

The Early History of West Virginia's Northern Ohio Valley

Robert Jay Dilger

The first native settlers in West Virginia's northern Ohio Valley (Doddridge, Pleasants, Ritchie, Tyler, Wetzel, Wirt, and Wood counties) were the Mound Builders, also known as the Adena people. Remnants of their civilization have been found throughout West Virginia, with many artifacts found in the Northern Panhandle, especially in Marshall County.

A more thorough discussion of West Virginia's the first native settlers was presented in the Fall 2002 issue of the *West Virginia Public Affairs Reporter* and can be read on-line at:

http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/ipa/par/Report19_4.pdf. Here is a brief overview of that history:

- Several thousand Hurons occupied present-day West Virginia during the late 1500s and early 1600s.
- During the 1600s, the Iroquois Confederacy (then consisting of the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida, and Seneca tribes) drove the Hurons from the state and used it primarily as a hunting ground.
- During the early 1700s, the Shawnee, Mingo, Delaware, and other Indian tribes also used present-day West Virginia as a hunting ground. West Virginia's Potomac Highlands was inhabited by the Tuscarora. They eventually migrated northward to New York and, in 1712, became the sixth nation to formally be admitted to the Iroquois Confederacy. The Cherokee Nation claimed southern West Virginia.

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- In 1744, Virginia officials purchased the Iroquois title of ownership to West Virginia in the Treaty of Lancaster.
- The Delaware, Mingo, and Shawnee sided with the French during the French and Indian War (1755-1763). The Iroquois Confederacy officially remained neutral, but many in the Iroquois Confederacy allied with the French.
- When the French and Indian War concluded, England's King George III feared that more tension between Native Americans and settlers was inevitable. In an attempt to avert further bloodshed, he issued the Proclamation of 1763, prohibiting settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains. The Proclamation was, for the most part, ignored.
- During the summer of 1763, Ottawa Chief Pontiac led raids on key British forts in the Great Lakes region. Shawnee Chief Keigh-tugh-qua, also known as Cornstalk, led similar raids on western Virginia settlements. The uprisings ended on August 6, 1763 when British forces, under the command of Colonel Henry Bouquet, defeated Delaware and Shawnee forces at Bushy Run in western Pennsylvania.
- In 1768, the Iroquois Confederacy (often called the Six Nations) and the Cherokee signed the Treaty of Hard Labour and the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, relinquishing their claims on the territory between the Ohio River and the Alleghenies to the British.
- In April 1774, the Yellow Creek Massacre took place near Wheeling. Among the dead were Mingo Chief Logan's brother and pregnant sister. Violence then escalated into Lord Dunmore's War.
- On October 10, 1774, Colonel Andrew Lewis and approximately 1,100 men defeated 1,200 Indian warriors led by Shawnee Chief Cornstalk at the Battle of Point Pleasant, ending Lord Dunmore's War.

- The Mingo and Shawnee allied with the British during the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783). One of the more notable battles occurred in 1777 when a war party of 350 Wyandot, Shawnee, and Mingo warriors, armed by the British, attacked Fort Henry, near present-day Wheeling. Nearly half of the Americans manning the fort were killed in the three-day assault. Following the war, the Mingo and Shawnee, once more allied with the losing side, returned to their homes in Ohio. As the number of settlers in the region increased, both the Mingo and the Shawnee moved further inland, leaving western Virginia to the white settlers.

Highlights of Doddridge County's Early History

Doddridge County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on February 4, 1845 from parts of Harrison, Lewis, Tyler, and Ritchie counties. It was named in honor of Philip Pendleton Doddridge (1773-1832).

Philip Doddridge was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania on May 17, 1773, the second son of John and Mary (Willis) Doddridge. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1797. He settled down in Wellsburg, Virginia, in present-day Brooke County. Renowned for his debating skills, he quickly established himself as one of the best attorneys in western Virginia. He served in the Virginia state senate from 1804 to 1809 and as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates in 1815, 1816, 1822, 1823, 1828, and 1829. He served as a delegate to the Virginia constitutional convention in 1829 and ran, unsuccessfully, for election to the U.S. Congress in 1822 and 1824. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1828 and served from March 4, 1829 until his death in Washington, D.C. on November 19, 1832.

Doddridge County's European Pioneers and Settlers

The county's earliest settlers included Elijah Summers, Daniel Gaston, Joseph Gray, and George Zinn. There were all living in the county prior to 1800. In 1783, Elijah Summers and several others contracted with Jonah Williams to teach their children.

James Caldwell was the first known landowner in Doddridge County. He acquired the title to 20,000 acres of land in the county and patented the current site of West Union around 1787. He later sold the land to Nathan, Joseph, and William Davis in 1807. The Davis family moved to West Union that year. Within the next year or two, the Davis family sold most of their land, about 16,000 acres, to Lewis Maxwell, a Virginia congressman, for 23 cents per acre.

