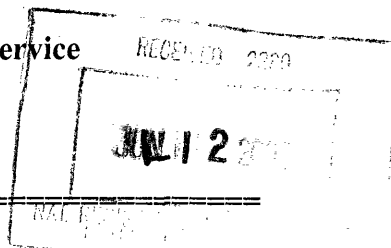


United States Department of the Interior National Park Service  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
Multiple Property Documentation Form



**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

County Courthouses of West Virginia

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

County Government and Courthouse Architecture in West Virginia, 1754 to 1954

**C. Form Prepared by**

**name/title:** Erin Riebe and Alan Rowe (WV SHPO) with Barbara E. Rasmussen

**street & number:** 1900 Kanawha Blvd., East **telephone:** (304) 558-0240

**city or town:** Charleston **state:** WV **zip code:** 26501

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*for* Alan Rowe  
Susan M. Pierce, Deputy SHPO

7/8/2004  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

Aug 25, 2004  
Date

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## Statement of Historic Contexts

### *County Government and Courthouse Architecture in West Virginia, 1754 to 1954*

#### Introduction

West Virginia county government plays a pivotal role in the lives of its citizens. The state's political roots go deep into the Virginia system of local government that grew out of the earliest days of colonization by Great Britain. Due to the rural character of early Virginia's existence, counties were an efficient way of providing essential public services to a widely scattered and agricultural population. As western Virginia grew, residents expected the familiar style of local government to be available to them as well.

County formation began as early as 1754 with the formation of Hampshire County. Although formation was slow through the eighteenth century, most of the counties formed in the first half of the nineteenth century. This growth of counties not only reflected population increases in western Virginia, but also showed the settlers important desire for the structure of government. Significant, too, are the rising aspirations among residents there for political and economic successes that depended on accessible local government. Social status accrued to those who held office in the new county, and that was an important aspect of the push for more political units in the west.

Once counties were formed and county seats were chosen, local governments began the process of securing funds for the construction of a courthouse. Although most counties are operating out of their second or third building, they each stand as a testament to the significance of county government and politics and West Virginia's past.

Following is a brief history of West Virginia to help place the discussion of counties and their courthouses in context. The history is followed by descriptions of county formations in West Virginia, the structure of county government in the state, and courthouse architecture and their setting.

#### West Virginia History

Europeans began crossing the mountains into what is modern-day West Virginia in the early seventeenth century when England established the Virginia Colony. The land was granted to supporters of King Charles II but by 1719, Lord Fairfax consolidated the entire area in his name.

After the close of the French and Indian War, colonial interest in the land between the Shenandoah Valley and the Ohio River surged as war veterans, immigrants, and speculators

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rushed to the west. The earliest English interest in western Virginia lands began in 1749, with the chartering of the Ohio Company, followed by the creation of many other such speculative ventures.

By 1769 there were four counties in western Virginia that reflected westward expansion of settlers along the frontier, which was at that time the spine of the Allegheny Mountains. According to Historian Charles Ambler, migrants streamed across the Allegheny Mountains in the closing days of the Revolutionary War “to escape oppressive taxes, the evils of an unsound currency, the exactions of creditors, and the consequent prevailing annoyances from lawyers and courts.” The fuller historic record also establishes that many immigrants were more nobly inspired, fully intending to build a new world in which they could play a more important role. The steady rise of county units evidences a human tendency to bring civilization along when relocating along the frontier.

After the American Revolution many veterans moved west to redeem their war pensions. Several new counties were formed in the years following the war. Over time, the western counties of Virginia gradually increased their political base and used their growing population to agitate for internal improvements and public education at the state’s expense. While the westerners were usually successful in forming their new counties, their other goals were elusive. Isolation and lagging political skills in the west meant slow gains in the matter of education and internal improvements. Still, westerners aspired to form their new counties as a sign of their community’s growth and development. The rise of some industry in western Virginia contributed to the formation of new counties.

Every new county generated a new local gentry that consisted of the elected, appointed, and paid officials of structured government. Sheriffs, justices, constables, clerks, and magistrates were salaried positions that carried local power and prestige. Additionally, the boards and commissions that government requires gave political voice to many other citizens of the new counties. The substantial personal bond that Virginia law required of the county sheriff (initially an appointee of the governor) usually meant that a new county’s wealthiest or most influential citizen was named. More often than not, the office, and political power, remained in his family’s hands for generations.

