

The county that could have been called Montpiller or Spring

by Kate Shunney

Morgan County was formed from parts of Berkeley and Hampshire counties back before West Virginia separated itself from Virginia in 1863.

In March of 1820, years worth of effort to establish this as its own county came to fruition.

The area was already in the process of being settled by immigrants of German, Scotch Irish, English, Dutch, Swiss and Irish descent. According to the late county historian Fred T. Newbraugh, those who settled the western part of today's Morgan County entered the area through the Shenandoah Valley and "pressed down the Cacapon and Potomac Valley to the border of Berkeley County." Folks in the eastern part of our county came in along the branches of the Sleepy Creek, which was shown on early maps as Umberston or Cabin Creek.

In the earliest days of settlement in the area, land holders had to travel on horseback to Orange County, Va. to record deeds. Some didn't bother, choosing instead to squat on the land until Hampshire County was formed in 1753 and Berkeley County was formed in 1772. The main road in the area was the Warm Springs Road, which ran from Martinsburg west, with a branch toward Romney. Roads were so bad that area residents petitioned in 1784 to create a new county, with its own county seat, called Montpiller.

"The petition of sundry citizens of the county of Hampshire and the upper part of Berkeley, inconvenienced by distance from court house to attend to public business particu-

larly those of Hampshire who have long distance over roads known for the badness, surrounded by mountains they are prevented from trade (markets), the little Town of Bath (during the season) affords the only market they have to vend the products of their farms."

Hampshire and Berkeley county officials were opposed to the idea of making a new county in between, saying there wasn't the wealth or leadership to run a county government. A new petition to create a county called Spring was submitted in 1799, and then again from 1801 to 1819. The last petition was approved by the Virginia General Assembly, and the new county was named for General Daniel Morgan. Morgan was reputed to be a regular visitor to Bath's mineral springs for a treatment of his gout.

Newbraugh's history says there was some strife creating a functional government for Morgan County in the early days, but court was held in Bath, there was a jail and matters of property and roads could be tackled locally.

The Virginia Assembly of 1831 authorized financing of \$20,000 for roads in Morgan County. The Morgan-Frederick Turnpike was finished before the Civil War.

Always a rural county, Morgan County had large settlements in the south part of the county along Sleepy Creek and its branches. Later, the coming of the B&O Railroad and the C&O Canal caused villages to pop up and grow from Paw Paw to Cherry Run. Train depots, ferries and fords across the Potomac and Cacapon

Rivers were places where stores, post offices and villages thrived.

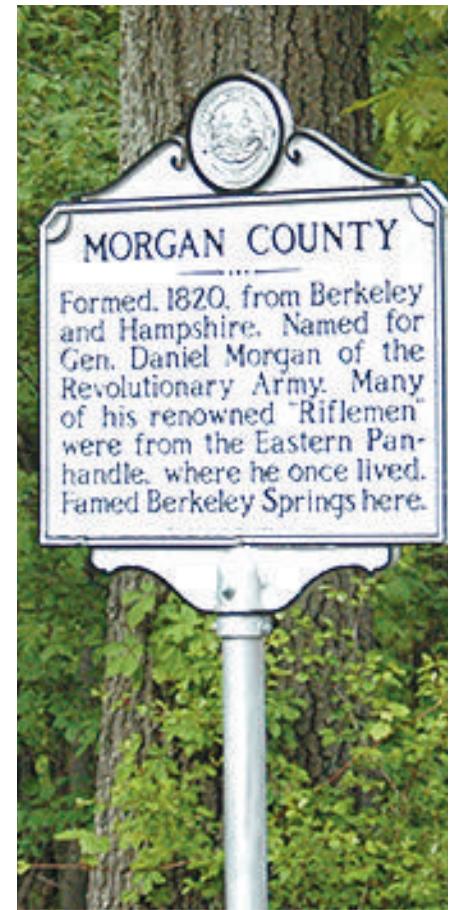
Industry included farming, tanning, woolen mills, then later tomato canning, fruit orchards, lumber and sand mining. Utilities and infrastructure followed industry into Morgan County.

Those industries fell to the wayside as economies evolved, war service pulled residents out of the county and natural resources changed.

Small manufacturing continues in the county today, with Caperton's furniture factory and Homeopathy Works in the county's business park. Water bottling, beer brewing, farming and food production, sand mining and orchards are ongoing industries in the county, adding to a strong tourism industry and many small retail businesses.

Morgan County spans 229 square miles and today is home to an estimated 17,800 residents, with local children attending six public schools. More opportunities to learn and work in the county are being added all the time.

Morgan County will celebrate its 200th birthday next spring.



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