John Smith, Jacob Riley, Joseph Jeffrey, and Matthew Neeley were among the first settlers in Lewisport, now West Union. They were all living in the town prior to 1810. Other early settlers included John Archibald, who arrived in Smithburg, around 1800, and Richard Dotson, who arrived in Greenwood in 1802.

Nutter's Fork was named for an early settler, Mr. Nutter. Not much is known about him, except that he was killed during a great storm that struck the county in the early 19th century. Benjamin Knight, a Methodist Episcopal preacher, also lived in the area, as did his brother, Sammy Knight. Other early settlers in the Nutter's Fork region included Hiram Sears (Sayre) and his brothers, a cattle raiser known as Haymond, and Thomas Smith, Sr., originally from Greene County, Pennsylvania.

Important Events in Doddridge County during the 1800s

Although some of the early records of the county's first churches have been lost or destroyed, it is believed that the Seventh Day Baptist Church was the county's first church. It was built in Lewisport, now West Union, in 1805.

John Chaney is credited as the county's first merchant. His West Union store was in

operation in 1820. At about the same time, a post office was established in the town and was called Lewisport, honoring Lewis Maxwell.

Doddridge County's growth during the 19th Century was assisted by the construction of the Northwestern Turnpike and the expansion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

The Northwestern Turnpike was initially proposed by George Washington in 1784. Designed to link eastern Virginia with the frontier areas beyond the Appalachian Mountains, it was completed in 1838. The turnpike linked Winchester, Romney, Grafton, Clarksburg, and Parkersburg. One of the more popular rest stops along the turnpike was Ephiriam Bee's Hotel in Lewisport (West Union).

The expansion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from Harper's Ferry into Doddridge County in 1856 opened up the county for additional settlement and economic growth. The Baltimore and Ohio railroad was an integral part of Doddridge County's transportation system well in to the 20th century.

The oil and gas industry began to develop within the county during late 19th Century. In 1892, the Sullivan Heir's Well #1, a part of the South Penn oil pool, was the first well to open in the county. The oil and gas industries continued to grow within the county, especially in the West Union area and continue to play a role in the county's economy today.

Chapman Johnson Stuart (1820-1888) was one of Doddridge County's most noted residents during the 1800s. An attorney, he was known as one of the "founders" of West Virginia. He served as a Delegate for Tyler and Doddridge counties at the Richmond Convention in 1861 where he opposed Virginia's succession from the Union. He also attended the 1861 Wheeling Convention which established the Restored Government of Virginia, and was instrumental in establishing the future state of West Virginia. A June 1913 article in the

Wheeling Intelligencer credits him for suggesting the name West Virginia as opposed to the other proposed names of "New Virginia" and "Allegheny."

Another prominent resident of Doddridge County during the 19th Century was the Frenchman Joseph H. Diss DeBar. Born in Alsace, France in 1817, he immigrated to America in 1842 and arrived in Doddridge County in 1846. He was a distinguished artist and linguist. In 1863, he designed the Great Seal and Coat of Arms of West Virginia which pictures a miner with a pick signifying industry, and a farmer with an axe signifying agriculture. Henry Joseph Smith, a resident of Cove in Doddridge County, was used as the model for the farmer. Joseph DeBar is also credited as the founder of the town of Santa Clara. He named the town in honor of his wife, Clara Lavassor.

The Doddridge County Seat

On April 17, 1845, the first meeting of the county court was held at Nathan and Jane Davis's home in present-day West Union. James Newton was elected the county's first county clerk and U. M Turner was elected the county first prosecuting attorney. Nathan and Jane Davis donated an acre of land to the county for its use as a public square. The county's first courthouse and jail was built on the donated land in 1849.

West Union was incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly on March 14, 1850 and by the West Virginia legislature in 1881. Nathan Davis suggested the town's name. In 1850, Lewisport was attempting to change its name to Union. Nathan Davis suggested that their town, located just west of Union, be called West Union.

Highlights of Pleasants County's Early History

Pleasants County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly in 1851 from parts of Ritchie, Tyler and Wood counties. It was named in honor of James Pleasants, Jr. (1769-

1839).

James Pleasants Jr., was born in Goochland County, Virginia on October 24, 1769. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in Goochland County. He served in the Virginia General Assembly from 1796 to 1803 and was the clerk of the Virginia lower house from 1803 to 1810. He represented Virginia in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1811 to 1819 and in the U.S. Senate from 1819 to 1822. He served as the Governor of Virginia from 1822 to 1825. He died on November 9, 1839.

Pleasants County's European Pioneers and Settlers

Rene-Robert Cavelier de La Salle was probably the first European to set foot in present-day Pleasants County. He sailed down the Ohio River in 1669. In 1749, Louis Bienville de Celeron sailed down the Ohio River, and may have set foot in present-day Pleasants County. He claimed all of the lands drained by the Ohio River for King Louis XV of France. He met several English fur traders on his journey and ordered them off of French soil and wrote strong letters of reprimand to the colonial governors protesting the English's presence on French soil. Despite de Celeron's warning, many English fur traders and hunters continued to visit the Ohio Valley region during the early 1700s, but their names were not recorded.