Constitutional reforms in 1851 included a requirement that no new counties smaller than six hundred square miles were to be created, but that regulation was generally ignored. None of the counties formed between 1851 and the Civil War are as large as six hundred square miles, although Roane and McDowell approach it. The measure was intended to slow the growth of the west by limiting the rise of towns and political entities. Every new county meant two more seats for the west in the Virginia General Assembly. Eastern Virginia increasingly feared the economic potentials of the west and saw passage of the restriction as a counterbalance to the rising population there. The economic strength of the west threatened the Tidewater planters

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who had controlled Virginia politics in the interests of tobacco and slavery since the seventeenth century. Internal improvements that the west so desperately needed would require public works projects for which the planters were unwilling to levy taxes.

The west captured the majority of the seats in the General Assembly after 1851, but limits on county size and restrictions about state indebtedness continued to hamper western ambitions. Some economic growth came with the completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and the Northwestern Virginia Railroad, which connected Wheeling, Parkersburg, Grafton, West Union, Keyser, Clarksburg, and other smaller towns to the large cities of the northeast.

The rise in the number of western counties supported the growing sentiment for statehood, as every new courthouse provided a new local bourgeoisie that began to exert its influence, politically and socially. Forming new counties became an attractive idea. The surging population and new counties laid the groundwork for rapid and dramatic social change that came with the end of the Civil War. Often, industrialists pushed for the formation of new counties.

In 1859, John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and his subsequent conviction of treason in the Jefferson County courthouse forever changed the way of life in what became West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle. The sharp political divisions that had long caused political dissension in the state finally boiled over into a conflict that was not resolved until the formation of the new state that was allied with the Union. Suddenly, the "domestic quarrel" over equal representation that had been simmering in Virginia became a very public fight.

Statehood for West Virginia came on June 20, 1863 and the Civil War was over by 1865. For much of the rest of West Virginia, reconstruction was done by the tool of investment capital. Outside wealth rushed into the state and rapid industrialization ensued. The new state fathers attempted to curb the formation of additional counties for much the same reason that the Old Dominion had. They were not any more successful. Several counties were formed after West Virginia was formed.

Powerful political factions that were well grounded in economic interest influenced the formation of several counties. Many industrialists in the state also entered politics, both as elected officials and as party chairmen. Van Winkle, J. N. Camden, Stephen B. Elkins, and Nathan Scott each used their power and influence to hold West Virginia's seats in the U.S. Senate during America's Gilded Age. John T. McGraw, a Democratic Party leader was one of their faithful lieutenants. Together, these men and others transformed the economies of the mineral rich counties of central West Virginia. They brought railroads, timbering, and coal mining to the remote towns and hillsides of the state.

Although West Virginia is now largely industrialized, almost all of the state remains rural. Only eleven counties in West Virginia have no recoverable coal, but most are rich in other natural

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resources. Exploiting these resources brought many social and cultural changes to the mountains, but West Virginia has chosen to manage its rural, industrial culture with traditional southern institutions that admittedly have no experience with industrial influences. Strong county governments are a hallmark of southern local government. Because of its long association with Virginia and southern political ways, West Virginia is essentially a southern state, despite the changes that came with the industrial transformation of the post Civil War Years.

**County Formation**

From the time when all of western Virginia was contained in the County of Orange, the formation of new counties recorded political and economic developments for the entire state of Virginia. County-making in western Virginia began in 1754, with the creation of Hampshire County. By 1769, there were four counties in Virginia's west including Frederick, Hampshire, (West) Augusta, and Botetourt Counties. These new counties reflected westward expansion of settlers along the frontier, which was at that time the spine of the Allegheny Mountains. Over time, the western counties of Virginia gradually increased their political base and used their growing population to agitate for internal improvements and public education at state expense.

At this time, populations were increasing more rapidly farther to the east resulting in the 1772 creation of Berkeley County, which was carved from Frederick County. Berkeley County contained the territory that later became the three present eastern panhandle counties of Morgan, Berkeley, and Jefferson.

