

The Creation Of Marshall County

By Joseph D. Parriott

Marshall County will be 179 years old March 12, 2014.

The creation of Marshall County from the major part of Ohio County is a story that is worth remembering. Why did Ohio County government agree to part with 75% of its territory? The answer is that they had "Hobson's Choice" of relinquishing the land or having the county seat located to Elizabethtown (now Moundsville). In retrospect they made the wrong decision when taking into account the natural resources (coal, natural gas, salt), the valuable river frontage and 315 square miles of territory that they gave away.

How did the Ohio County government get in this predicament? In 1832 the Virginia State Legislature, after listening to complaints from residents of southern Ohio County, appointed a fact-finding commission to visit Ohio County and determine where the county seat of government should be located. Should it remain in Northwestern Virginia's largest populated, prosperous industrial hub located on the country's main east-west highway? Or should it be relocated 12 miles to a community of 800 souls who could not even agree on having one city government? It had two: Elizabethtown and Moundsville. Elizabethtown's only advantage for being a county seat was that it was more centrally located in Ohio County than Wheeling. Its disadvantages as a county seat compared to Wheeling were many.

After listening to the grievances of those living in southern Ohio County, the commission recommended that the county seat be transferred to Elizabethtown. The Virginia Legislature then ordered the Ohio County Commissioners to construct a new courthouse in Elizabethtown using Ohio County funds. The Ohio County Commissioners ignored the mandate of the Virginia Legislature, provoking outrage with the Virginia legislators!

This precipitated a vote of the Legislature to create a new county from part of the territory of Ohio County. Wheeling supporters voted for this legislation in order to insure that Wheeling would remain the seat of government for Ohio County.

The Virginia Legislature, indignant about the affront from the Ohio County Commissioners, may have had retribution in mind when they directed that the new boundary line be drawn tightly at Wheeling's southern doorstep.

The Legislature elected to name this new county after its most highly revered citizen, John Marshall, the fourth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. John Marshall died about four months after Marshall County was created on July 6, 1835 at age 79.

The northwest corner of the new county was to be at a monument rock to be placed on the riverbank three-quarters of a mile north of the mouth of Boggs Run. The northeast corner of the county was to be the northern boundary of Dallas at the Pennsylvania state line. The boundary between these two points was to be a straight line.

Why did the Virginia Legislature listen to a small group of 'malcontents' who lived across a mountain range, 350 stagecoach miles from the state capitol? History records that a person of outstanding skills, including oratory, persuasion and tenacity, represented these 'rebels' who protested against the injustices of the Ohio County Commissioners. His name was John Parriott, an able and trusted ally of southern Ohio County citizens who elected him to the Virginia Legislature in 1827, and every year thereafter until Marshall County was created in 1835. His ability to gather votes in the Old Dominion Legislature is a testimony to John Parriott's standing among his colleagues in the body of lawmakers.

Twenty years later on April 28, 1855, John's obituary was printed in the Marshall County Herald of Moundsville. One of his descendants, Phyllis Comstock of Omaha, Nebraska, visited Moundsville about twelve years ago and provided a copy of the obituary. It reads in part:

"Col. Parriott has been identified with the interests of this county, during the greater part of his life. He has at various times been a Representative in the Legislature, and also a member of the State Senate, during several terms, at various periods, and was intimately and favorably known to the leading men of the State and Nation. It was to his efforts, more than any other, that we are indebted for our separate county organization, and perhaps there was not other man then living within our territory who possessed a sufficient degree of talent, perseverance, and influence, to accomplish this result. in the face of the opposition and difficulties which were then arraying against a division of the county.

Col. Parriott not only labored indefatigably for the organization of a county here, separate from Ohio, but has also ever, both in public and private capacity, earnestly endeavored to promote the interests and welfare of this adopted county." H15

John Parriott served in the Virginia Senate for a total of eight terms after Marshall County was created, and was one of five Magistrates appointed by the Governor of Virginia to organize the first government for the county. (First Magistrates for Marshall County: John Parriott, Jacob Burley, Benjamin McMechen, Samuel Howard, and Zaddock Masters.) John Parriott also served two terms as Marshall County Sheriff.

On August 28, 1889, Moundsville changed the names of several streets and avenues. The new names included Lafayette, Jefferson, Washington, Grant and Parriott. John Parriott was so honored 54 years after the creation of Marshall County, 34 years after his death and 32 years after his wife and descendants had moved to Iowa.

The above information has been compiled from: The History of Marshall County, by Scott Powell. 1925. Historical Collection of Moundsville, WV, by J.H. Brantner. 1947. Christopher Parriott and Martha Clarke Parriott and their Descendants, by Joseph D. Parriott. 2010.

(The author wishes to add that he is not a descendant of John Parriott, but rather is a distant relative.)