The first name that appears in the memoirs of the era was an English fur trader named Tygart, who was said to have lived on Middle Island around 1765. In 1770, George Washington explored the area.

The county's first, permanent settlers were Isaac and Jacob LaRue, Frenchmen who had been granted a large tract of land in the county for their service to the colonies during the American Revolutionary War. They built a cabin on Middle Island in 1790. At that time, the entire county was a wilderness.

In 1795, Alexander Henderson settled at the mouth of Cow Creek. In 1797, Basil Riggs settled above Raven Rocks narrows. Soon afterwards, Robert Triplett and his brothers moved into the county. The county's population continued to increase slowly throughout the early 1800s.

Important Events in Pleasants County during the 1800s

Most of the county's residents sided with the Union during the Civil War. When Virginians were asked to vote on the ordinance of succession on May 23, 1861, Pleasants County's voters opposed it, 363-158. When the war began, anyone suspected of having sympathy for the Confederacy was jailed.

The county did not experience any major battles during the war. However, on October 26, 1863 a band of Confederate soldiers raided St. Mary's, temporarily taking twenty-five citizens captive.

Small amounts of oil were discovered in the county during the 1850s. In 1863, a large amount of oil was discovered on Jacob Hendershot's farm. Soon after, St. Mary's became a leading center for the construction of oil barrels. The oil industry continued to play a large role in the county's economic development for many years.

The county's first newspaper, *The Watchword*, appeared on October 10, 1877. The Rev. F. M. Yates, of the Methodist Protestant Church, served as its editor and R. L. Pemberton its publisher.

The Ohio River Railroad, connecting St. Mary's to Parkersburg and Wheeling, began operation in June 1884. The railroad reduced travel times to Parkersburg and Wheeling, improved the county's mail service, and provided ready access to daily newspapers from larger cities.

The Pleasants County Seat

The first meeting of the county court took place on May 15, 1851 at the home of Alexander H. Creel, at St. Mary's. At that time, the county had less than 1,500 inhabitants. The meeting was conducted by ten justices appointed by Virginia's governor John Floyd. Rodney Hickman was elected county clerk, Greenberry Riggs was selected county survey, and Moses Williamson, John Prince, and Abner Martin were recommended to the governor for sheriff. Moses Williamson was later appointed the county's first sheriff and took his oath of office on July 15, 1851. Arthur Boreman, who later became the first governor of West Virginia, was among those admitted to the county bar at the meeting.

A collection was started in 1848 to raise funds for the construction of a courthouse and jail. Alexander H. Creel donated the most, \$700. The county court met at Isaac Reynolds home while the necessary funds (\$5,300) was collected to pay for the construction of the county courthouse and jail. The combined courthouse and jail was completed on June 11, 1854.

The land comprising St. Mary's, the county seat, was originally owned by Henry Thomas. The town was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1815. Thomas transferred the title to the land to William McClerry, who transferred it to Stephen West. West's heirs later transferred the title to the land to Alexander H. Creel's father, who, in turn, passed it onto his son.

Local legend indicates that when Alexander H. Creel passed the area on a steamboat in 1834 he had a vision in his sleep of the Virgin Mary who told him that he was viewing "the site of what some day will be a happy and prosperous city." He then woke up, opened the outer door to his state room, and saw in the moon-light the lower end of Middle Island and the cove beyond. He later returned to the area, bought the land, and started St. Mary's. However, the legend's

veracity has been brought into question because record books indicate that he did not buy the land, his father did. Moreover, in 1837, Creel sold the land to Hugh L. Pickens. He repurchased the land in 1849. Alexander Creel, believing the land to be a good place for the proposed extension of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad company to cross the Ohio River, moved there and founded St. Mary's. Thomas Browse, another prominent citizen of the area, laid out the town for him. Creel named the town, then known as Pickens' Bottom, in honor of the Virgin Mary. At that time, there were only three or four houses in the town. Its population began to increase after being named the county seat. Unfortunately for the town, the railroad line to Ohio was built through Wheeling, with a branch to Parkersburg, leaving St. Mary's isolated and with a population of less than 200 through the Civil War years.

St. Mary's was incorporated in 1872, but the charter was repealed in 1876. It was incorporated again in 1880. The discovery of oil in the area following the Civil War helped the city's economy and population to grow.

Highlights of Ritchie County's Early History

Ritchie County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on February 18, 1843 from parts of Harrison, Lewis and Wood counties. It was named in honor of noted journalist Thomas Ritchie (1778-1854).