In October 1776, just months after the Declaration of Independence, Virginia Governor Patrick Henry approved the partition of the District of West Augusta into three huge counties that contained most of the territory of the northern half of modern West Virginia. Monongalia, Yohogania, and Ohio counties joined with Hampshire and Frederick as political divisions in the western reaches. Soon thereafter, Botetourt County yielded territory to form Montgomery and Fincastle Counties. New counties formed rapidly in the coming years. Botetourt County yielded Greenbrier County in 1777, with Lewisburg as the county seat. Harrison County was formed in 1785, with Clarksburg as the county seat. Hardy County was formed in 1786 and Randolph followed in 1787, with the county seat at Beverly. Eventually, the territory that was the original Monongalia County became eleven counties.

In 1788, Franklin was selected as the county seat of new Pendleton County, formed from Augusta and Rockingham Counties. Kanawha County was created in 1789 from parts of Greenbrier and Montgomery counties. At the tip of the northern panhandle, Brooke was formed from parts of Ohio County in 1796 with Charlestown (now Wellsburg) as the seat. Wood County was also created from Ohio County in 1798 with Parkersburg as the seat, and "Old Monroe" was formed from Greenbrier in 1799, with the village of Union as the county seat. Each of the NPS

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counties were partitioned from an older larger county, establishing a pattern that would be repeated throughout the nineteenth century.

Only thirteen of West Virginia's modern counties were formed prior to the end of the eighteenth century. Between the turn into the nineteenth century and the Civil War population in western Virginia swelled, nearly doubling. All other counties were formed before the end of the war with the exception of five.

Because Virginia's general assembly was apportioned by county (two seats per county), increasing the numbers of counties meant increasing the political influence for the west. County formation was slow in the first decade of the nineteenth century, with only Cabell, Jefferson, and Mason being formed before 1810. Between 1811 and 1820, Preston, Tyler, Nicholas, and Lewis counties were created. Through the 1820s, Logan, Morgan, and Pocahontas were formed. In the 1830s Virginia created Braxton, Fayette, Jackson, Marshall, and Mercer Counties.

While only five counties were formed between 1830 and 1840, fourteen were created in the next decade, evidencing a rapid increase in settlement and political activism. Between 1840 and 1850, Virginia established Barbour, Boone, Doddridge, Gilmer, Hancock, Marion, Putnam, Raleigh, Ritchie, Taylor, Wayne, Wetzel, Wirt, and Wyoming Counties. Hancock was partitioned from Brooke in the Northern Panhandle but the rest of the new counties lay in the interior regions of the state.

Population in the west swelled by 75,000 persons between 1850 and the Civil War, spurring the rise of additional counties: Clay, McDowell, Pleasants, Roane, Tucker, Upshur, Calhoun, and Webster. Following statehood, only five additional counties were formed creating present-day West Virginia. They included Grant and Mineral Counties in 1866, Lincoln County in 1867, Summers County in 1871, and the youngest county, Mingo, in 1895.

### **Structure of County Government**

Counties are legal creations and territorial subdivisions of state government, but they also have local functions. They are particularly useful in rural areas where there are a widely scattered population and no towns except the county seat. The role of county government has changed over time. Early in their existence, county courts were charged with regulating and licensing certain enterprises, keeping records, and administering civil justice. Another important early responsibility of county courts was to build local roads.

Since the early twentieth century, the county's responsibilities have expanded to include such diverse institutions as libraries, sanitation, beautification, orphanages, poor farms, and potters fields. At the end of the twentieth century, county governments were dealing with planning and zoning, airports, recreation, and other public services. So long as county governments have

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salaries to pay and discretionary funds to allocate, their importance will remain significant.

Each of West Virginia's fifty-five counties are governed in the same manner which is outlined in the state's constitution. Officials collect taxes and pay for all county work. Following is a brief description of elected officials in West Virginia's counties. Other officials, such as the superintendent, public health officials, and notaries are appointed officials.

*County Court*

County court members, or county commissioners, are elected officials that manage all of the county's public affairs. Some of the commissioners responsibilities include setting tax rates, appointing election officers, and employing health officers and agricultural agents. The county court has both executive and judicial powers.

*County Clerk*

The county clerk is the county court's chief officer. The clerk is an elected official that manages all of the county court's records including property sales, tax, finance, marriage, death, birth, and will records.

*Circuit Court Clerk*

The clerk of the circuit court, also an elected individual, manages the records of all court trials.

*Sheriff*

The Sheriff is an elected official that is charged with keeping peace and collecting all owed money such as taxes.

