounding hills.

Nathan Davis, a prominent settler, was the first to purchase land on the south side of Middle Island Creek. He constructed a brick home on one of the highest points of the parcel. Davis later gave his house and one acre of land to the county to be used as a public square, which became known as Court Square. The county's first courthouse and jail were built there in 1849. Scant records exist about this first courthouse, destroyed by fire in 1898. Construction of the replacement courthouse began in 1899 and was completed in 1903.

The new Doddridge County Courthouse was a culmination of popular architectural styles of the late Victorian era. Visual dominance of the 2.5-story red brick and limestone building is enhanced by the sheer vertical rise of the building site above the surrounding terrain and is reinforced by the courthouse's steeply pitched gables and prominent Gothic towers.

Additional Gothic elements are found on the main front entrance gable, where limestone pinnacles and ornate half-buttresses abound.

Inside the courthouse, the feeling is still that of a 1903 setting. Modern conveniences like a cold-water dispenser and an electric chairlift on the hand-carved fine oak banisters have not detracted from the historical features of the courthouse. The rose marble wainscoting lends a stately ambiance to the building.

The Doddridge County Courthouse is the proud centerpiece of the town of West Union. West Union is the county seat and the only incorporated community in Doddridge County. Incorporated in 1881, it has long served as the business and social hub of the area.

Adjacent to the courthouse, the Doddridge County Library is housed in the Old Opera House. Free Wi-Fi service is provided in the library's reading room, a



Top: The Doddridge County Courthouse is the proud centerpiece of the town of West Union. West Union has long served as the business and social hub of the area. **Bottom:** The county's old Opera House, located adjacent to the courthouse, now houses the Doddridge County Library. The library is open to visitors of the courthouse who often take advantage of its free Wi-Fi service.

comfortable location frequented by attorneys visiting the courthouse.

The old jail stands in the shadow of the courthouse; it is now home to the County Historical Society, having been replaced by the North Central Regional Jail a few minutes away in Greenwood. This modern facility is a major employer in Doddridge County.

Many who travel to Doddridge County on business frequent the West End Café. West Union's mayor, the county commissioners, judges and county employees – as well as a good cross-section of local residents – have regular tables there.

The Senior Citizens Center is an active part of the county as well, offering health, nutrition and transportation programs to the region's elderly. The center also hosts meetings and workshops for representatives of organizations that provide training and services to all county residents.

Doddridge County Park's gently rolling 57 acres are home to the annual Doddridge County Fair, held in August. The park features a community swimming pool, rustic campsites, a lodge building and numerous pavilions for meetings, parties and family reunions.

Doddridge County is conveniently located along U.S. Route 50, just east of the midway point between Clarksburg and Parkersburg, providing residents and businesses easy access to these two regional population centers. Citizens of the county say they are proud of the way historic charm intermingles with modern convenience.

"We retired and moved here about five years ago to get away from the big city," said Diane Pitcock of the New Milton community in Doddridge. "It is a refreshing change to go into the courthouse for something like renewing a vehicle registration and not have to wait in line."

Regarding Doddridge County, West Union history buff and author Frances Stewart remarked in the *State Journal* that "we love our history – that's why we're still making it." Her statement has been adopted by the town of West Union as its official slogan. **WVL**

Monte L. Tremont retired early to Doddridge County almost a decade ago from the telecommunications industry. He currently publishes Doddridge County's online newspaper, doddridgenews.com, and manages various other Internet-based enterprises.