Thomas Ritchie was born on November 5, 1778 in Tappahannock, Essex County, Virginia. His mother was the sister of Judge Spencer Roane, the namesake of Roane County. He studied law for awhile then attended medical school in Philadelphia. He then decided to be a teacher and operated a school in Fredericksburg until 1803 when he opened a book store in Richmond. On May 9, 1804, he and his partner, W. W. Worsley, founded the *Richmond Enquirer*. A year later, he became the sole owner of the newspaper and slowly gained fame as

one of Virginia's finest journalists. His editorials on the political issues of the day elevated the *Richmond Enquirer* to one of Virginia's leading newspapers. He was widely known as the "Napoleon of the Press" for his strongly partisan advocacy of the Democratic Party. He turned the newspaper over to his sons in 1845 and moved to Washington, D.C. where he edited the *Washington Union*, the Democratic party's national newspaper. He edited the paper until his retirement in 1851. He died on July 12, 1854.

Thomas Ritchie also served with distinction in the War of 1812, was the State Printer of Virginia from 1814 to 1834, and the U.S. Congressional Printer in 1845.

Ritchie County's European Pioneers and Settlers

Colonel William Lowther and his brothers-in-law, Jesse and Elias Hughes, are credited as the first Englishmen to explore Ritchie and Wirt counties. They arrived in 1772 and named one of the rivers they followed the Hughes River.

John Bunnell was the first English settler in the county. He built a cabin near Pennsboro during the late 1790s. He later sold his land to John Webster. George Husher arrived in the Bond's Creek area in 1800. In 1801 (or 1803), Lawrence Mealey built a cabin about eight miles from the Bunnell farm, near present-day Harrisville. By 1810, there were about twenty families living near present-day Harrisville, then called Mealey's settlement. By 1830, the county's population had reached about 1,500.

Important Events in Ritchie County during the 1800s

John Ayers was the county's first school teacher. He taught in the Webb Mill's area from 1810 until his retirement in the early 1860s. The county's first school house was constructed in 1814.

The county's first church was organized by the Methodist Reverend Thomas

Cunningham in 1810.

The construction of the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike, completed in 1848, hastened the development of southern Ritchie County and the extension of the Northwestern-Virginia Railroad in 1858 from Grafton into the Pennsboro area and then onto Parkersburg also created additional economic opportunities throughout the county.

The county's first newspaper, *The Ritchie Democrat*, was published in 1856. It was owned and edited by Enoch G. Day.

The Ritchie County Seat

Harrisville was settled by Thomas Harris and his land was platted into lots by John McKinney on January 3, 1822. Stephen Stuart bought the first lot and built the first house in the new town. The town was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly on January 3, 1832. The town grew very slowly. In 1840, there were only four houses in the town. In 1842, Daniel Rexford built a hotel in the town and over the next several years the town experienced some growth, primarily because of its designation as the county's seat. The first session of the county court was held at John Harris' home on April 4, 1843. The town was then known as Ritchie or Ritchie Court House and was incorporated on February 26, 1869. In 1892, the town was renamed for General Thomas M. Harris, nephew of the town's founder and one of the commissioners in the trial of those accused of plotting Abraham Lincoln's assassination. General Harris was a physician who commanded several posts within West Virginia during the early years of the Civil War and later served with distinction in the Shenandoah Valley.

Daniel Haymond, Daniel Ayers, William R. Lowther, Alexander Lowther, Sr., and James Malone, Jr. served as the county's first justices of the peace and presided at the county court's first meeting. At that first meeting, William Lowther was elected county clerk, Austin Berkeley

was elected sheriff, and Archibald Wilson surveyor.

Highlights of Tyler County's Early History

Tyler County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on December 16, 1814 from parts of Ohio County. The county was named in honor of John Tyler (1747-1813).

John Tyler was born in James City County, Virginia on February 28, 1747. After graduating from William and Mary College he studied law and was appointed a judge of the admiralty in 1776. He was a member of the Virginia General Assembly (1778-1788), serving as Speaker in 1781 and in 1783. He was elected a judge of the Virginia general court (1789-1808) and later served as the Governor of Virginia (1808 to 1811). After his term expired, he was appointed by President James Madison Judge of the U.S. District Court for Virginia in 1811. He served in that position until his death on January 6, 1813. His son, John Tyler, was the 10th President of the United States.

Tyler County's European Pioneers and Settlers

The French explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle was probably the first European to set foot in present-day Tyler County. He sailed down the Ohio River and reportedly camped on the shores of the Ohio River in present-day Tyler County in October 1669. The second was probably Anthony Sadowski (Sandusky), an Indian trader and interpreter who traveled along the Ohio River during the 1720s and 1730s. In 1749, Louis Bienville de Celeron sailed down the Ohio River and may have set foot in the county. As mentioned previously, he claimed all of the lands drained by the Ohio River for King Louis XV of France and after meeting several English fur traders along the route ordered them to vacate the area.

Tyler County's earliest settlers included Thomas and John Williamson and a Mr. Purcell and Alexander Caldwell. They arrived during the early 1790s. By 1800, Henry and James

Jolley, George and Thomas Gregg, Robert Gorrell, Jacob Ankrom, Daniel Haines and John Martin were also residing in the county. Some accounts indicate that Jacob Ankrom may have arrived in the county as early as 1784.

