



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

This chapter identifies historical, scenic, archaeological, architectural and similar significant features. It also considers future steps to preserve features and community attributes that define Beckley as a unique place and contribute to community identity and historic roots.

““The past reminds us of timeless human truths and allows for the perpetuation of cultural traditions that can be nourishing; it contains examples of mistakes to avoid, preserves the memory of alternative ways of doing things, and is the basis for self-understanding...”

-Bettina Drew

18.1

INTRODUCTION

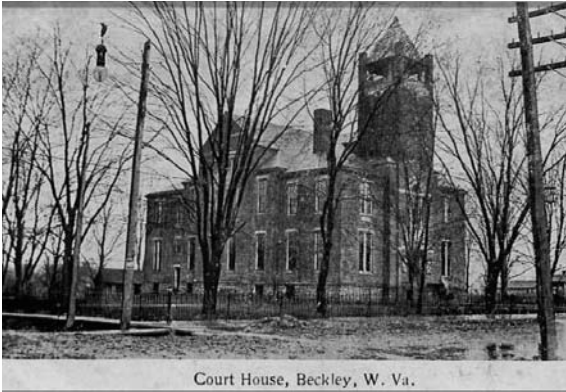
As described in Chapter 4, the City of Beckley has a rich history. Even more history was described in Chapter 4 of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan which discussed the historic and archaeologically significant resources within the City of Beckley at length. Mention is made of the Paleo-Indians that lived in parts of West Virginia over 11,000 years ago, and the several tribes of Native Americans that passed through the area. However, there are no known settlements within the Beckley area, although the Paint Creek Trail (roughly along the route of I-77) was an old Shawnee warpath.

As also described previously (and in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan), more modern historical aspects of Beckley are traced back to 1836 when General Alfred Beckley inherited land and built a settlement near what is now Main Street and North and South Kanawha Streets. A “paper town” was laid out by Beckley in 1838, and he donated two acres for the Courthouse Square. The first courthouse was built in 1852 and the town grew around

it. Unfortunately, the 1912 fire mentioned previously, destroyed many of the buildings around the courthouse. Reconstruction by local craftsmen and builders utilized native sandstone and brick, much of which is still seen today. Some noteworthy buildings and structures include:

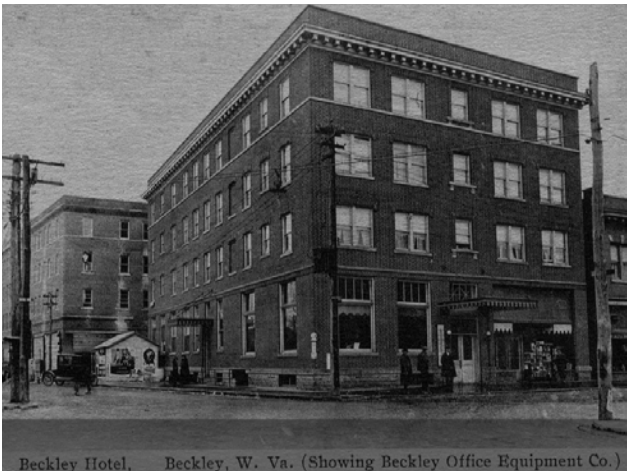
- Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Building on South Kanawha Street
- The Raleigh County Courthouse
- The present Federal Courthouse designed by WV architect Alex B. Mahood
- Beckley Federal Savings Bank designed by WV architect Richard M. Bates
- The Law Building
- The Old Raleigh Register Building
- The Foster Hardware Building
- The United Bank Building (Raleigh County National Bank)
- The Wooten, Wooten & Fragile Building
- The First Christian Church

As shown below, where historic images of buildings are placed next to recent images, the City of Beckley has been successful in retaining some historic buildings. In other cases, historic buildings have been replaced and some unique character has been lost.



Court House, Beckley, W. Va.

Old and "New" Raleigh County Courthouse



Beckley Hotel, Beckley, W. Va. (Showing Beckley Office Equipment Co.)

Renovated Beckley Hotel





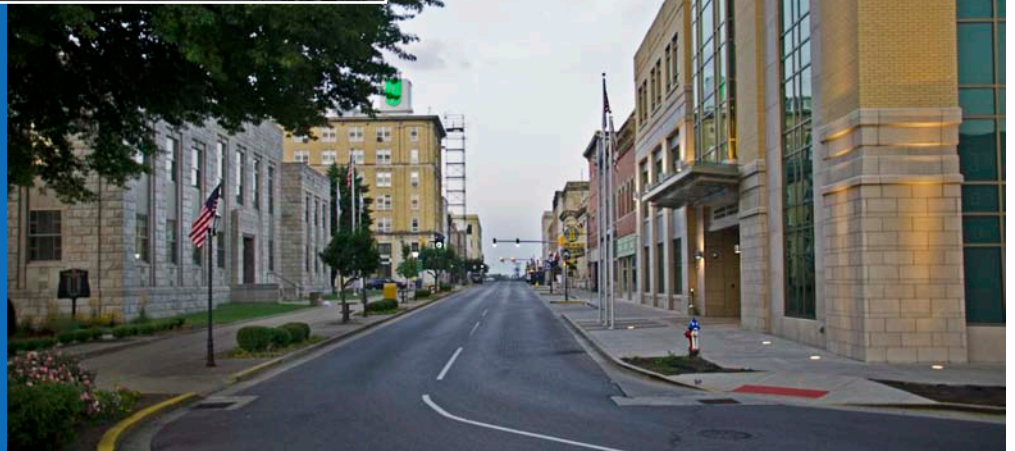
Older mixed-use buildings have been replaced with single-use office spaces. While office spaces add daytime activity and workers downtown - they typically provide little activity in the evenings.