*Assessor*

The assessor evaluate the value of all property located within the county. Records of these values provide information to the county court, the board of education, and city government for determining the amount of taxes individuals will pay. The assessor is also an elected official.

*Prosecuting Attorney*

The prosecuting attorney, an elected official of the county, represents the government in court against anyone accused of a crime. The prosecuting attorney also serves as an advisor to the county commission and board of education.

*County Board of Education*

In West Virginia, unlike many other states, schools are directed by a county-level board of education. Each of the five members are elected officials. They meet on a regular schedule to tend to all affairs dealing with the school system. The board also appoints the school superintendent and hires school staff recommended by that individual. They manage all details of the schools from its construction and property care to school supplies, budget, and salaries.



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**Courthouse Architecture and Setting**

*County Seats*

Heated arguments that often disregarded law and order often arose over the location of county seats. Designating the county seat of a new county was a politically charged issue for many of the counties. In some cases, preferences of voters were heeded, but in other cases, they were ignored. In one case, Hancock County's seat bounced between New Cumberland and New Manchester almost as frequently as the state capitol moved between Wheeling and Charleston. The town of Beverly will not soon forget that their status as the Randolph County seat was "stolen" from them, nor will Grant County historians overlook the fact that citizen preference was ignored when the state legislature established Petersburg as their county seat.

Shepherdstown was temporarily made the county seat of Jefferson County because of Civil War damage to the Charles Town courthouse, and there was a concerted effort on the part of Shepherdstown to keep it. Because the residents of Hardy County disagreed about loyalties during the Civil War, it was partitioned to form Grant in 1866. Court was held at Maysville until 1872, when the state legislature decreed that Petersburg would be the county seat, but it was so far removed from the bulk of the county's population that controversy arose. The arguing continued until 1895, when a substantial brick courthouse was erected. Public concern was not calmed, and an election was held that year. Voters again chose Maysville to be the county seat by a count of 876 to 604 votes. The argument ended up in the West Virginia Supreme Court, which in 1896 also found that Petersburg should be the county seat.

Usually in West Virginia, but not always, the county seat is the largest town in the county. County seats are the locales of important social services as well as politics and government. Health departments, the university extension service, federal conservation and lending agencies, welfare organizations, and youth services usually cluster their offices near the courthouse. Boards of education reside there as well. Banking, commerce, and transportation choose locations in the county seat towns as well. Thus, the county seat town could expect a more prosperous existence.

*Courthouse square*

In West Virginia's counties, the courthouses are generally located in the heart of their towns on streets that often bear the name Court or Main Street. Most of West Virginia's courthouses are set back from the street to afford a common or green space. In many counties this area includes a landscaped setting with trees and plantings, paved walks and benches. Many courthouse squares also contain additional resources on the site. Some counties have constructed additional buildings to serve their growing needs. Many contain statues, monuments, and flag poles.

The courthouse square is usually situated in the center of town near the central business district. This is not the case in every county, however. In Pleasants County the courthouse is situated on

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a bluff overlooking the commercial area.

*Courthouse buildings*

One needs only to look at the architecture of public courthouses to see the importance the community residents place upon their county government. These public buildings express a quiet reverence for the institution of local government. For most counties, their architecture is high style according to the time of their construction including Neo-Classical Revival, Romanesque Revival, and Richardsonian Romanesque.

Today, many of West Virginia's courthouses are the second or third buildings for the county. In some instances counties simply grew out of the old courthouse and constructed a new one. In the nineteenth century, however, several courthouse fires resulted in the loss of important records. An 1885 law in West Virginia required that all new courthouses and jails be constructed of stone or brick or both. The law also required that clerks' offices be fireproof or contain fireproof vaults. Currently, only Mineral and Summers counties are using their original courthouses. Some former courthouse buildings still exist and are in use for other purposes.

A significant characteristic of many of West Virginia's county courthouses is a tower or copula. Some courthouses even display more than one tower such as those in Monongalia, Taylor, Kanawha Counties. Some towers and copulas feature working clocks while others have cardinal points. Another significant characteristic displayed on several courthouses is a pedimented, two-story portico. These courthouses often display Ionic or Doric columns and decorative dentil molding.

West Virginia's county courthouse are the material evidence of the state's population growth and a symbol of their values.