Henry Jolley established the county's first ferry service and, in 1800, James Jolley started the county's first tannery and Thomas Gregg constructed the county's first grist mill.

Important Events in Tyler County during the 1800s

Charles Wells arrived in the county from Ohio in 1802 and built a cabin near present-day Sistersville. He was married twice and fathered twenty-two children, many of whom stayed in the county. His family was instrumental in the development of Sistersville.

A Mr. Gooden was the county's first school teacher. He taught ten students starting in 1810 in Sistersville. The first church service in the county was held in James Williamson's home in 1811. The first organized church was the Methodist Episcopal by Reverend David Smythers.

Most of Tyler County's residents sided with the North during the Civil War. There were no major engagements fought within the county during the war.

The county's first newspaper, *The Virginia Plain Dealer*, began publishing on April 20, 1860. Its original owner and editor was a Mr. Brown who sold the paper to J. E. Boyers soon after it went into print.

In 1892, oil was discovered in the county. In 1894, the world's largest natural gas well, "Big Moses" was drilled in Tyler County. It produced as much as 100 million cubic feet of gas each day.

The Tyler County Seat

The first meeting of the county court took place at Charles Wells's home on January 9,

1815. Ten justices of the peace presided at the meeting. Joseph Martin was elected the county's first sheriff, Abraham S. Birkhead was appointed county clerk, and Jeremiah Williams was elected county surveyor. Subsequent court meetings were held at Ephraim Martin's home and then at William McCoy's home.

After Charles Wells died, his estate was passed onto his daughters, Sarah and Delilah. Sistersville, which was built on the sisters' property, was named in their honor.

In 1816, the Virginia legislature moved the county seat to Middlebourne, primarily because it was more centrally located and had a larger population (then around 100). The county court then met at Robert Gorrell's (Gorrill) home in Middlebourne until the county courthouse was constructed in 1820.

Middlebourne was formally established by legislative enactment on January 27, 1813 on Robert Gorrell's property. He settled in the area in 1798. The town's name was derived from its location which was about halfway between Pennsylvania and the old Salt Wells on the Kanawha River above Charleston. The town was incorporated on February 3, 1871.

Highlights of Wetzel County's Early History

Wetzel County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on January 10, 1846 from Tyler County. The county was named in honor of Lewis Wetzel (1764-1808), one of the most colorful characters on the American frontier.

Lewis Wetzel was a famous Indian fighter and guide. He was born in August 1764 on the South Branch of the Potomac River in present-day West Virginia. In 1769, his father relocated his family to Wheeling Creek. In 1777 or 1778 Lewis and his younger brother, Jacob, were captured by Wyandot Indians and taken about twenty miles down the Ohio River. On the first night of their capture, the boys escaped and returned to their home. In 1782, Wetzel's

brother, George, was killed by Indians while on a hunting expedition. That same summer, Wetzel's friend, Joseph Mills, was shot by Indians but lived. In 1787, Wetzel's father, John Wetzel, was killed by Indians. Lewis Wetzel then resolved to kill as many Indians as possible and was always the first to volunteer whenever an effort was made to suppress an Indian uprising. A tall, muscular man, he reportedly rarely cut his black hair, which, when combed out, fell to his knees, in defiance of any Indian who would try to take his scalp. He reportedly killed about 100 Indians during his lifetime. Although a legendary figure on the frontier, his zeal and hatred of the Indians sometimes got the best of him. In 1785, he was detained for attempting to kill a friendly Indian, but escaped. In 1789, he was arrested in Marietta, Ohio for killing a friendly Indian, but the local authorities could not find a jury who would convict the famous Indian fighter for killing an Indian. He was later arrested in Natchez, Mississippi for counterfeiting (some accounts indicate that the real offense was an affair with the wife of an influential man in the town - an accusation Wetzel later denied). After serving for some time in prison, several of his friends arranged a pardon for him and he returned to the Wheeling area for several years before moving back to the Natchez area. He died near Natchez, Mississippi in 1808.

Wetzel County's European Pioneers and Settlers

The French explorer Rene-Robert Cavalier de la Salle was probably the first European to set foot in present-day Wetzel County. He sailed down the Ohio River and may have camped on the shores of the Ohio River in present-day Wetzel County in October 1669. The second was probably Anthony Sadowski (Sandusky), an Indian trader and interpreter who traveled along the Ohio River during the 1720s and 1730s. In 1749, Louis Bienville de Celeron sailed down the Ohio River and may have set foot in the county. He was followed by Christopher Gist who, on

behalf of the Ohio Company, surveyed the area in 1752.