As shown, newer construction has emulated the massing of older buildings and includes a good amount of fenestration to add visual interest.



Downtown as it appears today is far more oriented toward vehicular movement - rather than pedestrian movement.

Main Street was changed from two-way traffic to one-way. In the past, on-street parking helped to provide a safer and more pedestrian-friendly space in front of first-floor retail uses.





The City of Beckley has been able to hold on to some iconic structures with unique local stories to tell.



Street and sidewalk widths along South Fayette Street appear to be largely unchanged.

South Fayette Street (near downtown) saw considerable new development activity in the mid-1900's.



18.2

HISTORIC DESIGNATIONS

In 1994, the Courthouse Square Historic District was designated an historic district in the National Register of Historic Places. The District is bounded by Prince, South Kanawha, Church, Lebanon, Howe, McCreery, and Earwood Streets, as well as Alaska and First Avenues. It includes 129 buildings (100 of which are contributing) and about 700 acres, and is locally significant in terms of architecture, commerce and politics/government. The period of significance is listed as between 1900 and 1949. (Reference #94000722).

It should be noted that it has been 20 years since this downtown district was surveyed and a resurvey should be undertaken to update the inventory. Further, updates to code language is needed help reflect the intent of the ordinance. Similarly, the Design Standards need to be updated to reflect current fire code and best practices in historic preservation.

An individual site listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the Phillips-Sprague Mine, commonly known as the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine. Operated as a coal mine in the late 1800's by the Phillips family, it is now part of the New River Park in Beckley. The mine is considered of



Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine Entrance.

State significance on levels of commerce, education, engineering, and industry. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 (Reference #88000266).

The home of General Alfred Beckley, "Wildwood" is also listed on the National Register. Located at 117 Laurel Terrace, the double log cabin (which was later covered with clapboard) was built around 1836 by John Lilly. The five-acre site is currently a historical museum. (Reference #70000665).

The final property in Beckley that is currently listed on the National Register is the Beckley Feed and Hardware Company at 405 Prince Street, which was listed in 2001. Built around 1935, this structure, sitting on five acres, was designed and/or built by S.H. Bridge. It has local significance in the area of commerce, and served as a commercial speciality store until recent years. (Reference #00001309) Unfortunately, this structure was demolished in late 2013 and is now the site of a new commercial fast food restaurant.



The Beckley Feed & Hardware was an iconic structure in Downtown Beckley, but it was demolished in late 2013.



This historic home of Beckley's founder, General Alfred Beckley, is called Wildwood and it is open on weekends during the summer and for special pre-arranged occasions throughout the year for tours.

18.3

FUTURE HISTORIC DESIGNATIONS

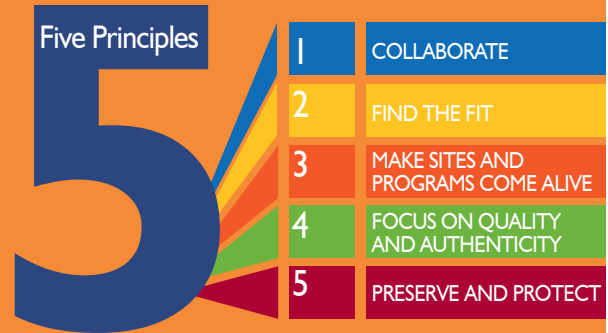
The 2001 Comprehensive Plan noted that two areas were being considered for recommendation to the National Register. One was a residential area on North Kanawha Street between Quesenberry and Wilson Streets, and the other was an area immediately south of Courthouse Square Historic District. Many of the buildings in this latter area are owned by the University of Charleston—Beckley. Neither of these areas has been listed on the Register to date. The

Landmark Commissions should continue to pursue designation to protect the architectural heritage of the City of Beckley and increase property values.

The City of Beckley has many more historic treasures than just those mentioned above. Many of the homes, sites, and buildings, as well as natural resources, throughout the City have significance in one way or another, and, collectively, they should be used to attract additional tourism to the area. “Heritage Tourism” is a growing industry, as explained by the National Trust for Historic Preservation:

Heritage tourism helps make historic preservation economically viable by using historic structures and landscapes to attract and serve travelers. Heritage tourism can be an attractive economic revitalization strategy, especially as studies have consistently shown that heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of travelers. As an added bonus, a good heritage tourism program improves the quality of life for residents as well as serving visitors.

The National Trust defines heritage tourism as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past,” and heritage tourism can include cultural, historic and natural resources. The National Trust has developed five guiding principles for successful and sustainable heritage tourism development as well as four steps for getting started. These principles and steps have been adopted broadly across the United States and internationally.



Heritage Tourism should be included in other tourism efforts as a means to attract more visitors into the community, and to expand the range of activities that current visitors undertake.

