

WEST VIRGINIA

HISTORY

Native hunters, Virginia pioneers, railroad builders and coal miners all helped build West Virginia. It became a state by splitting away from Virginia during the Civil War.



The First Peoples

People have lived in West Virginia for at least 12,000 years. More than 2,000 years ago, the Adena people built Grave Creek Mound at Moundsville. Later, Native farmers grew corn, beans and squash in river villages. By the 1700s, few Native towns were left. The Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo and Cherokee came here to hunt.



The Virginia Frontier

For a long time, this land was the western **frontier** of Virginia. In 1748, young George Washington surveyed land along the South Branch of the Potomac River. Settlers from Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania crossed the mountains. Towns such as Shepherdstown grew in the eastern valleys.

War in the Ohio Valley

Settlers and Native nations both wanted the hunting lands along the Ohio River. Raids came from both sides. In 1774, the Shawnee chief Cornstalk led warriors against Virginia **militia** at Point Pleasant. After a full day of fighting, the Shawnee crossed back over the Ohio. In a **treaty** that year, the Shawnee agreed to stop hunting south of the river. In 1777, soldiers at Point Pleasant killed Cornstalk while he was held at their fort. Native warriors allied with Britain attacked Fort Henry at Wheeling in 1777 and

1782. The fighting ended with a treaty in 1795. Native people live in West Virginia today.

Roads, Rails and Salt

Settlers built farms in the valleys. In the Kanawha Valley, salt works boiled salty water from deep wells. Enslaved people did much of the work at the salt works and on larger farms. The National Road reached Wheeling in 1818. In 1852, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad reached Wheeling too. Wheeling became a busy city of iron mills and glass factories.

A New State

In 1861, Virginia voted to leave the Union. Many people in the northwestern counties wanted to stay. Their leaders met in a **convention** at Wheeling and formed a government loyal to the Union. That June, Union troops won a small battle at Philippi. West Virginia became the 35th state on June 20, 1863. West Virginians fought on both sides of the war. West Virginia ended slavery in February 1865.



Coal Country

In 1873, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was finished through the New River Gorge. It ran to the Ohio River, where the new city of Huntington grew. Miners dug coal, and coal towns grew beside the mines. Loggers cut the great forests. Charleston became the lasting capital in 1885. Later, chemical plants lined the Kanawha River.

WEST VIRGINIA THROUGH TIME

1748	1774	1818	1852	1861	1863	1873	1885	1977
Washington surveys here	Battle of Point Pleasant	National Road at Wheeling	B&O railroad at Wheeling	Battle of Philippi	The 35th state	C&O railroad is finished	Charleston is the capital	New River bridge opens

PEOPLE TO KNOW

Cornstalk	Shawnee chief at Point Pleasant in 1774.
Booker T. Washington	Teacher. Worked in Malden salt furnaces as a boy.
Pearl S. Buck	Author born in Hillsboro. Nobel Prize winner.
Katherine Johnson	NASA mathematician born in this state.
Chuck Yeager	Pilot who first flew faster than sound.

WORDS TO KNOW

frontier	the edge of settled land
militia	citizens trained to fight when needed
treaty	a written agreement between nations
convention	a big meeting of chosen leaders