At various times during the early 1770s, Lewis Wetzel, Levi Morgan, Matthew Kerr and Joseph Dorsey traveled through the county on hunting and trading expeditions. Edward Dulin was the first English settler in the area. He arrived in the New Martinsville area around 1773 and built two cabins, one for his family and another for his slave. He was killed by Delaware Indians at the door of his cabin several years later. The Indians took his slave as a captive and would have killed Mrs. Dulin and her newly born daughter, Sarah, but decided to spare their lives because Mrs. Dulin was considered too beautiful to kill. The Indians intended to take Mrs. Dulin captive, but because she was still recovering from Sarah's birth they decided to let her rest for a few days and left to find some food. In the meantime, a neighbor named Martin (most likely Edmund Martin) heard shots in the distance and decided to investigate. When he arrived at the Dunlin cabin he found Mr. Dulin laying dead in front yard and Mrs. Dulin and Sarah huddled inside, petrified with fear. He took Mrs. Dulin and her daughter up the Ohio River in a canoe to safety. There is no record of what happened to the slave. Mrs. Dulin later remarried and moved to Kentucky. Sarah later married Daniel Boone, a descendant of the famous Daniel Boone.

Other early settlers in the county included Henry Church, who lived to be 109 years old and nicknamed "Old Hundred," Obidiah Paden, a fur trader named Proctor, John Crow, John Wyatt, and James Lowe.

Important Events in Wetzel County during the 1800s

In 1810, Sarah Dunlin sold the family farm in six sections to Andrew Beall (400 acres), Joseph and John Witten (400 acres), Robert McEldowny (300 acres), Samuel McEldowny (100 acres), William Springer (100 acres) and Presley Martin (100 acres). Presley Martin platted a

town on his land in 1838 and named it Martinsville, after himself. The town was named the county seat in 1846 by the act establishing the county. The town's prefix, New, was added to distinguish itself from another town of the same name in Henry County, Virginia. The town was incorporated on March 18, 1848 as Martinsville. The town's name was officially changed to New Martinsville in 1871.

Oil and natural gas were discovered in the county during the 1880s. In 1896, the large Stringtown oil field which straddled the Tyler-Wetzel county boundary began operation. By the turn of the century, Wetzel County was one of the largest oil and natural gas producers in the state.

The Wetzel County Seat

The first meeting of the Wetzel County court took place at the home of Sampson Thistle near Martinsville (now New Martinsville) in April 1846. The county had eighteen justices of the peace. The justices elected Presley Martin county clerk, James Snodgrass prosecuting attorney, and William Sharpneck county sheriff. In May, the court purchased the Thistle home for *400 and made it the permanent site for the courthouse. In 1852, a new court house was constructed on land donated by Sampson Thistle and Presley Martin.

Highlights of Wirt County's Early History

Wirt County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on January 19, 1848 from parts of Jackson and Wood counties. The county was named in honor of William Wirt (1772-1834).

William Wirt was born on November 8, 1772 in Bladensburg, Prince George County, Maryland. He was educated in Georgetown, studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1792 at Culpeper Court House, Virginia. He later moved to Richmond and distinguished himself as an

author, orator, and lawyer. In 1799, he was appointed the clerk of the Virginia House of Delegates, and, in 1802, he was appointed chancellor of the eastern judicial district. In 1803, he published “The Letters of a British Spy” which was well received and re-printed in several editions. In 1807, he was appointed by President Thomas Jefferson to be one of the attorneys representing the United States in the trial of Vice-President Aaron Burr for treason. In 1808, he served in the Virginia General Assembly. In 1816, he was appointed by President James Madison to the U.S. District Attorney for Virginia and, in 1817, was named Madison's Attorney General of the United States. He held that position until 1829, serving the Presidential Administrations of James Madison and John Quincy Adams. He participated in the representation of the federal government’s interests in well over 100 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including the historically significant *McCulloch vs. Maryland* (1819), establishing the doctrine of national supremacy, and *Gibbons vs. Ogden* (1824), establishing the federal government’s powers over intrastate as well as interstate commerce. In 1829, he moved to Baltimore and became active in the anti-Masonic political party. He served as their Presidential nominee in 1832 and received 33,108 popular votes and Vermont’s seven electoral votes. He died on February 18, 1834.

Wirt County’s European Pioneers and Settlers

Colonel William Lowther and his brothers-in-law, Jesse and Elias Hughes, are credited as the first Englishmen to explore both Ritchie and Wirt counties. They arrived in 1772 and traveled up the Little Kanawha River. Along the way they discovered Burning Springs creek and the Hughes River.

The county was first settled in the early 1770s, but the names of these early settlers were not recorded. In 1790, Elrick Hostler was traveling along the Little Kanawha River and

discovered Burning Springs Run. In 1792, Henry Neal, William Triplett, and Daniel Powell lived in the area and while hunting Buffalo were attacked by Indians. Neal and Triplett were killed.