**Summary**

Courthouses have an important civic function, and they are also extremely important from a historical standpoint because they are the keepers of the fundamental historical records of the counties they serve. The courthouses that were built as part of the state's growth house the commission minutes and order books, land records, criminal records, tax records, and vital statistics that are required by law. These are the most basic and important documents upon which a region's history is built. The existence of a county courthouse thus is evidence of the people's devotion to the importance of law, order, justice, record keeping, and history.

Within the halls of West Virginia's courthouses reside much of the particular folklore and personality of the county. Tiny Clay County has had sensational criminal trials. In 1905, prosecutors there tried Sarah Ann Legg for the murder of her husband. She was the first woman in West Virginia to be tried for murder, and was acquitted. In 1952 the eyes of the nation were

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focused on the Marion County Courthouse where Fairmont State College Professor Luella Mundell sued State Board of Education member Thelma Loudin for slander in a case that invoked the U.S. Constitution, academic freedom, and fear of a Communist conspiracy. In Monongalia County, West Virginia University students and others often hold candle-light vigils, protests, or other activities on the courthouse square. Farmers markets cluster around the courthouse in many counties.

From Jefferson County's 1859 trial of John Brown for treason, to Greenbrier County's notorious clerk, "Old Scratch," who assiduously purged voter rolls after the Civil War, the courthouses of West Virginia hold the memories of the spectacular as well as the tragic and mundane. Randolph County in 1799 ousted Clerk Hezekiah Rosecrans for keeping an illegal second set of land books. Bandits, brigands, scoff-laws, and rapsallions are part of every county's history, just as are the heroic leaders who served in good times and bad, to keep alive the engines of government and record-keeping. In Hancock County, Edward Stilwell gave his life in an attempt to save that county's records from flames. These anecdotes serve to remind us of the unique and important history that is associated with each county courthouse. They are part of the collective public memory that is history. They give personality to the past, and identity to the present. We are who we are because of our historical anchors. While events of the past cannot be changed, new perspectives often lead to a revised understanding of them. Courthouses are important keepers of the keys to this historical understanding.

Each county's commission minute books, land books, and order books from the early days of their existence reveal a great deal of important local history that explains larger trends in the state's experience. For mountain Virginians, it is a terrible irony that the vast wealth of their land, not their poverty, has directed the course of the state's troubled history. For resource-rich counties whose early courthouses burned, those records are lost.

Citizens freely and often use their courthouses for the transaction of business. They pay taxes, record deeds, record wills, deaths, and births. They record surveys, attach liens, and pay fines. They marry and they divorce. They sue and defend against suits. They charge and rebut charges of criminal behavior. For West Virginians, the county courthouse represents local government that is small enough to be close, large enough to be powerful, and accessible enough to be understood.

The importance of these public buildings is displayed through their architecture. In most of West Virginia's counties the architecture is very elaborate and high style for the rural communities they serve. Often executed in styles such as Neo-Classical Revival, Beaux Arts, and Romanesque Revival, these courthouses differ greatly from the vernacular buildings that otherwise characterize their county. When the first county courthouses were constructed, commercial areas developed nearby, populations increased, and town squares were established.

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The building and its architecture often became the focal point of the community. Today, West Virginia's county courthouses remain a significant feature in the county's built environment.

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## **Associated Property Types**

### **Name of Property Type**

“County courthouse” as the property type includes the site of the West Virginia county courthouse, the building itself, and any objects, or structures, or additional buildings located on adjacent public grounds.

Courthouse nominations submitted with this submission include:

- Pleasants County Courthouse
- Ritchie County Courthouse
- Wirt County Courthouse

County courthouses currently eligible for the National Register:

- Calhoun County Courthouse
- Gilmer County Courthouse
- Hampshire County Courthouse
- Jackson County Courthouse
- Lewis County Courthouse
- Mason County Courthouse
- Mineral County Courthouse
- Morgan County Courthouse
- Roane County Courthouse
- Upshur County Courthouse
- Webster County Courthouse

Courthouses already listed in the National Register include:

(listed as part of historic district)

- Berkeley County Courthouse
- Braxton County Courthouse
- Brooke County Courthouse
- Harrison County Courthouse
- Marshall County Courthouse
- Monroe County Courthouse
- Pendleton County Courthouse
- Preston County Courthouse
- Taylor County Courthouse
- Tyler County Courthouse
- Wetzel County Courthouse

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(listed individually)

