

Chapter 2 - An Introduction to Berkeley County

Location and Regional Setting

Berkeley County is located in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. Washington County, Maryland is located to the north of the county and Frederick County, Virginia is to the south. The West Virginia counties of Jefferson and Morgan are found to the east and west respectively. The county is less than 100 miles from the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan area and less than 200 miles from Philadelphia, Richmond, and Pittsburg.

The Potomac River forms the northern and part of the eastern border of the county. North Mountain bisects the county and is the western edge of the Shenandoah Valley, also known as the Great Valley, in the Panhandle. The City of Martinsburg and most of the county's developed areas are found here. West of the mountain, Back Creek winds through the countryside. The Sleepy Creek Wildlife Management Area on Third Hill Mountain is along the western boundary. Here, forested lands and farms have traditionally dominated.

A Brief History of Berkeley County

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the area that is now Berkeley County had been home to successive groups of Native Americans. The earliest evidence suggests that Mound Builders occupied the area over 2,000 years ago. Missionary reports dating to the 1500s and early 1600s indicate that the Huron Indians were driven from the area by members of the Iroquois Confederacy during that time. The various member tribes, including the Mohawk, Onondaga, and Seneca used the area as hunting ground during the spring and summer months. These tribes were gradually replaced by European settlers throughout the 18th Century.

Berkeley County was one of the first areas of the State of West Virginia to be settled by Europeans. John Lederer first explored the area in 1670. Others soon followed and in 1726, Morgan Morgan, II founded the first permanent settlement of record in West Virginia on Mill Creek near present day Bunker Hill. Many Quakers and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, along with the English and Dutch, became residents here in the early 1700s. They were followed by the Germans who built many of the present farm complexes.

Berkeley County was formed from Frederick County, Virginia in 1772 and named for Norborne Berkeley Governor of Virginia from 1768 to 1770. The County seat was established in the colonial village of Martinsburg, named for Thomas Bryan Martin, Lord Fairfax's nephew, and was incorporated in 1778. The arrival of the B&O Railroad in the 1840s gave Martinsburg and Berkeley County a big boost, economically. However, during the Civil War, the county's strategic location at the northern edge of the Shenandoah Valley and the presence of the railroad meant that control of both Martinsburg and Berkeley County changed hands many times during the conflict. While most families were loyal to the Confederacy, many had divided allegiances.

In June 1861 Stonewall Jackson destroyed the railroad cars at the Martinsburg B&O Railroad complex and commandeered the engines, dragging them through Winchester to Strasburg. The Roundhouse and machine shops were completely stripped. The first major conflict in the area occurred on July 2, 1861, when the North's General Robert Patterson crossed the Potomac River at Williamsport and defeated the South's General Joseph E. Johnston and General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. On October 18 and 19, 1862 the Martinsburg B&O Railroad complex and Roundhouses were burned. After November 1863, Berkeley County became part of the new state of West Virginia.

In 1872, the Pennsylvania Railroad came to the area, and it, along with the B&O Railroad, gave the area an excellent transportation base. In early times, a major source of the area's income came from selling flour produced by the area's water-powered mills to the Alexandria and Baltimore markets. Electricity, replacing water power, soon followed and the area became a large textile milling center.

Many of Martinsburg's historic and architecturally important buildings were included in seven historic districts placed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1980. Additional Districts have been added since then and are described further in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Plan.

Today, Martinsburg continues to be the focus of the business area of Berkeley County, although continued development throughout the county, particularly in the Tabler Station, Inwood and Spring Mills areas is altering the county's landscape. The county's economy is continuing its transition from agriculture and manufacturing to more service oriented and government related businesses. However, with the recent decision by Proctor & Gamble to develop a large manufacturing facility, it is clear manufacturing will continue to have a role in the county.

Quick Facts About Berkeley County

Location:	Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia
Major City:	Martinsburg -Population 17,668 (2013 estimate) ¹
Date of Establishment:	1772
Size:	321.14 square miles
Population;	110,497 (2014 estimate) ¹
Population Density:	324.4 per square mile (2010 calculation) ¹
Median Age:	37.6 (2010 calculation) ²
Primary Watershed:	Potomac River
Major surface Waters:	Potomac River, Opequon Creek, Back Creek
Forest Cover:	115,368 acres (2000 Data)
Recreation:	Sleepy Creek Wildlife Management Area; Yankauer Preserve

¹Population Data Source: www.quickfacts.census.gov

²Population Data Source: www.factfinder.census.gov