In 1796, William Beauchamp (1743-1808), former sailor in the Continental Navy and a lay minister for the Methodist church, settled in present-day Elizabeth. He claimed 1,400 acres of land at Tuckers Riffle on the Little Kanawha River. In 1803, he built the first grist mill in the county. Portions of his farm, known as Beauchamp's Mills, was laid out as a town by his son, David Beauchamp, in 1814. In 1817, he named the town Elizabeth, honoring his wife Elizabeth Woodyard Beauchamp. The town was incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly in 1822 and by the West Virginia state legislature in 1867.

Other early settlers in the county included Benjamin Roberts, Thomas Prebble, Jonathan Shepherd and his three sons, William, Samuel, and Henry.

Important Events in Wirt County during the 1800s

The first church services in the county were performed by Robert Manley in 1799 and 1800 on behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He traveled two religious circuits following along the Ohio, Little Kanawha, and Hughes Rivers and assisted local residents Reece Wolfe and William Beauchamp II in formally organizing the church within the county.

During the early 1800s several salt wells were drilled near present-day Elizabeth. The wells discovered relatively small amounts of oil which was bottled and used for medicinal purposes. In the 1840s, more oil was discovered along the Hughes River. In the 1850s, oil was discovered near present-day Burning Springs. In 1860, General Samuel Karns and his brother, Francis Karns, discovered a major oil field in Burning Springs. Following their discovery, thousands of fortune seekers poured into the county. In August 1860, Burning Springs had fewer

than 20 permanent residents. Six months later, it had over 6,000 residents. Hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil was produced there between 1860 and 1870.

During the Civil War, on May 9, 1863, Confederate cavalymen, under the command of General William E. Jones, burned the oil in the town's storage tanks and set the area's oil wells on fire. More than 100,000 barrels of oil were ignited, and it was reported that the light from the fire was clearly visible in the night sky as far away as Parkersburg, more than forty miles away.

Wirt county's first newspaper, *The Elizabeth Gazette*, was published on March 13, 1867. It was published by William McCoy and John McWilliams.

The Wirt County Seat

Elizabeth was named the county seat when the county was formed in 1848. The first meeting of the county court was held at Alfred Beauchamp's home in Elizabeth on May 23, 1848. Ten justices of the peace attended the meeting. They elected Daniel Wilkinson county clerk, John Jackson county prosecuting attorney, and J. C. Rathbone county surveyor. They also recommended Henry Steed to the governor for appointment as county sheriff.

Highlights of Wood County's Early History

Wood County was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly on December 21, 1798 from parts of Harrison County. At that time, Wood County had 1,217 residents.

The county was named in honor of James Wood (1747-1813), then Governor of Virginia. He was born in Frederick County, Virginia. In 1763, when he was 16, he served as a private during Pontiac's War. The following year he organized and commanded a company in the expedition against the Shawnee Indians. In 1775, he was elected to the House of Burgesses from Frederick County. He represented Frederick County in the Virginia Convention of 1776 and, later that year, was appointed a Colonel in the Virginia military. He served with distinction

during the American Revolutionary War and was named superintendent of the prisoners of war held by the Virginia militia. In 1783, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and put in command of the troops defending the border against Indian raids. In 1784, he was elected a member of the Virginia executive council and, by seniority, was the lieutenant Governor of the State. He then served as the Governor of Virginia (1796-1799). He was an ardent opponent of slavery throughout his lifetime and served as President of the society for the promotion of abolition of slavery in Virginia in 1801. He continued as a member of the executive council of Virginia following his governorship until his death, on June 16, 1813.

Wood County's European Pioneers and Settlers

Robert Cavelier de La Salle was probably the first European to set foot in present-day Wood County. He sailed down the Ohio River in 1669. Louis Bienville de Celeron sailed down the Ohio River in 1749 and may have set foot in the county during his voyage.

In 1751, Christopher Gist passed through the county during his explorations on behalf of the Ohio Company. George Croghan explored the area in 1765. In 1768, Thomas Hutchins surveyed the length of the Ohio River and noted in his journal a trading post owned by Neil McCollom located at the mouth of the Little Kanawha River. In 1769, Captain William Crawford and several others surveyed the county's lands on behalf of George Washington who was granted over 2,000 acres of land along the Ohio River for his service during the French and Indian War (1755-1763). In 1770, George Washington led a surveying party down the Ohio River and explored the area personally.

Several families and fur traders had established settlements along the Little Kanawha River during the 1760s. These settlements were abandoned following King George III's Proclamation of 1763, prohibiting settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains. Following the

treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768, which reduced Indian hostilities along the frontier, settlements sprang up all along the Ohio River. However, settlement was still prohibited. Legal title to land was not available until 1779, making it difficult to determine the county's first permanent settler. According to land records of 1782, the following pioneers were living in the county in 1772: Thomas Batton, Sr., Michael Cresap, John Gibson, Mark Hardin, William Minor, William Stewart, and George Yeager.

In 1771, Joseph Tomlinson, Sr. and his son, Samuel, then living in Moundsville, laid a tomahawk claim to the land of present-day Williamstown (some reports indicate 1769). They built a cabin on the land and used it as a hunting lodge. A few years later, the widowed Rebecca Tomlinson Martin moved in year-round. When she remarried in 1775 to Isaac Williams, they made their home there.