Barbour County  
Boone County  
Cabell County Courthouse  
Clay County Courthouse  
Doddridge County Courthouse  
Fayette County Courthouse  
Greenbrier County Courthouse  
Hardy County Courthouse  
Jefferson County Courthouse  
Kanawha County Courthouse  
Marion County Courthouse  
McDowell County Courthouse  
Mercer County Courthouse  
Monongalia County Courthouse  
Nicholas County Courthouse  
Pocahontas County Courthouse  
Putnam County Courthouse  
Randolph County Courthouse  
Summers County Courthouse  
Tucker County Courthouse  
Wood County Courthouse  
Wyoming County Courthouse

Courthouses not listed in the National Register:

Grant County Courthouse  
Lincoln County Courthouse  
Logan County Courthouse  
Mingo County Courthouse  
Ohio County Courthouse  
Raleigh County Courthouse  
Wayne County Courthouse

**Property Type Description**

*Associative Characteristics*

Each courthouse is associated with the growth and development of local government and politics within the interior regions of western Virginia and the later state of West Virginia. The courthouses not only represent population growth and development within the Appalachian

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Mountains of West Virginia, but they symbolize the proliferation of county government and politics in the state. Courthouses are the material evidence of the historic trend to form counties, thus creating local government in the mountains of western Virginia and modern-day West Virginia.

*Physical Characteristics*

The architectural evolution of West Virginia courthouses indicates a fairly common pattern: generally, the first county courts met in the home of a prominent citizen, who then became a county judge/commissioner. Sometimes, they moved to a local church until a courthouse could be fashioned. The first courthouses were almost always log buildings, for there was much timber in the mountains. In many cases, the location of a courthouse was decided by a gift of land for a court square, given by a large landowner who could then sell lots for a new town. There were precious few roads for hauling anything so massive as brick or stone. Such materials were quarried or manufactured locally, if they were used at all. Second courthouses were frequently constructed of dimension lumber. The third or fourth courthouse, those used today, were constructed of brick and/or stone, with some gesture to major high style architectural themes.

The most common architecture in this study was the Neo-Classical Revival structure of the early twentieth century. These buildings are assertive in their small towns, and usually feature a prominent pedimented portico and clock tower to dress up a more modest boxy building of simple rectangular or square massing. Beaux Arts, Second Empire, and Italianate buildings also appeared in this survey, suggesting that while they are more rare, they also are evidence of architectural sophistication in some very rural and simple places.

*Boundaries*

These courthouses sit on court squares, usually near the center of their towns. They range in size, usually from less than one acre to two or more acres. The boundary of the county courthouse is the public space surrounding the building. Significant landscape features, objects, and buildings located on the grounds are considered part of the nomination boundaries.

*Condition*

The demands of the twenty-first century, and an insensitivity to the historic significance of older courthouses pose twin threats to the survival of courthouse buildings. Many are poorly equipped to handle the substantial new requirements of personal comfort, accessibility, the computer age, heightened security requirements, and simple over-crowding. Many of the courthouses are outgrowing their buildings, and county commissioners frequently express a desire to rebuild their

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courthouse in a more modern tone. Interiors of many of the courthouses have been somewhat reconfigured. The exception to this is their courtrooms which often retain a great deal of their historic integrity.

**Property Type Significance**

The historic courthouses of West Virginia are significant under *Criterion A: Politics and Government* at the local level for their association with each county's history of forming new counties and thus forming new local governments. The courthouses represent the population growth and development within the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. They are significant for West Virginia because as the new counties were formed the courthouses were erected to extend the essential services of government to more and more people who subsequently sent more and more representatives to the state legislature and involved more citizens in politics. The courthouses are evidence of the respect West Virginians have for the institutions of government and the important roles that they play. Residents wanted government and the economic and political opportunities that it brought.

Many of West Virginia's courthouses are also locally significant under *Criterion C: Architecture* for their significance as local interpretations of high-style architecture. The buildings reflect the taste, budget, and construction standards of the era and community in which the buildings were erected. West Virginia's historic courthouses were often built economically, but elegant Neo-Classical Revival forms, Beaux Arts detailing, Romanesque and Italianate influences reveal a common public reverence for local governments. Courthouses that were constructed in the mid-twentieth century reflect the styles that were prevalent then. Courthouses are important workplaces and they are also important public venues. Courtrooms double as meeting places. Commission chambers house public groups, and are the sites of important policy decisions. In most communities courthouses were the most grand buildings in their towns at time of construction.

It was the county court that made the final decisions and negotiated with architects, suppliers, and builders. It is particularly significant that these courthouses, taken as a set, reveal some commonalities of style and locale. Overwhelmingly rural, West Virginia has few incorporated places that can truly be called cities. The largest towns in this submission have populations of seven thousand persons or less, and they serve counties with populations of less than 27,000. Even so, county fathers chose the Neo-Classical Revival, Beaux Arts, Romanesque Revival, Second Empire, and Moderne styles for their county courthouses. This linked small rural places with the events that were unfolding on the larger national architectural scene, and brought the people into a closer relationship with the discipline of architecture, because most other buildings in these small towns were of vernacular design at that time.



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It is meaningful that these courthouses are relatively grand structures, evidencing a local appreciation for the elements of high style architecture of the time. Crippled by poverty, small populations, and remote locales at the time of their formation as well as into the present day, these West Virginia counties nevertheless found ways to erect substantial and respectable public buildings in which to house their records and the fundamental documents of their history. Most of these courthouses were originally sited in a court square, and many of those survive. The small towns house bustling courthouses which contain the evidence of the region's culture. In some cases, the major source of the history of the county is contained in the county court's minute books.

**Registration Requirements**

In order to qualify for listing in the National Register, county courthouses in West Virginia must have been constructed more than fifty years ago and are used, or once used, to conduct business as the county's primary seat of government. In the courthouses and annexes county officials keep county records, administer civil justice, collect taxes, and administer and regulate public services. Significant examples of the property type are locally significant and are eligible under *Criterion A: Politics and Government*.

The courthouses are also eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* for their significance as local interpretations of high-style architecture such as Neo-Classical Revival, Romanesque Revival, and Beaux Arts styles. In most cases the county courthouse is the most elaborate building in the community, or was at the time of its construction.

Eligible courthouses must retain integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. In some cases, courthouses have replacement windows and/or additions. Such alterations have not detracted from the buildings ability to convey significance under the selected criteria. See individual nominations for justification.

As additional courthouses come of age they should be evaluated for their National Register eligibility. Under Criterion C, the buildings should be evaluated based on the time period it was constructed.

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## **Geographical Data**

County courthouses of West Virginia covers the state's boundaries. Courthouses may be located anywhere within the geographic limits of the state. They are located in every West Virginia county.

This submission includes the three historic courthouses within the State of West Virginia that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. They are located in Pleasants, Wirt and Ritchie Counties. Other county courthouses that are eligible for but not yet listed in the National Register include those located in Jackson, Mason, Calhoun, Webster, Lewis, Upshur, Hampshire, Morgan, and Gilmer Counties.

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## Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

This submission is based upon pre-existing courthouse surveys held by the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office and a survey of twenty-two West Virginia courthouses conducted by Barbara E. Rasmussen, Ph.D., in the summer of 2002. A site visit was conducted at each courthouse in which the building was photographed and a detailed description of the building's exterior and physical aspect was noted. All fifty-five counties of West Virginia now have been surveyed, and those that are eligible will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Of the buildings surveyed in 2002, fourteen were deemed eligible for the National Register. One courthouse was too substantially altered to retain its historic integrity. The survey and subsequent Multiple Property Submission were conducted under the direction of the West Virginia SHPO. Every courthouse not already surveyed was included in the 2002 project.

Of the courthouses not yet fifty years old, several will be so within ten years, and will be important examples of mid-twentieth century public architecture. Older courthouse properties that are no longer in service were surveyed, but will be nominated when the principle courthouse building achieves historic status. Attempts were made to locate former courthouse sites and buildings. We discovered that Hancock County's New Manchester courthouse has been demolished, and Grant County's original courthouse is now in service as an extended learning center for Shepherd State College. Clay County's historic courthouse is still in public service, but a newer building is the principle courthouse. The old Grant Courthouse and the old Clay Courthouse are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Other former courthouses of these twenty-two counties have been demolished.

There are five types of architecture extant among the fourteen eligible properties: Neo-Classical Revival, Beaux Arts, Second Empire/Italianate, Romanesque Revival, and Moderne. Neo-Classical forms were the most prevalent. Almost all of the buildings have some extensions and additions, evidencing growth of the counties that they serve.

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