Other early settlers in the county included Captain James Neal. He visited the county in 1783, built a block house, known as Neal's Station, about a mile south of present-day Parkersburg along the Little Kanawha River in 1785, and moved there, with his extended family, in 1787.

In 1785, William Tilden, President of a company with extensive land holdings along the Ohio River, entered into a business agreement with Joseph Wood to act as a land agent for the company. That winter, the two men, several pioneer families, and several hired hands sailed down the Ohio River and landed in present-day Belleville. They constructed a block house and over the course of the next year cleared over 100 acres of land for cultivation, built several cabins, and named their new settlement Belleville. The settlers included James Pewthrewer, William Ingals, David Jemerson (Jamison), Andrew McCash, Francis Andrews, and a Mr. McDonal, Mr. Greathouse, Mr. Tabor, and Mr. Gilruth.

Important Events in Wood County during the 1800s

In 1798, Harman Blennerhassett, noted attorney and respected scholar, constructed a mansion on Blennerhassett's Island. In 1805, Vice-President Aaron Burr visited Blennerhassett and convinced him to finance an armed force to capture the Wichita territory in the West and, in the event war broke out between Spain and the United States, to proceed to Mexico. A flotilla of about twenty small ships were constructed at Marietta and, in December 1806, the fleet, with about thirty well-armed men aboard, set sail down the Ohio River, supposedly toward Mexico. Fearing that the fleet was part of a scheme by Aaron Burr to overthrow the government and to set up a new nation comprised of the western states, President Thomas Jefferson ordered his arrest. Colonel Hugh Phelps, commander of the Wood County militia, attempted to intercept the ships. Unfortunately, the ships had already left when he arrived at the Blennerhassett mansion. Blennerhassett's wife, Margaret, insisted that her husband was not part of a plot to overthrow the government and ordered the troops not to disturb her property. The troops ransacked the mansion and the grounds. Burr and Blennerhassett were later captured and transported to Richmond and imprisoned. Burr was tried for treason and was acquitted. Blennerhassett was never brought to trial, but his reputation and standing in the country was ruined. He and his family moved to Mississippi and later moved to Europe where he died in 1831.

The completion of the Northwestern Turnpike, running from Winchester to Parkersburg, in 1838 and the completion of the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike in 1847 were critical to the county's continued economic development. The arrival of a branch line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1857 connecting Parkersburg to Clarksburg and the main line at Grafton and the development of oil refineries during the early 1860s to process oil from the Burning Springs oil fields in neighboring Wirt County were two additional important milestones in the county's

economic growth during the 19th century.

The Wood County Seat

In 1773, Robert Thornton, of Pennsylvania, claimed 400 acres of land in the county, including part of present-day Parkersburg. In 1783, after acquiring even more land in the county, he sold 1,350 acres, including the land on which Parkersburg now stands, to Captain Alexander Parker for \$50. After Parker's death in 1791, the land passed onto his daughters, Mary and Nancy. In the meantime, John Stokely had started a settlement, called Stokelyville and later Newport, on a portion of the land claimed by the Parker sisters. Stokely based his claim to the land on a survey conducted by James Neal in 1784 which indicated that Thornton's original claim to the land was in straight lines and did not include the northern bank of the Little Kanawha River. In 1805, a local jury ruled in favor of the Parker sisters, but, on appeal, the District Court in Morgantown awarded Stokely title to the land in 1806. The Parker sisters continued to litigate the dispute and, in 1810, Mary Parker and her husband, William Robinson, gained clear title to the land after John Stokely and his business partner, Hugh Phelps, were paid \$1,696.16. Nancy Parker was no longer a litigant because she had passed away without leaving any heirs. The Robinson's attorney, Philip Doddridge, agreed to provide the payment in exchange for one-third ownership of the lots on the land. In December 1810, George Avery re-surveyed the town and laid it out into lots. The town was renamed Parkersburgh, in honor of Alexander Parker (the h was later dropped). The city was chartered in 1820 and incorporated by the West Virginia state legislature on February 11, 1911.

The first session of the county court was held at Hugh Phelps's home, located just south of present-day Parkersburg, on May 13, 1799. Ten justices of the peace attended the meeting, five Republicans from the Parkersburg area and five Federalists from the Vienna area. The

Republicans walked out in protest over a dispute concerning the commissions for several of the justices and after it had become clear that the Federalists were intent on moving the court to Vienna. The two factions then appointed their own county officers and, for the next year, held competing meetings. The acts of both courts were rescinded in 1800 after the legislature appointed four additional Republicans to the county court. The Republican dominated court met on March 10, 1800 and selected William Lowther county sheriff and John Stokely county clerk. The justices later agreed to a compromise location for the county seat, on acreage owned by John Stokely at the mouth of the Little Kanawha River, then-called Newport and later renamed Parkersburg.

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